

Combating Violence Against Women In Politics: Revisiting policies, politics and participation
16-18 November 2008, Kathmandu

DECLARATION

We, the people representing civil society organizations, political parties, gender, human rights, legal institutions and media from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka assembled in Kathmandu to seek a substantive solution to combat the issue of Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP) by revisiting policies, politics and participation.

There are inherent structural impediments that prevent and discourage women from participating in decision-making processes which consequently perpetuates violence, both visible and invisible against women.

There is overwhelming consensus amongst the people of South Asia to ensure human rights, human dignity, equality, justice and human security. Indeed these are fundamental, inalienable rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, CEDAW, UN SCR 1325, UN SCR 1820, CPRW, Beijing Platform for Action and other related international documents, as well as the national Constitutions of SAARC countries.

Problems of democracy can only be addressed by deepening commitment to the processes of democracy and celebrating diversity and ensuring inclusivity. All democratic institutions, the judiciary, election commissions, other constitutional bodies and political parties must be strengthened and nurtured.

The experience of South Asian people demonstrates that all round holistic development cannot be achieved in a paradigm of politics that is totalitarian and extra-constitutional and which is devoid of fundamental rights particularly freedom of speech, expression and human security.

Violence is not just limited to overt, visible and manifest actions but can also be congealed and invisible and is deeply embedded in the system of the state mechanisms. Such violence is unacceptable to the men and women of South Asia.

Wars, armed conflicts and the unleashing of the “War of Terror” on the world, particularly on South Asia has generated its own politics of violence, an economy of war and militarization. This militarization of state and society is increasing the threshold for accepting violence and legitimatizing coercive actions by both state and non-state actors.

We want to reclaim the peace and liberty of the people of South Asia wherein women play a central role. Peace is not merely the absence of disorder, war and unrest. Instead peace is an environment that encourages creativity, a better quality of life, space for people to raise voices, enjoyment of fundamental rights and human securities so that we may prosper in freedom.

We strongly condemn and reject the existing paradigm of power politics that is inherently violent, corrupt and patriarchal. We believe in redefining of politics based on participation, inclusivity, justice, transparency and democracy.

WE ARE CONCERNED THAT

Women in politics are subject to a range of violence and intimidation and practices that adversely affect their active participation in decision-making processes. Such forms of violence include but are not limited to (honour) killings, actual violence and threat of violence, psycho-social torture, humiliation, degrading treatment, intimidation, character assassination and sexual harassment, targeting women, their relatives and supporters.

Abuse of religion, culture, traditions and patriarchal practices subvert and undermine the interest of women and inhibit and not only prevent the scope of their political participation in decision-making processes but

also negate the overall development of South Asia. Increasing sensationalised reportage on matters concerning women which lack gender sensitivity.

Despite the existence of effective laws to combat VAWIP, their implementation is inadequate.

WE DEMAND

Zero tolerance towards violence against women in politics in order to enhance a meaningful participation of women in political governance.

Irrespective of the system of elections (FPTP, PR, Mixed) there should be a minimum of 33% quotas for women for elected positions at all levels of governance.

Direct elections for women in all elected positions including reserved seats/quotas. There is no substitute for direct elections, since indirect elections/nominations make women subservient to party leaders, which is not only humiliating but also counter productive to growth of women's leadership. Conversely independent minded women with leadership qualities are not nominated by the party leaders as they are seen as threats to their own traditional leadership.

Repeal all discriminatory laws and replace them with universal civil/criminal codes that treat all citizens equally, irrespective of their gender, caste or religious persuasion.

Laws, Regulations and Code of Conduct prescribed and adopted by the respective South Asian countries must ensure that no person is excluded from the highest positions of the state and within any political party simply because of gender, class, caste, or religious persuasion.

The election commission should ensure a comprehensive and appropriate code of conduct so as to prevent abuses such as surrogate male nominations, prevention of women from voting whether directly or indirectly and/or coercive and illicit measures. All authorities of the state should assist the election commission in ensuring adherence, compliance and implementation.

Condemnation of any incidence of violence against women in politics is treated as an issue that cuts across party politics.

A South Asian regional institute / or forum for engaging sustained dialogue, conflict resolution and transformation with active participation of all stakeholders particularly women.

All relevant international human rights treaty bodies such as CEDAW Committee and Human Rights Committee should recognize and act upon VAWIP as a form of discrimination against women and the violation of women's human rights.

The harmonization of national laws and policies with existing international instruments, mechanisms and standards to specifically address the issue of VAWIP.

SAARC incorporates in their existing database, statistics, information and data on the levels of women's political participation and VAWIP.

Since electoral violence is a phenomenon that affects all South Asian countries, special electoral laws should be framed to address this issue, including VAWIP. The election commission should be empowered to administer and implement these laws during the period of elections.

That the SAARC heads of state at their next meeting make a formal commitment to address the issue of VAWIP.

We, the people of South Asia, both women and men, collectively challenge patriarchy and seek to replace it with a culture that actively supports equal participation of all. We encourage a South Asian forum that promotes such culture and values through mass communication.

First Declaration Date: September 20, 2007

Second Declaration Date: November 18, 2008