



## **A Call to Action to Address and End Domestic Violence** *From Members of the National Coalition of South Asian Organizations*

**February 26th, 2009-** As community-based organizations that provide services to, advocate for, and organize South Asians in the United States, we are deeply saddened by recent tragic incidents of domestic violence that have affected South Asian families and communities over the past six months.

The tragic murder of Aasiya Hassan, a 37-year-old mother, who was brutally beheaded in Buffalo, New York, is the latest in a series of recent violent incidents that has received community-wide and public attention. Ms. Hassan had obtained an order of protection against her husband and filed for divorce before the murder, which occurred on February 12, 2009.

This incident comes on the heels of another tragedy that occurred in Clifton, New Jersey last November, when 24-year old Reshma James was murdered by her estranged husband at the church she attended. And, it follows two murders of family members, including children: one occurring in Novi, Michigan, where the bodies of 37-year-old Jayalakshmi Rao and her two children were found, and the other occurring in Sorrente Pointe, California, where the entire Rajaram family (mother-in-law, wife, three children, and the suicide of the husband) was found dead last October.

Beyond speaking out and condemning these tragedies, we as community members and organizations must strive to do even more. As members of the South Asian community, each of us has a role to play in ending violence.

Most importantly, we must move beyond the tendency to reduce acts of domestic violence to culture or religion, or any such characteristic. The epidemic of domestic violence affects families from all backgrounds and religious faiths; in fact, the incidents we describe here occurred in Christian, Hindu and Muslim communities. We must call domestic violence what it is, and work both within our community and externally, to create safe spaces and environments.

And, we must understand and empathize with victims and survivors of domestic violence. All victims and survivors of domestic violence face significant barriers in seeking and obtaining assistance, justice, and support. For South Asians, these barriers become even more exacerbated. Many South Asians feel uncomfortable reaching out to those within their own community for fear of being judged, questioned, isolated, blamed and stigmatized. When abuse occurs in non-marital or same-sex relationships, it can become an even more difficult topic to broach. Moreover, a lack of cultural and linguistic sensitivity and tangible legal protections can make survivors feel that they have little recourse in existing laws, the justice system, law enforcement and social service agencies.

Finally, we must be ready to address domestic violence publicly. Around the country, community members, religious leaders and social service agencies must take significant steps each day to ensure that victims and survivors of domestic violence receive the support and assistance they need. Our entire community must be prepared to speak out against violence and address it in our homes, places of worship, cultural centers, and social service organizations.

In light of the recent tragic incidents of domestic violence, we offer three concrete steps that you can take: first, create a safe space to talk about domestic violence with your family, friends, and support networks; second, encourage your religious, cultural and civic leaders to address the impact of domestic violence in public statements, remarks, prayers and sermons, and settings; and third, support organizations that strive to end domestic violence in our communities.

We send this call to action with the hope that community members, religious, cultural and civic organizations, policymakers, allies and media will all take on the task of ending domestic violence. For our part, we remain committed to continuing our efforts to advocate against violence in any form, to create safe spaces for all community members, and to press for policies that support and empower victims and survivors of violence.

*The National Coalition of South Asian Organizations (NCSO), a network of community-based organizations in 12 regions around the United States, seeks to amplify a progressive voice on policy issues affecting South Asian communities. For more information about the NCSO, please contact South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) at 301-270-1855 or via email at [saalt@saalt.org](mailto:saalt@saalt.org).*

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