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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and
further actions and initiatives**

Statement submitted by All India Women’s Conference, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Violence against women: whose concern?

About All India Women's Conference

All India Women's Conference is one of the premier women's voluntary organizations that has been involved in the field of women's education and empowerment for the last 85 years. From its inception, All India Women's Conference has been deeply concerned about the economic, social and legal needs of women and has played a major role in the enactment and modification of laws pertaining to dowry, child marriage, etc.

Introduction

Violence against women is a universal reality and it is widespread across the globe. It creates a "culture of violence" where children witnessing abuse at home are likely to replicate these experiences later in their life. Disintegration of the joint family system and increasing intolerance of each other are some of the facts that have contributed to this problem.

Justification

The alarming rise in the number of cases of violence against women in India has drawn the attention of the nation to this issue. Government and many non-governmental organizations are trying their best to address the problem by framing laws, providing relief services to the victims and also creating awareness of the availability of such services. In spite of this, the incidence of violence against women is increasing. In a country like India, which has a multifarious culture, the impact of violence against women varies from state to state.

All India Women's Conference is deeply concerned with the increasing incidence of violence against women, in spite of all the efforts from the Government and voluntary organizations. To find out whose concern this is, and in order to address the problem holistically starting right from prevention and to make the existing programmes more effective, All India Women's Conference organized seminars in eight states of India, in New Delhi, Allahabad, Maharashtra, Agartala, Hyderabad, Jammu and Trivandrum, covering the entire country to incorporate the best practices in different states to prevent atrocities against women.

The uniqueness of the programme was that all the seminars were conducted in a similar fashion in order to understand the problem in its full purview and to come up with recommendations. The topics for the discussion were the same and the resource persons were drawn from similar disciplines. The resource persons comprised experts from research organizations, psychologists, policymakers and implementers, Government and non-governmental organizations, police, media and religious groups.

The focus of the seminars was on the following issues:

- What are the causes of this problem in different states?
- What are the preventive measures that have proven most effective in these states?

- What is the role of non-governmental organizations, media and religious groups in prevention of the problem?
- What is the role of family and educational institutions?

During the seminars the following issues emerged as the main causes of violence against women:

- Patriarchal family structure prevalent in our country
- Gender insensitivity
- Sluggish judicial system
- Insensitivity of the implementers of laws
- Inactivity of civil society
- Insufficient facilities for helping victims of violence
- Alcoholism
- Indecent projection of women in the media
- Trafficking
- Child labour

The recommendations of the seminars were:

- To recognize the role of parents in inculcating the right gender attitude
- Women should assert their rights and give up the notion that they are the weaker sex and emerge as stronger persons
- Economic empowerment of women is the most important aspect
- Vigilance committees comprising men and women should be set up at residential colonies to check violence
- Experienced, sensitive and grass-roots-level persons must be appointed to statutory bodies that deal with cases of violence at state and national levels
- An attitude of gender sensitivity must be inculcated in the minds of young children from the very beginning; this should be included in the school curriculum
- Resolutions passed at non-governmental forums should be submitted to state authorities so that pertinent and stern steps are taken to counter the problem
- Premarital and marriage counselling should be made available
- The punishment for rape should be given wide publicity
- Fast-track courts should be activated for such cases.
- Legal assistance should be given to the victims by non-governmental organizations and Government
- More counselling cells should be opened for such victims
- Quality education should be available for girls belonging to the weaker sections of society

- Men should be mobilized to support efforts to eliminate violence
- Public awareness against the dowry system should be created

The All India Women's Conference initiatives to help women victims include:

- Short-stay homes for victims of violence, providing services of shelter, food, counselling and rehabilitation
- Family counselling centres providing premarital and marriage counselling
- A 24-hour women's helpline, which gives immediate help and rescue to victims of violence
- Homes for old and abandoned women are provided in various places
- Regular awareness programmes are conducted by our branches all over the country on female foeticide, gender inequality, legal awareness, health and sanitation, trafficking, dowry, child marriage, etc.

Resolutions were passed during the seminars and submitted to state governors for action. Some of the resolutions were on the current state of affairs of victims in that state and sought intervention by the Government for speedy action.
