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**INTEGRATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER
PERSPECTIVE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

**Letter dated 16 May 2003 from the Permanent Representative
of Bhutan to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to
the Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights**

I have the honour to enclose a copy of a letter* that I have addressed to Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, concerning addendum 1 to the report that she presented to the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/2003/75).

I would be grateful if you could kindly circulate the said letter as an official document of the sixtieth session of the Commission on Human Rights.

(Signed): Bap KESANG
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* Reproduced in the annex as received, in the language of submission only.

Annex

BMG.03/UN/02/3

16 May 2003

Dear Ms. Coomaraswamy,

I wish to refer to Addendum 1 to your report to the 59th session of the Commission on Human Rights containing an analysis of developments in the area of violence against women at the international, regional and national level, and to provide the following additional information regarding the entry on Bhutan, with a request that these be reflected in the final report.

Most national studies on gender show that Bhutan is relatively "gender-balanced" and that there is no overt gender discrimination. Bhutanese women enjoy freedom and equality in most spheres of life. In view of the general overall equality of women and men, no legislation explicitly prohibits discrimination against women.

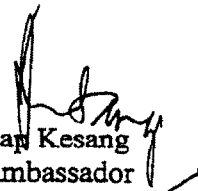
Under the section "Legislation", it may be noted that in addition to the Rape Act of 1996, crimes such as domestic violence and sexual harassment are covered under the general provisions of the "Thrimzhung Chhenpo" (Supreme Laws). Further, it may be noted that both polygamy and polyandry are legal on the condition that permission is given by the spouse. Concerning dowry, while it is correct that dowries are rarely used, it may be clarified that this custom is exclusive to the southern Bhutanese who are Hindus and that it is not prevalent among the majority of the population.

Under the section "Policies and programmes", it may be noted that while there are few specific programmes for women, the government is committed to mainstreaming measures related to the promotion of women in development into all sectoral projects and programmes. Women, children and gender are an important priority in the current Ninth Five Year Plan (2002-2007). In the areas of education and health, significant progress has been made including major reductions in maternal, under-5 and infant mortality, initiation of widespread gender-sensitive programmes in nutrition and maternal health, specific prioritization of reproductive health in national policies, establishment of community schools to promote higher enrolment of girls and vigorous promotion of non-formal education programmes where the vast majority of beneficiaries are women. A new and important area of concern where action is being taken is that of violence against women and sexual abuse/sexual harassment. Steps are being taken to sensitize police, judges, doctors, teachers and mass media to domestic and sexual violence through education and awareness training. A new and strong focus on domestic violence as a human rights issue will be initiated.

It may be noted that organized trafficking in women does not exist in Bhutan. Prostitution and trafficking in women is considered a crime under the law. Bhutan is signatory to the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combatting Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution. The Convention is expected to be ratified shortly by the National Assembly.

With regard to the assertion that "government forces were involved in the rape of large numbers of ethnic Nepalese women in the early 1990s", it may be noted that these allegations, made mainly by groups from the refugee camps in eastern Nepal, have never been proved. In the few instances where specific names of so-called victims have been provided, investigations have proved such claims to be totally untrue. On the other hand, there have been many instances of violence against the general population, including women, by individuals from these very same camps.

Yours sincerely,



Bap Kesang
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
