



## **Taking pains to reduce abuse; Website to spread awareness of women, child abuse, measure society's involvement**

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THIS month, with a click of your mouse, you can decide the fates of a housewife, a maid, a sex-worker and a child, all of whom have been abused.

But while these characters on <http://www.helpanna.com> are fictional, the torture they have suffered is very real.

To give others a clearer idea of the horrific acts these women have been subjected to, pictorial descriptions of spousal abuse, employer abuse and violence in prostitution tell the characters' stories on the website.

"(The characters') conditions will depend on the number of people who visit the website.

The higher the number of visitors, the better their conditions," said Ms Fazlin Abdullah, general manager of a local women's rights group that launched the website on Tuesday.

It takes a thousand visits to the website to make a positive difference; any less than that will lead to a deterioration in the condition of the women. The developments will be updated weekly. The website also carries information on gender-based abuse and the helplines victims can call.

Singapore's National Committee for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (Unifem) has created the website as part of its month-long campaign to raise Singaporeans' awareness about violence against females.

The project is also part of a campaign to commemorate the upcoming International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on Nov 25.

Said Ms Saleemah Ismail, the Unifem committee's director: "We want to get Singaporeans to be aware that there are different types of abuse against women. It's not just about men beating up women. We also have cases where maids are abused by their female employers."

According to statistics from the Ministry of Manpower, there were 39 cases of maid abuse in the first nine months of last year. Statistics from Unifem showed that 1,626 wives in Singapore had asked for protection orders from their husbands last year.

As these numbers only reflect reported cases, it is difficult to tell from such statistics if gender-based violence is rising or declining in Singapore, Ms Saleemah noted. Nevertheless, such cases have no place in a civilised society, she added.

"How can we be a developed country if we do not have the social graces to go with it?" she said.

Celebrities Aaron Aziz, Annabelle Francis, Desmond Koh and Nadya Hutagalung have been roped in as the campaign's spokespersons.

The final conditions of the four online characters will be announced by the Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, on Nov 25 at Clark Quay, where there will also be a carnival featuring several local celebrities.