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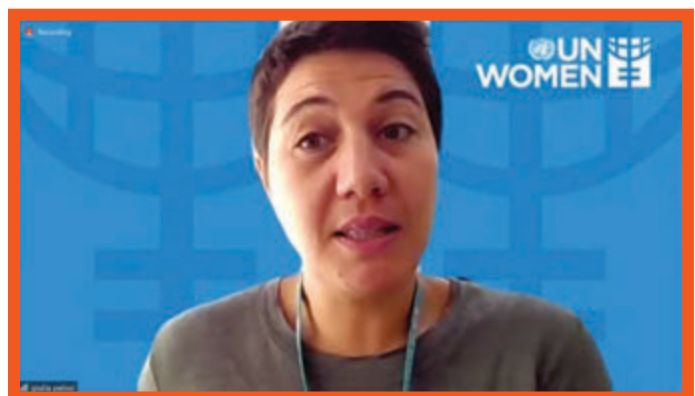
LAUNCH OF ZERO TOLERANCE TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY PATUAKHALI GOVERNMENT COLLEGE

ON 11 OCTOBER 2021, more than 60 students, teachers, managers and administrative staff from Patuakhali Government College attended the virtual launch of the institute's Zero Tolerance To Sexual Harassment Policy.

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 Cumilla, Bogura and Patuakhali districts. The project implements a 'whole-of-school' approach to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of violence on campus. Such an approach aims to bring holistic institutional and individual behavioural change across the educational institutions where the CGBV project is underway; by involving administrative staff, students and teachers. The policy is an example of institutional change aimed at achieving a violence-free campus.

Md. Nurul Amin, the college Principal and chief guest launched the policy with a commitment to work for a university campus which is free of harassment and safe for all, especially for women.

Referring to the COVID-19 context and its detrimental impacts on the rate of sexual violence across the world, Giulia Pelosi, Programme Specialist at UN Women, outlined the importance of the CGBV project's key objective i.e., primary prevention or stopping violence before it occurs. She lauded the launch of the policy as a concrete milestone for the project. She urged college authorities to effectively implement and monitor the policy and also ensure that administrative staff, teachers and students are held accountable for creating violence-free spaces for women and girls.



Giulia Pelosi, Programme Specialist, UN Women Bangladesh, presents her opening remarks. Photo credit: UN Women



Moriom Jahan, Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Patuakhali Government College. Photo credit: UN Women

Moriom Jahan, Lecturer, Department of Political Science at Patuakhali Government College, described how the policy provides detailed guidelines on filing a complaint, undertaking an investigation, securing protection from retaliation and the role of the Sexual Harassment Prevention Committee in taking action against perpetrators. Additionally, the policy

promotes peer-to-peer support as a mechanism for recognizing and stopping sexual harassment and other forms of violence on campus, informed by a survivor-centered approach and is aligned with Bangladesh's international commitment to ending violence against women and girls.

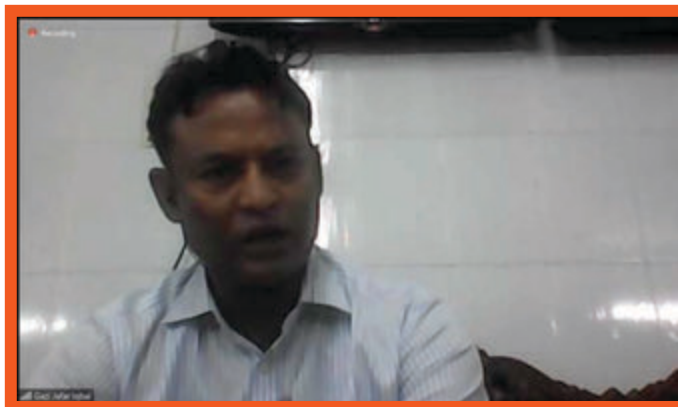
“As a woman and being a victim of sexual harassment and not knowing how and where to seek help, support has long felt unavailable and inadequate. I sincerely hope this policy will help remedy the situation.”

Fatema Tuz Shormi, Student,
Department of English,
Patuakhali Government College

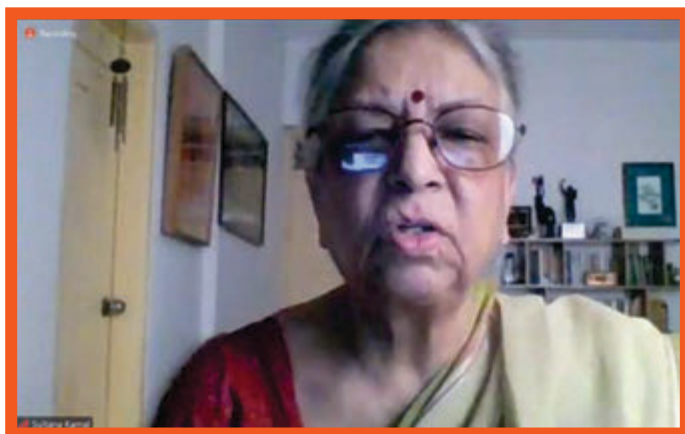
“I always encourage my female students to speak up against sexual harassment because perpetrators are the cowardly ones. Silence is never the answer— power lies in boldly speaking up.”

Md. Nurul Amin,
Principal,
Patuakhali Government College

Md. Gazi Jafar Iqbal, Assistant Professor, Department of Bangla and Secretary of Teacher's Council, Patuakhali Government College described various actions that have already been implemented to combat violence on campus. This includes the establishment of a complaint box and the activation of the Sexual Harassment Prevention Committee. Mr. Iqbal stated that college authorities are determined that the policy does not 'remain only in writing' but is executed in reality.



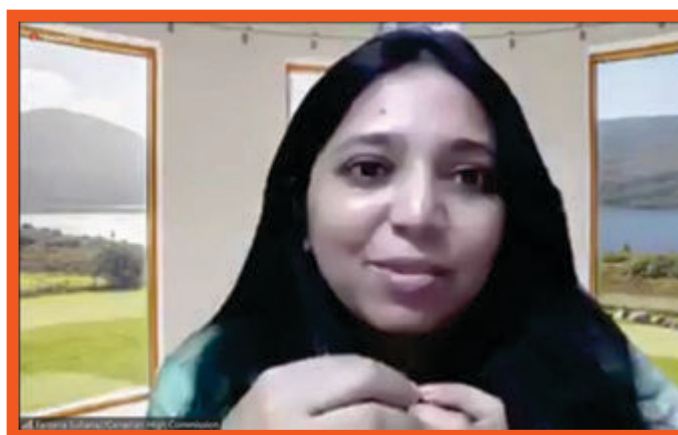
Md. Gazi Jafar Iqbal, Assistant Professor, Department of Bangla and Secretary of Teacher's Council, Patuakhali Government College describes actions to implement the policy. Photo credit: UN Women



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

Emphasizing the pivotal role and accountability of educational institutions in providing the impetus for a violence-free society, Sultana Kamal, Chairperson of WE CAN Alliance urged college authorities to ensure that the policy be acceptable and welcoming to students and administration alike. In order for the policy to gain momentum, Ms. Kamal recommended that college authorities should arrange sufficient workshops, trainings and orientation sessions. She expressed the hope that the policy launch would be a stepping stone for other educational institutions to similarly internalise, respect and implement the policy in working towards a common goal.

Commending Patuakhali Government College for its commitment to adopting the policy, Farzana Sultana, Donor Representative and Development Advisor, Global Affairs Canada expressed hope that the institution would take appropriate steps to implement the policy in collaboration with students. Sultana observed that rape culture is normalized through the practice of victim blaming and shaming in society. This perpetuates crimes such as sexual harassment in and outside campus. If a young woman or girl is not safe inside her own campus, she suffers physically and mentally, ultimately hampering her future prospects for education and personal growth.



Farzana Sultana, Donor Representative and Development Advisor, Global Affairs Canada shares her views. Photo credit: UN Women



Principal of Patuakhali Government College, Md. Nurul Amin at the event.
Photo credit: UN Women

In his closing remarks, Md. Nurul Amin committed to ensuring that the policy would be effectively implemented by the college staff, teachers and students. He described it as a collective effort which would serve as an example for other educational institutions to create safe spaces free of violence and harassment.



Attendees at the launch of the zero tolerance to sexual harassment policy. Photo credit: UN Women

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