

United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
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New York

INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

on

**"Elimination and Prevention of all Forms of Violence Against
Women and Girls"**

Tuesday, 5 March 2013 from 3:00pm to 6:00pm

Focus: Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls

**"Prevention of Violence Against Women in Constitution and
Nation-Building Processes "**

by

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Background

We congratulate the United Nation to make Violence Against Women and Girls as main theme of this session.

First, let me repeat my words during the Stakeholder Preparatory Forum for CSW: "it is upfront shame on humanity to still have women and girls who suffer from violence, while all UN efforts have been contributing towards the Member States realization and respect of all human rights".

Violence against women and girls is a phenomenon affecting all societies worldwide. It is the most widespread human rights violation of our times, claiming millions of victims and affecting all societies.

VAWG & Globalization

Since the last two decades of the twentieth century, the world has witnessed a new era of globalized economy, wave of free trade, open markets, capital flows and high technology. Globalization is a multidimensional process of economic, political, cultural, and ideological change. Globalization and neo-liberal have two faces; while it is expected to bring higher rates of economic growth, employment and human welfare; yet the other face is compounded with gradual decrease of the state's domestic power over policy issues, and in return marginalizing redistributive and comprehensive social policies with increase in inequality between countries and even within countries.

On the economical level, globalization and capitalism were expected to result in reduction of poverty, yet we witnessed neglect in the overall distribution of income and wealth within the society, and a regression in realizing the economic and social rights of individuals especially marginalized groups (women). Globalization has produced increasing violations of women's economic, political and cultural rights due to the feminization of poverty, the expansion of religious fundamentalisms, and new forms of militarism and conflicts.

Politically, globalization led to the new liberal thoughts which dominated the political scene with conservative attitudes in politics, economy and culture. This general mode produced suppression of human rights in general, and limited women's role and access to services and means of production in particular.

Ironically, globalization was supposed to promote free movement of capital, people, services and goods, yet UN reports proved that globalization worsened inequality coupled with social collapse in countries in transition.

Globalization should have a human face and reshaped to be more people-centered instead of profit-centered. Also, it should meet with a holistic approach towards protecting human rights; promote gender equality and empowerment of women.

VAWG & Arab Spring

With the tremendous changes the Arab region witnessed after the Arab Spring revolution, women of the Arab Spring, despite being at the heart of the social movements, continued their struggle to maintain control over the next phase of the revolution. Arab women dreamed of a nation with dignity and liberty while sustaining women's full human rights.

The true fact entailed new types of socio-economic violence and oppression against women in the region, especially with the emergence of new religious fundamentalist movements all over the Arab transitional countries. Misinterpretation of religion and culture are selected as tools against women, making them sources and victims of the political tectonic shift.

Egypt Case

On the local level, Egyptian women were marginalized, after the revolution from power when;

- only men were appointed to draft an interim constitution,
- when no fairly representation of women existed within the Founding Committee for Drafting the constitution,
- when the 64-seat quota for women's representation in parliament was abolished,
- when the number of women in the first people's assembly were 9 out of 508,
- when radical Islamist members of the previous parliament attempted to change the existing legal instruments concerned with women's rights.
- when the new constitution ignored the basic rights of women politically, socially and economically.
- when they removed the only women judge from the Supreme Constitutional Court,
- when they refused to put women on the political party list of nominees.

A new political weapon was used against Egyptian women protesters, to assault them and frighten them from taking part in demonstrations. Violence against women protesters in the form of identical "group sexual harassment" seemed to be carried out by hired gangs and organized to serve specific purposes. The end result of such violence is not only terrifying women and keeping them at home, but terrifying her husband, son, daughter, and all family members as well. These ill-practices against women were used during the previous regime in 2005 demonstrations.

Religious-based groups encourage violence against women through calls for;

- veiling women,
- early marriage for girls,
- legitimacy of FMG,
- revoking divorce laws (Khoul, the right of women to divorce herself),
- changing the age of custody of the child from 15 to 7.

Women Political Participation & VAWG

The relation between women political participation and VAWG is significant, as the greater gender equality achieved; the lower level of violence against women and girls exists. It is very important to increase women political participation because;

- Women are capable of explaining better the needs, rights and problems women are facing, and also conduct greater attention to gender related issues.
- Women will protect any legislation in their favor.
- Women's active participation would change the overall understanding of the people towards women's rights.
- Women would encourage other women attitudes towards their political participation and their perception towards their role in society.

Enhancing women's political participation means more progress in laws and policies that address key human rights concerns counting gender-based violence, especially women are more capable of evoking the kind of details that are required to protect women from violation.

Taking into account, the root causes of VAWG which persist in cultural stereotypes, abuse of religious and traditional practices; so strategies, policies and programs for enhancing women political participation should be tailed in accordance with the realization and understanding of the challenges women are facing. It is a fact that both the underrepresentation of women in politics and efforts to end VAWG, need strong governance concern.

VAWG & Civil Society

The civil society has a significant role in societies' development particularly with regard to combating violence against women and girls, and its engagement constitutes a dynamic support for achieving objectives such as:

- Tackle and monitor cases of violence,
- Report cases and violation of laws.
- Push for new laws, programs, policies or strategies.
- Raising awareness of VAWG.
- Provide hotlines, shelters and services for victims.

The civil society's efforts associated with raising public awareness should follow all human rights principles adopted by the United Nations legal entities and UN documents.

Positive responsiveness to VAWG is related to the creation of enabling environment in which all partners, government and civil society institutions, work together in a well-designed and harmonized manner to utilize the available resources.

Egypt Actions Against VAWG

VAWG is seen as viscous circle, where it has spillover effects on women wellbeing economically, socially and politically and thus community's wellbeing as well. Since its inception in 2000, the NCW in Egypt has been exerting unremitting efforts with many competent bodies to combat violence against women. With the restructure of

the NCW in 2012, a set of activities was implemented in cooperation with different stakeholders among which is NGOs, media, and ministries' officials.

▪ **National plan to combat VAWG**

The NCW is implementing a National Strategy to Stop Violence Against Women with three strategic objectives, five projects, and 24 steps. The Three Strategic Objectives are; (1) Strengthen laws and regulations to prevent and redress violence against women; (2) Protect and empower women survivors and their families; and (3) Prevent all forms of violence through public awareness and education. Several sequential and sometimes overlapping steps were prioritized to address these objectives.

▪ **Ombudsman Office**

The Ombudsman Office is a unit at the NCW and had branches across the country. It is the official channel through which any Egyptian woman may report any discriminatory practice or violence to which she is subject. It monitors, examines and addresses any violation of women's rights also provides hotlines and legal advice, refers complaints to the competent agencies, and raises cases to court for victims.

- **Organized** twenty seven conferences, held at the same time in all governorates, to discuss all sorts of violence on the grass root level, based on the results of a survey covered 15000 woman & girl, which demonstrated that 61% of the violence was at home followed by violence in the streets 38% then at work place.
- **Arranged with the Ministry of Interior** to take the following measures;
 - ✚ They increased security patrols all over the cities and streets;
 - ✚ They modernized the surveillance cameras to trace perpetrators since girls or women often fail to report sexual harassment;
 - ✚ They provided policemen and civil servants extensive training courses on human rights issues;
 - ✚ They appointed new female police officers to provide proper psychological atmosphere to women during reporting and interrogation.
- **Organized** several meetings with different ministries as well as religious institutions (Mosque and the Church) targeting the activation of procedures taken by these ministries to fight violence against women.
- **Launching** a campaign for collecting million signatures of Egyptian women and girls for confronting violence against them.
- **Organized** and participated, with concerned NGOs, in a number of demonstrations to address violations and condemn all harassment incidents.
- **Broadcasting** promo and announcements on criminalizing VAWG.
- **Addressing** VAWG through ethics and religious leaders' sermon.
- **Works** with different UN concerned organizations to apply the initiative of "*Safe Cities*" aiming to create models for cities free of violence.

▪ **Future Actions**

- A new legislation addressing VAWG has been prepared with accurate definition of sexual harassment; to cover all forms of violence against women, to intensify penalties and fill the gap in the application of existing laws.
- A legal observatory unit for women's rights will be established to monitor all legislations and ensure its adherence to the principle of equality and respect of women's rights, while tracking any violation or deviation in the implementation of laws.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender and human rights should be framed in a global context; in a method that investigates the relation between women's oppression and the global economy, inter-governmental relations, and state practices.

The international community is committed to put an end to such violence. It is not adequate to pass new legislations criminalizing violence against women to solve the problem, but finding comprehensive solutions for other interrelated factors on the international, regional, and local level is fundamental to enable structural change.

It is important to:

- Develop an international solidarity to protect women from new liberalism including religious fundamentalism that leads to women discrimination and suppression;
- Establish a special funding mechanism for ending VAWG in all conflict, humanitarian and development settings;
- Create an international legal observatory machinery at UN to monitor, review and assess practices of VAWG at member states and recommend measures should be taken to end VAWG;
- Enhance the states to formulate and implement policies closer towards women's rights.