

LET'S PROTECT WOMEN'S RIGHT TO WORK!
LET'S END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN!

Over the past few weeks there have been a number of leaflets and rumours containing allegations and making threats against women working in NGOs in Batticaloa and Ampara districts. These allegations have focused on issues of sexual exploitation of women, and have called for women to be stopped from working in NGOs and also in private businesses.

As members of organizations concerned with promoting the equality of women in society, we are pleased that MPs of Batticaloa have publicly denounced these leaflets aimed at denying women the right to work, a right which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Women play a vital role in the field of social development, and are often those who work directly with communities and families. Blanket allegations and rumours against ALL women working in NGOs have unfairly damaged the reputations of these women and their families. It has also given an opening to opportunistic persons to threaten and harass women workers in their communities and during their work. This has caused great anxiety and difficulties for women workers and their families.

We call on all organizations - government, nongovernmental and private - to ensure harassment does not take place at the workplace, to create work environments that deter violence against women, and to put in place mechanisms for anyone facing harassment to be able to come forward in confidentiality and have their complaints dealt with satisfactorily. We cannot protect women from violence or exploitation by locking them away from society.

The issue of sexual exploitation of women is a serious matter, and individual cases must be systematically investigated and justice must be sought for the women concerned. Perpetrators of exploitation must be penalized not women. Any process of obtaining justice for these women must be sensitive to their individual needs and circumstances and should avoid causing them further suffering. Women who have suffered exploitation should be assured of full support by their employers, the community and the legal authorities if they wish to come forward.

All community members have a role to play in supporting the rights of women to work whether in NGOs, within hospitals, within schools or within private enterprises. Community members should not attribute stereotypes or rumours uncritically to all the thousands of women who work in the social service sector to do so is to further victimize women.

We call on all members of society - members of public (men and women), civil society actors, intellectuals, religious leaders and the media - who believe in the rights of people to take an active role in ending all forms of violence against women and in supporting women's right to work.

Community Development Fund
Eastern Self-Reliant Community-Awakening Organisation
People's Welfare Association
Enfants and Development
Palameenmadu Welfare Society
CARE International Sri Lanka
Zahira Welfare Committee
Thiruperanthurai Community Development Organisation
Suriya Women's Development Centre
Sikaram Social Development Fund
Eastern Social Development Forum
Caritas-EHED
FORUT
ACTED

Helvetas
Viluthu
World University Services Canada
Save the Children in Sri Lanka
Norwegian Refugee Council
Thiruchendur Welfare Society
Koralai Pattu North Development Union
OXFAM Australia
OXFAM GB
Arche Nova
LEADS
Point Pedro Institute of Development
World Concern
World Vision - Tsunami Response Team

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