

NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON Actions Against Sexual Violence

25 November 2019, Dhaka



The collective voices of 250 experts and activists called for action to end sexual violence, at the inaugural event of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence.

The UN in Bangladesh, in partnership with the Ministry of Women’s and Children’s Affairs (MoWCA) and civil society organizations, held a national dialogue to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The Dialogue provided a platform to mobilize coordinated efforts to address sexual violence and ensure accountability, with panelists ranging from legal experts, government officials, UN Agencies, the judiciary, parliament, law enforcement agencies, academia, civil society organizations, and the arts. Fazilatun Nessa

Indira, MP, Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs (MOWCA) attended as the Chief Guest, United Nations Resident Coordinator Mia Seppo was present as Special Guest, and Kamrun Nahar, MOWCA, as Chairperson.

This year the theme “Orange the World: Generation Equality Stands Against Rape” was explored through a feminist lens to promote a deeper understanding of the root causes of rape and sexual violence in Bangladesh. Discussion topics covered sexual harassment in public spaces like university campuses and public transport, sexual violence within private spheres such as homes and in marriage, as well as the need to strengthen the legal framework and accountability mechanisms.



Participants at the ‘National Dialogue on Actions Against Sexual Violence’



Joya Sikder, Transgender Activist

The pervasive culture of rape in Bangladesh was a key focus of the dialogue throughout the day. One panelist, founder of KOTHA Ms Umama Zillur, urged the audience “to connect the dots” between the prevailing culture of rape and the high prevalence rates of sexual violence; a culture that “breeds incidents” of sexual violence. Panelists also discussed how this culture was leading to a protectionist response, in which women and girls are being withdrawn from public spaces to ensure their safety, instead of placing emphasis on making public spaces safe for all.

The overarching outcome emerging from the Dialogue was that society must work together to change the narrative of rape from blaming victims to holding perpetrators accountable. Ms Seppo pressed, “We should transform rigid social norms that are fueling and perpetuating gender inequality, address gender biases and stereotypes, and challenge toxic masculinity.” Throughout the day, panelists and participants discussed possible action steps to achieve this, including major legislative reforms, an overhaul of the justice response and essential services,

improved data collection and monitoring, comprehensive sexuality education in our schools, and the strengthening and expanding of institutional partnerships to prevent impunity.

The National Dialogue was wrapped up with a ‘Call for Action’ gathering together the voices of panelists and participants alike. The ‘Calls for Action’ will be endorsed by all participants and actors and widely disseminated, to strengthen coordination and accountability.



Mia Seppo, UN Resident Coordinator



At the 16 days of Activism launch event, panelist - from left, Ms. Taslima Yasmin, Asst. Prof., DU, Dr. Syed Md. Saikh Imtiaz, Associate Prof. DU, Ms. Shoko Isikawa, Country Representative, UN Women, Ms. Farah Kabir, Country Director, ActionAid Bangladesh, and Dr. Abul Hossain, Project Director, Multisectoral Programme on Violence Against Women, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.