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GENEVA

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

23RD SESSION (27 MAY - 14 JUNE 2013)

ANNUAL FULL DAY OF DISCUSSION WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

(5 JUNE, 2013)

STATEMENT OF INDIA

My delegation welcomes the Annual Full Day Discussion on Women's Human Rights and the focus of this panel on taking stock of efforts to eliminate violence against women. We thank the members of this distinguished panel for their contributions of the discussion.

Mr. President,

2. Violence against women and girls must be unequivocally condemned and tackled. We need to ensure that the stigmatization of victims, the trivialization of the crime and impunity of perpetrators are all stopped. We must also resolutely combat discriminatory practices and prejudices, and firmly oppose any attempts to rationalize such practices on the basis of tradition or custom. As recent events of horrific violence against women in India and other parts of the world indicate, it is not the lack of normative framework or basis that is impeding our efforts, but rather its effective implementation. These gaps must be addressed effectively.

3. The Government of India has taken a number of steps recently. It has set up fast track courts to try cases pertaining to violence against women. The report of the government established committee headed by the former Chief Justice of India Justice J.S.Verma is very comprehensive and recommends a range of measures. Based on these recommendations, the Government promulgated an ordinance in February 2013 amending the criminal law in India. It significantly broadens the definition of sexual assault and harassment, includes new types of violent behaviour such as voyeurism, stalking, etc, and aims for greater accountability of public officials. The Parliament also adopted the 'Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill", 2013 in February this year covering women employed in both public and private sectors. The Government has recently announced budgetary allocation worth US\$ 200 million for a dedicated fund to implement measures to ensure dignity and safety of women.

Mr. President,

4. The pervasiveness of violence against women is a reflection of unequal power structures among men and women, and how women's role is perceived by the society. It is, therefore, equally important to work towards empowerment of women, politically, economically and socially. An empowered woman is more likely to participate in decision making in the family and beyond. Thus, both combating violence against women and ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment, which are mutually reinforcing processes, lie at the heart of our pursuit to building inclusive societies. We also need to debate deeply held beliefs and social attitudes, not with a view to dismiss them but to modify them as required to facilitate social advancement and economic progress. Awareness generation and sensitization programmes are an integral part of government's efforts to combat violence against women. We see civil society as valued partners in this endeavour.

5. In conclusion, let me reiterate my country's commitment towards fighting violence against women. Representing a country which is home to more than 500 million women, even one incident of violence against any woman or any girl, is an incident too many, and simply unacceptable.

Thank you.