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Fighting domestic violence... 'One bracelet at a time'

By RINA JIMENEZ-DAVID
Inquirer.net

WHAT do Hollywood stars Reese Witherspoon, Selma Hayek and Lauren Conrad, supermodels Adriana Sklenarikova Karembeu and Daniela Pestova, and local actress Ruffa Gutierrez, have in common?

The answer, of course, is Avon. They are all—in a global or national capacity—ambassadors for Avon, particularly the company's *Speak Out Against Domestic Violence* program launched globally in 2004, and in the Philippines just last month.

Witherspoon is the current Avon global ambassador, speaking eloquently and staying "on message" during the past week, when, as part of Avon's celebration of International Women's Day on March 8, she took part in a press conference and as a keynote speaker in the *Global Forum for Women and Justice* held in Washington, DC.

Clad in a dark blue dress with a single accessory—the silver "Women's Empowerment Necklace" that Avon is selling, with the proceeds earmarked to support efforts worldwide to bring an end to all forms of violence against women—Witherspoon spoke of her involvement in the campaign and of her happiness at how pieces of jewelry, the necklace and an "empowerment bracelet" that Avon launched last year, had managed to raise millions for NGOs around the world while raising the public profile of the issue.

Advocacy

Hayek, on the other hand, was Avon's first brand ambassador to raise the possibility of the company's adding the cause of domestic violence to its longstanding advocacy



and support for breast cancer efforts.

Conrad, on the other hand, is the "ambassador" for "m.powerment," a line of clothing, jewelry and beauty products aimed at a younger demographic than that typically reached by Avon. Dubbed the "younger Carrie Bradshaw" (Sarah Jessica Parker's fashionista character in "Sex and the City"), Conrad focuses on dating abuse and violence for the "m.powerment" market by designing the "Have a Heart" necklace and promoting the "m.powerment" peach lip color, all to raise funds for the cause.

The two supermodels Adriana and Daniela, who hail from Slovakia and the Czech Republic respectively, have lent their easily recognizable faces and their mystique to help promote awareness of the "other" forms of domestic violence, encapsulated in the slogan "Not only bruises make you a victim."

And Gutierrez? I had written earlier in my column about how this brand ambassador for Avon Philippines went teary-eyed while watching a promotional video for the *Speak Out* campaign. Apparently, despite the passage of time, memories of her abuse at the hands of her former husband can still upset her.

As one of the hosts of the forum that marked the campaign's local launch, Gutierrez lent a note of credibility as she, together with one survivor of domestic violence who also happens to be an Avon sales representative, spoke of what abuse means on the personal, private level.

Woman-to-woman

Witherspoon spoke glowingly of the "woman-to-woman" network that lies at the heart of Avon's business, with nearly six million women worldwide, its sales representatives, who are uniquely suited to promoting awareness of and access to services that abused women could use as a lifeline.

Without saying a word, as Avon chair and CEO Andrea Jung outlined in an interview, an "Avon lady" could reach out to a woman needing help just by handing her a brochure that contains information she needs. And just by selling the "empowerment necklace" or "empowerment bracelet," which was launched in other places but not here, women could "change the world one bracelet at a time," said Witherspoon.

The same "empowerment necklace," a small pendant with the "infinity" symbol hanging from a thin silver chain, goes on sale this month in the Philip-

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