



**R-13/4/2024-PRPP(RU-2)**  
**National Human Rights Commission**

**Minutes of the National Symposium on Women's Safety at Work & Public Spaces**

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India organized a half-day National Symposium on Women's Safety at Work & Public Spaces at the India Habitat Centre, Delhi on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2024. The National Symposium was chaired by Hon'ble Acting Chairperson of NHRC, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, with Secretary General Shri Bharat Lal, setting the agenda for the day. The symposium was also attended by senior officers of the Commission including Shri Ajay Bhatnagar, Director General (Investigation), NHRC, Shri Joginder Singh, Registrar(Law), NHRC, Smt. Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary, NHRC, Shri Devendra Kumar Nim, Joint Secretary, NHRC and other officers and staff of the Commission.



2.) **Shri Bharat Lal** commenced the session by discussing the challenges faced by women in India today, especially those between the ages of 18-30 years at workplaces and public spaces. He noted the progress made in women's empowerment through various government initiatives. He stated that while it is important to discuss the systematic evolution of laws in last few decades, we must also see if they have brought forth a systematic change in the society. It is our responsibility, he stated, to collectively contribute towards the security and safety of women in these spaces so that they are able to realize their full potential.

3.) In her opening remarks, **Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson, NHRC**, highlighted that while India has made significant progress in women's empowerment, women still encounter challenges such as insufficient support systems and the disregard of their

concerns by authorities. She emphasized that incidents of violent sexual abuse are not isolated and require a collective response. She called for the strengthening of law enforcement and accountability for perpetrators, emphasizing the need to improve the justice system, raise public awareness, and create better support networks for survivors through collaboration among all stakeholders.



4.) **Smt. Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary, NHRC**, discussed how the trauma experienced by one woman can profoundly impact her mental health and deter other women and girls from leaving their homes. She referenced several recent high-profile rape cases, underscoring the shared responsibility of both society and individuals in addressing the issue. Smt. Sinha stressed the importance of taking preventive action, rather than waiting for more such incidents to awaken our moral conscience.

5.) **Smt. Ritu Gupta**, Professor of Law at National Law University Delhi (NLUD), said that though the positive changes are occurring but anytime an incident of sexual violence occurs, it suddenly puts a question mark on the effectiveness on all government initiatives. Rather than pointing fingers and criticising, constructive deliberation is the need of hour. It is important to sensitise both- the police, and the media. She also spoke about the three new criminal laws. She stated that it is important to know if the system is prepared to deal with cases of sexual violence in terms of infrastructural facilities like fast track courts, forensic investigations, etc. She concluded by saying that is important not to lose faith in the system.

6.) **Shri Pritam Yashwant, Joint Secretary, MoWCD**, emphasized on the steps taken especially in last decade for ensuring women safety, while acknowledging that the recent incidents of crime against women indicate that much more needs to be done. He briefly discussed some of the steps taken to prevent such crimes which include: Emergency Response System being integrated with all helplines numbers, with the average response time being 19 minutes, and the fastest response time being 9 minutes only; facial recognition system in place to identify sexual offenders; preparing a database of sex offenders; the Safe city project under

Nirbhaya Fund, which includes lightning of dark sports, panic button in public transports, pink toilets, etc.; creating a database of working women infrastructure (hostels) of both government and private hostels and prescribing minimum safety guidelines; a recent proposal, as approved under the Nirbhaya Fund, to sensitize all elected representatives at the Panchayat level.



7.) **Shri Bharat Lal** submitted his feedback and stated that it is important to treat the problem as a burning issue and perhaps start a nationwide campaign to bring forth greater sensitisation.

8.) **Ms. Rupali Banerjee Singh, Member Secretary, NCPCR**, highlighted the issue from children's perspective. She spoke about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by India. She detailed several initiatives taken by the NCPCR to ensure children's safety, including 8 portals and applications for better monitoring of cyber threats, greater sensitisation, especially in the light of the growing cyber usage in India.

9.) **Ms. Meenakshi Negi, Member Secretary, National Commission for Women**, spoke about the gaps in POSH Act, 2013, like the provision of conciliatory mechanism between the complainant and alleged culprit, which doesn't take into account the unequal power dynamics between the culprit and the complainant. She noted that the NCW routinely reviewed such laws and submitted its feedback to the relevant authorities. She also spoke about the importance of undertaking a City Safety Audit, with NCW having done such audits in 12 cities. These audits are important in order to find black spots and prevent future incidents, and they may be undertaken by collaborating with professional institutions.

10.) **Ms. Chhaya Sharma, IPS, Delhi Police** acknowledged the evolving landscape of crime and its impact on society, particularly focusing on cyber bullying and workplace harassment. The 2013 Criminal Amendment Act and the introduction of Section 166A were highlighted as significant legislative measures addressing these issues. She brought attention to initiatives taken by the Delhi Police like a specialized unit to combat crimes against women and children, the tracking and regulation of child pornography through IP addresses, and conducting raids on



cyber hubs to tackle child pornography. It was emphasized that while harsher punishments alone are insufficient, a collaborative approach involving the police, government, and society is crucial. Awareness campaigns, seminars, and self-defense training starting at the school level are essential for addressing these challenges. She stressed that legal proceedings in such cases must be conducted through in camera proceedings, with a call to eliminate media trials and establish stringent laws and SOPs for media regulation. The responsibility of multinational corporations (MNCs) to ensure the safety of their female employees and maintain workforce parity was also underscored. It was also discussed that PCR vans have been stationed for quick and immediate relief along with the 112 helpline number.



11.) **Shri Virat Bhatia, Managing Director, Apple India**, began by explaining how Apple India has one of the largest workforces, with 80% of the employees being female. He noted that it was indeed challenging to ensure the safety of their female employees, and shone light on some of the steps taken by Apple India, like having buses to pick up and drop employees to the factory and back to their residence, working women's hostels, regular audits of their work premises and factories, as well as other similar initiatives which are currently in the works to make the workplace safe for all their employees.

12.) **Ms. Meeran Chadha Borwankar, IPS(Rtd.)** spoke about how the safe city initiatives should not be too vendor-driven in nature. She emphasized on building a public discourse that interrelated diligent implementation of laws with investment and growth as big companies and businesses tend to establish their units in regions where bureaucracy is responsive and women's safety is ensured. She noted the importance of promoting bystander intervention to create safer communities. A collaborative approach should be the guiding principle, encouraging all stakeholders to work together and invest in women's safety.

13.) **Smt. Jai Shri Sharma, GM/HR, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation** spoke about the initiative taken by the DMRC that includes establishing two Internal Complaint Committees for addressing the grievances of their employees, CCTV cameras, separate coach for women,

helpline numbers, presence of CISF, helpdesks, etc. in the Delhi Metro. She also indicated that DMRC is making constant efforts to increase sensitisation on the subject.

14.) **Ms. Barsha Chakravorty, Head of Media, Breakthrough Trust** spoke briefly about their “Bell Bajao” initiative to encourage bystander intervention. She mentioned the need of making the issue of gender violence into a problem that pertains to everyone. She highlighted the fact that most people don’t intervene in cases of crime against women because they are unaware of what needs to be done in such situations, something that has been addressed by the Breakthrough Trust through its regular sensitisation programmes. She stressed on the importance of addressing the rape culture in the country, as today whatever happens offline does not necessarily stay offline, as exemplified by the recent Kolkata rape and murder case wherein the online searches for the clips of the incident were at a record high in the days following the incident. She concluded by noting the importance of having survival-informed programmes rather than just survivor- centric programmes.

15.) **Ms. Amrita Thakur, Project Manager, Jagori** spoke about the increased vulnerability of women engaged in unorganized sector as seen during the Covid-19 pandemic. She stated that despite the requirement of forming Local Complaints Committee under the POSH Act, this remained largely unfulfilled. She highlighted the importance of better monitoring, greater attention towards the unorganised sector where women are more vulnerable, and the need to change mindsets in the society at large to see women as more than just daughters, wives, mothers, and sisters but rather as equal citizens of the country.

16.) **Ms. Suneeta Dhar, Co-founder SAWF IN** highlighted the gaps in the POSH Act, as it does not clarify who is a “worker”. She pointed out that most women in the informal sector do not know about the act, or their rights, and emphasised the need for explanatory notes on the Act, in order to raise awareness. She focussed on the need to have more involvement from civil society in order to address the issue of women’s safety. She also noted that it is imperative to scale up and allocate more funds for women’s safety, and it is equally important to disburse these funds on time.



17.) **Ms. Shilpa Lavania, VP-Human Resources, Invest India**, mentioned that Invest India has an equal number of male and female employees. She briefly discussed the initiatives taken by the organisation to ensure women's safety which largely focussed on prevention first, rather than focussing only on redressal.

18.) **Ms. Kiran Bishnoi, Sr AVP – Legal, Invest India**, noted that it is extremely important to ensure that laws and rules pertaining to women's safety in the workplace and public spaces are strictly adhered to.

19.) **Ms. Kanta Singh, Deputy Representative, UN Women India** mentioned that women's safety has not received its due importance because somewhere there is some sort of a social acceptance of violence against women. Not acknowledging this form of violence affects the psyche of all women in the society, According to her, bystanders often do not intervene because are afraid of facing repercussions, and are worried about their own safety. She noted that roughly only 1.5% of CSR funds are allocated for initiatives pertaining to women's safety, and not nearly enough efforts are being made to protect women at home, in public transport, and in workplaces. It is important to have capacity building programmes for duty-bearers so that they are sensitive towards survivors. She also listed how UN Women India was involved in such initiatives, as well as initiatives for sensitising women regarding their rights.

20.) **Ms. Poulomi Pal, Programme Specialist – EAW, UN Women India** emphasised on the need to have survivor-informed monitoring and evaluation systems. She mentioned the ongoing work of UN Women in this regard, and how it also works with women in the unorganised sector, particularly those working in supply chains. It is important to have a focused curriculum to address this issue of violence against women. She concluded by stressing upon the need to have greater collaboration at the grassroots, like young boys and men at the village level, self-help groups, etc. and the need to strengthen existing laws.

21.) **Dr. Rajul Raikwar, Consultant (Research), NHRC** spoke about the need to have a preventive approach rather than focusing only on redressal, as in many cases, women and girls barely have time to register and acknowledge that they have faced some form of harassment.

22.) **Shri Devendra Kumar Nim, Joint Secretary, NHRC** spoke about the important role upbringing plays, especially in the case of male children, who must be taught to be more sensitive. He also noted that there was insufficient involvement of law enforcement unless the crime committed is of a higher magnitude, an attitude which is also present amongst the top management in many companies. He concluded by stating that there is an imminent need to sensitise top management across sectors to such issues.

23.) **Shri Bharat Lale** emphasised the need to ensure that these matters reach senior political leaders of the country, and that it was the duty of senior officers to give regular feedback to them

on such issues. He gave the example of Kanya Kelavani Abhiyan in Gujarat as positive steps to encourage women's empowerment, in which civil society had also played a significant role.

24.) **Ms. Anita Sinha** made important suggestions to the Ministry of Women and Child Development, asking if directives can be given to form the ICC. She also suggested that an awareness campaign may be undertaken by the DMRC to sensitise all commuters. She also praised initiatives like the social audit of institutions and safe cities initiative being undertaken by the NCW.

25.) **Shri Joginder Singh, Registrar(Law), NHRC** highlighted the need for identifying "dark spots" that act as easy locations for sexual harassment. Women often lack faith in the system, and are unaware of their rights. Similarly, bystanders are unwilling to intervene due to being called repeatedly by the authorities to give their statements in case of a crime. He recommended giving counseling to women who face such incidents so that they are able to give statements, and so that they are made aware of their rights.

26.) **Shri Ajay Bhatnagar, Director General, NHRC**, highlighted that violence against women stems from unequal power dynamics. He emphasized the importance of focusing on equity rather than equality, to better understand and address the unique needs of women and girls. He also pointed out how media and movies often glamorize behaviors like unwanted attention and stalking, which negatively influence societal attitudes. Additionally, he stressed the need for engaging men and boys at all levels to create a genuinely safe environment for women. Shri Bhatnagar also mentioned several ways in which the issue may be addressed, like taking strict action against forced pornography, incentivising bystander intervention, stricter monitoring of films by the Censor Board, greater investment of CSR funds in initiatives pertaining to women's safety, and induction courses for new employees and officers, in both government and private institutions.

27.) **Ms. Lakshmi Kumari, JRC, NHRC**, mentioned about the needs of establishing some institutional mechanism for checking and preventing incidents of sexual harassment at market places, a few among which are hubs of such incidents and often known to everyone.

28.) **Ms. Madhura Naniwadekar, JRC, NHRC** discussed how women's safety is an issue across all classes, and that perpetrators of violence come from all sections of society, as seen in the case of the leaked "Boys Locker Room" chats of boys from well-known educational institutes, and the increased cyber threats faced by women. A national level campaign would help make women across the country aware of their rights.

29.) **Ms. Swarna Singh, JRC, NHRC** underscored that addressing crime against women and children requires a societal approach beginning at the home. Monitoring and supervising family members, especially children and college students who are exposed to social media, is crucial.

Public awareness about the various types of crimes against women, as well as the appropriate steps for reporting and responding to these incidents, is vital.

30.) **Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani** thanked all the participants for providing extremely valuable inputs, and hoped that in the years to come, women's safety would no longer be a cause for concern in our country.

31.) **Shri Bharat Lal** concluded the symposium with a vote of thanks for all the participants and stated that NHRC will work upon the inputs provided by all the participants, and have further consultations on the subject. He stated that the Commission will work on a formal plan of action or an advisory for effective monitoring and enforcement of mechanisms for ensuring women's safety at work and public spaces.

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**List of Participants**

**Participants from NHRC**

1. Smt. S. Vijaya Bharathi, Acting Chairperson, NHRC
2. Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General, NHRC
3. Shri Ajay Bhatnagar, DG (Investigation), NHRC
4. Shri Joginder Singh, Registrar(Law), NHRC
5. Ms. Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary, NHRC
6. Shri Devendra Kumar Nim, Joint Secretary, NHRC
7. Dr. (Ms.) Rajul Raikwar, Consultant (Research), NHRC
8. Ms. Madhura Naniwadekar, Junior Research Consultant, NHRC
9. Ms. Swarna Singh, Junior Research Consultant, NHRC
10. Ms. Lakshmi Kumari, Junior Research Consultant, NHRC

**Participants from Ministries, National Commissions, Government Bodies, Private Sector, and NGOs**

1. Ms. Meenakshi Negi, Member Secretary, NCW
2. Ms. Rupali Banerjee Singh, Member Secretary, NCPCR
3. Shri Pritam Yashwant Joint Secretary, MoWCD,
4. Ms. Chhaya Sharma, Spl. Commissioner(Training), Delhi Police
5. Ms. Meeran Chadha Borwankar, former IPS
6. Ms. Kanta Singh, Deputy Representative, UN Women India
7. Shri Virat Bhatia, Managing Director, Apple India
8. Ms. Jai Shri Sharma, GM-HR, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation
9. Shilpa Lavania, VP-Human Resources , Invest India
10. Kiran Bishnoi, Sr AVP – Legal, Invest India
11. Prof. Ritu Gupta, Professor of Law at National Law University Delhi
12. Ms. Suneeta Dhar, Co-founder SAWF IN
13. Ms. Barsha Chakravorty, Head of Media, Breakthrough Trust
14. Ms. Amrita Thakur, Project Manager, Jagori
15. Ms. Poulomi Pal, Programme Specialist – EAW, UN Women India.