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NEWS RELEASE

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN TOP ISSUE WORLDWIDE:
KERRY KENNEDY CUOMO TO ADDRESS WOMEN'S RIGHTS AT UD TALK

DAYTON, Ohio — When asked if she discovered any personal heroes as she was researching and writing Speak Truth to Power, Kerry Kennedy Cuomo answers, "Sure. Fifty-one of them."

Speak Truth to Power (Crown Publishers, 2000) is a book that chronicles the lives and struggles of 51 human rights defenders from 41 countries. Published in 2000, it includes profiles of the famous — Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama — and those who work in virtual anonymity — Digna Ochoa, a nun and one of the foremost human rights attorneys in Mexico who was killed in 2001, and Juliana Dogbadzi, a former sex slave to a fetish priest who got a ban on sexual slavery in Ghana for the first time in its history.

Kennedy Cuomo plans to expand on the stories of Ochoa and Dogbadzi in her address on “Women’s Rights: A Global Perspective” at 8 p.m. Thursday, March 7, in the Kennedy Union Ballroom at the University of Dayton. The presentation is part of UD’s Distinguished Speakers Series, and the event is free and open to the public.

As part of her visit to UD, Kennedy Cuomo will take part in the dedication of a new display of items relating to Kennedy Union and its namesake, John F. Kennedy, the nation’s 35th president and Kennedy Cuomo’s uncle. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 and students campaigned to name the then-new building in his honor.

The dedication, which is also free and open to the public, will be held at 5 p.m. Thursday, March 7, in the Kennedy Union Torch Lounge.

Although the most pressing issue in women’s rights “depends on where you are,” said Kennedy Cuomo, she names physical violence against women as the primary issue worldwide.

“In our country we have an extraordinary amount of physical violence against women,” she said. “In the United States, one of every five women will be sexually assaulted before the age of 18, and one of every seven men. It’s a silent killer in the U.S. that we don’t talk about.

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OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
300 College Park   Dayton, Ohio 45469-1679
(937) 229-3241   (937) 229-3063 Fax
www.udayton.edu

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Contact: Pam Huber
Huber@udayton.edu
"If we address the issue of domestic violence and sexual abuse, we will start to resolve a lot of other issues, problems we face as a nation. If people are more sensitive to others and able to direct their anger in a more positive way, we will start seeing people who are more attuned to other issues women face," such as access to health care, fair wages, access to child care and job training.

Physical violence against women is also the number one issue worldwide, said Kennedy Cuomo. "If you address violence against women as an issue, you automatically address the issues of sexism and so then start opening up education for women, jobs for women — and that would change entire cultures and societies around the world."

Kennedy Cuomo is the daughter of the late Robert Kennedy, killed in 1968 as he was campaigning for the presidential nomination. She served until 1995 as executive director of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, a nonprofit organization that addresses problems of social justice in the spirit of Robert Kennedy. She ran three programs: the National Youth Project helped cities create more effective and less costly programs for dealing with young offenders; the RFK Book Award and RFK Journalism Award, known as the "Poor People's Pulitzers," recognized authors and journalists who prodded consciences and exposed the problems of the dispossessed; and the RFK Center for Human Rights, which Kennedy Cuomo founded in 1988, that ensured protection of rights codified under the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

She has worked on diverse human rights issues such as child labor, disappearances, indigenous land rights, judicial independence, freedom of expression, ethnic violence, impunity, the environment and women's rights.

Kerry Kennedy Cuomo is a graduate of Brown University and Boston College Law School. She is married to U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Andrew Cuomo.

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For a photo of Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, contact Pam Huber at (937) 229-3256 or via e-mail at huber@notes.udayton.edu.