

LAUNCH OF ZERO TOLERANCE TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY COMILLA UNIVERSITY

ON 7 June 2021, more than 170 students, teachers, managers, and administrative staff from Comilla University attended the virtual launch of its Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harassment Policy, jointly hosted with WE CAN Alliance.

The event was organized as part of the Combatting Gender-Based Violence (CGBV) Project in Bangladesh, funded by Global Affairs Canada and implemented by WE CAN Alliance with educational institutions across the districts of Cumilla, Bogura and Patuakhali. This project implements a ‘whole-of-school’ approach to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of violence on campus. This approach has led to institutional and individual behavioral change across all university sectors, from the highest levels of management down to the administrative staff, teachers and, importantly, to the students. This policy is an example of institutional change aimed to achieve a campus free from violence.

Following last year’s [Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harassment Validation Workshop](#), the ceremony saw the chief guest, Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Emran Kabir Chowdhury, inaugurate the launch with a solemn commitment to create an ideal university campus, harassment-free and safe for all.

Describing the “Comilla University Model” as an exemplary model for other educational institutions to emulate, Ms. Shoko Ishikawa, Country Representative of UN Women, congratulated everyone on the success of this landmark event, a definite milestone for the CGBV project. Ms. Ishikawa urged the university authorities to effectively implement and monitor the policy, and to ensure administrative staff, teachers and students are all held accountable when it comes to the prevention of violence. She further encouraged the students to speak up against sexual harassment, demand timely justice and continue building wider awareness on issues of violence against women (VAW).



Ms. Shoko Ishikawa, Country Representative, UN Women Bangladesh, presenting her opening remarks. Photo credit: UN Women



Ms. Sultana Kamal, Chairperson, WE CAN Alliance, speaking at the event. Photo credit: UN Women

Addressing the students, Ms. Sultana Kamal, Chairperson of WE CAN Alliance, shared a brief history behind the verdict of the High Court Directive that informed the policy; spotlighting the feminist movements that raged on over a decade to see this directive materialize. She urged the students to not only familiarize themselves with the policy, but to also engage in peer-to-peer conversations around



“ Students in educational institutes are not only sexually harassed by their peers, but also by their teachers and administrative members. According to research conducted by icddr,b, while only 3% of the cases on sexual harassment are reported, most of these do not receive proper and timely justice. Following that thread, I commend Comilla University for their commitment in adopting this very crucial policy, and I hope that they would take appropriate steps to implement this policy, in full collaboration with their students. ”

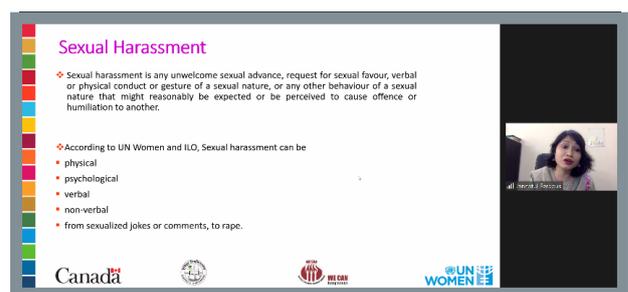
Ms. Farzana Sultana, Donor Representative and Development Advisor, Global Affairs Canada

“ We too, are in the process of establishing a Sexual Harassment Prevention Committee at our college, as well as validating a campus-wide Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harassment Policy. An event such as this would very much help our students, and us, teachers too, to achieve the goal of a violence-free campus for all. I would like to extend an advanced invitation to all of you to be a part of that landmark event as well! ”

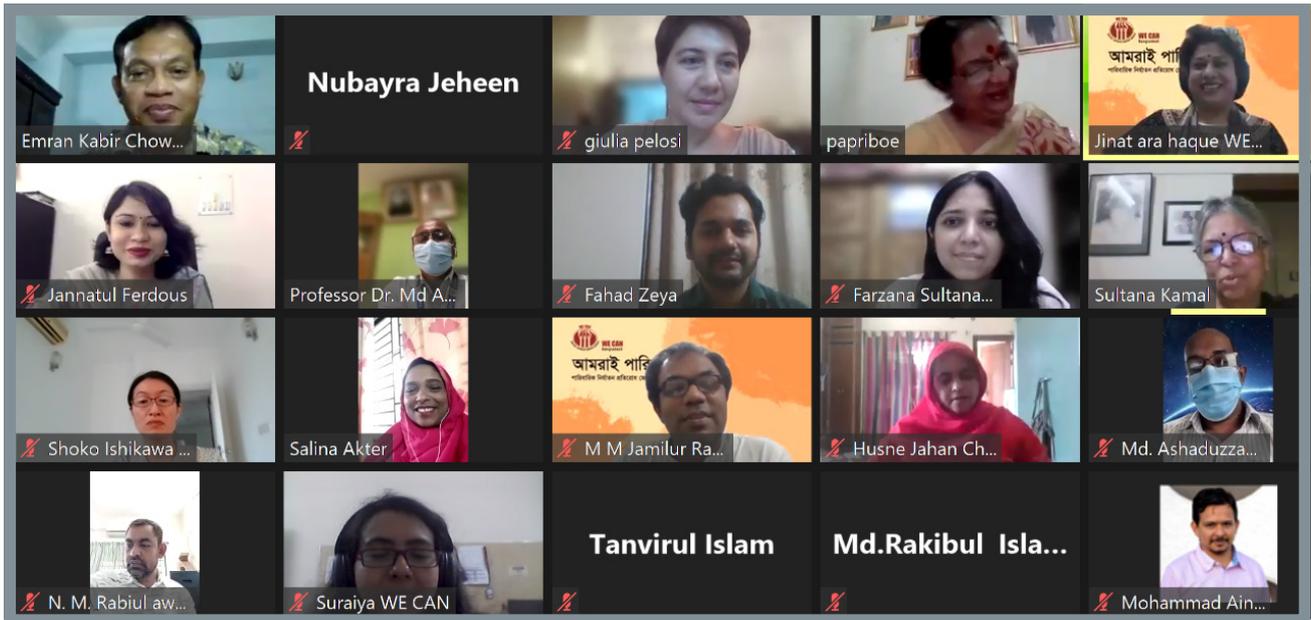
Ms. Salina Akter, Assistant Professor, Patuakhali Government College, one of CGBV Project’s partner educational institute

it. Calling on the students as agents of change, she further encouraged them to raise awareness on VAW prevention across all fronts: in families and educational institutions, to workplaces and broader society. In order to see the policy gain momentum, Ms. Kamal recommended that sufficient workshops, trainings, and orientation sessions be arranged by the university authorities. Finally, she expressed her hope that this policy launch be a stepping stone for other educational institutions to follow as they work towards a common goal.

A brief presentation on the policy specifics followed Ms. Kamal’s remarks. Ms. Jannatul Ferdous, Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration at Comilla University, shared how the policy provides detailed guidelines on how to file a complaint, how to undertake an investigation, how to secure protection from retaliation and the role of the Sexual Harassment Prevention Committee in taking action against perpetrators. Additionally, it promotes peer-to-peer



Ms. Jannatul Ferdous, Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Comilla University, presenting the Policy. Photo credit: UN Women



Attendees at the Launching Ceremony. Photo credit: UN Women



The Vice Chancellor of Comilla University, **Professor Emran Kabir Chowdhury**, speaking at the event. Photo credit: UN Women

support as a mechanism for recognizing and stopping sexual harassment and other forms of violence on campus. This policy is aligned with Bangladesh's international commitment and is informed by a survivor-centered approach.

Dr. Md. Abu Taher, Registrar and Dr. Md. Ashaduzzaman, Treasurer of Comilla University described the actions that have already been implemented at Comilla University to combat violence on-campus. This includes the establishment of a complaint box and the activation of the Sexual Harassment Prevention Committee. The university authorities are determined to see to that this policy does not 'remain only in writing', but is executed in reality as well.

In his closing remarks, the Vice Chancellor committed to ensuring that the policy is not restricted to seminars or conferences but rather is advocated as a fully-fledged, campus-wide law in the next syndicate meeting. Professor Chowdhury also spoke about building the capacity of staff, teachers and students to support the policy implementation as well as ensuring that reforms are put in place to attain a safe, violence and harassment-free educational institute.

“ We hope to work in tandem with Comilla University, and through their example with other tertiary institutes, to eliminate sexual harassment within campus. ”

Ms. Papri Bose, Executive Director, DRISTI

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