

NYC UNITES TO FIGHT RAPE

Powerful Event Honors Survivors of Rape, Sexual Assault and Child Sexual Abuse

14 April 2005, New York: The silence will be broken on April 19th when the city's leading organization in the fight against sexual violence hosts *Listen: NYC Unites for Sexual Assault Awareness*, the second annual 24 hour reading of sexual assault survivors' stories.

Beginning Tuesday April 19th at 12:00PM in City Hall Park, and continuing until noon the following day, volunteers will read from collected stories by survivors of rape, sexual assault and child sexual abuse. Several well-known New Yorkers, including Betsy Gotbaum, Public Advocate for the City of New York and Mariska Hargitay, star of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* are expected to read. Music and dance performed by and inspired by survivors of sexual violence are scheduled throughout the two days.

"This event can alert New Yorkers to the state of rape in New York City," said Harriet Lessel, Executive Director of the Alliance. "It's too easy to forget the frequency of rape and the devastating effect on victims and on our community."

The biggest challenge in fighting rape is the feeling of shame that many survivors feel. By breaking the silence, the organizers hope to break that shame. Many stories that will be read have been collected from New Yorkers themselves; others are culled from published works and websites.

For many survivors, this will be the first time their words are spoken out loud. For many more, it will be the first time their words are not met with contempt and doubt. By reading and listening to these stories, the event will send a message to all survivors that their experiences are real, their anger justified, and their safety and support paramount.

Sexual assault continues to be a silent crisis for New York City. As reports of other crimes have steadily fallen, reported rapes have actually risen over the past two years. Silence continues to surround this crisis. Tuesday's event will break that silence and draw attention to the problem through this powerful experience. As one participant at last year's event put it, "I was only there about 90 [minutes], but in that short time, I saw many people reached."

An opening ceremony at 11:30am will include remarks by the event organizers and survivors of sexual assault. At noon, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum will read the first story, and reading will continue for 24 hours, with interspersed performance sets scheduled on Tuesday at 4:30pm and 8pm. The event will close on Wednesday April 20th with a performance by the New York based Artichoke Dance Company, beginning at 11:30am.

For information on the event or the NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault, contact Kate Woodrow at **212.229.0345**, kwoodrow@nycagainstrape.org, or visit www.nycagainstrape.org.

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The New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault provides leadership in creating a society in which rape and sexual abuse are not tolerated, and in which survivors receive appropriate support and intervention. Supporters include Awareness of Rape and Incest through Art (ARIA); Bellevue Hospital Rape Crisis Program; CAMBA Rape Crisis Program; Mt. Sinai SAVI; Safe Horizon; and St. Luke's-Roosevelt Crime Victims Treatment Center; The New York City Council; The New York Women's Foundation; Right Rides; PACE University; Luna Bar; and Women on Top Water.