



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women  
and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled  
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace  
for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Prahar, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The status of women in India has undergone many great changes over the past few millennia from a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period to the promotion of equal rights in recent decades. With special reference to the North East region in India, women enjoyed a high and respected status in the time of Sri Manta Shankardev era who introduced the concept of feminism back in the fifteenth century. But with time, poverty, illiteracy, and superstition crept silently into the general people's lives and as a result women became victims of all these odds.

Witch hunting became a burning issue faced by women in Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand etc. Women branded as witches not only suffered from mental and physical harassment but also lost their lives at the hands of highly superstitious people. Unfortunately, death rates of women increased day by day in these regions where witch hunting is practiced. Not only those particular women but also their families faced threats to their lives.

Rape cases are also registered in alarming rates in several parts of India. Even a blooming girl child cannot escape from this brutal behaviour. Child abuse is a state of emotional, physical and sexual maltreatment meted out to a person below the age of 18. It is a global phenomenon. Child sexual abuse is disturbingly common in home, school and residential care facilities in India. Kids, who suffer repeated trauma, feel lonely, scared, worthless and unloved, which is exactly the opposite of how children should feel. Domestic violence and rape are focused on women. Women belonging to different age groups suffer from brutal behaviour of some distorted people of Indian society. Now a days it can be seen that many women even lose their lives in such tragic incidents.

Women demand peace because they are directly and specifically impacted by conflict. They are assaulted, beaten, humiliated, raped and murdered during conflict. The North East region has been the most continuously militarized region in India after Independence. North East India could well be one of the regions that is infamous for unaccountable mass rape cases. Cries for justice have faded over time and justice is buried now.

In India, ancient texts describe women as power which rules over God's creation. But current scenario shows a contrasting picture. The demand for the dowry became the most essential condition of the marriage settlement. Middle class people became the main target of these attacks. The huge dowry demand has led to female infanticides and selective abortions. This inhuman practice can be seen in places like Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar etc. Dowry system was absent in the North East Region in India, but it has become a curse in recent times. It poses a challenge that seems difficult to meet.

Human trafficking has been documented as a critical issue all over the world. The number of trafficked victims has been rising day by day in India. India became the most transit country for men, women and child trafficking in the world. The purpose of human trafficking includes forced prostitution, marriage, domestic labour, bonded labour, begging, drug smuggling and peddling and organ transplants. Most common trafficking routes in India are Assam, Goa, Mumbai, Haryana, Delhi, Bihar, Punjab etc.

The greatest challenge today is to improve the status of women who constitute half the population of India. Geographically, economically and socially the North Eastern part of India is slightly different than other parts of India. That is why women of this part are also facing different kinds of health issues like malnutrition, anaemia deficiency, maternal mortality etc. Malnutrition is a critical issue that badly affects not only women but also children in India. Observing various surveys we found that almost 48 per cent of children, under age of five have stunted growth indicating that half of the children are chronically malnourished in India. Anaemia in women in Assam is fairly high in comparison to other parts of India. Life expectancy at birth for both rural and urban areas are lower in the state than the national average. It has been observed that sex ratio in India is comparatively higher than other parts of the world.

Gender inequalities continue to be a critical issue in Indian society. Traditional patriarchal norms have relegated women to secondary status within the household and workplace. This drastically affects women's health, financial status, education and political involvement. In fields like education, men are preferred over women in employment opportunities in Indian society. Gender discrimination is mostly common in middle and eastern parts of India like Rajasthan, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh etc.

The status of women has improved to a great extent as many women have proven themselves in their respective fields but still a lot is needed for women. There are lots of challenges in front of women and in front of society, especially in developing countries like India, African states etc. The contribution of women is omnipresent and all-pervasive in every sphere of life as India seeks to march steadily towards the path of growth. Women also contribute towards expanding political, social and economic participation once they can encourage access to and the sharing of knowledge, establishing networks and strengthening decision-making power. The modern world today is proud to recognize the equality that has been acknowledged between age, gender, and race. Women are beginning to be treated as equals with men, in new customs, lifestyle, society, and economy. Today, women are freer and are liberated from their traditional roles as housewives, and are pursuing their hopes and dreams. However, this is not the case in many regions of the world. With all this progress apparently visible, the state of the majority of women of the developing countries remains a neglected and an oppressed class. In the developing countries, thousands of females are dehumanized. Women have long been fighting for equal rights in every sphere of society. Those in the western world have been luckier. They are not faced with the daily conflict of discrimination like those who live in third-world countries. Women are pieces of property and should be used as pleased. Indian women have had an extremely difficult time developing under the oppression of a male-dominated society, class and religion. Women's place in society has been extremely fixed in nature, and has kept women at a low rung on the status ladder. Many societies and non-governmental organizations have helped but there is still scope for enhancement. Let us strengthen the development of women in the contemporary world.

Therefore we request that the International community ask the Government of India and request and pressure them so women of India can live a meaningful and respected life.