

Women's voices must be heard during times of transitions and reform

Sunday 11 December 2011, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#), [MANJOO Rashida](#) (Date first published: 8 December 2011).

Statement by the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo, and the Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice

16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence Campaign

GENEVA (8 December 2011) – “Recently we have witnessed the active participation of women in public protests in many parts of the world which reflect their strong desire to promote societal change, including in respect of the rule of law and human rights generally, and women’s human rights in particular. Moments of political transition provide a unique opportunity to ensure that women participate equally in public life and that their rights in legal and social systems, including the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence in law and in practice are addressed.

Women have stood together with men in the streets, at the frontline of the struggle for a better future. They have also provided support to the protestors.

Too often civilians participating in these movements of change have encountered different types of violence. Women are among those who have had to pay a high price, as political and economic transitions often exacerbate pre-existing discrimination, subordination, and violence against women. Women have experienced sexual abuse, inappropriate touching, invasive body searches, as well as insults and humiliations of a sexual nature. Women human rights defenders, including activists, journalists and bloggers, as well as women political candidates have been particularly targeted for politically motivated purposes.

So far these acts of violence against women have met with silence from State authorities and impunity for such acts has been the norm. Impunity, coupled with existing laws and practices that discriminate against women, will only encourage more violence against women during and after these phases of transition. We should remember that impunity arises as a consequence of States’ failure to comply with their due diligence obligation to prevent, investigate and prosecute violence against women and to protect women from such acts. The effectiveness of responses to violence against women during these crucial times will have a direct effect on the way and means such violence will be addressed in the States and societies that will emerge from the transition.

Violence, or the threat of violence, is a significant impediment to women’s full and equal participation in political and public life. The root causes of violence against women in public life are similar to those which underpin violence against them in other sectors of human action. They

include persisting cultural stereotypes, abuse of religious and traditional practices, patriarchal norms, values and societal structures which have historically relegated women to subordinate roles in both the public and private spheres.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 23 on political and public life and the Beijing Platform of Action all recognize that without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.

The gains obtained through change and transformation cannot be consolidated if half of the population does not fully participate in public and political life, without fear of violence. Political transitions thus provide a unique opportunity, through constitutional and legislative reforms, to strengthen the codification of women's rights to equality, to repeal laws, policies and practices that discriminate against women, and to ensure that the human rights of women are fully included and protected in the new institutional architecture of a country. Temporary special measures and women's access to justice, including transitional justice mechanisms must also be encouraged and strengthened.

Most importantly every effort should be deployed to ensure the protection and promotion of women's rights and gender equality. Women are entitled to contribute to societal change and transformation, free from threats and violence. Their voices must be heard and their concerns taken into account during times of transitions and reform."

P.S.

* Ms. Rashida Manjoo (South Africa) was appointed Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, its causes and consequences in June 2009 by the UN Human Rights Council, for an initial period of three year. Log on to: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/rapporteur/index.htm>

The five member of the working group were appointed by the Human Right Council in March 2011 and assumed their functions on 1st May 2011: Kamala CHANDRAKIRANA, Chair-Rapporteur (Indonesia); Emna AOUIJ (Tunisia); Mercedes BARGUET (México); Frances RADAY (Israel/United Kingdom) and Eleonora ZIELINSKA (Poland). Learn more: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/WGWomenIndex.aspx>

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