

Gujarat Mahila Manch Statement in solidarity with survivors of sexual harassment, especially in Gujarat

14 October 2018

Gujarat Mahila Manch is extremely pained and disturbed by the traumatic accounts of women's sexual harassment and strongly condemns such rampant sexism and misogyny in civil society organisations (CSOs). We also condemn the sexual harassment that goes unchecked in CSOs promoting a culture of silence or victim blaming, despite the legal prerequisite.

The Gujarat Mahila Manch is an open space for engagement - a space for dialogue with room to voice differences, a safe and non-judgemental space to encourage women to speak up (openly or anonymously), and a space to provide continued support to all brave women irrespective of whether they choose to speak up - openly, anonymously, or not at all. We extend our full support - legal, emotional & psychological counselling, or any other that would be of assistance.

Gujarat Mahila Manch, in this defining moment stands in absolute solidarity with all those women who have bravely spoken up about their experiences of sexual harassment within the civil society sector as well as in different sectors in India. Over the decades, these struggles, battles for safe workplaces have taken many forms - within workplaces, on the streets, in the courts, etc., including #LoSHA (List of Sexual Harassers in Academia) almost a year ago by young feminists. We acknowledge the bravery and efforts of all the many marginalised women and queer people over the years.

For every woman who has courageously spoken up, there are tens of thousands of women who have remained silent, especially, the women in the unorganised sector and semi-formal workspaces. We recognise that the marginalised women, queer people, the dalit, tribal, bahujan, muslim, DNT, disabled and other women, may not identify this #MeToo as a safe space to speak up given the deeper exclusions and power relations. We are painfully aware of the exclusions of this space even as we stand with those who have chosen to take on this tough struggle.

While we, as a network, have helped set up [Internal Committees \(ICs\)](#) or sat on IC of different corporate, educational institutions, and CSOs, handled cases and taken actions too but somewhere we have missed turning the spotlight inwards on the civil society organisation sector as a whole. We take this opportunity to redress this and stand with all those women who have courageously chosen to speak out and even those brave women who have chosen not to speak out. We want you to know that we believe you, support you, and stand in solidarity with each one of you. We encourage more women to speak out, share their experiences, reach out to us without fear. We assure you a safe and non-judgemental space.

We reiterate that all civil society organisations and networks must put in place a gender policy and a policy to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace. They must set up an appropriately constituted Internal Committees (IC) as per the mandatory requirements of The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, with every member trained to handle complaints. All ICs must be headed by a woman employed at a senior level, half its members must be women, and the ICs must have one impartial external woman expert in law or women's rights. IC members must be accessible and empathetic to complaints, inquire into them in a time-bound manner, and the managements must take prompt action based on the recommendations of the IC. The organisations must ensure that the process of initiating a complaint is known widely and more importantly, the names and contact details of the IC members are prominently displayed in the workplace.

Ending sexism and misogyny at workplace and the society is a herculean task. The #MeToo campaign has yet again challenged and pushed the boundaries of the Indian feminist movements and provided us with an opportunity to reach out to the survivors and complainants and support them to seek justice. The victims and survivors are compelled to go public with their harrowing experiences at the risk of their reputation and fear of consequences, when organisations and institutions do not take sexual harassment complaints seriously and instead encourage the accused to get away with

impunity - time and time again. We need to reform our workplaces one at a time - organisation by organisation, industry by industry, institution by institution! The Government authorities too need to be held accountable to monitor the implementation of the Act.

As a diverse network of women and others, Gujarat Mahila Manch, extends support to all survivors and condemns any effort to disbelieve, discredit or malign them, irrespective of whether they choose to speak - openly, anonymously or not at all. We are committed to ensuring zero tolerance to any form of 'abuse of power' in workspaces, especially, 'sexual harassment', 'sexual misconduct', 'inappropriate or predatory behaviour', 'intimidation', 'any behaviour which coerces consent' or 'male privilege', and ensure that the accused does not enjoy impunity within civil society sector. We also discourage the "whisper gossips" doing circles within the organisations, as well as, the frivolous and reckless writing in social media. If you know something, call it out in the open.

The Gujarat Mahila Manch offers support to all women - survivors including those from marginalised women, queer people, the dalit, tribal, bahujan, muslim, DNT, disabled who would like to speak up, strengthen Internal Committees, and for other similar support. We encourage anyone, especially from Gujarat, who would like to be part of a support network to sign up on the link here <https://goo.gl/forms/zX0qRTqbYWo2Jvvz1> so that we can get in touch with you .

If you want to endorse this statement in support of survivors please sign up on this link: <https://goo.gl/forms/GSIn0EiPd5Zr956V2>.

You can get intouch with Gujarat Mahila Manch via email at gujaratmahilamanch@gmail.com or via Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/gujaratmahilamanch/>

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