

Date: November 25, 2013



Joint Press Statement

Today, Gender Advocacy Working Group (GAWG) starts its fourth consecutive campaign to advocate for the elimination of violence against women. Similar to previous years, the focus of this year's campaign is on domestic violence, which is one of the most prevalent and pervasive forms of violence against women in the Maldives. The campaign, this year focuses on the theme: "Thinakun Ekeh – Bodu Kusheh" (one in three – a grave offence), depicting that violence against women is an offence punishable by law and is prohibited in Islam as well. Today, billboards with a key message to the public will be put up in almost all the inhabited islands to kick-start the campaign. Several media events will continue throughout the sixteen days of the campaign to highlight the impact of violence against women in our society.

Violence against women, especially domestic violence is a major issue in the Maldives and mostly occurs at home and within the family. Statistics show that one in three women between the ages of 15 – 49 experience physical and or sexual abuse at some point in her life. The reported increase in conservative thinking and behaviors that justify acts of violence, especially when it is within marriage, is also alarming. The report by the Human Rights Commission, "Rights Side of Life (2012)", shows that a significant number of respondents thought that violence against women by their husbands is justified. The same report also shows a decrease, from 2005 to 2011, in the percentage of men who agreed that men should never hit their wives. Furthermore, 90% of the cases submitted to the Family Protection Authority, reveals that women were at the receiving end of these atrocities.

Violence against women has implications beyond the victim. It impacts the whole community; breaks up families, traumatizes children who often grow up to be perpetrators themselves. Violence against women curbs the economic productivity of those affected and is a heavy financial burden on the state. For example in 2009, violence against women and their children cost the Australian economy 13.6 billion dollars. Given these reasons violence against women is not only an obstacle to the full realization of women's human rights, but it is also an impediment to the economic growth, development, peace and social progress of a country.

We believe that the main reason for violence against women is the societal impunity and the patriarchal beliefs and perceptions that justify it. Therefore, GAWG calls upon everyone (men and women) to challenge such beliefs, and stand up for eliminating violence against women. We believe that each and every one can make a difference.

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