

KLE MUN 2024

**UNITED NATIONS ENTITY FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND
EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN (UN WOMEN)**

**AGENDA: PROTECTION OF WOMEN AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT
AND RELIGIOUS ABUSE**

BACKGROUND GUIDE

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Esteemed Delegates,

I am delighted to welcome you all to the UN Women Committee of KLE MUN 2024. As the Chair of this significant committee, it is my absolute honor to be guiding the discussions to find the solution for the critical issue of protecting women against sexual harassment and religious abuse. This is a global problem that transcends national, cultural, and religious barriers and impacts millions of women.

As you are aware, there have been more and more instances worldwide of violence against women in public as well as private settings. The intersection of gender-based violence with cultural and religious settings adds complexities. This raises questions about whether women in modern society are genuinely free to exercise their rights. We will explore these important topics in depth, considering the complex interplay between history, customs, and religion. We must realize that while religion plays an important and good part in the lives of many, it cannot be employed as a tool to marginalize or hurt women.

To guarantee that these protections are consistent with firmly held values, the committee must seek solutions that uphold women's rights while also promoting communication with leaders in the religious and cultural communities. I want you to critically consider how international frameworks may be improved or redesigned to better support today's women throughout the conference. We will be navigating the complex progress of human rights, cultural traditions, and religious principles, so the discussions won't be simple. However, I believe that by working together, we can develop comprehensive and effective solutions that will safeguard women while also advancing the creation of a more fair and just society for all.

“Don’t be afraid to speak up for what is right” – Wonder Woman

Looking forward to the enthralling debates and the innovative resolutions!

Warm Regards,

Sannidhi S Rao

Chair, UN Women

COMMITTEE MANDATE

The United Nations organization devoted to women's empowerment and gender equality is called UN Women. UN Women, a global advocate for women and girls, was founded to accelerate the process of addressing their needs on a global scale. It advocates for equal involvement of women in all spheres of life and works on a worldwide scale to realize the Sustainable Development Goals for women and girls. It centers on **four strategic objectives**:

Women participate in, lead, and gain equality from systems of governance.

Women enjoy stable incomes, respectable jobs, and financial independence.

Every woman and girl is free from violence of any kind in their life.

Women and girls contribute to and have a greater impact in creating sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian assistance.

COMMITTEE MANDATE

Key functions of the UN WOMEN:

To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.

To assist Member States in putting these principles into practice, to establish successful collaborations with civil society, and to be prepared to offer appropriate financial and technical support to those nations who ask for it.

To oversee and direct the UN system's efforts on gender equality and to encourage accountability, notably by routinely keeping an eye on the system's overall progress.

INTRODUCTION

Two widespread problems that pose a threat to women's rights worldwide are sexual harassment and religious abuse of women. They impact women in both secular and religious settings and come in a variety of forms. In order to shield women from these assaults, this agenda examines the necessity of national laws, international legal frameworks, and community-based initiatives.

The problem is complex: underreporting of sexual harassment is common, and religious abuse can become rooted in society's standards and be challenging to resolve without the use of culturally sensitive methods. To guarantee complete safety for women in a variety of settings, this committee needs to assess these complexities.

Sexual Harassment:

According to the UN,

Harassment is any improper and unwelcome conduct that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another person.

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. While typically involving a pattern of behaviour, it can take the form of a single incident. Sexual harassment may occur between persons of the opposite or same sex. Both males and females can be either the victims or the offenders.

INTRODUCTION

A variety of things can lead to sexual harassment, including:

Power Dynamics: When there are power disparities, which are common in businesses and educational institutions, offenders may take advantage of their positions.

Cultural Regulations: Sexual harassment is more common because of societal views that normalize it. Aggressive behavior is mistakenly associated with masculinity in certain societies.

Lack of Awareness: Many people could be oblivious to the fact that such actions constitute harassment, which could result in inaction or quiet.

Fear of Retaliation: When victims report harassment, they frequently worry about facing job loss, social rejection, or additional victimization.

Inadequate Legal Protections: Unchecked harassment can occur in situations where laws are weak or inadequately implemented.

INTRODUCTION

Forms of sexual harassment:

- 1. Visual Harassment:** Spreading obscene photos or making suggestive gestures may encourage hostility.
- 2. Physical Harassment:** This includes any unwanted physical intimidation, touching, or groping.
- 3. Verbal harassment:** This includes offensive jokes, remarks, and verbally made, uninvited sexual approaches.
- 4. Cyberbullying:** As technology has advanced, harassment via text messages, social media, or emails has increased in frequency.
- 5. Institutional harassment:** Procedures or policies used by organizations that undermine accountability by accepting or ignoring sexual harassment.
- 6. Quid Pro Quo:** This is the practice of offering jobs or educational chances in return for sexual favors, which creates a coercive setting.

INTRODUCTION

Religious Abuse:

When individuals or institutions use their religious beliefs or practices to oppress, control, or injure other people, this is known as religious abuse. Abuse of this kind can take many different forms and frequently depends on the confidence and power attributed to religious organizations or their leaders. It can have an impact on people's physical, mental, and emotional health and frequently contributes to ongoing social injustices. Religious teachings or rituals can be interpreted patriarchally, which can lead to a variety of types of violence against women.

Forms of religious abuse:

1. Gender-based discrimination: Religious teachings that encourage unfair treatment of women, restricting their rights, duties, and opportunities in both religious and societal contexts.

2. Domestic violence: The perpetrators use their religious beliefs to justify domestic abuse on the grounds that it's necessary to uphold discipline or family order.

3. Forced marriage: Denial of women's autonomy and choice through forcing women into marriages against their will, frequently justified by cultural or religious beliefs.

4. Reproductive coercion: Refers to the use of religious doctrine to control women's reproductive choices, including pressure to have children or controlling her choices on contraception and abortion.

5. Dress codes and Modesty Laws: Imposing strict dress codes that restrict women's freedom of expression and movement, often framed as religious obligations.

6. Shaming and Guilt: When religious teachings are used to make women feel guilty or ashamed of their lifestyles, choices, or activities, it can cause emotional and psychological damage.

7. Religiously justified cultural practices: Religiously justified cultural practices are those that violate women's rights and health yet are portrayed as religious, such as female genital mutilation or honor-based violence.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the early history, rape and other forms of sexual abuse were viewed more as a contamination of a man's property (the father or the spouse) than as a crime against women. The majority of the penalties are indicative of the disdain for the victim's trauma and sentiments. But with time, attitudes against rape as well as its penalty started to shift. Sexual harassment was mostly tolerated at first since there were little to no legal safeguards against it. The late 20th century saw the emergence of laws that reflected the increasing activity and awareness surrounding women's rights. Particularly when it comes to religious abuse, this has frequently been used as an excuse to oppress women, with some behaviors being maintained as religious or cultural customs. Under the pretense of religious conviction, practices like as forced marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), and discriminatory inheritance laws have specifically targeted women. For a long time, the UN struggled to advance gender equality around the world due to a lack of resources and the absence of overseeing UN initiatives in this field. To address these issues, the UN General Assembly established UN Women, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, in July 2010. By adopting this, UN Member States accelerated the Organization's goals for women's empowerment and gender equality, marking a historic stride forward. As part of the UN reform strategy, UN Women was established, combining mandates and resources for increased impact. Significant events, such as the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, have sought to counter these injustices. Despite these international instruments, progress has been uneven, and many women continue to face abuse in the name of tradition or religious doctrine.

CASE STUDIES

1) **Saudi Arabia and other Islamic Countries:**

The status and treatment of women are frequently influenced by deeply rooted cultural norms and religious interpretations in many Islamic nations. Even while the Quran upholds the worth and dignity of every person, patriarchal interpretations have traditionally resulted in institutionalized discrimination and inequality. Because of the social shame and fear of retaliation associated with the common separation of genders in public spaces—which has been influenced by conservative interpretations of Islam—harassment frequently remains undetected in this complex environment. Women's reports have brought attention to incidents of harassment in public spaces, workplaces, and educational settings. A lot of women feel under pressure to keep quiet for fear of facing social rejection or legal consequences. Guardianship System: In Saudi Arabia, women frequently need permission from male guardians—fathers or husbands—for a variety of activities, such as traveling, going to school, and working. This system may limit autonomy and result in oppressive oversight. Religious and cultural explanations for violence against women, including abuse in the home, are frequently offered.

Other Islamic Nations

Pakistan: Though cultural stigma and poor implementation impede development, the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010) attempts to address harassment. There are still reports of abuse and harassment in religious settings, which are frequently supported by conservative interpretations of Islam.

Iran: Religious rules in the country foster systemic discrimination against women. Lack of legal rights frequently makes harassment and abuse worse, and women may face consequences if they speak up.

CASE STUDIES

2) **India:**

India is home to a diverse range of social systems, civilizations, and faiths. Even though the nation has made progress in advancing women's rights, institutional injustices and deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs keep driving widespread discrimination and violence against women. The interconnection between sexual harassment and religious abuse worsens the vulnerabilities experienced by women from minority populations. In a Thomson Reuters Foundation survey, nearly 70% of Indian women said they felt uneasy in public places. In order to address workplace harassment, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, was a significant step. But there is still a lack of enforcement, and many women are not aware of their legal rights. Some important cases include:

1. **The Nirbhaya Case (2012):** A young woman in Delhi was brutally raped and killed by a gang, causing widespread anger and large-scale protests.
2. **#MeToo Movement:** Many Indian women came forward to express their experiences of harassment as a result of the worldwide #MeToo movement, sparking conversations about responsibility and cultural shift.
3. **Manipur Violence (2023):** Reports suggest that sexual harassment against women had been utilized as a technique in the interethnic conflict in Manipur, with the aim of instilling fear and imposing authority over communities. This covers many types of sexual assault and rapes committed by gangs.
4. **RG Kar Case (2024):** A 31-year-old postgraduate trainee doctor at Kolkata's RG Kar Medical College and Hospital was brutally raped and killed, igniting a public outcry.

IMPORTANT FRAMEWORKS

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979)

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)

The Istanbul Convention (2011)

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality)

QARMA

- 1.How can member states ensure that laws addressing sexual harassment and religious abuse are implemented effectively?
- 2.What actions may be implemented to assist women in coming forward with allegations of religious abuse and sexual harassment without fear of retaliation?
- 3.How can international organizations strike a balance between the need to uphold women's rights in religious settings and cultural sensitivity?
- 4.What part does education have to play in stopping sexual harassment and abuse associated with culture and religion?
- 5.In what ways can religious organizations and local governments work together with international organizations to promote a more safe and secure environment for women?
- 6.How to ensure the effectiveness of existing support systems for victims of sexual harassment and religious abuse?
- 7.What is the role of media in shaping public perceptions of sexual harassment and religious abuse?
- 8.What are the measures to be taken to regulate the impact of technology on the issues of sexual harassment and religious abuse?
- 9.How to overcome the health consequences of sexual harassment and religious abuse of women?

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