



ASIAN LEGAL RESOURCE CENTRE

AN NGO WITH GENERAL CONSULTATIVE STATUS WITH THE ECOSOC OF THE UN

Unit D, 7th Floor, Mongkok Commercial Centre, 16 Argyle Street, Kowloon, HONG KONG
Tel: +(852) 2698-6339 . Fax: +(852) 2698-6367 . E-mail: ahrchk@ahrchk.org . Web: www.alrc.net

UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS 59TH SESSION

ITEM 12: INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE: (A) VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 'Honour killings' in Pakistan

Statement read by Mr Ali Saleem, of the Asian Legal Resource Centre

Madam Chairperson

I speak on behalf of the Asian Legal Resource Centre.

On 17 July 2000, the Government of Pakistan enacted an ordinance "to provide for the setting up of a National Commission on the Status of Women". This legislation grandly proclaimed that the said Commission would work for the emancipation of women, the equalization of opportunities and conditions between men and women, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. However, that Commission has since been given no money, no secretariat, no independence and no power.

The unhappy state of the National Commission on the Status of Women is indicative of how women victims of violence are treated in Pakistan. They are insulted, further abused and ignored. While the government acts as if it has complied with its international obligations, it in fact wants only a veneer of legitimacy.

The true attitude of the Government of Pakistan is betrayed in its reaction to the work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women. Detailed reporting by the Special Rapporteur on 'honour killing' (notably E/CN.4/2002/83, paras 21-37)—the practice of killing women ostensibly out of family pride—has been contemptuously rejected by the government.

Yet, when it comes to the relentless killing of Pakistani women by their men, the authorities have plenty of excuses. Some say that women's rights are irrelevant in this deeply patriarchal society. Others avoid responsibility by saying that people are ignorant, and their attitudes can't change.

These arguments are disingenuous. The real obstacle to the effective protection of Pakistani women is the attitude of the government itself. Despite its protestations to the contrary, the Government of Pakistan tolerates violence against women. It permits an informal tribal justice system that punishes women without regard to conventional law or human rights standards. It makes piecemeal gestures in order to placate and mislead the international community, such as the establishment of the National Commission on the Status of Women.

The Asian Legal Resource Centre has already proposed to the Commission many steps that may be taken to end the killing of women in Pakistan (E/CN.4/2003/NGO/95). However, ultimately these all depend upon the political will of the Pakistani elite.

Most recently, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has indicated that she will "closely follow the pattern of government inaction" on honour killings (E/CN.4/2003/3, para. 59). While the Asian Legal Resource Centre welcomes this commitment, it has time and again pointed out that justice requires more than the monitoring of conditions and making of recommendations. For the women of Pakistan whose lives are daily at risk, the Commission must actively and aggressively intervene and oblige the Government of Pakistan to work for substantive change. There is no other way.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson