

## Coordinating the Global Women's Strike

[womenstrike8m@server101.com](mailto:womenstrike8m@server101.com); [www.globalwomenstrike.net](http://www.globalwomenstrike.net)

Red Thread coordinates the Global Women's Strike in Guyana.

Since 2000, every year on 8 March, International Women's Day, women in over 60 countries have taken all kinds of grassroots actions to demand together that society *Invest in Caring Not Killing*, and that the money squandered on war goes instead on our communities' needs.

The Strike has been growing stronger each year, especially in the "Third World", where there are active members in many countries including Uganda (Kaabong), India (Chhaatisgarh), Indigenous communities in Latin America, and most recently, Venezuela, Haiti and Mexico. Women, and increasingly men, now take Strike action throughout the year.

The International Coordinators of the Strike are Selma James (USA/UK and Nina Lopez (Argentina/UK).



Global Women's Strike women and men from Payday, a men's group which works with us

### Global Demands of the Strike

- Payment for all caring work - in wages, pensions, and & other resources. What is more valuable than raising children & caring for others? Invest in life & welfare, not military budgets or prisons
- Pay equity for all, women & men, in the global market.
- Food security for breastfeeding mothers, paid maternity leave and maternity breaks. Stop penalizing us for being women.
- Don't pay 'Third World debt'. We owe nothing, they owe us.
- Accessible clean water, healthcare, housing, transport, literacy.
- Non-polluting energy & technology which shortens the hours we work. We all need cookers, fridges, washing machines, computers, & time off!
- Protection & asylum from all violence & persecution, including by family members & people in positions of authority.
- Freedom of movement. Capital travels freely, why not people?

## Red Thread Women

**Crossroads Women's Centre  
Office of Red Thread  
and the  
Global Women's Strike**

**Mailing address: 72 Princes & Adelaide Streets, Charlestown, Georgetown, Guyana**

**Tel: (592) 227 7010 or 223 6254**

**Email: [red\\_thread@gol.net.gy](mailto:red_thread@gol.net.gy) Fax: (592) 227 7010**

[redthreadguyana@gmail.com](mailto:redthreadguyana@gmail.com)

### About Red Thread

**Goal:** Red Thread's goal is to organise with women, beginning with grassroots women, to cross divides and transform our conditions. We provide services to women and children exploited in unequal power relations and simultaneously work to change those relations.

### Specific Objectives

1. To work for women's unwaged and low-waged caring work to be re-valued and properly remunerated and for equal pay for work of equal value.
2. To work against all forms of violence, especially against women and children, beginning with domestic violence and violence during racial and/or political conflict, and to support victims of such violence.
3. To build solidarity among women across divides and to oppose all forms of discrimination including discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, class, dis/ability, age, sexual identity and HIV status.
4. Wherever possible, to provide individual women and groups of women with the information, skills and other support they need to fight against economic, social and political injustices.
5. To develop, evaluate and share the lessons of small projects addressing key issues including grassroots women's income generation, women's health and children's literacy.

**Where we work:** Red Thread works both on the coast and in the interior. To date (2006) we have worked in all Regions except Region 1.

**How we work:** Coordination, management and every other aspect of Red Thread's work is done on a partly or wholly voluntary basis. The organization is funded by donors and to a small extent, our own fund-raising. The work is carried out by a core of 9 full-time women - Karen de Souza (Red Thread Coordinator), Andaiye (Global Women's Strike Coordinator), Joycelyn Bacchus, Cora Belle, Halima Khan, Margaret Inniss, Nicola (Joy) Marcus, Vanessa Ross and Wintress White, and by a close network of 17 women and a wider network of 45 women. We also have a network of women and men both locally and internationally who support our work in various ways including with small donations and training.

**About our Centre:** We own our Centre for which most of the purchase price came from Red Thread supporter Dr Linda Peake and each member of the Red Thread core. In addition, we raised money, materials and equipment locally and internationally from individuals, organizations, businesses and agencies. Special thanks to the Global Fund for Women and the International Women Count Network. The ground floor of our centre is wheelchair accessible.



## Skills and tools

Skills which Red Thread has been building since we began have continued at the heart of our work.

**\*Popular education:** From 1988 to 1990, Sistren, a Jamaican popular theatre collective, trained mainly working class Red Thread women in the use of participatory methods of popular education, drama and skit development and workshop techniques. These skills are used to develop and implement workshops. In 1989/90 the team estimated that they did more than 100 workshops in coastal and interior schools and communities on topics including violence against women, child abuse and counting women's work. Following training in applying popular education techniques to women's health issues by overseas-based Guyanese Nesha Haniff, Red Thread carried out programmes on women's health and community health in coastal and interior communities.

**\*Popular (participatory) research:** Between 1992 and 1993, a team of working class Red Thread members was trained by Linda Peake in participatory and quantitative research methods. This training has been put to use in several surveys conducted by Red Thread, including on domestic violence and with commercial sex workers, on women's reproductive health needs. We were also employed by CEMCO and PAHO to do research on women's pre and post natal health. Overseas-based Guyanese Alissa Trotz has worked with us on several pieces of research.

## The Red Thread Press

From 1993 to 2001 a major tool of Red Thread's work was its printing press (we stopped only because the equipment became obsolete). The press produced texts for primary schools and in cooperation with the Guyana Book Foundation, children's story books and learning materials. It also produced an alternative grammar book by Eusi Kwayana, *Groovy Grammar*, books of history and poetry including *Selected Poems* by Martin Carter, *Kyk-Over-A l* magazine, and Amerindian stories written in English and translated into Wapishiana and Macushi; these were used as readers in schools in the Rupununi.

Following are major examples of work on our other objectives:

**Objective 4: provide individual women and groups of women with the information, skills and other support they need to fight against economic, social and political injustices**

**Example:**

**Helping other women's groups and individual women to access support**

Red Thread applied for and received a partnership grant from Global Fund for Women, to be distributed to 10 small women's groups unable to access grant/loans for themselves. The small grants are to be used by women to better themselves and communities. So far six groups have received grants: small vendors in Georgetown, poultry farmers in Linden, and poultry farmers and small vendors in Mahdia & Campbelltown to set up revolving loan funds, a group in Annai to carry out education on domestic violence in several communities, and one in Waramadong for equipment and material to produce school uniforms for sale.

In 2005, following the flood disaster, we organised with women for the restoration of their livelihoods.



March 13, 2006 strike action. Speakout of more than 250 women to publicise their demands following the flood

**Objective 5: develop, evaluate and share the lessons of small projects addressing key issues including grassroots women's income generation, women's health and children's literacy.**

**Example:**

Red Thread runs a literacy programme for children from 3 feeder schools in the community where its centre is located and the Drop-In Centre. The programme includes a children's library, computer classes and reading classes.

**Work towards our objectives**

**Objective 1: Revalue and adequately remunerate women's unwaged and low-waged caring work**

With the economy in crisis, Red Thread began in October 1986 with income-generation - grassroots women in 2 Indo Guyanese and 2 Afro Guyanese coastal communities, most of them mothers, producing embroidered products. We chose embroidery because it was a skill many women already had and because each woman's production could be scheduled around her unpaid housework and family care. At the height of the embroidery project 75 of the producers earned 45 per cent of their household income through Red Thread, some less and some more.

"My husband who is a welder is the breadwinner. He was dismissed from GUYSUCO nearly 2 years ago and we couldn't make ends meet... Since I start to produce for the project I see life all over again".  
Doris, Meten-meer-zorg, about 1987

Although revaluing women's unwaged and low-waged work was not a stated objective at the time, by using and providing reasonable remuneration for a traditional 'women's skill' (sewing), the embroidery project valued and taught the producers to value "women's work". We quantified and valued the labour both in group meetings on costing and workshops on "a woman's place". The project encouraged producers to recognize their work as they created greeting cards, wall hangings and pictures with designs including women sugar workers, women farmers, a girl plaiting her hair.

Early on, Red Thread also implemented a series of workshops in a coastal Amerindian community, St. Cuthbert's, to assist producers of craft items "see" all of the work - starting with the invisible, unwaged work of women - involved in their production and to place value on it.

Gradually, counting women's work became not just an aspect of Red Thread's work but the framework of our organising. This was put on a firm footing in 2004/2005 when we conducted a time use survey among 100+ women on the coast and in the interior so that women could discover the quantity of work they do when they lack resources of money, technology, etc, and use this information to lobby for what they need (for example, publicly owned transport for school children, pensioners and people with disabilities).

... Red Thread's survey is the first systematic time-use survey conducted by and for grassroots women that we know about, and we understand it is the first time-use survey of any kind carried out in Guyana. Although deprived of the resources - computer technology, supporting staff, years of academic preparation, etc. - available to professional time-use surveyors, this path-breaking project is enabling fundamental truths about women's work and time, and therefore about women's lives and those they care for, to emerge. We believe that, because of its nature, more information has emerged here which is often not fully collected or even approached by other such surveys carried out by government or academic institutions.

*International Women Count Network*

## Objective 2: combat all forms of violence, especially against women and children

### Red Thread's work to date

#### Domestic Violence

Ongoing: Crisis intervention, including counseling, referral and court support especially for child victims of rape and sexual assault, and from 2005, the beginnings of court support for women with disabilities.

2005-2006: training of women in 8 communities on the coast and interior in basic skills and information needed to provide crisis intervention and support services within their communities. This is expected to lead to the formation of a small team of women in each community willing, with Red Thread's continued assistance, to offer group support, referrals and information about the use of the Domestic Violence Act. Training continues.

In support of this practical work Red Thread has also carried out the following activities:

- Participatory research into the incidence of violence against women (published 2000).
- Participatory research into trafficking (2004).
- With the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security and UNICEF, research into children's experience of violence (2004).
- With other groups, lobbying for changes in the law (for example, leading up to the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) and in administration of the law.
- Popular education about violence against women and girls and the Domestic Violence Act (DVA), including:
  - \* an 11 part radio serial on domestic violence (1992) called "Everybody's Business";
  - \* a stage play reworked from the radio serial, performed in Regions 2, 3 and 10 (1994)
  - \* video spots on domestic violence (1996);
  - \* a household guide to the DVA (1997);
  - \* status and needs surveys with women sex workers (2000, 2002) and
  - \* a booklet on the causes of domestic violence and what to do about it (2004).

Red Thread has used the household guide and booklet widely with women and girls and a few males in communities throughout the country. The Guyana Police Force (GPF) and the Women's Affairs Bureau (WAB) have also asked for and used the household guide in their own work, the GPF with officers and ranks in police stations.

Red Thread also serves on the National Task Force on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

#### Violence against women and girls in racial and/or political conflict

Red Thread is documenting information on violence and perceptions of violence against women and girls in racial and/or political conflict in Guyana.

## Objective 3: build solidarity among women across divides

The Red Thread core and networks include women of all ages from all ethnic/race groups. Core and network members are mainly grassroots: full-time and part-time caregivers in our homes – single mothers, mothers with partners and spouses, grandmothers, aunts, daughters and sisters, women with disabilities and women looking after children with disabilities, domestic workers, farmers, vendors and other micro-businesswomen.

The crossing of divides has been a major objective since Red Thread began.

We started work with 11 founding members: Andaiye, Desiree Christie, Karen de Souza, Jocelyn Dow, Bonita Harris, Zailoon Kamaludeen, Diane Matthews, Irene Price, Danuta Radzik, Vanda Radzik and Savitri Singh. Almost all members or supporters of the same political party at the time, we formed Red Thread because, as Bonita Harris put it, we wanted to organize with women against "the narrow interests of the broader political struggle" which divided women. In launching Red Thread publicly we said that no party, religious or other membership or loyalty was needed from women before or after they joined.

The embroidery project was deliberately started in 2 Indo-Guyanese and 2 Afro-Guyanese communities, and hundreds of women came together across race to gain new skills and income. Although each woman produced individually, the project brought them together through joint meetings, workshops, annual "encounters" exchange visits and exchanges of skills between women in coastal villages. Soon, women from an Indo-Guyanese community and an Afro-Guyanese community had organized an informal buying co-op to beat shortages and high prices. Later, when Afro-Guyanese Red Thread women in Linden used money from an exercise book project to start a feeding programme for children and old people which fed 250 a day during a bauxite strike, subsidised by paid catering work, Indo-Guyanese Red Thread Meten-Meer-Zorg women were active in the Linden strike relief committee and in union-organised marches.

As a small step towards crossing coastal/interior divides we chose a producer from the coast to train producers in a later embroidery project in the North Rupununi, working with a trainer from the interior.

This objective has stayed fundamental to all our activities but has been put on a new footing since counting women's work became the framework of our organizing. In particular, since the time use survey of 2004/2005, Red Thread has used time use diaries as a tool for bringing women together across race, because the process of making time use diaries makes the real similarities and differences among women visible in a clear and practical way, in the first place, to the women themselves.