



ශ්‍රී ලංකා මහජන විප්ලවීය නොවීමේ කොමිෂන් කොමිෂන්
இலங்கை மனித உரிமைகள் ஆணைக்குழு
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

The Message of the Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka on International Women's Day 2023

Each year on the 08th of March the world celebrates International Women's Day to commemorate the social, economic, civil and political achievements of women and further advocate for gender parity. Although progress has been made over the years in promoting and protecting women's rights, the journey of fully realizing women's rights remains a continuous uphill climb. Building upon the ongoing functions of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, this year on International Women's Day the Commission spotlights the '*responsibility of law enforcement authorities to ensure the inherent dignity of women*'.

Women are most often faced with disrespectful and uncomfortable situations when accessing justice due to reasons stemming from inherent patriarchal gender biases, power dynamics and structural inequalities. This situation, although not limited, is common place with women victims of violence. Prevalent across all socio-economic strata, violence against women (VAW) encompass a wide array of types of violence which includes physical, psychological or emotional, economic or social and intimate or domestic violence. Further, the increased access to digital technologies has led all types of VAW to increasingly transcend to online or technology facilitated gender based violence.

During the past two years, amidst the pandemic and continuing economic crisis, Sri Lanka saw a significant escalation in the number of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) cases, both offline and online. This situation has necessitated the need to have more number of gender sensitive law enforcement officers capable of ensuring victims/survivors, witnesses and in extension their family and friends fair and just access to justice. This is especially to prevent secondary victimization of victims/survivors of SGBV who courageously resort to legal redress mechanisms.

In this context, a special programme is implemented by the Commission in collaboration with the Women and Children's Bureau of the Department of Police, to equip law enforcement officers with the required skills, knowledge and sensitivity to follow a victim centered approach in dealing with all cases of sexual and gender based violence. This will primarily ensure law enforcement responses to violence against women are up-to-date, swift, safe and respectful.

On this day, while acknowledging the efforts taken by the government entities, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and all other parties including individuals to ensure rights of the women, the Commission calls upon all stakeholders to embrace equity and engage in inter-linked and coordinated efforts to create safe and respectful spaces for women. This includes crafting sustainable solutions across all sectors to ensure gender sensitive environments devoid of mere tokenism. In the failure, a woman's right to live with dignity and respect will be far from reality even in the decades to come.

Justice Rohini Marasinghe,
Chairperson,
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka
08.03.2023