

Shop Window Showcases Campaign Over Teenage Pregnancy in Venezuela



Caracas, November 18 (XINHUA-RHC)-- A Venezuelan campaign against teenage pregnancy has created a big bang in Caracas by dressing a shop window with "pregnant" mannequins in back-to-school gear.

The display at a big shopping center shows mannequins dressed in typical school uniforms complete with pleated skirts and backpacks, with telltale bulging bellies. The display, initiated by two local non-governmental organizations, has sparked a public debate, just as intended by its designers.

"The idea of the campaign is to get people talking about sex education and to reach as many Venezuelans as possible about this serious problem that is affecting not only our country but also Latin America and the world," Thalma Cohen, an organizer of the campaign, told Xinhua. The problem of teenage pregnancy "is today a reality and people are not paying attention to it," says Cohen.

The campaign coincided with a mid-November report from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which warned that nearly 30 percent of young women in Latin America become mothers before 20 years of age.

Venezuela has one of the region's highest rates of teenage pregnancy, at 101 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years old, surpassed only by Nicaragua and Honduras.

"I think no parent is happy to see a daughter in a situation like that, and even though the campaign's message is very strong, what it's showing us is real," said Jairo Gonzalez, a father with a young girl in high school.

Gabriela Rodriguez, director of sex education at Construyendo Futuro, one of the NGOs that organized the display, agreed. She said that teenage pregnancy in Venezuela leads to school dropouts and economically dependent women, as well as domestic violence. She said: "Our society needs to stop seeing this issue as taboo and openly talk about it."

The government has recently made an effort to promote sex education to make up for the traditional lack of such programs. The campaign may be expanded to other shopping centers throughout the country.

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