

FOCUS

Law and Our Rights

Meeting on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls in South Asia

A Commitment Renewed

by A H Monjurul Kabir back from Kathmandu

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GENDER violence as one report puts it, is...the greatest human rights abuse in the world today. Its forms are both subtle and blatant and its impact on development profound. But it is so deeply embedded in cultures around the world that it is invisible.

To make it visible, so to say, or to address the issue of violence against women girls, over 120 women — and also men — from across South Asia gathered in a four-day regional meeting on 'Ending Violence to Women and Girls in South Asia' from 21st to 24th October 1997 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The four-day meeting was organised by UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) in cooperation with UNIFEM, UNDP and the Swiss Development Corporation. Participants, invited in their individual capacity, came from throughout the subcontinent including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka as well as the Afghan community in exile. In fact this was the first time such a variety of activists against violence to women and girls who are heads of non-governmental organisations, Supreme Court lawyers, young human rights activists, journalists, editors, high ranking police officials, academics and Members of Parliament.

Although the workshop is stated to deal with what the Beijing Conference had a lot to say about, the programme worked out some specific solutions to end gender violence "and how to multiply these through mutual and complementary action." Ending violence against women and children is one of the twelve areas of priorities identified by the Beijing Platform for Action.

The more than one hundred participants gathered were able not only to discuss common experiences to combat violence but pledged to work together to devise individual, group, national and regional strategies to address this problem.

The conference ended with what the organizers call a historic pledge made by all participants to mobilize, to the best of their ability, the youth, the media and the non-governmental organizations of the region for sixteen days in November of intense action against gender violence. The pledge called the "Kathmandu Commitment" committed participants to follow up on plenary decisions calling on changes in government policies related to the issues, judicial and police reform and actions for individuals and communities to take on this problem is to be addressed.



Background and Objectives of the Meeting

Too often, the home and family are not a safe place and institution for the protection of girls' and women's rights. This is no less true in South Asia than elsewhere. A regionwide movement against gender based violence, with men as well as women involved, will benefit children, women and men, and it can help to break the cycle of violence learned from generation to generation within the patriarchy. Unless and until such violence is eliminated, it is difficult to make seriously any claim that women are empowered or that girls' and women's rights are respected — and protected, let alone fulfilled. Men will also continue to be dehumanized by social norms that would make acceptable their violence against women and girls.

UNICEF ROSA, in cooperation with UNICEF country offices as well as with some NGOs, has been identifying and interviewing women and men from all walks of life in the region who are speaking out and acting against some form of violence to women and girls. One of the prime objectives of the above mentioned meeting was to bring together some of these outstanding individuals with like-minded potential partners from the region. Other goals that were to be achieved are:

- Exchange of successful actions and strategies against violence to women and girls in South Asia.
- Increased involvement of men as part of the solution rather than as perpetrators of violence to women and girls in South Asia.
- Partnership to address and prevent the impact of domestic violence on children and youth.
- Greater awareness of resources which can be used to stop violence against women and girls.
- Plans for greater cooperation and revitalized movements

against such violence.

Areas of Concern

The meeting substantially dealt with such areas like: building coalition to end violence against women and girls; impact of gender violence on children; challenging gender role stereotypes; women's action against gender violence; using the legal system to end violence against women and girls and working with media and arts in coalition to meet this end.

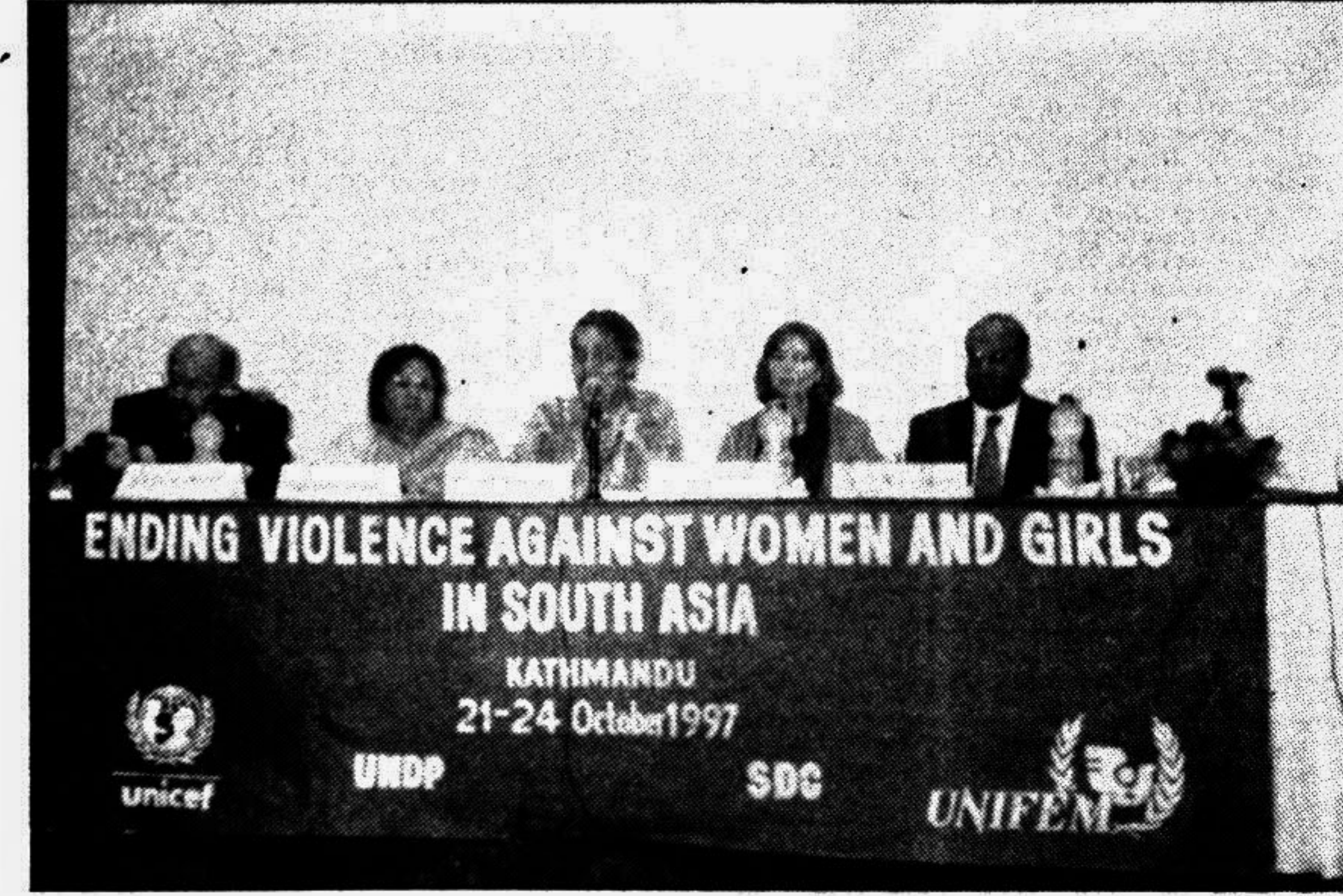
Although the meeting was not very specific about the types of violence that it had desired to deal with, the programme, no doubt, tried to bring into picture even the taken-for-granted problems such as neglect of health-care for women, especially in pregnancy and delivery, unequal burden for girls, differential care for girls and boys, unequal access to education, abuse by in-laws, child marriage. Often the taboo topics such as incest, gender specific foeticide, female infanticide, unequal property rights, sexual

abuse and girls trafficking also figured during the meeting.

A South Asian Coalition Against Gender Violence

"It can be done," says Dr Ruth Finney Hayward, the Deputy Director of UNICEF's Regional Office for South Asia and the conference organizer. "Out of this meeting has come a renewed commitment on the part of participants and an unprecedented openness on the part of those taking part in looking at the problem in their own countries as well as neighbouring countries." Carol Long, resident representative of the UNDP, Nepal at his inaugural speech on 21st October aptly remarked, "This conference is not the one that deals with an issue of just women and girls, but is one which touches the essence of humanity that affects men, and women, in almost every country of the world."

Most of the experts noted that violence against women (VAW) has only recently been taken up seriously by the larger



communities. Only as late as 1993 that the UN General Assembly adopted the declaration against VAW which elaborated and defined it as a critical human rights issue.

"If a woman reported a case of domestic violence to the police, she used to be sent back home. Domestic violence was thought proper to be treated only inside one's own home," said Professor Savitri Goonesekere from the University of Colombo. "Now there is the UN declaration against violence to women. But it is still only a declaration."

At the end of meeting, participants pledged to end the conspiracy of silence regarding the issue of violence against women and girls in South Asia. They discussed common experience to combat violence and pledged to work together to devise individual, group, national and regional strategies to address this problem.

The pledge called the "Kathmandu Commitment" states: "All forms of violence against

women and girls, whether physical, sexual, psychological or others, including those perpetrated under conflict situations, are a gross violation of their individual human rights, as well as a major impeding factor for the equitable and sustainable development of our countries."

The participants agreed that the Kathmandu Commitment could very well be a catalyst for a South Asia movement on an issue which for too long has been taboo. Many participants noted that the meeting was unique as a number of male activists working on the issue participated. These activists are not usually heard from. "Men must be part of the solutions to end violence against girls and women," said Finney Hayward. "In fact, men participating in the Kathmandu meeting decided to spell out their own commitment to end violence against women and girls, in addition to the joint commitments shared by all participants."

The participants shared chilling tales of wife burning, beating and poisoning, the difficulties for lawyers and police officials to bring those culpable to justice. But the conference was also one of hope. Professor Harendra de Silva, a paediatrician and head of the Child Protection Authority under the Sri Lankan President summed up the feeling of many participants when he quoted Albert Einstein: "The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who watch and let it happen." "Those are the passive perpetrators," he added. Professor de Silva is one of those who decided not to continue to let it happen when children victims of physical violence in the home were brought to him with injuries. He decided to speak out and become an activist.

"It is very encouraging to learn through success stories from fellow participants how violence have been fought in other countries," said a participant from the Maldives. "This is no less than a coalition against domestic violence starting its work from now," agreed another young participant from Bangladesh. "Impressive to hear from other activists how they have been able to help stop violence to women and girls and inspiring to have a network to rely on from now on."

LAW WATCH

The Kathmandu Commitment

WE women and men gathered as participants at the Meeting on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls in South Asia held in Kathmandu, Nepal from 21 to 24 October 1997, organized by UNICEF, Regional Office South Asia with UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office, do hereby commit ourselves to that end.

While recognizing that violence against all segments of society including children is a serious and growing problem in our times and in this region, we nevertheless state that the issue of violence against women and girls has been largely ignored.

We come from countries in South Asia with a diversity of political situations, laws, institutions, cultures and traditions. Yet the anguish of violence is a common problem that debilitates and threatens all women and girls, manifesting itself in similar and different ways, being rooted in gender inequality, discrimination and patriarchal value systems and son preference.

All forms of violence against women and girls, whether physical, sexual, psychological or others, including those perpetrated under conflict situations, are a gross violation of their individual human rights, as well as a major impeding factor for the equitable and sustainable development of our countries. They are an extreme manifestation of the unequal distribution of resources between men and women within the family, community, work place, in the political, economic, legal and educational systems and the State.

For too long women and girls have been forced to suffer violence silently in their families and communities, in the work place, in public spaces, within public service institutions and through the legal system. They are the victims of gross violence and infringement of their basic integrity and basic human rights are stigmatized, victimized and blamed by societies affected by violence, inequalities and contradictions. Our silence has made us accomplices of this violence, even passive perpetrators.

Our first commitment as human beings concerned to build a gender violence free society is, therefore, to end the conspiracy of silence. We vow to recognize and expose the reality of violence against women and girls perpetrated within our families, communities, work places, professions, political

Cooperation (SAARC) and the agencies of the United Nations system to play an active role in advocating for a gender violence free society in South Asia and to assist governments, educational institutions, other opinion and value generating institutions and non-governmental organizations in our countries towards that end. We in particular call upon SAARC and its member countries to fulfil and build upon the commitments of the Male Summit (1997) to adopt a Regional Convention and to demand and ensure regional and bilateral cooperation for stringent law enforcement and strict prevention of cross border and in-country trafficking of women and children.

We recognize that the family itself often promotes and perpetuates gender based violence, through the differential treatment given to girls and boys from conception and birth by all members of the family. We shall endeavour to promote gender equality in the family, so that this key institution in our countries becomes a source of support for its members and creates a cooperative and nurturing environment. This requires the involvement of a number of institutions in the reconstruction of the nature and functions of the family. We call upon the State to recognize its duty to protect human rights by protecting women and children against any act of violence that occurs in the family.

As schools often perpetuate the status quo on gender relations we urge that policy makers, educators, teachers and children develop gender sensitive curriculum and teacher training methods. We recommend life skills training with special reference to gender violence and puberty related issues using participatory and interactive methods of teaching and communication.

We women and men recognize that without the active participation of men, we cannot achieve our goal of eliminating violence against women and girls. We shall strive as individuals, as parents, as educators, as opinion formers to promote new, positive models of masculinities and femininities, so that boys and young men will grow up realizing their own potential as caring human beings committed to respecting the rights of women and girls as equal partners in their families, communities and societies.

We recognize the potential of children, both girls and boys, to interact with one another and

SONY
RANGS

আবশ্যিক

র্যাংগস ইলেকট্রনিক্স লিমিটেড-এর ফ্যাক্টরীর জন্য নিম্নে উল্লিখিত পদের জন্য আগ্রহী প্রার্থীদের কাছ থেকে দরখাস্ত আহবান করা যাচ্ছে। প্রার্থীদের দরখাস্ত, প্রায়োজনীয় সকল সনদপত্রের সত্যায়িত কপি এবং সদ্য তোলা দু'কপি ছবিসহ আগামী ০৮ নভেম্বর, '৯৭-এর মধ্যে নিম্নোক্ত ঠিকানায় পৌঁছেতে হবে:

- ১। কোয়ালিটি কন্ট্রোল ইঞ্জিনিয়ার : ১টি পদ।
প্রার্থীকে অবশ্যই রঙিন টেলিভিশন এবং অডিও সেট অ্যাসেসমেন্টের কাজে অনূন ৫ বছরের অভিজ্ঞতাসহ বি.এসসি ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং (ইলেকট্রনিক্স/ইলেকট্রিক্যাল) অথবা অ্যাপ্রাইড ফিজিক্স-এ এম.এসসি হতে হবে।
- ২। অ্যাসেসমেন্ট লাইন ইঞ্জিনিয়ার : ২টি পদ।
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- ৩। সুপারভাইজার : ২টি পদ।
প্রার্থীকে অবশ্যই ডিপ্লোমা-ইন-ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং (ইলেকট্রনিক্স) অথবা সংশ্লিষ্ট ফ্রেড কোর্স পাসসহ গ্রাজুয়েট এবং রঙিন টেলিভিশন ও অডিও সেট অ্যাসেসমেন্টের কাজ সুপারভাইজার করার ৪/৫ বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা সম্পন্ন হতে হবে।

সত্যিকারের দক্ষ ও অভিজ্ঞতা সম্পন্ন প্রার্থীগণ অগ্রাধিকার পাবেন এবং প্রার্থীদের যোগ্যতার আলোকে আলোচনা সাপেক্ষে উপযুক্ত ও আকর্ষণীয় বেতন প্রদান করা হবে। প্রার্থীদের পক্ষে সুপারিশ ও উদ্বিগ্ন অযোগ্যতার পরিচায়ক বলে বিবেচিত হবে।

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Closed Architectural Design Competition

Interested Architectural consultants are requested to apply for a Closed Architectural Design Competition within November 10, 1997 during office hours regarding the design of proposed 20 storied Head Office Building for Peoples Insurance Company Limited at 36, Dilkusha C.A., Dhaka. Ten consultants/Architects from the interested consultants will be selected on the basis of Experience and quality of works for Design competition. The selection of consultants and the competition will be organised with the collaboration of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (AIB) and according to the rules and regulations of the Institute.

The application should contain a list of Architectural works completed and a list of works at hand along with a list of technical personnel of the organisation and should be addressed to the undersigned.

Saikh Mohammadullah
 Company Secretary

To be continued