

REPORT OF THE  
REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON  
PARLIAMENTARY ADVOCACY FOR  
THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN IN SOUTH ASIA

DHAKA, BANGLADESH  
18-19 MARCH 2003



Asian Forum of Parliamentarians  
on Population and Development  
Bangkok, Thailand



UNFPA Bangladesh and  
Country Technical Services Team  
for South and West Asia,  
Kathmandu

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## LIST OF SELECTED ACRONYMS

AFPPF	Asian Forum of Parliamentarians for Population and Development
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CST	Country Technical Services Team
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICCDDR,B	International Center for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
MNA	Member National Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
VAW	Violence Against Women
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women

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**V**iolence Against Women (VAW) is only now beginning to receive recognition not only as a serious human rights violation but also as a public health issue. VAW and girls occurs in all countries in South Asia, in settings as varied as the home and in the wider community, in peacetime and in war. It occurs in every segment of society, though the forms and incidence of such violence are variable. VAW occurs through out the life cycle. Such violence ranges from pre-natal sex selection in favour of male babies and female infanticide to domestic violence, battering, marital rape and dowry-related violence to sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation, to trafficking and forced prostitution. Sadly this violence is not random - women and girls are victims simply because they are female. Women are particularly vulnerable to abuse in societies where there are marked inequalities between men and women, rigid gender roles, cultural norms that support a man's right to inflict violence, and weak sanctions against such behaviour. All these factors are present in South Asia. Thus, VAW is an expression of gender inequality but it also may serve to bolster wider patterns of gender discrimination and injustice. Too often, violence is visited upon women as though it were a right of men to inflict it and the obligation of women to suffer it. Such thinking must be rejected categorically. Although all women live in the shadow of violence and abuse, it is the poor and powerless who are the most vulnerable. They have the least resources to escape or change their situation.

Gender-based violence is still a taboo subject in the countries in the region. In many places it is considered a private matter, not to be discussed publicly. We need to break the silence. Domestic violence, rape and other forms of sexual abuse are gross violations of human rights. In most regions of the world, women slightly outnumber men. Demographic data shows alarming evidence of "missing" girls and women in the population in South Asia. In parts of South Asia, women are fewer than men to an extent which cannot be explained by biological and physical factors alone. This is the result of gender discrimination.

In 1833 slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire. Many countries in South Asia were then part of the British Empire or protectorates. One hundred and seventy years

later a new form of slavery exists in South Asia, namely, trafficking of women and girls, which is yet another tragic context for sexual violence. Every year, thousands of women and girls throughout South Asia are bought and sold into marriage, prostitution, and slavery. Once in the hands of traffickers, women and girls often have little chance of escape. Many are forced to engage in unsafe sex with their customers, severely exacerbating their risk of HIV. We therefore welcome the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Preventing and Combating the Trafficking in Women, which was signed at the Eleventh Summit meeting, held in Kathmandu, Nepal in January 2002. But again, the Convention alone will not ensure the eradication of this form of organized crime. Political will is essential to combat this problem, as well as international cooperation.

While legislation exists in all South Asian Countries yet the best of laws will have little effect if there is not the will to enforce them. Some people may look on male VAW as legally intolerable, but it is still considered an acceptable part of life in many societies, including by its victims. Socialising institutions like the family, school, religion, the media, culture and traditional authority still continue to entrench gender stereotypes against women. Only through first getting rid of so-called cultural stereotypes can we overcome domestic violence and abuse of women. It would be a mistake for any of us to underestimate the magnitude of the effort required to eliminate VAW. Our efforts towards elimination of VAW must be serious and must begin immediately.

First, and above all, we need more political commitment at the highest level to help bring about the social and legal changes needed to better support women and girls. Parliamentarians have a major advocacy role and responsibility in creating and strengthening national political will at all levels since that is a prerequisite to eradicate VAW. Second, only a dedicated, more inclusive approach involving broad partnerships with governments, NGOs, local communities, and the media can help bring about such changes. Third, VAW can only be combated through the ultimate goals of gender equality, equal opportunities and women's access to resources. As long as inequality exists, women are predisposed to subordination and vulnerability to violence. How can we ever win this battle without openness about women's rights?

The Asian Forum of Parliamentarians for Population and Development (AFPPD) and UNFPA has always worked for the empowerment of women. Hence, AFPPD, the Parliament of Bangladesh, UNFPA Country Office in Bangladesh and UNFPA Country Technical Services Team for South and West Asia came together to jointly organise the *Regional Workshop on Parliamentary Advocacy for the Prevention of VAW in South Asia* in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 18 and 19 March, 2003. Parliamentarians from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Iran attended the meeting. In addition to the parliamentarians there were representatives from the media and civil society organisations as well. The objectives of the workshop were to draw attention to the plight of women who are the victims of violence and to galvanise parliamentarians to address the issue both as a gross human rights violation but also as a major public health problem. The meeting succeeded in strengthening their resolve to meet their countries commitment made at global and regional fora to address gender equality and eliminate all forms of VAW. *The Dhaka Declaration for Eliminating Violence Against Women in South Asia* that was adopted at the meeting and their own personal commitments show their determination to address the issue.

This document is in two parts. The first part contains the outcome of the meeting, namely the *Dhaka Declaration* and individual commitments of parliamentarians. The second part is a synopsis of the proceedings of the meeting. A CD-rom is also included which contains the short film 'Echoes of Silence' which is about VAW in South Asia, Country Papers prepared for the Workshop, web pages and other useful information related to VAW.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the parliamentarians and other participants who took part in this important workshop. I would like to thank in particular Ms Imelda Henkin, Deputy Executive Director (Management) for addressing the workshop on behalf of UNFPA. Mr Shiv Khare, Executive Director of AFPPD, Ms Suneeta Mukherjee, UNFPA Representative in Bangladesh, Mr Nurul Ameen, Assistant Representative, Dr Prasanna Gunasekera, Consultant, and Mr Jalaluddin Ahmed, Director of the South-South Center, Dhaka were key movers of the workshop in terms of both substantive and logistics aspects. I would like to thank them and all other colleagues from the Country Office, AFPPD and other institutions who helped make the workshop a success.

We trust that you will find the report useful and informative.

**Wasim Zaman**

Director  
UNFPA Country Technical Services Team  
For South and West Asia  
Kathmandu, Nepal  
April 2003

**Ms. Imelda Henkin**  
**Deputy Executive Director (Management), UNFPA**

**Introduction**

Your Excellencies, distinguished parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the Government of Bangladesh for hosting this regional workshop on parliamentary advocacy for the prevention of violence against women. It is indeed difficult to think of a more timely or worthwhile pursuit than protecting women and girls from the widespread discrimination and violence they face.

I would like to thank the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development for organizing this workshop in collaboration with the UNFPA Country Office in Bangladesh and the UNFPA Country Technical Services Team for South and West Asia. The background papers and reports you have prepared set the stage for a most fruitful meeting.

**Role of Parliamentarians**

It is indeed a pleasure to be here in Dhaka and to have the opportunity to discuss the issue of violence against women with government officials and parliamentarians from throughout the region. As Parliamentarians and Ministers, you are very important because you represent the people in your countries and advocate for their rights and needs. You are uniquely placed to offer leadership in the area of violence against women, now recognized as a critical issue for human rights and for economic and social development.

As Parliamentarians, you have influence at the highest levels of government, in civil society and at the grassroots among individual men and women. You are the voices of the people and their natural link to their governments. Your presence here is most gratifying.

It is my sincere hope that you will use this opportunity to reaffirm and strengthen your commitment to women's rights and to the elimination of violence against women and girls.

**Threat to Development**

In Ottawa last October, 130 parliamentarians from around the world reaffirmed their commitment to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. This agreement, which was endorsed by 179 nations, stipulates that advancing gender equality and equity, empowerment of women, eliminating all forms of violence against women, and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development-related programmes.

Violence against women has a profound impact on development. It perpetuates poverty by reducing women's capacity to work outside the home, their mobility and access to information, and children's school attendance. Gender based violence severely limits women's full participation in society, impacting on all phases of their life cycle.

**Threat to Health**

It is a sad reality that today the vast majority of the excluded and marginalized citizens in our world are women and girls. The brutal discrimination and violence they face is not only a violation of human rights, it is also a serious threat to their health and the health and well-being of their families, communities and nations.

In the worst cases, the woman dies and this has terrible repercussions for the children and the family. Very often, the death of a mother means the death of a family. In Bangladesh alone, 14 per cent of maternal deaths are associated with injury and violence.

The health damage done to women includes unwanted pregnancies from rape and sexual assault, malnourished and low birth weight babies, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, persistent gynaecological problems and psychological issues including depression. The damage done is damage to human dignity and the human spirit.

The impact on children who witness violence is also considerable and can lead to the

intergenerational transmission of violence. Apart from the impact on health and education, several studies have established that witnessing violence as a child is a strong predictor for experiencing or perpetrating violence as an adult.

Violence against women also increases the risk and vulnerability to HIV. Although national HIV prevalence rates for countries in the South Asia region are low (1 percent or lower), there are already localised epidemics within particular populations. India's national adult HIV prevalence rate of less than 1 percent offers little indication of the serious situation facing the country. In fact, an estimated 3.97 million people were living with HIV at the end of 2001. This is the second highest figure in the world, after South Africa. In addition to their biological vulnerability, the gender discrimination, abuse, trafficking and poverty that women face in South Asia, translates into high levels of vulnerability to HIV infection.

### **Epidemic Proportions**

It is no exaggeration to state that sexual abuse and violence against women and girls have reached epidemic proportions.

From honour killings to acid throwing, sex selective abortion to domestic violence, rape to sexual trafficking, and child abuse to dowry murder, the violence suffered by women and girls is of a systematic and massive scale. And in many cases, the mantles of culture and tradition are used to hide or justify these cruel and alarming human rights violations. The recent resurgence of religious extremism brings these issues to the forefront.

Yet the function of culture and tradition is to provide a framework for human well-being. No value worth the name supports the oppression and enslavement of women. Yet in many places, violence against women and girls is somehow perceived to be normal or even expected. And this perception hinders progress and the full achievement of women's rights.

Here in South Asia, where boys are preferred by parents, the problem begins in the womb. It is estimated that over 60 million girls are missing, the result of sex-selective abortion, infanticide and neglect. These 60 million girls were eliminated for one reason—and one reason alone: because they were girls. In one

study of a clinic in Bombay, all but one out of 8,000 aborted fetuses were female.

In the region, daughters are viewed as a burden, as an economic liability, as transient members of their families and as the property of others. A young woman who escaped from near death said: "Women were always hated in my household. My mother hated having girls." From early on, she was stopped from progressing in every aspect of her life. "I had to fight to go to school," she said. "I was tied up with rope and beaten on many occasions." This 25-year-old woman escaped and spoke out. However, many others suffer in silence, and even blame themselves for the injustices they endure.

Poverty, discrimination, weak legislation and poor enforcement fuel violence against women and girls and nowhere is this more apparent than in the growing trade of human trafficking. According to the United Nations, some 30 million women and children across the Asia-Pacific region have been trafficked over the past 30 years. This constitutes the largest slave trade in human history. The victims, often teenage girls, end up working in sweat shops or as prostitutes. However, in many cases, the very forces that are supposed to protect them offer protection instead to the very criminals that sold them. During the next few days, we will have an opportunity to discuss ways to ensure that the new regional Convention on Trafficking can become an effective counter to this growing crime. The plight of women and girls is further escalated in conflict and civil strife situations, occurring on an ever increasing scale.

Another grave problem is early marriage for girls, which despite laws against the practice, continues to be more a norm than an exception. Early marriage and early pregnancy place adolescent girls at great risk and deprive them of a full education, thereby severely limiting opportunities for the rest of their lives. Here in Bangladesh it has been found that maternal mortality among teenage mothers is double the national figure. Together, we must increase knowledge of the benefits of delaying marriage and expanding opportunities and choices for girls.

Everywhere, the treatment of women and girls is a reflection on the state of societies and the status of women within them. We must constantly remind ourselves that gender in-

equality, which is the root of gender violence, is neither inherent nor inevitable. It can be changed by human beings through equitable policies and laws and greater social awareness, mobilization and behaviour change.

The very first article of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. The 1978 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women offers a means of holding governments accountable. It imposes obligations on States parties to eliminate discrimination in private as well as public life.

### **Role of UNFPA**

At the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), we work to improve laws and policies and to raise awareness on these critical issues. We support the training of health workers on how to help victims of violence, and training for police and judges to enforce relevant laws. Our programmes often involve men to generate greater awareness and promote positive behavioural change. We also support counselling and campaigns for the eradication of harmful traditional practices.

In India, UNFPA has assisted with the development of a national advocacy strategy to put an end to the pre-birth elimination of girls. Here in Bangladesh, UNFPA joined with the Home Ministry to raise awareness of women's health and gender issues among nearly 4 million members of the village defence part, Ansars and police personnel. UNFPA is also working with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs on a Male Attitude Study that will look into reasons for violent behaviours of men.

Studies show that most women will not mention that they have experienced violence in their lives unless they are asked directly. As a result, millions of women continue to suffer in silence and in shame. It is necessary to break this silence. A little over two years ago, UNFPA embarked on a new initiative to integrate the assessment and treatment of violence into reproductive health and family planning services. In collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM, and the World Health Organization, we prepared a manual - now being field tested in Nepal and Sri Lanka - which offers step-by-step guidance on how to address violence against women and girls

in health care settings. The findings of the field testing will also enable women's organizations to lobby governments to urgently address these issues, which have for too long been shrouded in secrecy and neglect.

### **The Way Forward**

Here in this region and around the world, positive changes are taking place at all levels—from the home to the streets and to the halls of government. Many women themselves are refusing to be beaten and abused. Many women have joined with other women to campaign for justice and support. And a few brave men have joined them. All of these advocates deserve our full support.

At the heart of some of this violence are socially ingrained attitudes towards female sexuality. There is a desire to control women and to keep them in their place as second-class citizens. Therefore, in order to bring about change, there is a need for increased awareness of the rights of women. This awareness must be created through awareness-raising campaigns, public speeches and through the implementation of laws that bring offenders to justice.

Here in South Asia, there is increasing awareness, pressure, and a willingness by policymakers to take the issue of violence against women seriously. We can point to progress in the increasing number of laws that have been passed in the region to protect women from violence and to punish offenders. The Acid Crimes Control Act and the Prevention of Women and Child Repression Act in Bangladesh, and the 2002 SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating the Trafficking in Women are all positive steps that have been taken.

However, as we all know, the mere passage of laws does not stop the violence. The challenge is to ensure that the implementation of laws is institutionalized and that the violence is no longer accepted within households, communities and within governments.

In many places, gender-based violence is on the rise because the prosecution rate is negligible and men know they can get away with it. As Ministers and Parliamentarians, you can play a key role in bringing this impunity to an end.

In terms of the protection of women and their health, resources are urgently needed

for safe houses, shelters and burn centres. As Ministers and Parliamentarians, you can provide resources for shelters where women can receive support and counselling, and burn centres where women can receive skilled medical treatment and recovery services.

Overall, it is women themselves who are more likely to speak out for women's issues and they should have an equal say in policymaking. Reserving seats for women in the Parliament and in provincial and local

government assemblies can help to bring these issues to the top of agendas so they can be addressed.

In closing, I would like to stress that the Joint Declaration and Action Plan that is to be adopted at this meeting are important steps forward. Together, we must confront the problem of violence against women and girls with a level of action and commitment that is proportionate to the scope of the problem. This way we will be ensured of success.

Thank you.



**T**he *Dhaka Declaration for Eliminating Violence against Women in South Asia* which was adopted at the Regional Workshop on Parliamentary Advocacy for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and fulfilled the objectives of the meeting. The *Dhaka Declaration* comes first in this report. It represents the commitment of parliamentarians to break the silence and denial in relation to VAW that prevails in the region and plans for greater cooperation and a commitment to eliminating VAW. It charts the way forward in combating VAW in that it shows clarity of purpose in initiating legislation, developing mechanisms for their enforcement and implementing supporting programmes.

Parliamentarians in their individual capacity recognized the value of making personal pledges. These individual pledges demonstrate the strength, commitment and drive of participants to eliminate VAW.

The outcome of this Regional Workshop will no doubt be felt around the region given the resolve and unity of purpose shown by the parliamentarians who participated.

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

**W**e 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 shelters 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.

## INDIVIDUAL PLEDGES BY PARLIAMENTARIANS



### BANGLADESH

**Mr. M.A. Matin,  
MP of  
Constituency 264  
(Chandpur-5), from  
Bangladesh.**

I, am committed to uphold the mission and vision of this workshop to the best of my ability and capacity.



### BHUTAN

**Mr. Dasho Sangay  
Dorji, MNA on  
behalf of the  
Delegation of  
Parliamentarians  
from Bhutan**

As Parliamentarians, we will draw attention to domestic violence being a human rights violation, and work for the implementation of specific laws against it. We will in order to further reinforce the commitment already made by the Government of Bhutan.

Besides, all possible efforts shall be made to eradicate sexual abuse and sexual harassment of women and girls, particularly in the workplace, community and in rural social life. Gender equality and the empowerment of women in the social, political and economic spheres will be actively advocated.



### INDIA

**Mr. Lakshman  
Singh, MP, Vice-  
Chairman, AFPPD,  
India**

I am taking back to my country a lot of new ideas and have renewed by commitment to address this issue.

First, I would like to step up the educational process and facilities for women' education, especially in rural areas.

Secondly, I would try to expedite setting up centres for rehabilitation of destitute women.

Mr. Chandra Sekhar Reddy, MP (Rajya Sabha), India

We must work together and extend all our support for the empowerment of women and to prevent violence against women.

I suggest that parliamentarians should form a committee and work together at the national and constituency level.

I would like to provide infrastructure (buildings), especially for women and I will also allocate matching funds for this noble cause.

**Dr. M Jagannath, MP (Lok Sabha), from India.**

I will :

- Work for the overall development of women and encourage empowerment of women;
- Help the HIV / AIDS patients who face discrimination from the community, and make them feel they are safe in society.
- Oppose pre-natal diagnostic techniques for determination of sex and selective abortion of female foetus
- Impress upon the Government of India to implement all the laws and acts made in favour of women.

**Dr. Chandrakala Pandey, MP (Rajya Sabha), from India.**

I will campaign against any type of oppression on women and take up issues like dowry, wife beating and sexual harassment. I will also go and teach in evening schools for illiterate women, and make them aware of their equal rights. If I am made aware of any sex discrimination within my electorate or anywhere, I will take action against them.



### IRAN

**Mr. Ramezan  
Wahidi, MP,  
Director of  
Population and  
Development  
Group of Iran.**

I will organise a meeting between NGOs and governmental organisations working on the subject of violence against women and will unify their aims and efforts.

I will organise information transfer through the public media on the subject.



### MALDIVES

**Ms. Aneesa  
Ahmed, Minister  
for Women and  
Children's Affairs,  
From Maldives**

I commit myself to circulate the Dhaka Declaration to all parliamentarians; request the

President of the Maldives to propose to his SAARC colleagues to designate 2004 as the SAARC Year for Eliminating Violence Against Women; hold informal discussions in my constituency to sensitise the people on VAW.

**Mr. Ismail Zahir, MP from Maldives**

I will visit my constituency to inform the people on the provisions of Declaration of this meeting.

**Ms. Fatimah Sheereen Abdullah, MP from Maldives**

I would like to run some awareness programmes among my constituency.

I would like to sensitize men about violence against women through media.



**PAKISTAN**

**Mr. Sardar Muhammad Yaqub, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, from Pakistan**

I will move a legislation bill in Parliament to constitute a committee which will look after the legislation for VAW. This committee will monitor the implementation of existing laws and formulation of new laws against the victimisation of women.

Small committees will be created in rural areas and town to create awareness on violence against women and I will also lobby with district governments.

**Mr. Sardar Tufail Ahmed Khan, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan**

I will take every step for the encouragement of women in our country.

**Dr. Donya Aziz, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan**

I will pursue the task of adding values/ethics to our school programmes. Since Pakistan's Ministry of Education is currently undertaking a review of school curriculum and trying to add reproductive health issue to school programmes, we could incorpo-

rate a values/ethics programme to the amended curriculum.

I feel that teaching children at a young age about the hazards of violence will help us cultivate a generation of Pakistanis who will honour women and welcome them as powerful and equal members of society.

**Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan, Member of National Assembly of Pakistan.**

NGOs working in Pakistan will be assisted to prepare a data base / directory which will provide details of shelters and gather information on types of violence in different parts of the country. Moreover, the NGOs will be organised to create awareness in the rural and most remote areas of the country so that women will know their legitimate rights.

**Ms. Shagufta Jumani, Member, National Assembly of Pakistan**

I shall move a resolution in the National Assembly of Pakistan stating that there should not be any discrimination on the basis of gender and there should not be any violence against women.

**Ch. Muhammad Rafiq, Additional Secretary, National Assembly of Pakistan.**

I shall encourage women Members of Parliament to work for the welfare of women-folk of the country.



**SRI LANKA**

**Ms. Pavithra Devi Wanniarachchi, MP on behalf of Delegation from Sri Lanka**

We will propose to have a Women Parliamentarians' Sub-committee included in our Human Rights Committee.

We are interested and willing to work as parliamentarians, with agencies and civil society groups, for creating awareness of women's rights. This will help us to work on women's rights issues in our constituencies.

## INAUGURAL SESSION

**Chairperson: Ms Khurshid Zahan Haque,  
Hon Minister for Women's Affairs**

**M**r. Rakibuddin Ahmed, Secretary Bangladesh Parliament welcomed the participants. He said that the meeting was opportune to create awareness among parliamentarians on violence against women (VAW) since they represent the peoples' interests. He emphasized the need for parliamentarians to address the issue of VAW because of the resulting adverse effects it had on society.



Senator Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit, Secretary General, AFPPD, in her introduction to the meeting hoped it would stimulate action to combat VAW. She pledged AFPPD support for legislative advocacy and action at national or local levels.

After briefly describing the AFPPD, she spoke of the Trust Fund for Parliamentarians set up in Japan with UNFPA to aid AFPPD's efforts all over the globe. Dr. Sukavejworakit pointed out that parliamentarians have a very important role to play in regard to VAW and that a growing number of parliamentarians are committed to its eradication through their legislative and social roles. She said that AFPPD has now started a "Report Card Programme" for each parliamentarian who attends an AFPPD organized event and expresses a desire to work further for the cause.



In a thought provoking address, Ms. Imelda Henkin, Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA, said that parliamentarians are uniquely placed as people's representatives and advocates of their constituencies to address the issue of VAW, which is now recognised as central to development.

Parliamentarians have access to both the grassroots and highest levels in society. The present meeting is a sequel to the Ottawa Conference on Population and Development held in 2002 where 130 MPs from different countries reaffirmed their commitment to

advancing gender equality, empowerment of women and eliminating discrimination and VAW. Ms. Henkin reiterated that VAW is a threat to development and to health and has assumed epidemic proportions. "We have to constantly remind ourselves that gender inequality, which is the root of gender violence, is neither inherent nor inevitable. It can be changed by human beings through equitable policies and laws and greater social awareness, mobilization and behavior change" she said. The recent resurgence of religious extremism has worsened matters. Poverty, cultural values, weak legislation, and poor enforcement fuel the crisis she said. Ms Henkin linked the campaign against VAW to the Human Rights Declaration (1948) and CEDAW (1978) and highlighted the role of UNFPA in combating VAW.

Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Honourable Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, observed that despite their traditionally submissive role, women in Bangladesh are making an important contribution to development in the country and are becoming more active in the social and political arena. Minister Ahmed said that women now play a positive role in grass root level government bodies. He went on to say that the Ministry has prepared proposals for amending the Constitution in order to reserve seats for women in Parliament. The Minister pointed out that several laws to combat VAW had been passed such as the Prevention of Women and Child Repression Act, the Acid Crime Control Act and the Anti-dowry Act. However, the mere existence of laws was not enough to combat VAW, they need to be implemented in order to bring about change.



The Chief Guest Barrister Muhammad Jamiruddin Sircar, Speaker, Bangladesh Parliament, stressed that the implementation of existing laws was crucial to the eradication of VAW. He observed that it was necessary to create social awareness from the village level upwards about the consequences of VAW and about gender equal-

ity. With a combined effort and launching a social movement against all forms of VAW, substantial success can be achieved within a very short period of time. The Speaker observed that MPs cannot afford to ignore the issue of VAW, as women's empowerment is essential to societal and economic development.



Ms Khurshid Zahan Haque, Honorable Minister for Women and Children Affairs, as Chairperson, pointed out the benefits of a cross-cultural exchange between MPs afforded by the workshop. This would enrich understanding in regard to laws and policies pertaining to discrimination against women. She said that gender inequality and discrimination are common in South Asian countries and that the region needs to foster increased regional and international cooperation for eliminating discrimination and inequalities between women

and men. The Minister stated that through a partnership between NGOs and government, the Ministry is committed to improving women's status. She mentioned the recent "long march" sponsored by the Government of Bangladesh to raise consciousness regarding women's rights. A pilot project, called 'One Stop Crisis Centre' had commenced to improve the quality of services and effectiveness of investigation. These 'One Stop Crisis Centre' offers medical, legal and policy assistance.

Finally, Ms Suneeta Mukherjee, Country Representative UNFPA, Bangladesh concluded the inaugural session by thanking the distinguished invitees, embassy representatives from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and UN agencies and the parliamentarians for attending the workshop and hoped that their deliberations would be fruitful.



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**Chairperson:** Ms. Anisa Ahmed, Minister of Women and Children Affairs of Maldives,  
**Presentation:** Ms Ruchira Tabassum Naved  
**Discussant:** Ms Gitanjali Singh, Programme Officer, UNIFEM Regional Office, New Delhi



The session commenced with the screening of the poignant film “Echoes of Silence”, which portrayed VAW in South Asia. The film was commissioned by UNFPA CST /SAWA for the workshop. While introducing the film, Mr. Deepak Gupta – UNFPA Consultant reiterated the much needed and sustained efforts for advocacy on VAW issues at all levels. He especially demonstrated, through the film, a critical linkage between reproductive health, reproductive rights and violence issues.

Ms Ruchira Tabassum Naved of ICDDR,B: Centre for Health and Population Research, Dhaka, Bangladesh then gave a synopsis of her paper “A Situation Analysis of Violence Against Women in South Asia”. This detailed all forms of gender based violence prevalent in South Asia and its impact, underlying causes, linkages with other areas such as health, and also provided a snapshot of what government agencies and NGO are doing to eliminate this pandemic.

Ms Naved commenced her presentation by saying that VAW is a world-wide problem, crossing cultural, geographic, religious, social and economic boundaries. It is now recognized as an important human rights and public health issue and was given due attention at the UN World Conference on Human Rights (1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1994). The worst manifestations of gender-based violence are observed in South Asia,

which is known to be the most gender insensitive region in the world. According to Ms Naved, VAW in South Asia occurs throughout the lifecycle, starting as early as the in utero period. No wonder that compared to demographic expectations there are an estimated 60 million “missing women” in South Asia. This phenomenon can partly be explained by female feticide and infanticide, while the other reasons are discriminatory child-care practices, which kill by neglect, linked to lack of access to health care and education for girls and women. South Asia is the region in the world where women’s life expectancy at birth is least favorable compared to that of men. It is less than men’s in two countries and almost the same in several others, in contrast to most regions of the world where women’s life expectancy exceeds that of men.

VAW may take the form of physical, sexual, psychological abuse. These different forms of VAW may take place both within and outside homes. Ms Naved observed that domestic violence is the predominant type of violence, a fact, which may seem extremely difficult to accept as the family has always been believed to be the primary source of love, care and support. Quoting a large survey conducted in Bangladesh in 2002 by ICDDR,B and Naripokkho, Ms Naved said that most of the perpetrators of physical violence were relatives of the victim. Husbands are the most common perpetrators of violence against women. Therefore, contrary to the popular perception husbands rather than in-laws top the list of perpetrators of VAW in marital families of South Asia.

Ms Naved said that rape is increasingly being reported in South Asia. Quoting the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, she said one woman was raped every 35 minutes. The Islamabad Women Welfare Agency (IWWA) estimates that 8 out of 10 women who are molested or abused know their perpetrators and 75 percent of the perpetrators when questioned say that they had witnessed violence in their families when they are children. In India, 13,208 cases of rape

were reported in 1994, according to official records (National Crime Records Bureau 1994). Rape of girls under 10 years of age and from 10 to 16 years increased by 15.8 percent and 17.6 percent, respectively.

She pointed out that sexual harassment in the workplace is also on the increase. A recent study conducted in Pakistan by Alliance Against Sexual Harassment at Workplace (AASHA 2002) found that 58 percent of nurses faced sexual harassment by patients, co-workers, doctors or relatives of patients, and that young nurses were more vulnerable to it. The study also found high prevalence of sexual harassment of women working in offices. Some 93 percent of the women working both in the private and public sectors interviewed had experienced some form of harassment, mostly by senior colleagues. The study also observed that the problem of sexual harassment is acute among rural wage workers, domestic workers in urban areas and garment workers. In Bangladesh, high rates of sexual abuse has been recognized among girls employed as domestic workers. A study by the NGO, "Breaking the Silence" found that employers' sons had abused 13 percent of the victims.

Ms Naved drew attention to some culture-specific community violence, such as acid attacks, *fatwa* (a religious decree issued by religious leaders) and bonded labour. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, acid attacks are a relatively new concern not much reported in other South Asian countries. Acid attacks are usually carried out by men against women who refuse to marry them or turn down their proposal of love. UNICEF Bangladesh reports that there were 47 reported cases of acid violence in 1996, which grew to more than 200 cases in 1998. However there is believed to be considerable underreporting. She went on to say that newspapers in Bangladesh reported 25 cases of *fatwa* between January 1993 and August 1995, and three of them led to suicide of women and two resulted in murder. Bonded labourers are a group of women and girls who are especially vulnerable to exploitation and violence. This is a form of slavery in which women suffer sexually as well as physically, psychologically and economically. This type of labour is common in the Sindh province of Pakistan. For bonded labourers the usual situation is virtual imprisonment of families over generations, with scarcely any chance of freedom.

Ms Naved was of the opinion that growing religious fundamentalism in South Asia, has resulted in the interpretation of religion in very narrow and restrictive terms.

It is estimated that 200,000 children from Bangladesh have been trafficked to brothels in India and 4,500 women and children are trafficked to Pakistan annually. In a majority of the cases families are not involved in trafficking. Small networks of traffickers were found operating in Satkhira, Bangladesh. They recruited girls, the majority of whom were less than 18 years of age, from neighboring villages among their distant relatives. Some of the traffickers were arrested by police and fined, but their trade was not stopped. They are powerful and no one dares to oppose them. Trafficking of women and girls by families is also rampant in South Asian countries. In one Nepalese settlement, for example, up to 200 families have sold their daughters who were mostly between 12-15 years old.

Ms Naved then spoke about the health consequences of VAW which are both physical and mental. Violence may have a direct impact on a woman's reproductive and sexual health. Physicians have recorded some of the reproductive health problems inflicted by incest, which are anal and vaginal laceration, sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. Unwanted and unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections and HIV are increased among women subjected to violence. The coercive control exercised by a violent partner often extends to preventing a woman from exercising her reproductive right to use birth control methods and condom use. The mental health consequences of VAW include fear, anxiety, fatigue, depression, sleeping and eating disturbances. Suicidal tendencies are also an important psychological consequence of violence. Rates of traumatic and post-traumatic stress disorder and depression are greatly increased amongst women who have experienced violence as children, especially sexual abuse, and among women who have experienced violence in adult life. In Pakistan, a study of women seeking outpatient care in Karachi shows that depressed women were 7.4 times more likely to be physically abused, 13 times more likely to suffer high level of psychological abuse and 15 times more likely to be verbally abused than non-depressed women. The abused women complained of restlessness and uneasiness, which persisted even if their hus-

bands were not around. Sudden sweating and palpitation were common for them. Some of them suffered from mood disorders and hence disliked work and could not concentrate.

Ms Naved then went on to described some of the initiatives taken by Governments' and NGOs' in the region to deal with the issue of VAW.

The designated discussant Ms. Geetanjali Singh, Programme Officer, UNIFEM Regional Office, New Delhi, said that world wide, VAW is recognized as a symptom of unequal power relations between men and women. She pointed out that what is peculiar to South Asia is extreme son preference, the strangle hold of patriarchy, a culture of subordination of women and deep-seated stereotypical attitudes that valorize male superiority and power. She quoted Mehbub Ul Huq who said " *while growing up in South Asia is a struggle to a be a woman in this region is a to be a non person. Women bear the greatest burden of human deprivation in South Asia*".

Ms Singh observed that women and girl children are under valued and their contributions to the household and national economy were invisible for many years. The invisibility of women's work and the perception that they are meant to assume subordinate gender roles plays a large part in maintaining gender inequality in many countries of the region. Among the many things that perpetuate violence is the so-called gender neutrality and gender blindness of the state machinery and its officials including policy makers, leaders, enforcement institutions and families.

Ms Singh went on to say that in addition to all the forms of VAW discussed in the paper presented by Ms. Naved it is critical to focus on some of the following: the region is currently witness to both emerging peace initiatives on the one hand as well as intensification of conflicts across and within borders. VAW in conflict is one of history's great silences. *The Progress of the World's Women 2003 Volume 1*, reiterates that VAW during conflicts has reached epidemic proportions. The extreme violence women face during conflict does not arise solely out of conditions of war; it is directly related to violence that exists in women's lives during peacetime. Because so much of it goes unpunished, it is an accepted norm, which escalates during conflict as violence in gen-

eral increases. Militarization and the presence of arms legitimize new levels of brutality and impunity. Breakdown of the socio-economic order forces many women into transactional sex, forced marriages and into being trafficked. Women as partners of combatants and ex-combatants are subject to different forms of violence. Women are often marginalized in formal negotiations on peace despite establishing their credibility as peacemakers at the grassroots level.

She drew attention to the growing rise in religious fundamentalism in the countries of South Asia which has resulted in the reinterpretation of religion in very narrow and restrictive terms and a redefinition of ethnic and religious identities through control over women's bodies, codes of conduct for women and active promotion of religious, stereotypical images of women. Fundamentalism has been accompanied by recruitment of men and women, adolescents and young boys to sustain the movement as well as militarisation of the state and insurgent groups. Women are impacted heavily as they are forced to assume the household burden in more ways than one.

Ms Singh went on to state that gender inequalities and VAW have placed women at the epicenter of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. New forms of violations and the denial of human rights that HIV positive women face are exacerbated by the site of their location. The double burden of stigma and discrimination can lead women into further cycles of exploitation and also contribute to other high-risk behaviour. The link between HIV/AIDS, VAW and sites of conflict needs further exploration.

In addition to the health consequences of VAW that Ms Naveds' paper refers to, there are social costs of VAW on women that need to be kept in mind - it undermines the viability of the family, effects children, restricts women's decision making with regard to safe sex and reproductive outcomes. The political costs include limitations to women's empowerment, undermining of democratic processes and development. VAW teaches inequality and demonstrates how it could be used as a perverse means to solve problems.

Ms Singh pointed out that state initiatives to end VAW have emerged out of a combination of indigenous needs, international thinking on development practice and constant

interaction with women's groups which have been a very vibrant force in the South Asia region. South Asia mirrors many contrasts – all the SAARC countries have ratified CEDAW. India, Nepal and Maldives and Sri Lanka have reported before the CEDAW Committee in 2000, 2001 and in 2002. The SAARC countries have recently rededicated themselves to the Beijing Platform for Action commitments during the Beijing+5 sessions. National plans and policies have been drawn up and National Human Rights and Women's Commissions have been formed in most countries of the region. Recent years have witnessed some landmark judgments – despite all of this women are routinely victimized by myths, prejudices, and gender blind approaches and procedures. Two areas where Governments are willing yet unable to make progress are the socialization processes and in changing socio-cultural values of South Asian societies which are continuously reproducing patriarchy through the media, institutions of state at different levels, religion, community leadership, economic institutions and so on. Though VAW has become an important and critical area to address for governments in the South Asia region, however, the translation of this understanding into meaningful policies and programmes for women as well as their effective implementation leaves much to be desired.

Ms Singh emphasized that the human rights discourse has to permeate policy making, legislation and programmatic interventions. It has to inform the working of every rung of the state machinery (not remain confined to the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare), especially in the context of the family, which is still seen as a 'private' domain, outside the ambit of human rights. Legal literacy and the language of rights has to be understood by those who need to exercise the right as well as those who need to respect and promote it. Gender sensitization has to be regular, periodic and linked to a clear set of indicators for monitoring state accountability to women's rights.

Ms Singh pointed out that advocacy has been probably the most well addressed area of intervention for making VAW a public issue and demanding appropriate state action. This is where parliamentarians and networks such as the Centre for Asia Pacific Women in Politics and South Asia Committee for Political Empowerment of Women can play a crucial role in pushing the agenda forward and strengthening accountability

mechanisms at the highest level. NGOs and women's groups in each of the countries are offering counselling services, shelters, legal aid and referral services of various kinds, medical services, income generation/ employment. She pointed out that regionally, the reporting of VAW has increased, but the quality and outreach of support services for women needs to be improved.

Ms Singh then shared an example on how work on gender neutrality operates. SAKSHI an NGO in India undertook a comprehensive interaction with judges with the aim of assessing judicial understanding of concepts related to gender specific crimes and to juxtapose this with experiences of women, including those of female litigants and lawyers. These were some of their alarming findings -

1. 74% of the judges felt that preservation of the family should be a primary concern for women even if there was violence in marriage
2. 50% felt that child sexual abuse was not common
3. 90% said they would not opt for legal redress in cases of domestic violence involving their daughter or other female relatives
4. 55% believed that the moral character of a woman was relevant in sexual abuse cases
5. 78% had never heard of CEDAW

These statistics are of 1997 and since then UNIFEM and the Ford Foundation supported the Gender and Judges Initiative which has been able to set up a unique Judge-NGO partnership in the region. The purpose of this programme is not just to make judges understand gender but rather help them understand and internalize the concept of substantive equality from a gender lens, through an extraordinary partnership with activist, issue-based women's rights NGOs. Sensitizing the judiciary to understanding the principle of substantive equality, particularly in lower courts needs to be strengthened, to make them more gender sensitive in the interpretation of the law.

Ms Singh concluded by listing some of the emerging issues related to VAW that require focus and critical thought.

1. The mental health impact of VAW should inform counselling. The importance of "adequate facilities" for psychosocial counselling and life skills education that enables the victim to truly becoming a survivor cannot be over emphasized.

2. Research and documentation on prevalence, changing and emerging forms and impact of violence and a well-designed dissemination plan can contribute to building public opinion on the issue. Research on different aspects of VAW is practically non-existent e.g. the economic impact of VAW and the rehabilitation of survivors.
3. Mechanisms for engagement with the community have to be piloted more vigorously. This is partly because the community (family networks, neighbourhood networks, organized groups etc.) are the "first site of response" for women facing violence. Building the capacities of community structures that can support women is critical. This has to be accompanied and supplemented by a responsive institutional machinery. In some countries, national level data on VAW and its various dimensions is absent.
4. More generally, it may be observed that the onus of tackling VAW has been on women, women's groups and NGO's. Advocacy and awareness programmes should highlight that VAW is an impediment to social development at large and has to be tackled by both men and women. Exclusion of men from gender initiatives can significantly jeopardize success. It also overloads women with the responsibility of change. The international experience of working with perpetrators should be examined closely for replication.
5. Emerging areas of focus e.g. "exploring masculinities" to understand the interplay between masculinity, gender and violence need to be articulated, understood and strengthened. The specific understanding of gender and equality are plural so are the ways of thinking about how masculinities are made and re-made within critical alternate frameworks. A multitude of concerns like sexuality, health, violence self-awareness and supportive practices seem to have acted upon and given rise to this emergent field.
6. The role of the media in perpetuating gender stereotypes and shaping community norms necessitates appropriate intervention strategies with this constituency. A targeted programme aimed at the media, to build sensitivity on the issue, shape community norms and promote responsible reporting can be an effective area for intervention.
7. The intensifying conflict situations in the region, both across and with-in borders

are increasing women's vulnerabilities to multiple forms of violence - direct and indirect violence and conflict; rape, forced labor, displacement, being widowed, abandoned, deserted, disowned or orphaned. Both state and non-state actors often fail to adhere to international humanitarian norms in regards to treatment of civilians, especially women and children. Further, women are completely marginalized from the processes of peace negotiation and reconciliation and are usually absent from decision-making positions in the national, regional, and international bodies that make war or negotiate peace.

8. The devastating gender implications behind the growing pandemic of HIV/AIDS and the need to understand that HIV and AIDS is an issue of women's empowerment and rights among Governments and civil society.

### General Discussion

During the general discussion that followed, different approaches towards eliminating VAW and the role parliamentarians could play were discussed.

#### Increasing education opportunities for girls

Providing education to girls could significantly help to gradually elimination of violence against women. Hence, government should make necessary arrangements to educate girls because they are the future mothers of the nation. "If we can spend enough resources on educating girls, I suppose VAW would diminish gradually though not completely" a participant from Iran observed. However, another participant observed that education alone did not prevent VAW. Many educated women, some of them even with Ph.Ds, experienced violence inflicted by their husbands.

#### Increasing awareness among males about VAW

The need to launch a campaign focusing on men in order to contain VAW was emphasised. There was a need to change the behaviour and attitudes of men in order to create an enabling environment for mutual respect and understanding, cooperation and coexistence.

#### The need to adopt a multi-dimensional approach to address VAW

It was observed that though most of the countries in South Asia had enacted laws to fight

VAW, yet the problem existed. It was vital to raise women's status, enhance equality between men and women and provide various kinds of social and economic protection. To this end poverty alleviation programmes directed at women would be beneficial in reducing VAW. Hence, a multi dimensional approach to address VAW in South Asian countries was necessary. Participants felt that international agencies such as UNFPA should formulate strategies to address VAW at the grassroots level in South Asian countries.

### **Addressing socio-cultural traditions and thinking**

It was necessary to break the barriers of ingrained thinking among men and also women that VAW was the norm. Women often felt

that if the husband did not beat her anymore that he did not care about her. Somehow they linked beating to caring and the difference was not apparent to them. Many of the victims do not bring charges against perpetrators because they think the matter is a family affair rather than a legal one. The reluctance of law enforcers to prosecute is another issue. Men felt that when a girl agrees to marriage, it is a part of her contractual obligation to comply with the husband's demands. He could therefore not understand why a girl would refuse sex with her husband.

There is therefore a need to change perceptions and attitudes towards laws on VAW as culture, customs and traditions frequently impede the elimination of VAW.

**Chairperson:** Mr. Lakshman Singh, MP from India  
**Presenter:** Professor Savitri Goonesekera  
**Discussant:** Ms Sigma Huda



**P**rofessor Savitri Goonesekera, presenting her paper on *"Constitutional and Legislative Measures to Eliminate Violence Against Women in South Asia"* said that 170 countries including all those in South Asia have ratified CEDAW. Countries report regularly to the CEDAW committee of experts and the reports reveal that though all sectors of the population experience high levels of violence, women on account of their sex are particularly susceptible. VAW must be addressed as a special problem in the endeavour to achieve progress and must not be trivialized.

Professor Goonesekera went on to say that realising the goal of gender equality requires a "holistic integrated agenda of legal and policy interventions, programmes, effective monitoring and allocation of resources". The Constitutions of South Asia she said all follow the Anglo American tradition and contain basic provisions on human rights that provide the ideological basis for protecting women against violence. However, the provisions refer to the civil aspects of human rights in the main and socio-economic rights are referred to only in relation to 'State Policy'. This results in vagueness where the socio-economic rights of women are concerned. Thus none of the Constitutions in South Asia adopt a holistic approach and fail to recognize the universality and interdependence of civil/political and socio-economic rights. Sri Lanka has tried to redress this but the amendments have yet to be sanctioned by Parliament. These changes (ensuring women's access to education, health and economic opportunity) are necessary for preventing violence. The gaps identified have sometimes been addressed by judicial ac-

tivism in higher courts and Professor Goonesekera cited some specific cases to illustrate her point. Incorporating socio-economic rights by constitutional amendment can be difficult and proactive judicial decisions can help in this regard. She stressed the important role of CEDAW in this area. She went on to say that lawmakers or parliamentarians have a special role and responsibility in contributing to the strengthening of laws and legal controls on violence against women in South Asia. Lawmakers are partners in initiating law reform, in monitoring law enforcement through critical debate within and outside parliament, and in allocating budgets and resources for law enforcement.

She then discussed custom, tradition and their often times problematic relationship with constitutional law. Often courts face problems when 'secular' state laws clash with gender discriminating customary laws and practices. As religion and culture are sensitive areas, the courts are often in a dilemma. They circumvent this by trying to harmonize the two. Professor Goonesekera said that sometimes a method of harmonization may be to ascertain core religious/cultural norms favourable to women and use them in judicial interpretation. She then brought up the crucial issue of state violence and complicity of the state in VAW. She said that all the Constitutions contain clauses which can be used to seek redress for state sponsored violence though that has not prevented these acts from going unpunished. This is an important aspect as most countries in South Asia like the rest of the global experience intense conflict situations and there is ample evidence of torture, rape, harassment with some form of state sanction.

The presenter discussed in detail specific forms of VAW such as trafficking, rape, sexual harassment, incest, female fetus abortion and linked these to existing Penal Codes in South Asia. The Penal Codes inherited from the colonial period leave many loopholes and Sri Lanka for instance has sought to reform these.

In relation to Islamic Law and Penal Codes, Professor Goonesekera showed how the introduction of Islamic Law in Pakistan in 1997,

for instance, has resulted in retrogressive legal action. By the new laws, an underage girl who lodges a complaint of rape is accused of '*zina*' and it has become difficult to prove sexual violence committed by a man. Family laws in South Asia have been generally left untouched since independence. "By reinforcing gender discrimination, they tend to legitimise gender based violence within the family and community." The concept of the father as a superior guardian, which is the foundation of family laws, is creating much misery. Polygamy, child marriage, divorce, specially in Muslim communities continue to plague women. Bhutan by contrast appears to have some of the most progressive legislation where marital rape is recognised, for example.

She then highlighted the impact of legislation on the problem of VAW based on her cross-national review and showed how crucial such legislation and their implementation can be. Professor Goonesekera discussed in detail the situation on legislation prevalent in each country which brought out the prevailing situation in South Asia with regard to constitutional rights of women and emphasised the problematic relation between state and family laws. The problem with the criminal law procedure is that it is deeply embedded in its colonial roots - there is some 'tinkering' but structures remain the same today, the procedures 'unwoman friendly' and the issue of VAW is prone to be trivialized in the judicial system as a whole.

According to Professor Goonesekera several South Asian Constitutions share a common legal tradition, since they share a colonial experience and a substratum of common colonial laws. Analyzing the Constitutions of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives, she showed that these Constitutions reflect both a common approach and diverse viewpoints on the constitutional norms and enforcement procedures relevant to VAW. All Constitutions of countries in South Asia contain basic provisions on fundamental rights, including the right to equality and non-discrimination. Consequently they have an ideological basis for protecting women against violence that is gender based. However, there are differences in approach in regard to the scope and enforcement of these rights. She observed: "It is therefore clear that none of these Constitutions in South Asia adopt a holistic approach to rights, and they fail to

recognize the universality and interdependence of the full range of civil, political and socio-economic rights. "

Largely as a result of the activities of human rights groups in civil society, including lawyers and women groups, the Constitutions have been used on occasions in some countries to challenge infringements and also initiate legislative reform. Similarly legislation has been introduced in the post-independence era to strengthen the legal framework on special problems such as trafficking, acid throwing and dowry violence. Some countries have developed these initiatives in response to the international monitoring of women's rights that has taken place through the CEDAW reporting process, since all countries are State parties to this international human rights treaty.

Despite the positive Constitutional, legislative and programmatic interventions, Professor Goonesekera observed that all countries continue to face a high incidence of VAW. There is also documented research clearly indicating that all countries face a serious problem of failing to enforce laws and legal controls effectively. There is a sense that legal reform combined with non-enforcement legitimizes the violence and promotes cynicism, without providing any redress to women or victims of violence. "It is important in this context to recognize the reasons for the common malaise of non-enforcement of laws."

Professor Goonesekera also stated that laws reform has been ad hoc rather than consistent. Large areas of the law discriminate, do not confer equal rights, and reinforce the legal and social environment that does not take women's equal rights seriously.

Making a 10-point recommendation, Professor Goonesekera suggested that the South Asian countries, as parties to the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and as States that have written Constitutions guaranteeing fundamental human rights, need to recognize VAW as a complex, urgent problem, that must be addressed with holistic interventions.

The recommendations are as follows:

1. Efforts should be made to withdraw reservations to CEDAW, ratify the Optional Protocols to CEDAW and CRC, and integrate Concluding Com-

- ments on reports into national planning with time specific agendas for legal reform. CEDAW progress reviews in South Asia should be monitored through shared experiences and bilateral cooperation. Support of international agencies should be obtained for gender disaggregated data collection, and development of indicators on VAW.
2. Government should work towards the early ratification of the SAARC Convention on Trafficking and the UN Convention on Migrant Workers. They should develop a mechanism to ensure that progress on the SAARC Conventions standards is monitored regionally.
  3. The Constitutions have emerged as a powerful and speedier mechanism for enforcing rights, and in catalyzing priority areas for legislative reform in several countries. In the violence area they break down the public/private divide by showing that private violence is a public concern. Constitutional rights jurisprudence should "travel" through the region with shared programmes on legal education and professional training for lawyers and judges. Enforcement mechanisms in all countries should be strengthened and locus standi widened to enable violations to be brought to the courts. Constitutional restrictions on judicial review, exclusion of socio-economic rights, and private sector liability should be reviewed, and specific provision on sex discrimination, torture and trafficking should be included. If Constitutional amendment is difficult, legislation should be enacted to fill these gaps in the Constitutions.
  4. Since National Commissions on Women tend to get marginalized, well resourced agencies with a broad mandate like the National Child Protection Authority of Sri Lanka, and National Human Rights Commissions, should integrate the issue into their work.
  5. The interface between law reform to punish VAW and reform of the Penal Codes criminal procedure and evidence laws, and family law, must be recognized. Unless reforms in these areas are parallel, it is impossible to create a legal culture or social environment of zero tolerance for VAW. A time frame based agenda for law reform should address the gaps in Criminal law, Evidence, Criminal Procedure and Family law, using comparative new legislation from the region.
  6. Efforts should be made to encourage communities to use comparative experience from the region or outside and engage in harmonization of religious and customary law with Constitutional and CEDAW standards, within a time frame. Generally applicable laws should be harmonized with CEDAW and promoted through advocacy for acceptance by a wide section of South Asia's plural communities.
  7. Enforcement of minimum age of marriage legislation, and prohibition of forced and child marriage must receive priority. The law on sexual crimes should be reviewed in the light of new thinking on gender discrimination in colonial laws. In particular the offence of rape should be reformulated, and incest included as a Penal Code offence. Penal Code and Maintenance law reform from Sri Lanka should be shared in the region. Domestic violence legislation should be adopted in all countries on the basis of experience from countries which address the issue holistically, without confining it to a procedure for obtaining protection orders.
  8. Human rights education and development of Codes of Ethics for the medical and legal profession with a focus on VAW should receive priority.
  9. Continuing education and awareness raising programmes on VAW for armed forces, the judiciary and public officials should be developed and incorporated into regular training, and colloquia or workshops.
  10. Governments should institutionalize through specific laws, and regular programmes, cooperation with NGO's in service delivery for victims of VAW. Their support and cooperation should be obtained in monitoring law enforcement, and for community based advocacy programmes. This is critical, given the varied demands made on governments in developing countries for service delivery, which they cannot satisfy.

Taking part in the discussion on the paper, the designated discussant, Advocate Sigma Huda praised the comprehensive nature of the paper, and said women's issues are not a priority in Parliament. The concept of giving priority to women's issues is missing in the Bangladesh Parliament. We do not have any lobbyist in parliament to act on our behalf.

She agreed with Professor Goonesekera that in Bangladesh as well, the clash between Criminal and Family Law is also apparent. She wondered if all Bangladeshi parliamentarians were aware of the scope and implications of the existing prevention of Cruelty to Women and Children Act in Bangladesh. She referred to the case of a fair verdict by a sensitive judge in a case where a prostitute was illegally evicted, but in most cases social values are overriding and these tend to go against women. She suggested, there should be more interaction between MPs, activists and civil society.

Advocate Huda pointed out that awareness of laws relating to VAW among parliamentarians was not sufficient. "We need to know how much the parliamentarians know about the priorities to check violence against women," she said. She also mentioned about a number of laws, including the recently formulated Acid Control Act. "After the formulation of the Acid Control Act last year, we have found a significant decrease in the number of acid attacks on women and girls this year," she said. Advocate Sigma Huda also emphasised the need to provide training to law enforcement personnel, including police to deal with the cases relating to VAW.

### General Discussion

During the lively discussion several issues were addressed. Experiences from different countries in the region were exchanged.

It was suggested that Human Rights Commissions similar to those in Pakistan be established in other South Asian countries. This Commission in Pakistan is authorized to monitor discrimination of women.

There was also the need to create community awareness about VAW and to inform women about laws applicable to them and their rights. Public awareness is a first step in ensuring that victims are not stigmatized. There is therefore a need to change behaviour and attitudes.

In spite of the existence of laws many of the victims do not come forward and register their complaints. Increasing the number of police stations manned by women throughout the region was one way to combat VAW. One parliamentarian said "It is very significant, because it encourages the women victims of violence to approach to the police station to narrate their suffering more freely."

The education system needs to be more values based, rather than content based. The concepts of gender equity and equality need to be inculcated at an early age in children if VAW is to be eliminated in the region. Sex role stereotyping needs to be addressed at an early age.

The need for a very close working relationship among the parliamentarians of South Asian countries to address VAW was stressed. Formation of a Regional Network with the involvement of parliamentarians in South Asian countries was suggested. Another suggestion was for formation of Women Parliamentarians' Caucus as existed in Nepal in other South Asian countries.

The necessity of sensitizing men about the issues relating to VAW was emphasized.

It was also suggested to interlink poverty reduction programmes with social issues in South Asia to cope with VAW.

## PANEL DISCUSSION ON VAW BY NGO REPRESENTATIVES AND MEDIA PERSONS

**Moderator:** Mr. Wasim Zaman  
**Panelists:** Mr. Mafuz Alam  
Ms. Bandana Rana  
Ms. Anushree Mishra  
Mr. Deepak Gupta



**M**r. Wasim Zaman, Director, UNFPA CST, Kathmandu the moderator of the session said that the media and NGOs have a vital role to play in preventing VAW. He said that the media has a duty to address gender stereotyping and gender violence in society. They have the ability to support the work of NGOs and others in working for gender equality and preventing VAW. There is therefore a need to look into effective mechanisms for involving governments, NGOs and the media to work together to eliminate VAW. It is the duty of the media he said to break the silence on the issue of VAW and to bring it to the notice of parliamentarians and society.

### **Ms. Bandana Rana**

Ms. Rana said that the purpose of the workshop was to bring the issue of VAW to the notice of parliamentarians and thereby initiate discussion on VAW. Saathi, the NGO she is involved with has worked to eliminate VAW in Nepal since 1992 and focuses on the silent issue of domestic violence. She felt society has a long way to go to address VAW. In this regard, she felt that it was necessary for activists to work with the media so that it becomes more gender sensitive. Ms Rana also said that it was necessary to engage and include young people more and obtain their views on sexuality and gender. It was also necessary to increase their awareness about their rights. Youth need to be harnessed to combat VAW if the cycle of violence is to be broken. This needs to be carried out at an early age. She went on to say that since it was the unequal gender power relations which contributes to VAW it was necessary to challenge and change common notions of masculinity. Ms Rana felt that more male activists were necessary to

combat VAW who should serve as role models for other men. She said that men needed to be included as activists and be considered and part of the solution to ending VAW rather than regarding them only as perpetrators of violence.

### **Ms. Anushree Mishra**

Ms. Mishra said that the media as such could not bring about change directly but in depth knowledge on issues such as VAW was necessary for media practitioners to bring them to the forefront. Hence, the organization she represents, PANOS, provides fellowships for journalists whereby the fellow can be associated with a scholar in the field for a period of time. This enhances their journalistic skills vis-à-vis gender. The media fellowship programme addresses the issue of VAW in a sensitive manner as much reporting on women is undertaken with a view to sensationalizing matters. Sensitive reporting and confidentiality is ingrained into those who are trained under the programme.

### **Mr. Deepak Gupta**

Mr. Deepak Gupta, UNFPA Consultant flagged, among other issues - the crucial role which elected leaders and media could play together in bringing forth the existing gaps in legislation with regard to VAW. Leaders need the media to position their work among the masses; whereas, media need "hard political stories" through leaders. Mr. Gupta stated that the pre-election manifestos of political parties should start mentioning about issues such as VAW more progressively. Therefore, the media need to begin questioning such issues, while positioning stories. In addition, he mentioned that "rape/molestation/murder" makes hard news, whereas, there exists a number of silent violence issues, which need a more "human-interest" treatment by the media in South Asia.

### **Mr. Mahfuz Anam**

Mr. Mahfuz Anam, a well known journalist from Bangladesh, gave an acerbic speech on the unsatisfactory role of MPs once they are in power. He felt that parliamentarians are losing their credibility especially in Bangladesh. "No MP had made a worthwhile

speech in Parliament on the subject of VAW" he said. He went on to say "Parliamentarians seldom if ever do their homework and merely utter generalities". Yet their constituents expect so much of them. Mr. Anam opined that gender is a 'social' not a woman's issue. He brought out the power dynamics inherent in the phenomenon of VAW and questioned how a parliamentarian is expected to be sensitive when even educated citizens are lacking in this regard. Mr. Anam felt that a media monitoring cell on gender was a good idea where by it would be possible to ensure sufficient attention was paid to such issues as VAW.

### General Discussion

In the animated discussion that followed, what emerged was that the media have a major role to play in educating the people. Some TV channels in some countries carried development/gender programmes that went a long way to educating the masses. However, another opinion expressed was that it was not possible for the media to go in depth into the problem of VAW. It was therefore necessary to consider networks between parliamentarians and the media.

There was agreement that parliamentarians should be trained in gender issues so that they could be more responsive and sensitive to the real needs of their constituents. Members of parliament are mostly men and they may not consider these issues important.

It was unanimously agreed that in order to reduce VAW it was necessary to reduce poverty and that population and environmental harmony are essential to improving the status of women.

It was also felt that the media needed to be more respectful towards families of victims

or survivors of violence and those living with HIV. This includes asking their permission before taking photographs or reporting on their personal tragedy and to refrain from using 'single source' reports that relate to crime and violence.

It was pointed out that NGOs in Nepal for instance have played an important role in providing counseling and health services for victims of violence. Such NGOs play an important role acting as a link between households and communities and the health services. Their work should not be forgotten and support for their efforts by parliamentarians is crucial. NGOs have also been working to empower women through training programmes, networking and income generation activities.

Summing up, Mr Zaman said that the media had a positive public service role to play in the eliminating of VAW. He underscored the need for sensitive and responsible reporting of cases of VAW and raising awareness among women of their rights. The media have the important task of bringing to the notice of parliamentarians and other policy makers important social issues such as VAW. On the other hand, parliamentarians should encourage accurate reporting, including data collection, support research programmes necessary for the formulation of strategies and organize follow up, Parliamentarians were in a position to influence budget allocations for combating VAW. They have a major advocacy role and responsibility in creating and strengthening national political will at all levels since that is a prerequisite to eradicate VAW. NGOs need support in terms of resources for their work. Mr. Zaman said that a strong partnership between governments and NGOs would make programmes for preventing VAW more organized, sustainable and effective.

## PARLIAMENTARIANS' PERSPECTIVES ON VAW

**Chairperson:** Mr. Sarder Mohd Yakub, Deputy Speaker of the Pakistan National Assembly  
**Panelists:** Barrister Ziaur Rahman Khan, MP Bangladesh, Dr. Chandrakala Pandey, MP India  
Ms. Paviitra Wanniarachchi, MP Sri Lanka.



### Ms. Wanniarachchi

Opening the panel discussion, Ms. Wanniarachchi said that parliamentarians in any country, whether in the government or in the opposition, have a role to play on important issues such as VAW. As representatives of the people, they can take a common stand and agree to address the problems of VAW. Women in South Asia suffer from violence because their dignity and rights as equal citizens is not recognized in families and communities. In Sri Lanka, there is a great deal of information on gender-based violence. Successive governments in Sri Lanka, since 1993, have given priority to the problem of VAW. The law on sexual offences, adopted as a policy document in 1993 (UNP Government) has been developed further and passed with the agreement of all parties during the tenure of the Peoples' Alliance Government. Parliament by consensus has also passed budgetary allocations to support programmes such as women's and children's units in police stations. All concerned departments, such as the judiciary, police, health and social service must coordinate and be strengthened in their operations. In Sri Lanka which is experiencing a prolonged armed conflict, the abuse of women in custody has been a grave problem, and all governments have taken this seriously and also awarded compensation to the victim. In Sri Lanka, Select Parliamentary Committees monitor various problems in society, but there is still no Select Committee on VAW. This needs to be put in place urgently and other countries may consider following.

### Dr. Chandrakala Pandey

Dr. Chandrakala Pandey spoke about the need for a Special Parliamentary Committee on VAW in the Lok Sabha. At the same time parliamentarians have to take up these problems at their constituency level and make the community and women and children aware of the problems.

### Barrister Ziaur Rahman Khan

Barrister Khan said that the existing laws to combat VAW needed to be further strengthened. He also stressed that effective implementation of existing laws was necessary. Parliamentarians of all political parties must work to address the underlying issues which perpetuates VAW in society.

### General Discussion

During the discussion, a parliamentarian from Bangladesh said that some effective steps against acid throwing, and children trafficking, security for women and shelters for endangered women have been undertaken by government in the various ministries. However, political lobbying with parliamentarians and influential government figures allow perpetrators to escape. The parliamentarians of all parties and the media have to play a positive role to combat this urgently.

The Chairman of the session, Sardar Mohd. Yakub, summed up the discussions, and suggested that all the countries in the region, should have Select Committees to deal with legislation on VAW, and the problems of implementing such legislation. There has to be provision for small committees at the district administration, at village and town levels to create awareness about gender issues and for mutual respect and to find solutions to the problem. The chairman committed himself to move such legislation in the Pakistan Parliament.

# SUMMARY OF GROUP WORK DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Chairperson: Mr. Dasho Sangay Dorjie, MNA  
Bhutan**

**T**hree group work sessions on VAW re-lated issues were held. Group 1 dealt with the theme, addressing gaps in legislation and implementation of laws on violence against women. Group 2 dealt with the theme on addressing gaps in support services including health, for victims of violence. Group 3 dealt with the theme of mobilising communities to address VAW. Two hours were allocated for the discussions. Each group elected a chairperson and a rapporteur who was responsible for recording and reporting the discussions. During each of these sessions resource persons highlighted the major issues and suggested minimal guidelines as to the scope and directions of the group discussions.

A summary of the discussions and recommendations are given below.

## GROUP 1 LEGISLATION ON VAW

Based on the Background paper and the paper on the Constitutional and Legislative Responses and knowledge of the issues in their respective countries the group were requested to identify gaps in legislation in their respective country and regionally to address VAW; recommend amendments to existing laws or new laws that are required to address VAW; identify impediments to the passage of such laws and how can they be addressed; identify problems in implementing existing legislation and make recommendations on how they could be implemented effectively.

The discussions were spirited and reflected the diversity of views and legal systems in the region but recommendations were directed towards formulating practical recommendations.

The participants in this group arrived at the following recommendations:

1. Identification of gaps in legislation in individual countries and regionally to address VAW.
  - Registration of cases in police stations and hospitals at special counters to be provided for such cases.
  - Regional Committees to advise each country on legislation gaps and effective implementation of laws.

- Inter-country sharing of best practices of Parliamentary Committees.
  - In hospitals, sensitization of medical and administrative staff; integration of police services with medical services; inclusion of referral and counseling services.
2. Amendments to existing laws, new legislation required, and impediments to passage of such legislation.
    - Orientation of judges and police required for addressing cases of VAW. Necessary amendments were required to existing procedures.
    - Procedures for special counters in police stations for victims of VAW.
    - Review of legislation on VAW to identify the gaps and inconsistencies through relevant Parliamentary Committees. Implementation of these laws should also be monitored and considered by relevant Parliamentary Committees to remove impediments.
    - In the Maldives, Islamic Law was examined and a civil law enacted to deal with the problems of multiple marriages, wife's inheritance etc. This was the same in Iran. Also in Iran, there are laws for calculation of share of lifetime earnings to be divided between children and wife, in case of divorce, and divided between the children and widow in case of death of husband.
    - Inter-country experience sharing is required on custodial VAW, and trafficking.

## GROUP 2 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF VAW

Support services for victims of violence are crucial. However, there is a dearth of such services in the region. These services are mainly managed by NGOs. The objectives of the group work were to ascertain what services were available for victims of VAW in the respective countries; identify challenges related to providing such services, and; how to address such challenges.

### 1. Existing support services

The existing support services vary across countries. In Pakistan there are legal aid centres, police stations run by women and

crisis centres as well as burn units in hospitals. These are run at both state and private levels. Section 174A of the Pakistan Constitution states that burn victims may report to the magistrate immediately and seek redress. A Special Committee on the status of women monitors cases, works to eliminate discriminatory laws and meet obligations of international covenants. The Ministry of Women Affairs has taken steps to raise consciousness at the grass roots level. In Maldives counseling and awareness raising among children and women is provided. It is only recently that violence, acid attacks, rape etc is receiving the attention it deserves. Trafficking is not a problem there.

In India, awareness about VAW and laws to combat it are being disseminated. NGOs and the government are bringing out material on support services (directories) in all languages. Booklets listing government schemes are available. In Sri Lanka the Ministry of Social Services and Women's affairs provides services as do the NGOs. Women migrating for employment abroad are targeted by the Ministry which has set up training cells for them in reproductive health, use of electrical appliances etc. Most migration takes place to the Free Trade Zones which have a stigma attached to them. The government has set up hostels and day care centers in the Free Trade Zones. Awareness on health and other issues is generated through street dramas and programmes at the hostels. The Iranian delegate said that the services provided by the private sector are better than those offered by the government. Decentralisation of authority and services is important. The need for psychological counseling of victims was also stressed.

## 2. Challenges ahead.

These were listed according to the following headings:

- Inadequate resources
- Lack of gender sensitivity among custodians of law e.g. police as well as citizens .
- Inadequate training of social workers and health staff in the public sector to deal with VAW. VAW has mainly been addressed by NGOs
- Socialization process. Intervention are necessary to change the mind set of the public, especially young people, in relation to the status of women.

- Lack of awareness of rights of women.
- Duplication of services,- hence coordination required on part of government and NGO schemes.
- Lack of database on government schemes.
- Lack of research on VAW and project implementation
- Religious interpretation of customs/laws and sentiments which go against women

## 3. How do we address these challenges.

- Improvement and implementation of laws.
- Additional laws to highlight that domestic violence is not a private but a social issue.
- Setting up MP funds as in India to use for victims in local constituencies as well as development works.
- Parliamentarians can establish human rights cells to monitor the events.
- Database of available support services in all languages.
- Adding value-ethics to school curricula specially with regard to VAW.
- Training of social workers and citizens.
- Training of medical personnel in forensic medicine to deal with victims especially of rape.
- Creation of women police force.
- Media campaign – print and electronic media must be discouraged from sensationalizing violence.
- Public statements by parliamentarians and religious leaders in regard to commitment to prevent VAW.
- Allocation of funds to development projects targeting women.
- Where there are loopholes, legislation needs to be tightening up, specially regarding rape, trafficking and domestic violence.
- Help lines should be established.

## GROUP 3 COMMUNITY MOBILISATION TO ADDRESS VAW

The group came up with the following recommendations

### 1. Mobilisation by NGOs, Voluntary Organisations.

- Increased awareness and preventive strategies at the community level on violence related issues. Training in Communication / Behavioral Change Com-

munication with better quality material and monitoring of community work.

- Quality training in counseling (psycho-social aspects) and promotion of special cells / centres of excellence in delivery services ; establishment of local community bodies providing redress to victims of violence.
- Fostering economic empowerment of women and young girls through micro-level income generation initiative, with community ownership, which in turn will create a social security net of institutions.
- Forging increased participation of community groups in the policy formulation processes at all times. Thereby, it would yield more 'people- centred' development including the VAW issue.
- Sensitization and promotion of community groups in mobilising fast-track disposal of

"violence" cases at the lower/special courts. More legal aid made available

## **2. Mobilisation by Corporate Sector / Private Institution**

- Involvement of key private sector groups in policy dialogues and programme formulation on VAW issues.
- Mobilisation of resources through joint-partnerships, with select corporate groups in prevention and care' activities on VAW issues at the micro/community levels.

## **3. Mobilisation by the Media**

- Providing more human-interest stories at the local level to the vernacular press and to the national media.
- Increase in interaction / dialogue with media representatives on gender issues on a sustained basis.

**Chairperson: Barrister Ziaur Rahman Khan, MP  
Bangladesh**



**A** Drafting Committee consisting of parliamentarians from the different countries prepared the draft *“Dhaka Declaration for Eliminating Violence Against Women in South Asia”*. The final draft of the document was presented and a number of amendments that were proposed were discussed and those that were accepted by the majority were incorporated into the text of the document. The participants then formally adopted the *“Dhaka Declaration”*.

Secretary General of AFPPD Senator Dr Malinee Sukavejworakit, thanked everyone for their active participation in the deliberations. She said that the parliamentarians present should use the *“Dhaka Declaration”* as a basis for their efforts to eliminate VAW in their respective countries.

The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director, Ms Imelda Henkin said that the situation of women in the South Asian countries is far from satisfactory. New and terrible dangers have come to the forefront because of globalisation such as trafficking in women and girls, HIV/AIDS, and armed conflicts and emergency situations. To this sorry list, she thinks that one more should be added, namely sex-selective abortion, made possible by modern technology.

Ms Henkin was convinced that parliamentarians can play a key role in both mobilising society and the government to address issues on women’s equality, equality and empowerment. At the same time, she said that not all the parliamentarians are equally sensitised to the issues at hand. “Therefore, there is a need for strong advocacy among parliamentarians for building up strong and broad coalition to advance the cause. Your

commitment and dedication towards implementing your road map back home should ensure the establishment and strengthening of basic human rights for women and girls, ensure their physical survival and allow them to develop their full potential, with their full participation in society” she said.

Drawing attention of parliamentarians to the *“Dhaka Declaration”*, Ms. Henkin said, You now have a Declaration committing yourselves to enact, implement and effectively monitor progress to be made and to give a voice loud and clear on behalf of all those millions of women and girls suffering in silence. You now have a Plan of Action to take back to your countries, to your parliaments and your communities. You are urged to take a holistic and comprehensive approach. Legislation without enforcement is useless and so is legislation without necessary resources and programmes, she said.

Ms. Henkin reiterated that combating VAW was a top priority for the UNFPA. “Let us work together to break silence and make real positive change by moving towards elimination of VAW and girls” she said. With its network of country offices, Ms. Henkin said that UNFPA is ready to work with parliamentarians, their governments and civil society.

Ms Suneeta Mukherjee, UNFPA Representative, Bangladesh, thanked all parliamentarians and resource persons who contributed to the success of the meeting. She said she was impressed with the strong spirit of participation, collaboration and commitment shown by the parliamentarians over the last two days. She hoped that the momentum created over the last two days must be sustained and translated into concrete action.

The workshop ended with a vote of thanks from Mr Shiv Khare, Executive Director, AFPPD. He expressed AFPPD’s deep appreciation to the Parliament of Bangladesh for hosting the workshop and for the warm hospitality of the Government of Bangladesh. Mr Khare thanked the resource persons for their valuable inputs and all the participants for coming for the workshop.

**Programme for the Regional Workshop on Parliamentary Advocacy  
for the Prevention of Violence Against Women in South Asia  
Venue: Hotel Sheraton, Dhaka, Bangladesh  
Date: 18-19 March 2003, Programme**

<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Resource Person</b>
Day One: Tuesday, 18 March 2003		
<b>08:00 - 08:45</b>	<b>Registration</b>	
<b>Session I:</b>	<b>Inaugural session</b> <b>Chairperson: Hon Minister for Women's Affairs</b>	
09:00 - 09:10	Welcome Statement <b>Kazi Kakibuddin Ahmed</b> Secretary, Bangladesh Parliament	
09:10 - 09:20	Introduction to the workshop <b>Senator Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit</b> Secretary General, AFPPD	
09:20-09:30	Addresses: Special guests <b>Ms. Imelda J.M. Henkin</b> , Deputy Executive Director UNFPA	
09:30-09:40	Air Vice Marshal (Rtd.) <b>Altaf Hossain Choudhury</b> , Honourable Minister, Ministry of Home Affairs	
09:40-09:50	<b>Barrister Moudud Ahmed</b> , Minister, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs	
09:50-10:00	Chief Guest <b>Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar</b> Hon. Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament	
10:00 - 10:10	Chairperson <b>Khurshid Zahan Haque</b> , Minister for Women and Children Affairs	
10:10 -10:15	Vote of Thanks <b>Ms. Suneeta Mukherjee</b> , UNFPA Representative	
10:15-10:45	<b>Tea/Coffee</b>	
<b>Session II:</b>	<b>Violence against women in South Asia (10.45 - 12.00 hrs.)</b> <b>Chairperson - Ms. Anisa Ahmed, (Maldives)</b>	
10:45 - 11:00	A film on VAW	Introduction to film Mr. Deepak Gupta
11:00 - 12:00	Presentation on, "A Situation Analysis of Violence Against Women in South Asia"	Presenter Ms. Ruchira Naved
	<b>Discussion</b>	Discussant Ms. Geethanjali Singh
<b>Session III:</b>	<b>Legal and constitutional responses to violence (12.00-13:15hrs)</b> <b>Chairperson - Mr. Lakshman Singh, (India)</b>	
12:00 -13:15	Presentation on Legal/Constitutional Response to Violence Against Women	Presenter Professor Savitri Goonesekera
	<b>Discussion</b>	Discussant Ms. Sigma Huda
13:15 - 14:15	<b>Lunch</b>	
<b>Session IV</b>	<b>Open forum (14:15-15:30 hrs)</b> <b>Chairperson - Mr. Sardar Muhammad Yaqub, (Pakistan)</b>	
14:15 - 15:30	Formation of drafting Committee Parliamentarians perspectives on VAW	Panelists- <b>India-</b> Dr. Ms Chandra Kala Pandey <b>Sri Lanka-</b> Ms. Pavitra Wanniarachi <b>Bangladesh-</b> Mr. Allama Delwar Hossain Syedi
15:30 - 15: 45	Tea/Coffee	

Date & Time	Activity	Resource Person
<b>Session V</b>	<b>Panel Discussion on VAW by Media and NGOs ( 15:45 -17:00)</b> <b>Moderator - Mr. Wasim Zaman</b>	
15:45 - 17:00	Panel discussion by NGO and media representatives on addressing VAW	Panelists- Mr. Mafaz Alam Ms. Bandana Rana Ms. Anushree Mishra Mr. Deepak Gupta
17: 00 - 17:30	First meeting of drafting committee	
19:00	<b>Dinner hosted by Ms. Suneeta Mukherjee, UNFPA Representative, Bangladesh</b>	
Day Two: Wednesday, 19 March 2003		
<b>Session VI</b>	<b>Group work on National Responses to VAW (9:00-13:15 hrs)</b>	
09:00 - 09:15	Introduction to Group Work	Mr. Wasim Zaman
09:15 - 11:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Addressing gaps in legislation and implementation of laws on violence against women</li> <li>■ Addressing gaps in support services including health, for victims of violence</li> <li>■ Mobilizing communities for social sector responses to address VAW</li> </ul>	Professor Savitri Goonesekera / Ms. Ena Singh Dr. Prasanna Gunasekera / Dr Tara Shakya/ Ms. Shadiya Ibrahim/ Ms Geethanjali Singh Mr. Deepak Gupta / Ms. Bandana Rana / Mr. Bhanu Niraula
11:15 - 11:30	<b>Tea/Coffee</b>	
<b>Session VII:</b>	<b>Presentation of group work (11:15 - 13:15)</b> <b>Chairperson - Mr. Dasho Sangay Dorji (Bhutan)</b>	
11:15 - 13:15	Presentations and Discussion on Group Findings Presenters: Rapporteurs of 3 groups	
13:15 - 14:15	<b>Lunch *</b>	
<b>Session VIII:</b>	<b>Statements of commitment by Parliamentarians and follow up ( 14:15-16:00 hrs)</b> <b>Chairperson- Ms. Chitra Lekha Yadav (Nepal)</b>	
14:15 - 16:00	Statements of commitment by Parliamentarians Presentation on follow up of the Bangkok Workshop Future plans at national level	Mr. Shiv Khare, Executive Director, AFPPD
<b>Session IX:</b>	<b>Presentation of Draft Declaration; Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks</b> <b>Chairperson - Barrister Ziaur Rahman Khan (Bangladesh)</b> <b>Presenter: Rapporteur of drafting Committee</b>	
16:00 - 16:30	Discussion	
16:30 - 17:00	Closing remarks  Closing remarks  Vote of Thanks	Ms Imelda Henkin Deputy Executive Director, UNFPA Senator Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit Secretary General, AFPPD Mr. Shiv Khare, Executive Director, AFPPD
18:30	<b>Cultural show and Dinner hosted by Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar Hon. Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament Hon Speaker</b>	

\* Drafting committee meeting

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