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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Northampton MA: Dr. Janice Raymond, well known advocate for women's rights against sexual violence and medical abuse, will be among the featured speakers at the Zonta Public Forum on March 31st, at the Unitarian Society in Northampton (next to City Hall). The meeting will begin at 7 p.m.

The focus of the evening will be CEDAW, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, known as the "women's bill of rights." Originally drafted in 1979, it has been ratified by nearly all the nations of the world except Micronesia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran – and the United States.

Dr. Raymond is the co-executive director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, but travels and lectures all over the world on behalf of the issues of sexual exploitation and trafficking. In January 2004, she spoke to the European Parliament on "The Impact of the Sex Industry in the EU," and last year testified before a US Congress subcommittee on "The Ongoing Tragedy of International Slavery and Human Trafficking." She has written extensively, her most recent book being *Women as Wombs: Reproductive Freedom and the Battle Over Women's Bodies*. Dr. Raymond has been affiliated with universities in Sweden, Indonesia and at MIT; she is a UMass Professor Emerita of Women's Studies and Medical Ethics.

Zonta International, the professional organization whose mission is "to improve the status of women worldwide," has long been a non-governmental organization (NGO) with the United Nations, working through UNICEF and UNIFEM on many projects bringing health and education to women and girls. Last year, however, the organization took a strong political stand that goes beyond the benevolent: Zonta has thrown out a challenge to all the nations of the world to put a stop to the illegal sex slave trade. "We don't even like the word 'trafficking,'" said Linda Gibbon, former ZI District 1 governor and member of the local club. "Women and children are not inanimate objects. The human devastation is appalling, and governments are turning a blind eye to this incredibly lucrative trade. When the United States can ignore the basic precepts of CEDAW, even those countries that have agreed to it can shrug off their obligations."

Other speakers at the CEDAW Forum will be Dr. Gregory S. Prince, Jr., president of Hampshire College, who will deliver a keynote address on the United Nations and relationships among members, particularly with regard to the CEDAW question. Dr. Laura H. Roskos, visiting scholar at Suffolk University and coordinator of the Massachusetts CEDAW Initiative Center for Women's Health and Human Rights, and Dr. Connie Chow of Simmons College, from the Women's Rights Program Steering Committee of the Brookline/Boston chapter of Amnesty International and Coordinator of the Massachusetts CEDAW project, will be presenting vital information from their perspectives. Betty Jane Bourdon, area businesswoman active in Zonta International, currently International Vice President and a candidate for International President, will give the background on Zonta's role in the CEDAW and trafficking initiatives. Mayor Mary Clare Higgins, who serves on the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, will welcome guests to the city, and State Representative Ellen Story, who brought a petition to ratify CEDAW before the Great and General Court, will bring greetings.

For further information, please contact 413-268-9241, or the Northampton Zonta website at www.zontadistrict1.org/northampton_ma