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## **SisterSong Post-Conference Report**

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Originally published in *Collective Voices* Vol 1 Issue 1, Summer 2004

More than 600 activists gathered in Atlanta, Georgia November 13-16, 2003 to participate in the first SisterSong Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights National Conference. It was the largest gathering of women of color working on reproductive health issues in U.S. history.

The SisterSong Conference was an opportunity for both seasoned and emerging activists to reflect upon their work, expand their knowledge, celebrate their accomplishments and develop and refine their strategies. They acknowledged the power of individual activism, the power of diversity among women of color, and the power of collective organizing.

Each day of the conference opened up with music from the different ethnic communities of color. All plenary sessions were led by women of color discussing topics like hip hop music, midwifery, violence, abstinence, poverty and prisoners' rights. This wide range of topics in 12 plenary sessions and 60 workshops reflected the complexities of the lives of women of color and the connection to a broader message of reproductive justice, which is not exclusively limited to abortion rights.

The four-day event began with an honoring celebration of the foremothers of color who courageously pioneered a space for a new generation of women of color activists. The honorees included Byllye Avery, founder of the National Black Women's Health Project, Alexandrina "Reena" Marcelo, a founding member of GABRIELA, a women's solidarity network in the Philippines, and Luz Rodriguez, an Afro-Puerto Rican activist in New York City.

The conference also featured ethnic caucuses (called Talking Circles), which occurred between the plenary sessions to create an opportunity for women to work with their own ethnic groups across the country. A new caucus for Arab American/Middle Eastern women was created during the conference, adding these important voices to the discourse on reproductive health and sexual rights in the United States.

Perhaps the most spectacular sight at SisterSong was the incredible diversity of people who attended the conference. The youngest speaker was 15 years old and the oldest participant was 76. There were mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, men and white allies who came together to support women of color organizing for reproductive justice.

The SisterSong conference closed with a Call to Action for women of color in the United States to work to defend our reproductive health and sexual rights. In the coming years, we will continue our work to ensure that women of color achieve undivided justice and respect for their human rights here and around the world.

Since the conference, SisterSong played a leading role in the April 25, 2004 Pro-Choice March, the first time in four marches that women of color have demanded and achieved leadership positions in the decision-making process. SisterSong worked to ensure that thousands of women of color participate in the March, with 1.15 million people, became the largest March in U.S. history. SisterSong believes that mobilizing thousands of women of color for the March for Women's Lives had a significant impact on the direction of American society that is being deceived by a selected – not an elected – presidential administration.



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America is at a dangerous moment in history that is reminiscent of the 1930's in Germany when ordinary Germans did not understand the warning signs of their society. They were compelled into mindless hyperpatriotism, whipped up into a fiercely aggressive war labeled as "defensive," misled by a government manipulated media that strictly limited access to alternative points of view, encouraged to express anti-Semitism, and most of all, urged to become debt-ridden consumers to prop up the German economy. The parallels to America today are frightening.

SisterSong has committed to doing its best to help mobilize women of color in the United States so that we take every peaceful action possible to stop this downward spiral of endless war and pitiless suffering worldwide. The U.S. government is ceaseless in its attacks on women's human rights worldwide, most famously for its imposition of the Global Gag Rule restrictions that prevent women from having access to accurate sexual health information and that contribute to the 500,000 pregnancy-related, 3 million AIDS-related, and 75,000 unsafe abortion-related deaths worldwide each year.

By promoting the more inclusive human rights framework in reproductive justice organizing, SisterSong also helps the mainstream movement recognize the limits of the "choice" rhetoric, and truly build a movement to transform women's lives. This human rights-based framework is based on the early recognition among women of color organizers that we have the right to control our own bodies simply because we are human, and as social justice activists we have the obligation to ensure that those rights be protected.

For more information on SisterSong, visit our website at [www.Sistersong.net](http://www.Sistersong.net)