



Regional Seminar for Asian Parliaments

Preventing and responding to violence against women and girls: From legislation to effective law enforcement

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Conclusions of the regional seminar for Asian parliaments on “Preventing and responding to violence against women and girls: From legislation to effective enforcement”

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Representatives from the Parliaments of Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand, as well as representatives of international organizations, Indian State Legislatures and government agencies, met in New Delhi, India, from 15 to 17 September 2011, for a regional seminar on preventing and responding to violence against women. The seminar was jointly organized by the Parliament of India and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The inaugural addresses by Hon. Meira Kumar, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, and Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia, set the tone for the seminar.

Participants appreciated the quality and relevance of all the experts' presentations, particularly the sharing of good practices. The discussions reflected the pluralism of Asian societies and the need to respect cultural diversity and establish a framework based on gender justice, gender equality and gender equity.

The seminar enabled participants to assess the situation of violence against women and girls in Asia with regard to its prevalence, forms, causes and consequences. Participants agreed that this type of violence was multi-faceted and multi-layered, that it was widespread in every country, that it constituted a form of gender-based discrimination and, inversely, that that type of discrimination was a leading cause of violence against women.

Participants highlighted the fact that existing and ingrained social and cultural patterns justified and rendered acceptable, by both men and women, domestic violence and other forms of violence against women and girls. However, participants agreed that the cultural prescriptions of gender-based roles were not static. Some participants noted a slow trend away from the stereotypes that nurtured violence against women while others said that efforts to generate awareness or encourage a shift in attitudes were insufficient. Sensitizing the general public, the clergy and the local grassroots leaders through intensive media campaigns and reporting could help bring about change and promote zero tolerance of violence against women. Youth awareness of human rights, gender equality and non-discrimination should be raised, notably through adequate school curricula and social media campaigns.

In addition to being a human rights violation and a public health issue, violence against women was an economic issue, the cost of which was borne by victims, families, communities, local and national governments. Measuring the cost of inaction would strengthen the argument in favour of action to address that scourge, in particular when compared to the lower cost of implementing anti-violence against women laws.

With regard to legislative frameworks on violence against women, participants briefly discussed the range of relevant international legal instruments. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was endorsed as a comprehensive international instrument on the subject and the standard-setter for national legislation. Appropriate legislation on violence against women should include measures of prevention, response to victims, redress and criminalization. Such legislation

should contain enforcement and monitoring mechanisms, as well as provide for the adequate training of all stakeholders involved in implementing and enforcing the law. It was also underscored that effective implementation of anti-violence against women legislation required a functional judicial and law enforcement system; other key requirements were accessibility, affordability and accountability.

Participants stressed the importance of building cross-party alliances through, for instance, women's parliamentary caucuses and gender committees, when drafting and tabling laws. Their experience showed that garnering the support of parliamentary leaders and of a large number of parliamentarians – both men and women – was fundamental to the success of this process. Participants shared experiences and good practices that could either be adapted to or adopted by individual parliaments.

Men should be part of the solution. Their multiple roles as fathers, educators, role models, law enforcers and justice providers made their involvement in the elimination of violence against women desirable and necessary. If men felt involved, they would help promote changes in attitudes among other men.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of measures proposed by participants to be read along with the working group rapporteurs' reports:

1. Analyse and address the root causes of violence against women as well as its forms;
2. Review national and local legislation to repeal laws that discriminate against women;
3. Ensure that legislation on violence against women is comprehensive and:
 - includes measures of prevention, response to victims, redress and criminalization
 - includes measures on enforcement and monitoring mechanisms
 - includes provisions for adequate and regular funding
 - takes into account all forms of violence against women, particularly country-specific violence
 - makes specific reference to women with disabilities, internally displaced women, refugee women, migrant women, women in situations of armed conflict and women belonging to underprivileged segments of the population;
4. Ensure that where parallel legal systems exist, gender-related and specific anti-violence against women legislation be harmonized;
5. Evaluate the cost of implementing anti-violence against women legislation and allocate budgetary resources accordingly;
6. Request the government to formulate and adopt a national action plan to combat violence against women and to report regularly to parliament on its implementation;
7. Increase women's participation in politics at all levels and strengthen the capacity of women parliamentarians to protect and advance women's human rights;
8. Develop and strengthen women's caucuses as a means of building cross-party alliances and garnering support;
9. Encourage men, in particular men parliamentarians and opinion leaders whose role is crucial, to speak out against gender inequality and violence against women;
10. Foster change and a paradigm shift in traditional attitudes and social norms that militate against women through a process of socialization and education from the family unit to all spheres in the public domain;
11. Request the IPU to create a social media network that uses new technologies to promote awareness, particularly among today's youth;
12. Also request the IPU to strengthen its role of fostering contacts among parliaments and parliamentarians, and facilitating exchanges of good practices and experiences on eliminating violence against women.