

.....**Connect The Dots Coalition**

CONNECT, Crime Victims Treatment Center, Feministing, NOW-NYC,
NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault, The Healing Center,
and Service Women's Action Network

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PRESS ADVISORY: Rally in Support of Nafissatou Diallo

WHEN: Tuesday, August 23, 2011, 11:00 AM

WHERE: 100 Centre Street, Manhattan

**WHY: To “connect the dots” between the outcome of the
Dominique Strauss-Kahn case and
the broader issue of violence and sexual assault**

New York, NY– *Connect The Dots*, a coalition of anti-violence advocates, activists, and individuals, would like to see the Manhattan DA continue to pursue the criminal case against Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the 62-year-old former International Monetary Fund chief who was arrested and charged with the May 14th sexual assault of 32-year-old Nafissatou Diallo, a housekeeper at the Sofitel hotel. Ms. Diallo’s medical report from the Manhattan hospital where she was treated lists the cause of injuries as “assault” and “rape.” The coalition hoped to see the case move forward on its merits, despite issues that have been circulating in the press questioning the credibility of the victim.

The interests of gender, race, class and geopolitics that surround this case have erased Ms. Diallo’s courage, suffering and humanity. There are many lessons to be drawn from the experience of Nafissatou Diallo in the days and weeks following Mr. Strauss-Kahn’s arrest: first, and foremost, that victim blaming is still viewed as a “credible defense.” Within a week of his high-profile arrest, the media reported that Mr. Strauss-Kahn’s lawyers hired a private detective firm to dig into Ms. Diallo’s entire history to find any detail that could be used to discredit her, and thereby undermine the case. This sends a chilling message to survivors of sexual assault, who will think twice before reporting the crime for fear of becoming a media target and subject of gossip and speculation.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recognizes sexual violence as a public health crisis in this nation, where an estimated one in six women in the United States – and one in 33 men – will experience a sexual assault in their lifetime. Yet, owing to the shame, fear and stigma surrounding a sexual assault, coupled with the widespread practice of victim blaming, sexual assault is the most underrated crime in the nation.

Connect The Dots stands in solidarity with Ms. Diallo as she seeks justice not only for herself, but for all survivors of sexual assault who must contend with the rationalizations, denial and victim blaming of our misogynist rape culture. We urge the criminal justice system and the people of New York City to ensure that the power and privilege of Dominique Strauss-Kahn do not make a mockery of justice. The coalition members share the following observations about her case and the ways it illuminates issues common to all survivors of sexual violence:

“CONNECT stands in solidarity with Ms. Diallo as she deals not only with the trauma of rape but with the violence being perpetrated against her by a rape culture that has blamed and demonized her for being the victim of a crime. The media continues to discredit her story, question her experience and erase her pain while normalizing Dominique Strauss Kahn’s behavior. *This is what defines a rape culture: bashing and blaming a victim while an influential, powerful perpetrator gets away.* CONNECT praises the courage of Ms. Diallo and the countless other victims of sexual assault and rape who seek justice.” – **Kala Ganesh, Executive Director, CONNECT, Inc.**

“The justice system should equally be available to all, regardless of the background of an alleged victim or an alleged perpetrator. A victim’s past does not change the fact that a crime was committed against her.” – **Carole Sher, Director of the Rape Crisis/Violence Intervention Program at Beth Israel Medical Center**

“The coverage of Ms. Diallo’s case against Dominique Strauss-Kahn demonstrates not only misogyny, but also the public and the media’s severe lack of understanding of the trauma caused by sexual assault. There is no one ‘correct’ or ‘typical’ response to the trauma of sexual assault. SWAN applauds the courage of any survivor who chooses to come forward. We will continue to educate the public, media and policymakers on the realities of sexual trauma to ensure that survivors are celebrated for their courage rather than misrepresented and vilified.” – **Anu Bhagwati, Executive Director, Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)**

“Nafissatou Diallo deserves her day in court. Despite all the lies, innuendo and slander directed towards her, her allegation is credible. We urge the District Attorney to proceed with this case. Let a jury, not a media circus, decide Dominique Strauss-Kahn’s fate.” – **Sonia Ossorio, Executive Director of the National Organization for Women – New York City.**

“The New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault applauds Nafissatou Diallo and all the courageous victims of sexual assault who come forward to report the crime. Victim blaming is a common defense tactic, and the risk is significantly higher in a high-profile case such as this one. Here’s what we know about sexual violence: We know false accusations of sexual assault are extremely rare. Victims of trauma commonly experience shock, numbing, and dissociation as well as effects on memory of details. As a result, it is not uncommon for a victim’s statement to contain inconsistencies and/or untrue statements. This, however, should not be confused with a false allegation. According to a study by the American Prosecutors Research Institute, false rape allegations account for 2 - 8% of all reported rapes.” – **Cathleen Cogswell, Interim Executive Director, New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault**

“All men are not abusive, but all men benefit when injustice is upheld by court systems or public opinions that re-victimize and criminalize women by putting the onus and blame on them for only wanting justice for the harm inflicted upon them. The merits of this case have become solely about Ms. Diallo’s character and past, rather than those of the accused—Mr. Strauss-Kahn. Let’s be clear that this case is about race, class, gender

and immigration status and how DSK benefits by having privilege where each are concerned.” – **Quentin Walcott, Program Director, CONNECT, Inc.**

“No victims of sexual assault should have to think twice of reporting a crime committed against them. The fact that Ms. Diallo came forward is commendable, she did the right thing, yet she is re-victimized by Dominique Straus Kahn, his legal team and the media. While many victims feel the shame of sexual assault acts committed against them in Ms. Diallo’s case, the shame is not in her. The shame is in Dominique Strauss-Kahn and his legal team who go to the extreme at whatever the cost, to continue to discredit Ms. Diallo.” – **Antonia Clemente, Executive Director, The Healing Center**

Connect the Dots is a diverse NYC based coalition of advocates and organizations working to prevent violence and sexual assault in our city and promote women’s health and rights.

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