

‘India not willing to accept failure in providing safety measures to women’



UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women Rashida Manjoo

Women’s rights groups and lawyers came together on Tuesday in the Capital to discuss and debrief on the observations made to India by the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which met in Geneva last month.

Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (UN-SRVAW), Rashida Manjoo, presented her report in June this year on her official mission to India that took place between April and May 2013. Representatives from women’s groups noted that both these reports have come at a time when concerns relating to women’s security, dignity and equality and freedoms cast a dark shadow on India’s claims to development, growth and its aspirations as a world leader.

Madhu Mehra from the Partners for Law in Development, who chaired the discussions, said India had filed a protest document against 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 generalised allegations not substantiated by facts and even calls the Special Rapporteur ignorant,” she said, adding India was not willing to accept institutional failure at all fronts and that the country’s response to the observations made is filled with contradictions.

Referring to India’s opening statement at CEDAW, senior advocate Vrinda Grover noted that “seriousness of engagement was lacking on many issues and basic understanding was lacking in responses”.

She pointed out 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.

Dalit rights campaigner Asha Kotwal noted that the Special Rapporteur’s report talked a lot about discrimination faced by the Dalits and Adivasis, yet India’s delegation did not even listen to the issue of caste-based violence.

Ms. Mehra, further, pointed out that “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”.

A statement from the Human Rights Council in support of the SRVAW report in India said: “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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