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Women's Day: Another day, nothing has changed

3/8/2013



A woman in India tells the police she has been sexually molested by a taxi driver. The result? She is beaten and told she is a whore, this to add to the recent publicized series of rapes and beatings, because someone of a lower caste dares to study and because women are "asking for it".

The intention of this article on International Women's Day is not to single out India as the pariah in the international community regarding gender violence and women's rights. Such would be an insult to the good work being undertaken by millions of male and female activists in this country.

India, however, is not an island. As we celebrate yet another International Women's Day, to be more precise, the 102nd International Women's Day and I repeat, the one hundred and second, while there are improvements in awareness, the hard fact is that the statistics are getting worse.

As we celebrate the 102nd International Women's Day, gender violence is on the rise. Up to six out of every ten women in some areas of the world continue to be victims of some form of violence during their lifetimes - that is sixty per cent. In regions of Nigeria, reports continue to abound that around 15% of sexually abused hospital patients are under five years of age.

In Africa, around 100 million women continue to be victims of female genital mutilation (cutting off the clitoris so that they will never experience an orgasm and so be less likely to "fool around"); honour killings continue to rise in the Moslem world; legislation continues to exist in certain countries that women can be stoned to death if they are raped. Four million women continue to be trafficked every year, one million children continue to enter the sex trade. In Southern Africa, female babies weeks or days old are raped "to provide protection against AIDS".

Nine per cent of women in Japan continue to be slapped by their husbands or partners, over half the women in areas of rural Peru continue to be beaten. And before westerners start chortling and finger-pointing at "tropical countries", the statistics in the European Union and North America are equally shocking.

The number of women and children trafficked into the sex trade in the USA is around 17,500 every year; up to 20% of American women will have been the victims of a complete or attempted rape/sexual abuse in their lifetimes; the vast majority of the culprits continue to go unpunished.

Before any country or society becomes too self-righteous, gender violence, or Violence Against Women, is a universal phenomenon. The percentage of women reporting incidents of violence in France is higher than that in the Philippines; in Switzerland, it is higher than in India; in Germany, it is higher than in Egypt; in Denmark, it is higher than in Nicaragua; in Australia, it is worse than in Peru and in the Czech Republic, worse than in Mozambique.

After the Beijing Platform for Action, after countless meetings and resolutions of the UN General Assembly, after one hundred and two International Women's Days, do we really still live in a world in which the woman's place is in the kitchen, in which they are considered too hysterical to form an opinion and therefore do not have the right to vote, in which they are regarded as a sexual object and a pin-cushion to vent a male's frustrations?

History of International Women's Day

International Women's Day started in the United States of America, launched by a declaration of the Socialist Party of America on February 28th, 1909 using as a basis the need to guarantee women's rights in an increasingly industrialized society and was taken up by the international community at the first International Women's Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1910. The horrific and inhumane conditions at the New York Triangle Shirtwaist factory which caused the deaths of 140 garment workers (mostly women) in 1911 provided an added impetus at a time when women were pressing for the right to vote and demonstrations in Russia prior to the 1917 Revolution were the first signs of women's emancipation in that country, culminating in the declaration by Lenin of a Women's Day on March 8th; in 1965 it was declared a public holiday by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.