



## 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 Samaj Kalyan O. Unnayan Shangstha, 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

According to reports of various Bangladesh based human rights organizations, the violence against women in Bangladesh is increasing and gender equality and women's empowerment is not. It is learned from those reports that there is a significant rise in domestic violence, dowry violence, rape, acid violence, illegal fatwa, sexual violation, rights of childless women and their safeguarding and harassment in the recent years.

Available data on education, health, nutrition, water and sanitation and economic performance generated through numerous studies indicated that even in the 8th decade in the previous century the status of women in Bangladesh remained considerably inferior to that of men. Women, in custom and practice, remained subordinate to men in almost all aspects of their lives; greater sovereignty was the privilege of the rich or the necessity of the very poor.

Studies disclosed that around 82 per cent of women lived in rural areas and majority of rural women, about 70 per cent of them belonged to small cultivator, tenant, and landless households; many worked as labourers part-time or seasonally, usually in post-harvest activities, and received payment in kind or in meagre cash wages. An additional 20 per cent, mostly in poor landless and marginalized households, depended on casual labour, gleaning, begging, and other irregular sources of income; typically, their income was essential to household survival. The remaining 10 per cent of women were in households mainly in the professional, trading, or large-scale land owning categories, and they usually did not work outside the home. The economic contribution of women was significant but largely unacknowledged by the families and societies.

It was commonly seen all over the country that most women's lives remained centred on their traditional roles, and they had limited access to education, health care, markets, productive services and local government. The lack of opportunities contributed to high fertility patterns, which diminished family well-being, contributed to the malnourishment and generally poor health of children, and frustrated educational and other national development goals. As long as women's access to health care, education, and training remained limited, prospects for improved productivity among the female population remained poor.

But the situation has been changing since the ninetieth decade of the second millennium. The Bangladeshi women are gradually becoming empowered. They're speaking out against discriminating practices and started to demand their right to earn. Today, let alone all the women around the world, represent doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, entrepreneurs, pilots, artists and etc. Millions of women are now working in the readymade garment factories, contributing towards the country's economy, and earning of foreign currencies, reduction of poverty, hunger and malnutrition and improvement of the food security, health and nutrition.

In the case of education, the girls' enrolment ratio in primary and secondary education over boys is higher and they are performing better than boys. According to the World Bank, ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education (per cent) in Bangladesh was last measured at 109.64 in 2011. Ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education is the percentage of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.

Though many years ago women didn't have the privilege to vote, to speak or to act in free will, now Bangladesh is only one country in the democratic world where Prime Minister, Speaker of the Parliament, Leader of the Opposition and Deputy Leader of the Parliament are women.

Though the women of Bangladesh are increasingly performing greater roles in the societal, national and international level, discrimination and violence against women still exist. As with other professions, men dominate the higher ranks of the civil services. Currently, we have only five female secretaries employed by different ministries out of a total number of public service secretaries to be 69. A total of 293 additional secretaries, only 24 are female additional secretaries; whereas among 923 joint secretaries, only 110 are female joint secretaries.

Still, now, many of the women of remote rural areas and marginalized communities are facing challenges to equal treatment in family as well as in society. In the areas like remote coastal areas, haor (low land areas submerged by water), Chittagong Hill Tract, reverie chars and areas dominated by religious extremists and vested interest groups, unfavourable situation for womenfolk exists. The women of all religions and castes in many areas of Bangladesh are cruel victims of disparity. Socio-culturally, the regions which are religiously conservative and impose strict restrictions on women's mobility are depriving women. Women living with other family members are especially vulnerable as cultural practices and patriarchal systems discriminate against women, limiting their access to basic rights and services. Due to waterlogging, particularly in coastal, riverine chars and haor areas livelihood options are limited thus male members in households are forced to migrate, which puts additional burden on the women. Trafficking is also at a high rate in the border areas. Wage discrimination in the remote areas is a significant contributor to poverty for women-headed households who earn approximately half the daily wage of their male counterparts for the equal work. Social networks in those areas are both assets and causes of vulnerability. Informal networks emphasized as being critical in situations of crisis. People maintain networks as a buffer against insecurity and ill-being.

The rights of childless women and safeguarding have become a problem in Bangladesh in the last few years. The problems arise when a woman fails to fulfil the desire of her husband to be a father of the most desirable child. It is very disheartening to observe that inability to have a child by a couple goes to the account of childless women. Along with the congenial life of childless women, they have to face a lot of intolerable problems at family as well as societal levels. For a long time this problem has persisted in society and the problem is aggrading at all levels irrespective of education and wealth. So the childless women suffer from an array of social, economic and emotional difficulties. They suffer Psychologically, Marital instability, Stigmatization and abuse, Social pressure and Poor level of support. The rural childless women experience strong stigma in society, as their identity is devalued due to their inability to produce children. As a result, they suffer from feelings of guilt, role failure, loss of self-esteem, abandonment by the family, social isolation, and impoverishment.

The women of the religion-ethnic minority groups are the worst victims of ethnic and caste discriminations; they face the triple burden of caste, class, and gender. The gender inequity existing among them remains very high. The female children instead of going to school are forced to work as child labourers. At the very

beginning of life, they are denied their fundamental rights. They face discrimination at school. The practice of early marriage denies opportunities to the adolescent girls to become self-reliant and productive human beings.

Due to the social constraints, institutional attitudes and weak media coverage, most of the gender-based violence in Bangladesh goes unreported. Many cases of human rights violence against women are frequently settled informally by local power structures that do not protect the dignity and rights of women. Efforts undertaken to address gender-based violence in Bangladesh are challenged by a complex interplay of cultural constraints and limitations of existing social infrastructure. The normalization of Violence against Women within Bangladeshi culture means that women are not aware of their rights, and oftentimes expect and condone violence as the norm.

According to various studies and reports, the main challenge of implementing gender equality and women's empowerment in Bangladesh is poverty, lack of equal wealth sharing, lack of higher education for women, Social, cultural and religious constraints, lack of institutional development, over population and lack of life skill education etc.

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