



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

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### Speech by

**Ms. Kumari Selja**

**Hon'ble Minister of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation and Culture**

#### ***Ladies and Gentlemen:***

At the outset, I welcome all the participants to the First Session.

In this Session, we shall discuss forms, causes and consequences of violence against women and girls. We shall also compare notes on strategic approaches that have been adopted in the context of the Asian region.

Vulnerability of women & girl child to violence is now universally accepted. In December 1993, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. This declaration gives a very wide definition of violence against women.

The Declaration also amplifies the definition of gender violence by identifying three areas in which violence commonly takes place. Number one, Physical, sexual and psychological violence that occurs *in the family*. Number two, Physical, sexual and psychological violence that occurs *within the general community*. And thirdly, Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned *by the State*, wherever it occurs.

All of us are aware of the stark reality that violence against women is prevalent in Asian countries which takes various forms. While all or most forms of violence against women perpetrated elsewhere may be found in Asia, there are certain forms which are specific or near specific to this region. In the Asian context, there are a variety of cultural norms and beliefs associated with harmful traditional practices which cause violence against women. For example, domestic violence in the Asian context includes dowry deaths, forced and child marriage, son preference, discriminatory criminal punishment and restrictions on women's rights in marriage, etc. Traditional practices like 'honour killings' by families and communities affect women and girls in many Asian societies including India. We should all condemn such violence.

There are increased levels of violence against women including trafficking in women and girl children which crosses national boundaries. Advancements in technology also have brought about new forms of violence against women. Early detection of sex of the child has given rise to increasing instances of female foeticide. This issue is now being addressed in India through appropriate legislation. Easy access to new forms of information and communication technologies has given rise to new forms of harassment and violence such as cyber or phone stalking and increase in demand for pornography.

Violence against women intersects with multiple forms of discrimination. While violence against women is universal, its manifestations and women's personal experiences of it are shaped by factors such as economic status, race, class, religion, etc.

Violence against women has consequences for women's health and well-being. It carries a heavy human and economic cost, hinders development and can also lead to displacement. Health consequences include poor physical and reproductive health, poorer mental health and social functioning. Victims suffer physical injuries and chronic health conditions also.

It also has enormous economic costs. It has a direct cost on the resources from social services, the justice system and health-care agencies to treat and support victims and to bring perpetrators of violence

to justice. It costs individual women and their families, communities and nations at many levels, by reducing the capacity of victims to contribute productively to the family and the economy. A constant feature of the subordination of women is found in devaluing women's contribution, while at the same time extracting a significant contribution from them.

In order to end violence against women, a variety of strategies are required. Following the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, earnest efforts have been made to create international legal instruments and to progressively bring national laws in conformity with international standards. India has also been made considerable progress in this direction.

One of the thrust areas in our strategic approaches for a long time has been to pass legislations or improving laws, wherever they exist, relating to violence against women. Passing laws to criminalize violence against women is an important way to redefine the limits of acceptable behaviour. A corollary to this approach is to ensure that national legislation, once adopted is effectively enforced.

An approach which aims to deal holistically with the problem of violence against women must be twofold, addressing the root causes of the problem and treating its manifestations.

In India our approach to tackling violence against women and girls is a test of this government's capability to build a fairer society. There is clearly much more to do to ensure that women and girls are not held back. We should strive to be ambitious in our aims and meet our shared commitment to ending violence.

Women face disparities in access to and control over services and resources. Bulk of the public expenditure and policy concerns are in "gender neutral sectors". Implications on women in the above sectors are not recognized or identified. Therefore one of the tools that can be used to promote women's equality and empowerment is gender-responsive budgeting or gender budgeting as is commonly known in India while making provision for funds and incurring expenditure.

I would also like to mention here that the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation which I head, is implementing an employment oriented Scheme named Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY). The scheme strives to provide gainful employment to the urban unemployed and under employed poor. This is done by encouraging the setting up of self employment ventures, skill training and also through providing wage employment by constructing socially and economically useful public assets. We have special focus on urban poor women under this scheme for empowerment of women.

The focus of this Seminar, in the context of the Asian region, will be on the forms violence against women take and how it impacts the lives of women victims, their families and society. We would also discuss various strategic approaches adopted to prevent or deal with this violence and how successful they are. With these introductory remarks on the topic for this Session, I will now leave the stage open for the participants to deliver their presentations and share their observations and views with all of us present here.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.