

# THE DHAKA DECLARATION FOR ELIMINATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SOUTH ASIA

We Parliamentarians from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Iran, meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on the 18-19 March 2003, at the Regional Workshop on Parliamentary Advocacy for the Prevention of Violence Against Women in South Asia, issue the following Declaration.

We recognize, and accept, our crucial role, both individually and collectively, as the bridge between people and government -- as advocates for the rights and concerns of the people, as legislators to make laws to protect these rights and mobilise the policies and resources required to create the enabling environment for this purpose.

Noting that our Governments have considered endorsing or have endorsed / signed / ratified the following international instruments,

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)  
The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979); (CEDAW)
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); (CRC)
- The Declaration on Violence Against Women (1993);
- The Vienna Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights (1993);
- The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Cairo, Egypt (1994);
- Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration (1995)
- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998)
- South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Preventing and Combating the Trafficking in Women, (2002)

We further recognise the following:

1. On the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, and The Convention on the Rights of the Child, any form of violence against women which can be construed as a threat to their life, liberty or security of person or which constitutes torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment infringes the fundamental human rights our countries have recognised under international law and in our constitutions.
2. Violence against women and girls taking place within the family, community, at the work-place or in society which includes, inter alia, ill-treatment, battering, incest, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, custodial violence, trafficking in women and rape, is a violation of the right to life, safety, liberty, dignity and physical and mental integrity of the victim and therefore an obstacle to the development of a democratic society.
3. Violence against women in general takes various forms and is unquestionably linked to discrimination against women and power relationships between the sexes in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres and in misinterpretation of religious doctrine, in our countries and in the family and community.
4. That domestic violence against women in the South Asian region is widespread and persistent, and that insufficient legal instruments and inadequate implementation of the laws that exist, results in women suffering violence in the family.
5. The majority of cases of abuse are not reported to the police/courts, mainly due to the belief that it is a private matter and the lack of proper enforcement of laws and the absence of social and economic support to protect women, with the result that violence against women remains a largely hidden crime.
6. That all forms of gender-based violence falling within the scope of the CEDAW definition and CRC should be considered criminal offences and States parties to the Conventions are also specifically obliged to act against private persons,

companies and organizations committing violence against women.

7. That adequate statistics and research on violence against women are not available in most of our countries.
8. There is still a low level of awareness of the specific needs of women subjected to violence among service providers and law enforcement agencies, including the police, social workers, educators, lawyers, judges, legislators, public servants and agencies.
9. Rape is a serious infringement of human rights and is used in war and armed conflict and is defined as a crime against humanity by the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court.
10. Violence against women in the home and in our societies directly and indirectly affects children and can often create a cycle of violence and abuse that is perpetuated through generations in families, communities and our societies and violence against women has long-lasting negative impacts on children.

## Call to action

We Parliamentarians here in Dhaka commit ourselves and call on Parliamentary colleagues, Governments and peoples of participating countries to strive for primary prevention of violence against women by empowering women through access to education, laws, policies and programmes including, income generation and poverty reduction so as to enhance the role and status of women in their communities;

We commit ourselves to giving priority to the following actions:

## Raising public awareness on women's human rights and violence against women as a basic aspect of development, peace and progress.

We will strive to promote the creation of a non-violent culture through education and sensitisation strategies targeting men and women, especially through the mass media and the education sector, as fundamental tools to prevent intergenerational and social violence;

We will encourage programmes for schools aimed at enhancing awareness among boys and girls of the effects of gender-based violence and developing collaborative means of resolving conflicts in order to counteract attitudes and behaviour which tend inter alia to regard women's bodies as commodities and inevitably leads to violence;

We call upon our Heads of State / Governments to use the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation to designate a particular year as the South Asian Year of Eliminating Violence Against Women.

### Enact and enforce legislation

We will take necessary legal measures to enact and monitor the enforcement of legislation impacting on violence against women.

We will support programmes to integrate health services and investigation procedures including programmes on legal aid so as to encourage women and girls subject to violence to report to the authorities and women's organizations or appropriate institutions to take legal action in defence of women who suffer violence;

We will ensure that resources are allocated and separately identified for law enforcement.

We will support the formation of parliamentary committees which will identify the gaps in relevant laws, support law reform and monitor the enforcement of laws on violence against women.

### Strengthening support services for victims of violence

We will actively support resource allocation and funding for independent services for the survivors of violence, including one stop safe havens and shel-

ters and gender sensitisation training of law enforcement agencies and all health personnel.

### Strengthening research and information sharing

We will actively encourage the collection of statistics on violence against women,

We will promote nationally and regionally, the sharing of research results and statistics as well as information on best practices and innovative measures taken in combating VAW

### Regional cooperation

Together we will work towards combating trafficking of girls and women in the South Asian region which often resulting in forced prostitution; to set up special programmes and to introduce specific measures to support those persons who are the victims of enforced sexual exploitation;

We will ensure that special attention is paid to the position of migrant women and HIV positive women who are the victims of gender violence;

We will share information and best practices within the region on laws including religious laws, and policies and programmes to combat violence against women and develop a process in monitoring the situation in our countries in meeting our constitutional commitments and responsibilities as state parties to CEDAW and CRC.

### Pledge

We parliamentarians pledge, as public advocates, opinion leaders, legislators and policy initiators to carry out these actions and to systematically and actively monitor the progress we make in doing so.

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Adopted at the Regional Workshop on Parliamentary Advocacy for the Prevention of Violence Against Women in South Asia

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