

# REPORT ON STATE LEVEL CONSULTATION ON WOMEN SECURITY AND REHABILITATION

*THEME: VICTIMS DISAPPEAR & CULPRITS ESCAPE*

March 6<sup>th</sup> 2012 at Ashir Bhavan Kacheripady

From celebration of womanhood to deliberations of issues related to victims of violence and abuse was indeed a remarkable journey undertaken by Cultural Academy for Peace and Indian Council of Social Welfare, Kerala as they conducted a workshop on “**Victims disappear and Culprits escape**” at Ashir Bhavan Kochi.

Gandhiji once said “our country is truly free only when a lady is able to walk freely and without fear, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari at midnight”. Even with all the talk about gender equality, drafting and implementing new policies and laws... Women still face violence in all spheres, be it home, workplace or in public. Everyday the media brings the news of the disappearance of girls or women harassed in public. The fact is that every three minute a crime against woman is reported in India. What happens after the media frenzy that leaves these victims and their families more traumatized? Where have these girls and women gone? Have they been buried in shame or left in isolation, ignored by their family and friends ...where are they now??? The cases are erased, the culprits escape and another victim has fallen prey to this vicious circle of violence... Justice is denied once again..It is high time we take up this matter with those who wield power....the decision makers...The main thrust of the event was to organize a State level forum for Shelter Homes in Kerala, the first of its kind.



Rush at the registration counter

The packed hall, with Social Activists, NGOs, representatives of Government Departments, Social Institutions, College Students, Service Providers, survivors, Managers of Shelter Homes and others, indicated that there is genuine concern for the helpless victims. Those committed to the cause of justice from the grass root level to the legal were present to share their experiences, their success and disillusionment too. They spelled out the challenges and the possibilities to better the prospects of those who are denied justice.



Ms. Beena Sebastian, Chairperson of Cultural Academy for Peace emphasized the dire need to awaken the conscience of our society to be representatives of the voiceless and the hopeless victims of abuse. She urged for support, ensuring them “you are not alone, we are with you.” The Hon Judge of the Family Court Mrs. N Leelamani cited 2600 cases filed and remarked “it is the erosion of family values, the low tolerance level of the youth that often leads to divorce.” Mrs Girija Surendran, Chairperson Kerala State Social Welfare Board, pointed out how victims unable to produce evidence remain silent and perpetrators being relatives, friends or even well-known personalities walk free. Mr Shenoy, National President, ICSW suggested that a separate court should deal with cases of violence against Women and the Judge should be a lady. Ms. Lida Jacob IAS, State level Committee member Nirbaya project, criticized the legal system, the lack of a time-frame to ensure justice to victims of sexual abuse. If lawyers, legal advisers and NGOs work together these victims could be brought to the mainstream, procure compensation, and provide occupation. Besides by tele-conferencing the victim could avoid reliving the traumatic experience. Ms Radhamani Secretary Working Women’s Association advocated the intervention of the Government to solve the problem of mothers to get Transfer Certificate for their children.

Ms. Leela Menon condemned the culture of exploiting women “no age bar any woman or child becomes a prey.”She questioned as to why only women have to live with the social stigma while men go free. The media reports dramatic cases, then the culprits disappear because of their ‘power’, or their political connections. Advocate Sandya Raju, Director Human Rights Law Network, Cochin, admitted that Laws exist but fails in implementation. The Victims seek immediate relief, protection and compensation. They are totally frustrated and withdraw complaints as justice is long delayed. Abusers escape due to poor investigation system and lack of evidence. Dr Neena Joseph Prof IMG observed that private and public participation are required to address the issues of the victims. She added that networking with voluntary organizations and Service Providers creates synergy that can even challenge the Govt. Victims should be empowered to save them from despondency syndrome.



The engrossed participants

The Seminar ended on a positive note hoping for continuous support of the State Govt as recommendations formulated will be forwarded to the concerned Govt Authorities. The interactive session was an occasion for deep reflection on the trends in society and the attitudes towards women that call for change. In spite of odds there is hope for a new dawn.

## **Recommendations suggested at the Consultation**

- To form a State level forum including all the shelter homes in Kerala
- To appeal to the Government to set up a Shelter Home Apex Body including members of the Government as well as from Voluntary Organizations, to integrate and monitor the activities of all the Shelter Homes in the State.
- The residents of Shelter Homes, who are forced to leave their home, must be provided with the Identity card, which avail various services and schemes of government in view of their special circumstances.
- There is also a need of special consideration from the Education Dept to obtain Transfer Certificate for the children of women in shelter homes without prior consent from the father. To overcome such hurdles the Government has to draft a new policy.
- To request the Government, to provide single room facility for the women having children in the shelter homes and Rehabilitation Centers to maintain a family atmosphere and privacy.
- To request to the government to take necessary steps to ensure that the annual funds earmarked for Shelter homes reach them on time.
- Hence it is beneficial to appoint a LIASON Officer to follow-up the Project proposal submitted to the Central Govt or Social Welfare Dept.
- In view of the geographical differences between Coastal, hilly and urban areas, the Govt. has to approve plans accordingly.
- To avoid inordinate delay 'Fast track' courts have to be set up.
- Appeal to the Government, to open permanent Rehabilitation Centers /houses for women and children once their stay at the shelter homes expires.
- Request the government to take up measures to integrate the social welfare schemes and services of respective departments.