



22 December 2016

Press Release

Dissemination Event on “CEDAW Recommendations: Securing Justice for Violence Against Women”

Today, on 22 December 2016, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) organized the dissemination of a publication titled “CEDAW General Recommendations: Securing Justice for Violence Against Women” supported by UN Women at the BRAC Inn Centre, Dhaka. The publication has been designed to make General Recommendations 19 and 33 of the Convention to Eliminate of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) more accessible to stakeholders in Bangladesh, and to briefly outline the CEDAW system and its application in Bangladesh. The event was attended by lawyers, women’s rights activists, NGO representatives and researchers from different organisations. Sultana Kamal, Former Advisor, Caretaker Government, Rokeya Kabir, Executive Director, Bangladesh Nari Progoti Shongho, and Aroma Dutta, Former Member, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) were the panelists at the event. Also on the panel was Christine Hunter, Country Representative, UN Women. The event was moderated by Barrister Sara Hossain, Honorary Executive Director, BLAST.

Barrister Sara Hossain set the context for the event and briefly outlined the objectives of the meeting. She stated the status of ratification of the CEDAW Convention and the Optional Protocol, and that the objectives for the event were to obtain feedback from the participants on how to use CEDAW and its General Recommendations in Bangladesh in the women’s movement, how to undertake closer monitoring of access to justice for women in cases of violence and welcomed feedback and recommendations on the publication. Christine Hunter, Country Representative, UN Women Bangladesh spoke about the historic implementation of the CEDAW recommendations and how they can be used as a tool to mobilise and bring people together to discuss the barriers of implementation of obligations under CEDAW, and what can be done to bring a change for women. She stated, “Violence against women is one of the most pervasive forms of human rights violation”. She mentioned that violence against women has been emphasized as an important issue in the last concluding remarks by the CEDAW Committee.

Najrana Imaan, Team Leader, SHOKHI, BLAST presented the publication, highlighting the intersection between CEDAW GRs 19 and 33, and stated that the two GRs taken together provide a comprehensive guideline on how to ensure remedies and effective access to justice for women facing violence.

In the open discussion, participants highlighted the need to raise awareness and provide training to grassroots level stakeholders regarding the State obligations under the CEDAW Convention. They also highlighted the need to ensure the ‘good quality’ and ‘accountability’ of the justice system under GR 33, and the need to incorporate the media in all awareness raising programmes. Suggestions were also made to include examples of national laws and policies contradictory to the State’s obligations under CEDAW in order to contextualize the discussions in the publication.

Panelist Aroma Dutta emphasized on the need to incorporate media and telecommunications, suggesting that informative messages be broadcast through telephone companies to ensure wider dissemination of the rights under CEDAW. She also highlighted the need to have more intensive trainings for public administration officers, and include information about CEDAW in school curriculums. She suggested the use of easy and simple language for effectiveness.



বাংলাদেশ লিগ্যাল এইড এন্ড সার্ভিসেস ট্রাস্ট (ব্লাস্ট) Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)

Panelist Rokeya Kabir emphasized the need to firstly ensure equal rights, human rights and constitutional rights to ensure equality for women, and stressed the need to pay attention to laws and policies drafted in violation of the Constitution. Sultana Kamal emphasized the need to hold the government more accountable regarding their obligations under the CEDAW, as signatories on behalf of the citizens of Bangladesh. She stated that there is a lack of commitment and sincerity in implementing CEDAW in Bangladesh and a lack of sensitization on violence against women among government sector actors. She stated that the publication will be a very useful tool, suggesting that such publications should be developed after gaining a clear understanding on how the tools should be used, taking a strong stance towards implementation.

Background:

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a treaty that upholds the rights of women, recognising discrimination against women and the need for State action to address and eliminate these inequalities and discrimination, which was ratified by Bangladesh on 6 November 1984, which currently retains two reservations on provisions of CEDAW, on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the equality of men and women in the context of marriage and family relations. CEDAW General Recommendation 19 relates to violence against women and GR 33 relates to access to justice.

UN Women is the global champion for gender equality, working to develop and uphold standards and create an environment in which every woman and girl can exercise her human rights and live up to her full potential. UN Women, among other issues, works for the elimination of discrimination against women and girls; empowerment of women; and achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, humanitarian action and peace and security.

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) is the largest legal aid organization in Bangladesh. It provides support extensively to women and children living in poverty or facing disadvantage, disability or discrimination. It also provides legal aid, advice and representation across a range of areas, including civil, criminal, family, labour and land law, as well as on constitutional rights and remedies, providing access to judicial remedies alongside alternative dispute resolution wherever appropriate. Alongside individual legal aid, BLAST undertakes strategic litigation, or public interest litigation, as a key part of its advocacy for law, policy and institutional reforms to ensure effective access to justice and legal protection of rights.

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