

YWCA OF INDIA  
THE Y'S EYES MAGAZINE

# SAFE SPACES

WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE

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COMING TOGETHER  
*is the **beginning.***

KEEPING TOGETHER  
*is **progress.***

WORKING TOGETHER  
*is **success.***

HENRY FORD

# WHAT IS A SAFE SPACE?

**A Safe Space** is a place where 'ANYONE can relax and be able to fully express, *without fear* of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome or unsafe on account of biological sex, race/ethnicity, gender identity or expression, cultural background, religious affiliation, age or physical or mental ability.<sup>12</sup>

A safe space may include the following features:

- Safe spaces can be created for a particular group, on a specific issue or topic, or even for peers to interact and work together.
- It is a place where the rules guard each person's self-respect and dignity, it also strongly encourages everyone to respect others.
- A safe space may be a physical space such as a specific location which may include a café, a room for discussion, a hall, internet forums, or even sitting as a group under a tree.
- Safe spaces are not restricted to just locations but can also be spaces where people are emotionally free to be themselves without being judged or discriminated against for their identity or thought.
- They are social platforms for young people to interact with each other, to share their stories / views in a group and to take action or find solutions to common issues they may face.
- It is also a ground to build meaningful relationships, to motivate and encourage their peers as well as build confidence and leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://safespacenetwork.tumblr.com/Safespace>



# YWCA AND SAFE SPACES

Safe Spaces began with the first YWCA in London, which provided safe housing to young women coming to the city in search of employment during the Industrial Revolution and continues today in many forms. From emergency shelters for survivors of violence, to safe spaces for young women to discuss harmful traditional practices and cultural taboos, to support groups for women living with HIV, as well as inclusive and accessible spaces for women with disabilities, YWCAs have become synonymous with safe space.

For the past 150 years, YWCAs have expanded safe spaces to reach over 25 million women, young women and girls in 120 countries. Providing access to economic, social, political and cultural opportunities to fulfill their potential and actively contribute to the development of their community, country and World, YWCAs are providing spaces where women, young women and girls become champions of their rights and their lives.

The YWCA of India has also consistently been working across its local associations through its various projects to build safe spaces for young people and to address key issues, especially for spreading awareness on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights, endorsement of uniform application on Human Rights as well as prevention and rehabilitation of people affected by HIV/AIDS.

This book on Safe Spaces seeks to outline the defining characteristics of YWCA Safe Spaces as a model for creating lasting change in the lives of women and girls. This model builds upon the common purpose of uniting YWCAs worldwide to:

“DEVELOP THE LEADERSHIP AND COLLECTIVE POWER OF WOMEN AND GIRLS AROUND THE WORLD TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE, PEACE, HEALTH, HUMAN DIGNITY, FREEDOM AND CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.”

Through the safe spaces model, YWCAs are creating a safe space for women, young women and girls to discuss taboo subjects without fear or judgment. These spaces are also designed to close the gap between policies and commitments at national, regional and International level along with the realities that women face in accessing services and in making personal decisions.

By creating an enabling environment that builds awareness of International commitments as well as providing opportunities and training for women - particularly young women- to engage in direct dialogue with policy makers, we are building accountability while connecting policy making with the living experiences of women, young women and girls in communities.

The model is also adaptable to broader programming designed to support women, young women and girls to claim their human rights in other spheres. It applies a human rights based

approach to development and puts the fundamental principles of non-discrimination, empowerment and participation, as well as accountability, into daily practice. This model is also guided by the World YWCA Standards of Good Management and Accountability, which is an expression of the organization's commitment to modeling practice which exhibits quality, responsibility and accountability in the communities we serve.

Safe spaces are complex, dynamic physical and emotional environments that require constant caretaking. YWCAs strive to maintain unique women-led spaces that foster strength through leadership and solidarity towards one vital end: a world where the human rights of women, young women and girls are protected, respected and fulfilled.<sup>3</sup>

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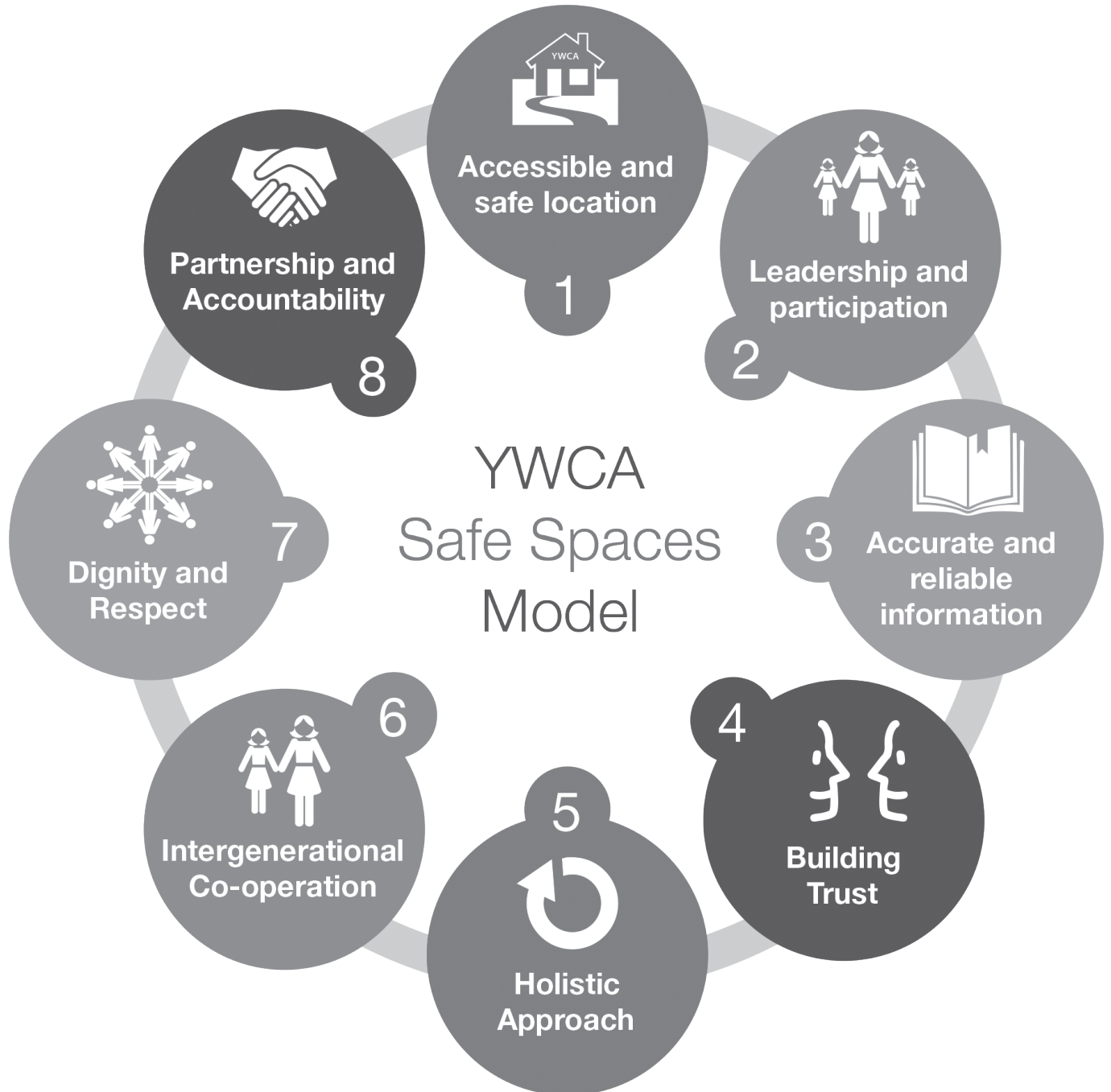
3 YWCA Safe Spaces for Women and Girls: A Global Model for Change by World YWCA Publication

**“IT'S AMAZING  
WHAT WE CAN  
ACCOMPLISH  
WHEN WE'RE IN IT  
TOGETHER.”**

*Essie*

# THE 8 PILLARS OF SAFE SPACES

The 8 Pillars of Safe Spaces as shared by the World YWCA are as follows:







### 1. Accessible and safe location:

Safe spaces located in accessible areas, central and convenient to women, young women and girls, where safety and privacy are assured.

They reach isolated communities through mobile outreach programmes, along with extensive rural networks and prominent urban and rural visibility to ensure awareness of YWCA activities.

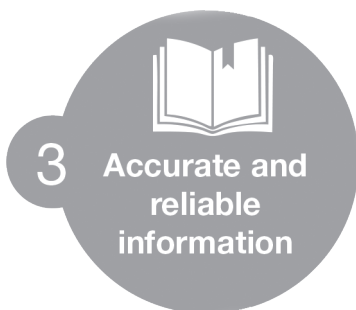
Issues of safety and accessibility are addressed in programme planning.



### 2. Leadership and participation:

Women – led spaces that offer inclusive and empowering spaces for women, young women and girls of all ages and in all their diversity. Leadership development and participation are essential components of YWCA programming, fostering a sense of solidarity and ownership that transforms a beneficiary into an active agent of change.

- Programmes are targeted to vulnerable groups of women, young women and girls (i.e. out of school girls, teenage mothers, women living with HIV, survivors of violence, domestic workers, victims of trafficking, migrants and indigenous women).
- Target groups are included in project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to ensure community relevance and ownership.



### 3. Accurate and reliable information:

Sharing and promoting evidence-based information that supports women, young women and girls to make informed choices.

- Information about sexual and reproductive health and human rights is evidence based and provides factual, non-judgmental information that supports women, young women and girls to make informed decisions.
- YWCAs build knowledge and skill of staff and volunteers to challenge harmful traditional practices in communities, such as early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and violence against women and girls.

#### 4. Building trust:

Places where women, young women and girls can openly share their experiences, challenges and traumas and be assured of confidentiality and support.



- YWCAs form support groups in communities that enable women, young women and girls to share their experiences with their peers and access information about their rights and services.
- YWCAs provide a private space where a woman, young woman or girl can meet with a counselor or mentor and talk about private or sensitive topics, including sexual and reproductive health issues.

#### 5. Holistic Approaches:

Places that take into consideration the multiple facets of women's lives and deliver services that respond to the life cycle of women, young women and girls. Education and economic empowerment are recognized as fundamental tools for empowerment, personal security and claiming rights.



- YWCAs are a place for women, young women and girls to learn life skills that broaden opportunities and build self-reliance to prepare them for life's economic, social and emotional challenges and strengthen their personal security.
- YWCAs promote and/or deliver initiatives that economically empower women, young women and girls (i.e. vocational skills training, financial and business management and small loans).

#### 6. Intergenerational cooperation:

Encourage intergenerational sharing, mentoring and cooperation between women and girls of all ages. These supportive relationships are based on respect and equality among different age groups, with a focus on developing young women's leadership.



- YWCAs ensure that a minimum of 25% of decision making positions are held by young women 30 years or under.
- YWCAs practice positive interpersonal relationships that foster respect for one another and acceptance of differences of lifestyle and opinion.



## 7. Dignity and respect:

The organizational structure of the space provides a local and global network of women, young women and girls who support and inspire one another. It is a place where women, young women and girls in all of their diversity are respected and their dignity and rights are upheld.

- YWCAs transformative and shared leadership model, encourages participation, collective efforts and common ownership for creating positive change among individuals and society.
- YWCAs champion women's human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights and freedom from violence, in local health centers/hospitals, police stations, schools and government offices.



## 8. Partnership and Accountability:

YWCAs are part of their communities and are permanent, reliable and sustainable spaces for women, young women and girls. They work in partnership with local, regional and global actors to advance women's rights and demand accountability from relevant duty bearers.

- YWCAs model good governance and management through their compliance with the World YWCA Standards of Good Management and Accountability.
- The YWCA is a volunteer-led movement that promotes shared leadership with staff, values and respects members and claim holders and is sustained by community involvement.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> YWCA Safe Spaces for Women and Girls: A Global Model for Change by World YWCA Publication

Alone we can  
do so little;  
together we can  
do so much.

# CREATING SAFE SPACES

THE YOUTH OF THE MOVEMENT are the torch bearers and the light for creating a better world for our future. Therefore, Safe spaces are most effective when young people work towards building it through their own means, capacities and team work which are goal oriented towards empowerment of themselves and others.

*Basically a Safe space includes:*

- Inclusiveness
- Freedom of Speech
- Privacy
- Support and Encouragement
- Human Dignity, Trust and Respect
- Safe and Accessible Location

Young people are encouraged to be creative with the method of creating safe spaces, since the concept is versatile and adaptable for each situation.

However, a suggested method for creating a basic safe space with the YWCA is through the following few steps which may be modified or elaborated upon as per the requirement of the group.



## 1. Find a community or a group to help you create this safe space:

The volunteer model of the YWCA can help you engage with other like minded young women and youth who will be willing to create a safe space. Begin creating a safe space with them where you can share and connect with each other.

## 2. Choose a location:

Once your group is established, find a place where you can all meet or work together and discuss matters of mutual or common concern without fear or threat. The location of a safe space does not have to be a particular location, but can also be through a virtual platform; however, it should be easily accessible to all the group members.

### 3. Decide on the particular character of your safe space:



Ask and discuss some of the following fundamental questions:

- What is the prime purpose of your group?
- What issues do you seek to solve through the group network created?
- Is the safe space so created addressing physical, emotional, financial and/or social security?
- How will the safe space so created help the members of the group and the community at large?

### 4. Budgeting and Resource utilization:



- Asses the budget and expenses required for each of the meetings or programs to be created under the Safe Space model.
- Assign a long and short term agenda for each meeting and create budgets as per the requirement.
- Also assess the need for particular resources and material that may be required for conducting a successful group discussion or programme for building the safe spaces.
- Such pointers must be discussed and planned with the group beforehand so that the safe space can function smoothly for the entire group.

Thus, these are some of the aspects that one can foresee for starting a safe space group within the YWCA.



# MY SAFE SPACE STORY

Reflect on some of the concepts listed below and/or share your idea of what makes safe spaces:

- What I understand by the term SAFE SPACE:

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- How I will create a SAFE SPACE:

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- For whom will I be creating the SAFE SPACE?

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- My SAFE SPACE story and how it helped me change my life:

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# THINK tank

The following are articles and essays from young people of the movement detailing their idea of Safe Spaces:



# THE FEARLESS GIRL

V/S

# THE CHARGING BULL

It's often said, when Wall Street sneezes, the world catches a cold! i.e. when the markets at the wall street are down or bearish it sends ripples around the globe. On the eve of International Women's Day this year, Wall Street situated at the heart of the financial center of the world, Manhattan, New York in the United States of America witnessed a similar but rather unprecedented incident which sent ripples around the world, this time not for a crash in the markets but an incident which raked up one of the most crucial issues of our times.

One company named State Street Global Advisors installed a *roughly 50-inch-tall bronze* statue of a defiant girl in front of Wall Street's iconic charging-bull statue.



**THE FEARLESS GIRL**, with her hands on her hips, and chin up, confident and poised unimintimidated by the charging bull, is not just a powerful symbol, but the girl sends up one of the most poignant messages to appreciate and encourage gender diversity in the corporate world. She is a part of State Street's campaign to pressure companies to add more women to their boards. The company followed up the installation with a letter to the thousands of companies that can comprise the Russell 3000 index asking them to take action to increase

the diversity on their boards. According to the company, a quarter of the 3,500 companies it sent letters to had no women on their boards.

The plaque below the statue states,

***“Know the power of women in leadership. SHE makes a difference,”***

with ‘SHE’ referring to both the gender of the subject and the fund’s NASDAQ ticker symbol.



History is witness to the fact, that the world has witnessed some utmost exemplary leaderships under the authority of the women, be it Indira Gandhi, Margret Thatcher or Aung San Suu Kyi, the list might be endless but each of them have been an instrument to have shaped the course of history with their intelligence, strength, passion and leadership qualities. They have been the symbol of revolutions and change, of peace and developments; they have defied the odds, challenged the status quo, made lasting reforms and even presided over their countries for decades, ushering in significant developments on the global front.

If women have time and again demonstrated their abilities as a leader, then a question often strikes us - why is the participation of women in global economy so much less compared to men?

According to a research conducted by Pew Research Centre in the year 2015,<sup>6</sup> it was surveyed that only 25 Companies in the Fortune 500 Companies are run by women. The low number of female CEOs may be due to gendered stereotypes that pervade the workplace. Pew’s survey found that 34% of the respondents believed that male executives were better than women at assuming risk. Whereas a significant portion felt that men would do a better job leading technology, oil and gas and finance companies. Perhaps as a result, female CEOs are more common in industries like retail and food production.

According to Catalyst, a leading nonprofit organization with a mission to accelerate progress for women through workplace inclusion, reported<sup>7</sup> that in India, women’s labour force participation rate fell from **34.8% in 1990 to just 26.7% in 2014**. In 2016, women held 16.0% of senior leadership roles and a meager 11.2% of board seats in 2015.

Globally, women’s labour force participation rate decreased from 52.4% to 49.6% between 1995 and 2015. While the odds that a woman will participate in the labour force remains almost 30% less than they are for a man. Still, an additional quarter of a billion women have entered the labour force since 2006.

Further it is also reported that women face a GENDER WAGE GAP GLOBALLY, earning 77% of what men earn. In 2015, the global average annual earnings for women were \$11,000, compared to men's earnings of \$21,000.

The statistics are disturbing and it is the need of the hour to resolve the growing disparities in the gender diversity in the corporate board rooms. A sustained unbiased corporate eco-system is the need of the hour for lakhs of women who enter the corporate workforce.

How does one ensure and create such a system to them? How does one create such a space for them? How do we bridge the gap between empowered girls and powerful women as leaders? How do we insist on equal opportunity and equity in pay? How do we encourage the type of mentorships that help girls succeed in their chosen field be it tech, science, engineering or finance without any biases or stereotypes?

The first step in this direction would be eradicating all barriers also termed as 'GLASS CEILINGS' in the corporate world that limit and obstruct the development of women in the hierarchical structure of the corporation even though they are highly educated and qualified.

Some of the issues faced by women are inequity in pay, opportunities and promotions, attitudinal and organizational biases and so on. In 2008 the OECD reported that the median earnings of female full-time workers were 17% lower than the earnings of their male counterparts and that "30% of the variation in gender wage gaps across OECD countries were explained to be caused by discriminatory practices in the labour market. The European Commission reported that women's hourly earnings were 17.5% lower on average in the 27 EU Member States in 2008.

Studies have shown that access to finance remains a persistent barrier to female entrepreneurs. In a report published in March 2017, the Entrepreneurs Network found that only 9% of funding into startups in the UK went to women-run businesses. Men are 86% more likely to be venture-capitally funded and 56% more likely to secure angel investments.

Second step would be cleaning the 'STICKY FLOORS'. The sticky floor phenomenon has been variously described as women's self-imposed career blocks, corporate barriers to women's promotion and other middle-management bottlenecks that keep women stuck near the bottom half of the ladder. At times it can be women themselves who are reluctant to pursue higher-level responsibilities. These factors hamper their career progression as compared to their male counterparts. It is often said in the American circles, when a man looks in the mirror, he naturally sees himself as a Senator, whereas in the case of a women, she has to be pushed to conquer the top jobs. However, this does not mean that women are in any way less ambitious than men. Sticky floors are created over a period of time due to various cultural and social constraints.

It is imperative for women at the frontlines of their career to create advances for themselves, nurture, improve and upgrade their knowledge and skills with the relevant market demands. Corporations can further act as a catalyst in empowering and encouraging women at various management positions by adopting best practices and initiatives to identify high-potential women and pair them with executives who become sponsors and advocates, creating connections and visibility for them. Ensure these women have meaningful development plans, excellent coaching, and targeted learning programs.

Next step in this direction would be to check the 'LEAKING PIPELINE'. According to ILO, even when women do enter the labour force, their participation rates drop significantly

with age, which is the time when women are experienced enough to assume higher positions and more responsibilities at work. This attrition or exit of qualified women at higher career levels from companies and organizations is often referred to as the 'leaking pipeline'. It also leads to a shortage of women in senior management posts to serve as role models.

To address this issue, requires a large scale assistance both from the employers and the society. Employers need to create eco-systems for their women employees which cater to their work life balances, provide pre and post maternity safeguards, implement and advocate policies which are not discriminatory to women. The society at large can also be an important cog wheel for a woman in advancing her career, an inclusive holistic family support, can go a long way in bridging the gap of attrition.

Laws and legislations passed in furtherance of this cause will also be an important instrument of change. The Maternity Benefits Act, 2017 passed by the Parliament of India is a benevolent legislation in this direction. However it is also feared that many organisations and start ups would have serious reservations in employing a women. In such circumstances, it is of utmost importance that such laws are implemented in their true letter and spirit with right checks and balances.

The Fearless Girl statue is an epitome of the faith and hope for scores of women about their ambitions of equality and fair play of being heard and being counted against patriarchal and oppressive societies, cultures and eco systems. It assures her that no Charging Bull will and can ever back her down, if she believes in herself without any defiance.

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5 Picture representation: Google

6 <http://fortune.com/2015/01/14/why-so-few-women-ceos/>

7 <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/statistical-overview-women-workforce/>

*Here's to strong women!  
May we know them.  
May we be them.  
May we raise them.*

By Aparna Campbell

# I A M YOUNG

Born to fly,  
High above in the sky,  
Wind beneath my wings,  
I want to laugh and cry.

The aim is to create a free space for me,  
Where I can feel secure,  
Fight for justice,  
Tough times I can endure.

I want to run my race,  
No matter how many obstacles I face,  
I will fall to rise again,  
I have faith in the divine grace.

I am ready to face the world  
My goals will make me strong  
The violence against women should end  
I will stand against the wrong.





