

India aspires to be the world leader, while safety of women is in dark shadow

Janpratinidhi Times 07-Aug-2014

New Delhi: The group of Women's rights and lawyers came together to talk over and probe on the readings made on India by the UN Committee on the Exclusion of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in Geneva last month. A report was prepared on the Violence Against Women (UN-SRVAW), by the Special Rapporteur, Rashida Manjoo, which she presented in June this year on her official mission to India that took place between April and May 2013.

The women's group representatives pointed out that these reports have arisen at a time when apprehensions concerning women's security, dignity and equality and freedoms are seeming in a dark shadow on India's assertions to development, growth and its goals as a world leader.

Madhu Mehra from the Partners for Law in Development, who chaired the deliberations, said India had filed a protest document in contradiction of the observations made by Ms. Manjoo in the SRVAW. "In fact, in its response, India has stated that the report is replete with sweeping statements and generalized allegations not substantiated by facts and even calls the Special Rapporteur ignorant" she informed.

Furthermore, she added that, India was not eager to accept recognized disappointment on all fronts and that the country's answer to the observations made is filled with contradictions.

Mentioning India's opening statement at the CEDAW, senior advocate Vrinda Grover explained that, "seriousness of engagement was lacking on many issues and basic understanding was lacking in responses". She claims that the CEDAW, in its questions to the Indian delegation, was very specific and stressed on quality of dialogue.

"The Special Rapporteur stressed on several issues relating to violence against women and issues in the Northeast and Jammu and Kashmir. In fact, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act found serious space in her reflections," she added.

A Dalit rights activist Asha Kotwal asserted that the Special Rapporteur's report communicated a lot about discrimination confronted by the Dalits and Adivasis, yet India's delegation did not even listen to the issue of caste-based violence.

"Eight out of 13 people who made up India's delegation were from the External Affairs Ministry and only one from the Women and Child Development Ministry. This gives us a sense of how seriously they took the matter," said Ms. Mehra.

According to the statement from the Human Rights Council, which reflects its support to the SRVAW report in India has mentioned, "The report aptly outlines the diligence obligations by the State to address not just the manifestations of violence, but most importantly its causes and consequences, so that social transformation becomes possible. Even as new laws, particularly those relating to sexual violence, are necessary, it calls attention towards longstanding gaps in prevention, protection, redress and reparation."

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