

Law needed to deal with witch hunt: NCW member

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A separate central law is needed to address witch hunting, prevalent in many parts of the country, National Women's Commission member Charu Wali Khanna said at a seminar in the national capital.

"There is a need for a central legislation against witch hunting and violence against women in its name," said Charu Wali Khanna, member of National Commission for Women. She was speaking at a symposium held by the Human Rights Defense International (HRDI), a non-governmental organisation, Thursday evening.

Cases of torture of women in the name of witch hunting keep surfacing from states like Jharkhand, Odisha, Assam, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Women branded as witches are attacked, beaten, stripped naked or forced to eat human excreta, Khanna explained.

According to the National Crime Record Bureau data, since 2008, 768 women have been murdered for practising witchcraft.

Khanna said while a few states have enacted laws to address the issue, a central law is needed to set the standard.

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"Witch hunting is often related to issues like property, or to an assertion of power. A separate legislation is needed so that this social menace can be addressed," she said. Madhu Mehra, executive director of Partners for Law in Development, a legal resource group working on women's rights, however, contended that the need was not exactly for additional laws but proper implementation of existing ones.

"The recent anti-rape laws have provisions against disrobing and disfiguring, which is what mostly happens in cases of a witch hunt. The need is to implement the existing laws strictly," Mehra said.

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