WOMEN RIGHTS NOW!

CITIZENS SPEAK OUT AGAINST BRUTAL CASES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE FROM KOLKATA TO MANIPUR, GUJARAT, UTTARAKHAND, BIHAR, UTTAR PRADESH...

DEMAND URGENT, INDEPENDENT AND UNBIASED INVESTIGATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY!

NO MORE SHIELDING OF PERPETRATORS AND THEIR PROTECTORS

JUSTICE TO VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES!

August, 2024

Amidst distressing news of brutal rape cases coming from multiple states, women's rights groups were joined by mass organisations, trade unions, students' groups, and other civil society organisations initiated the following statement seeking immediate investigation and action against perpetrators and demanded an end to sexual crimes and gender-based violence.

The heinous rape and murder of a medical practitioner reported from RG Kar Hospital and Medical College, Kolkata, and the cover-up by the institution and authorities are a stark reminder of the callousness of societal attitudes and systemic failures that in fact, perpetuate such violence. Within days of the Kolkata rape and murder, several gruesome cases of sexual violence have been reported from Uttarakhand, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. Each, a grim reminder that the violence against women and young girls across the country continues undeterred.

It is condemnable that elected representatives, government officials and some political parties are rushing to make political capital out of each case, rather than being invested in the cause of justice or even simply fulfilling their mandated responsibility to ensure accountable working of the machinery of criminal investigation, law and governance. Far from being concerned prevention of such crimes, governments at the state and the union are resorting to rhetoric – wanting to treat 'rapists as terrorists' or seeking the death penalty without stopping to consider that the rapists at RG Kar weren't deterred by the hanging of the four men held guilty for the rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi in 2012, or the hanging of Dhananjay Chatterji in 2004... How could they be, when global data has established that the death penalty does not end crimes, it only ends the criminal.

We condemn the actions and inactions of the West Bengal government led by Mamta Banerji for trying to obfuscate the issue as a suicide case and a political conspiracy, 'transferring' Sandip Ghosh, Principal of the RG Kar Hospital as Principal of the Calcutta National Medical College Hospital, and only rescinding the order under great public pressure. It also had the temerity to transfer 43 doctors and professors, including some from the RG Kar hospital, in the middle of nationwide protests by healthcare professionals! Against the backdrop of vandalism at the hospital, in which some protesting doctors were also attacked, such actions evidence the state government's attempts at muzzling those demanding justice and reveal exactly why perpetrators of such heinous crimes feel no pressure or fear of the law.

We urge the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) now investigating the Kolkata case to rise above political interests and conduct a fair and unbiased investigation. However we recognize that the demand for fair trial and implementation of the law is even more challenging in these times when the Union Government, while making claims of making more stringent laws to 'protect' women, systematically releases and even felicitates those held guilty of gang rape, and multiple murders

such as those convicted in Bilkis Bano's case (Gujarat 2002), Muzzaffarnagar (2013), Ariyalur (2016), the Kathua case (2018), or Hathras (2020), Muzzafarpur (2024). This is also the same Union government which stood silent despite widespread evidence of women being brutally assaulted, raped and paraded naked in Manipur. And it is the same central government that assaulted women (and male) wrestlers when they agitated against being molested by the President of the Wrestling Federation of India Chief, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. Not to mention the political support they extend for 'spiritual leaders' convicted of sexual crimes such as Asaram Bapu and Gurmeet Ram Rahim to constantly be out on bail.

Let us not forget that the suffering and death of this young woman in Kolkata is only the latest in a series of such terrible incidents, each of them a signpost of the state's dereliction of duty. Laws framed to protect women - in their homes, on the streets, in their workplaces - are flouted with impunity. Mechanisms to monitor the implementation of these laws exist only on paper. It is the state - whether at the Centre or in the states - that creates an enabling climate for sexual violence and ensures that abusers go free.

Such abysmal failure of the state to stand firmly with victims and their families, and rigorously implement the law has created a rampant culture of impunity in which gender-based crimes deeply rooted in oppressive structures of patriarchy, caste, class, capitalism, communalism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism continue unabated. In such a system, women, and gender-based minorities especially those of oppressed castes, religions, class continue to be much more vulnerable to all forms of sexual violence. And the evidence lies in the relentless calendar of cases we hear of everyday (and many more we don't). According to the National Crimes records Bureau (NCRB) about 30,000 cases of rape are reported every year – that's an average of about 86 rapes every day, and we have a national conviction rate as low as 27%!

Installing CCTV cameras or calling for the death penalty does not enhance safety or counter systemic impunity. Concealing the facts, silencing whistle-blowers and crushing those who call for justice as we have seen in case after case - these can bring neither safety nor justice.

Let us also make the connection between the budget that was passed just a few weeks ago, and the horror of this and countless other incidents of sexual violence. How much does this budget allocate to monitoring the implementation of the rape laws, the DV Act, the POSH Act, POCSO, the SC/ST Act. The Ministry of Women refuses to disclose whether the mechanisms mandated by these laws are in place and functioning as they should be. Does this data even exist?

Today, we stand in solidarity with the victims' families and survivors and demand that action be initiated against perpetrators of these crimes.

We demand a fair trial that deals with sexual violence cases with expertise and empathy.

We hope the intervention of the Supreme Court will help ensure accountability for the failure of institutions, elected representatives, police and bureaucracy.

We unite to build a society where women's rights are non-negotiable, and our safety is a fundamental guarantee. The time for that change is now.

TOGETHER, WE CAN...

Break the silence around sexual violence

Challenge institutional, individual and community patriarchy

Stand up for justice and accountability

Endorsed by the following organisations and individuals:

All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM)

All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA)

All India Mahila Samskritik Sanghatan (AIMSS)

All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA)

All India Feminist Alliance (ALIFA)

All India Lawyers' Association for Justice (AILAJ)

All India Union of Forest Working People (AIUFWP)

Act Now for Harmony and Democracy (ANHAD)

Basti Suraksha Manch

Centre for Financial Accountability (CFA)

Conference of Religious India (CRI)

Delhi Solidarity Group

Dwarka Collective

Federation of Catholic Associations of Archdiocese of Delhi (FCAAD)

Fight Against Inequality

Financial Accountability Network (FAN)

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Indian Christian Women's Movement (ICWM)

Khudai Khidmatgar

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National Alliance for People's Movement (NAPM)

National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW)

New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI)

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Pragatisheel Mahila Sangathan (PMS)

People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL)

Saheli Women's Resource Centre

Sangrami Gharelu-Kamgar Union (SGU)

Satark Nagrik Sangathan (SNS)

Sheheri Mahila Kaamgar Union (SMKU)

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Unity in Compassion

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Nisha Singh Social Work Delhi
Nishtha Jain Filmmaker Mumbai
Nita Mahadev activist Ahmedabad

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