4th March 2021  
Sri Jishnu Barua  
Chief Secretary  
Government of Assam

Sub: International Women’s Day Appeal

Dear Sir,

Greetings,

On the eve of international Women’s Day, we from North East Network, would like to bring to your attention the situation of women’s safety and protection in Assam.

We are once again alarmed at the rising crimes on women in Assam. Assam has topped the chart of crime against women in the country for the third consecutive year (NCRB report of 2019). The crime rate registered per lakh women population is 62.4 in 2019. However, the rate was 58.8 in 2018. There are many issues to be looked into, both from public responsibility and state accountability viewpoints.

A case was reported from Bharalumukh thana in September, 2020. In a span of five months, another incident of acid attack took place in Dibrugarh in February, 2021. Acid attack is on the rise in Assam which is a matter of concern and must draw the attention of the government. The crimes on women and girls must stop and collective action from homes to villages to government levels must be the top priority for the state. Therefore we would like to bring to your notice a few concerns for your prompt interventions,

1. A Writ Petition was filed in the Gauhati High Court by North East Network and Nishamoni Borah, a survivor of acid attack. We are waiting to hear on its status. It may be mentioned that the Supreme Court issued guidelines in 2013 to strictly monitor and regulate the sale of acid and undertake adequate publicity measures to ensure that the survivors of acid attack are able to access the provisions of the law aimed at aiding them. It is hoped that this Petition will serve as a step towards ensuring that the State fulfils its responsibility of preventing such heinous crimes.

2. We also need swift and sensitive action to implement the revised Victim Compensation Scheme, dated February 2019. Often the District legal Services are plagued with fund crunch as learnt. This leads to delay in release of funds to victims which could lead to death and disability. A regular coordination between appropriate state departments and the district courts is very essential. Moreover, the responsible officers must be made sensitive to be gender responsive to such appeals by aggrieved women.

3. A comparison of NFHS 4 and NFHS 5 data showed that Karnataka, Sikkim and Assam saw the maximum rise in spousal violence in the last five years. During and after the lockdown, Assam also witnessed rise in domestic violence cases. NEN’s Gramin Mahila Kendras recorded 27 such
Officers (under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act) as District Social Welfare Officers are entrusted with multiple Departmental duties.

4. Assam is yet implement ‘Guidelines and Protocols – Medico Legal Care for Survivors/Victims of Sexual Violence’ by the Ministry of Health and family Welfare for comprehensive health care response while dealing with persons from vulnerable groups such as women, persons with disabilities, sex workers, LBTQIA+ persons, children etc. A proposal by NEN was forwarded to Health Department, Government of Assam in 2018 informing the same. We would like to seek your interventions in this matter too.

5. Cases of witch hunting continue in Assam. The State of Assam is yet to frame Rules to implement the Assam Witch Hunting Act, 2018. This Act mentions that the state must establish special courts and shelters, empower Panchayats, women’s organisations and also provide for compensation to victims among others. It is extremely crucial to immediately pass state Rules so that mechanisms and personnel can carry out its provisions and take necessary actions to stop the crime.

6. Women in workplaces remain unsafe in both formal and informal sectors. A NEN study in 2019 along with Gauhati University showed that 44.2% working women shared having faced sexual harassment in their workplaces in Assam. Local Committee at the district level and Internal Committees in various workplaces must be formed with directives of and follow-up by the state Nodal Agency. A gap is seen in this regard and with your directives it can be fulfilled.

We suggest that the need of the hour is to formulate

A state policy for women with adequate budgetary allocation, convergence of concerned departments and a dedicated task force with highly gender sensitive individuals from both government and society.

We hope that you will hear out our Appeal and take prompt action with your team towards ensuring safety and dignity of women and girls in the state. We have shared this Appeal with media too to draw the attention of public as well. We believe in your strong leadership on gender justice issues and look forward to positive outcomes on our Appeal on the above mentioned matters.

We look forward to your response.

Anurita

With warm regards,

Anurita Pathak

State Coordinator