

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence - Breaking Chains: Standing Against Technology- Facilitated Abuse and Online Violence

By Kim Chandler McDonald

The Urgency of Action

As the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence begins, Andrea Powell's powerful open letter reminds us of the urgent need to address image-based sexual abuse—a devastating form of technology-facilitated violence that disproportionately affects women and gender-diverse individuals.

Linking TFDV and Image-Based Sexual Abuse

Technology-Facilitated Domestic Violence (TFDV) and image-based sexual abuse are inextricably linked. These abuses exploit digital platforms to control, coerce, and humiliate victims, leaving survivors trapped in a cycle of fear and harm. The stats are harrowing: women are 28 times more likely to face image-based abuse, with LGBTQIA+ individuals four times more likely to experience this violence.

The Lack of Legal Protections

Yet the legal protections needed to address this are sorely lacking in many parts of the world. Survivors are left navigating a labyrinth of platforms and laws, often forced to collect their own “digital rape kits” while the abuse continues to haunt them.

The Importance of Global Standards

Powell's call for the ratification of the Draft United Nations Convention Against Cybercrimes is a critical step toward creating a global standard for defining and prosecuting image-based sexual abuse. This treaty would send a clear message: no survivor should endure the perpetual trauma of seeing their abuse distributed online, and no abuser should act with impunity.

A Commitment to Change

As Global Vice President of CyAN and lead of its Combatting Technology-Facilitated Abuse and Violence initiative, I'm proud to work alongside CyAN President, Jean-Christophe (J-C) Le Toquin, a dedicated ally, advocate, and leader in the Trust and Safety community. CyAN is committed to fostering a safer, more resilient digital world by creating an inclusive environment where cybersecurity professionals collaborate, share knowledge, and support one another to drive meaningful change at the intersection of technology and abuse.

Collective Responsibility for a Safer Digital Space

Achieving this vision, however, requires collective effort—not just from advocacy groups and governments, but also from the platforms and tech companies that shape our digital spaces. Platforms and tech companies must step up. It's time for safety-by-design principles to become the norm, with tools that proactively protect users, swiftly remove abusive content, and hold perpetrators accountable.

Empowering Individuals

As we advocate for these systemic changes, we must also work to empower individuals to reclaim their digital spaces. Simple steps like securing accounts, adjusting privacy settings, and using tools to detect image misuse can provide a measure of control in an often overwhelming situation.

A Human Rights Issue

This is a human rights issue. Consent is the cornerstone of safety, trust, and dignity. Without it, technology becomes a tool for violence rather than empowerment.

A Call to Amplify Voices

Let's use these 16 days to amplify the voices of survivors, demand accountability from platforms and governments, and work toward a safer digital world for everyone.

Survivors deserve more. They deserve better.