

Schakowsky Marches for Mexican Murder Victims

February 15, 2004

BY ANA MENDIETA - Chicago Sun Times

For 10 years, the residents of the Mexican border town of Juarez have been grappling with the tragic and unsolved rapes, murders and disappearances of almost 300 women, many of them factory workers.

The grim scenario hasn't escaped the attention of Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), who participated in a march Saturday in Juarez to honor the missing and murdered women and their families.

"I feel both an obligation and an opportunity as a woman in Congress to stand in solidarity and raise issues of women oppressed around the world and form an international sisterhood around those issues," Schakowsky said.

The murders in Juarez have continued even after the conviction of one man and the arrests of about a dozen suspects. Fifteen women were found killed between January and September 2003, according to Amnesty International.

Organized by Amnesty International and V-Day, a U.S. based fund-raising organization aiming to end violence against women and girls, the march was to be followed late Saturday by a performance of "The Vagina Monologues" by a group of Mexican and American women, including actresses Jane Fonda, Sally Field and Christine Lahti.

V-Day was formed in 1998 by a group of New York women as an outgrowth of Eve Ensler's award-winning play "The Vagina Monologues."

V-Day has reportedly raised \$20 million and educated millions on the issue of violence against women.

Schakowsky, who first traveled to Juarez last November, has co-sponsored legislation that would make the investigation of the murders part of the bilateral agenda between the Mexican and U.S. governments; create a DNA database to allow families to identify the remains of victims, and encourage proper judicial proceedings for the people accused of the murders.

Secretary of State Colin Powell raised the issue with his Mexican counterpart during the U.S. Mexico Binational Commission in November, Schakowsky said.

Last week, Mexican President Vicente Fox appointed a female prosecutor to head a federal team to investigate the murders.

"I want to speak to women in the U.S., who often are more privileged, and say, 'We have a role to play in stopping violence and oppression against women in Juarez, Chicago, Iraq, or anywhere. It is our business,' " Schakowsky said.

V-Day will also host "The Vagina Monologues" at DePaul University on Feb. 22.

Part of the proceeds will go to V-Day's Spotlight on Missing and Murdered Women in Juarez.

For more information, call (312) 362-6769 or e-mail ticketsdepaul@yahoo.com.