



HISTORIC GATHERING OF WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS CLOSES IN SRI LANKA

December 2 2005: “Every day activists across the world suffer serious abuses in the course of their work as women human rights defenders. Many women have already paid with their lives for their courage and commitment to the defense of human rights,” says **Sunila Abeysekera**, Director of INFORM (Sri Lanka), and a member of the international coordinating committee behind the first-ever global gathering of women human rights defenders in Colombo this week.

“Women activists working in all parts of the world face particular risks in their political organizing. Our advocacy often results in gender-related abuses including rape, psychiatric incarceration, and restrictions on access to rights of expression and association. Yet these violations are frequently not recognized or validated. This meeting has challenged that invisibility and celebrated the efforts of women human rights defenders around the world.”

The conference closed today in Colombo, Sri Lanka after four days of historic coalition building between women's rights and human rights activists. It brought together an international group of 200 women human rights defenders, including women who defend a range of human rights, and men who defend women's human rights. Delegates shared experiences and developed a range of strategies to combat the violence, discrimination and other abuses they experience specifically because of their gender and because of their work in defense of human rights.

The meeting focused on four separate sources of abuses commonly experienced by women human rights defenders. These included state-based violence and issues of accountability and justice; the growing rise in fundamentalist movements seeking and gaining political power; the use of sexuality-based attacks to intimidate women and harm their bodies and reputations; and the need to address abuse perpetrated by communities and families.

Mary Jane Real from the Secretariat of the consultation's coordinating committee comments: “Over the past four days women human rights defenders have shared a wide range of experiences, and worked to seek responses to the abuses we face. From policies and practices that regulate women's sexuality, to restrictions on our work because of misuse of counter-terrorism efforts, we have outlined the nature and depth of these violations as they apply to all of us. And we have identified and discussed campaigning strategies that are available to help us put an end to the abuse of women human rights defenders worldwide in the course of our activism.”

Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International and a speaker at today's closing public event, says: “All of us – women and men – must demand the protection of those who defend women's rights and women who defend all human rights, insist on justice when they're attacked, and fight for them to be given the recognition they are due.”

The consultation has defined key priorities, as well as a range of action points:

--It is vital that individual states are held accountable for abuses of women human rights defenders at the hands of all state and non-state actors within their jurisdiction. This includes both fundamentalist and paramilitary groups, as well as communities and individuals responsible for these violations.

--All activists should call on governments worldwide to ensure the mandate of the UN Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders, a position currently held by **Hina Jilani**, is continued in order to maintain UN and governmental focus on women human rights defenders.

--Conference participants commit to maintaining solidarity, enhancing coalition-building efforts and networking within and across regions, and to creating and strengthening regional and international standards for the protection of women human rights defenders worldwide.

Other speakers at the press conference included:

Charlotte Bunch, Center for Women's Global Leadership, USA

Lydia Cacho, CIAM, Crisis Center for Women, Mexico.

Tilder Kumichii, Ndichia, Global Education and Environment Development Foundation, Cameroon

Radhia Nasroui, Association for the Fight Against Torture in Tunisia, Tunisia.

Zenaida Soriano, Amihan, Philippines

Leyla Yunus, Institute for Peace and Democracy, Azerbaijan.

The Defending Women Defending Rights Campaign is sponsored by the following organizations:

Amnesty International	Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development
Asia Pacific Forum on Women's Law and Development	Center for Women's Global Leadership
Front Line	Information Monitor (INFORM)
International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission	International Service for Human Rights
ISIS Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange	Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights
Women Living Under Muslim Laws	World Organization Against Torture

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