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Immediate Release

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## **If you had a choice between being homeless or imprisoned what would you choose?**

Local woman gets new home and lease on life

ATLANTA, October 8, 2009 - Atlanta resident Astou Dieng faced that dilemma every day of her life for seven years. Fortunately, Partnership Against Domestic Violence, a local nonprofit, provided her with a third option – safe, affordable housing.

Astou Dieng who is from Senegal, West Africa, married and moved to Atlanta with her husband who was studying at Georgia State University. Weeks after arriving and eight months pregnant, Dieng who was penniless and unable to speak English, found herself imprisoned, and emotionally and physically abused by her husband. But with help from PADV, she is now free from beatings and humiliation; she has taught herself English; she owns a car; has her own home; is providing for her two children and has earned her nursing assistance certificate.

Dieng will be one of three domestic violence survivors who will speak at two PADV events: *Silent No More* candlelight vigil, scheduled from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 8, 2009, at the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site Visitor's Center, 450 Auburn Avenue. The second event, the *Domestic Violence Speak-Out*, is scheduled for Thursday, October 29 from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Gwinnett Justice and Administrative Center, Breezeway, 75 Langley Drive, Lawrenceville. Both events are free and open to the public, and are being held to observe National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

"I now have a family at PADV," said a jubilant Astou Dieng. "They are the only people I can talk to about my life. Sharing my story with staff and other survivors has helped me regain my confidence. I hope that through my career, I can help other people the way PADV has helped me. I have an important story to tell, and each day is getting better because I'm not alone."

Dieng like many domestic violence survivors had limited options. After learning about PADV, Dieng enrolled in its supportive housing program. "PADV's long-term housing program is critical because economic barriers make it difficult or impossible for many domestic violence survivors to find permanent, safe alternative housing," said Cathy Willis Spraez, president and CEO for PADV. "Unfortunately, with limited options, many survivors return to their batterers to avoid homelessness. That's why PADV's supportive housing program is so important in our community. We are reducing metro Atlanta's homeless population one woman at a time."

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PADV's supportive housing program serving Gwinnett and Fulton Counties was recently awarded more than half a million dollars in federal stimulus monies. PADV operates the *only* supportive housing program for domestic violence survivors in the city of Atlanta. Women who experience recent or ongoing domestic violence are far more likely to face eviction than other women. In fact:

- Forty-six percent of homeless women reported that they stayed in abusive relationships because they had nowhere to go.
- Domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children.
- One in four women will experience domestic violence.

**About PADV:** For more than thirty years, PADV, the largest domestic violence agency in Georgia, has provided professional support, safe shelter and empowering advocacy to battered women and their children in metro Atlanta. PADV transforms the lives of thousands of domestic violence survivors and their children in metro Atlanta annually through violence prevention, emergency intervention and long-term advocacy. Operating the only state-certified domestic violence shelters in Fulton and Gwinnett Counties, PADV also offers a 24-hour crisis line, long-term housing, support groups, legal advocacy, corporate and community education and a teen dating violence prevention program. To learn more about domestic violence and PADV programs and services, please visit [padv.org](http://padv.org) or call 404-870-9600.

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