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Practices that discriminate against women must end, UN expert tells Zambia



Special Rapporteur Rashida Manjoo

10 December 2010 – An independent United Nations human rights expert today urged Zambia to translate its laws and policies to protect women into reality and to combat negative practices which violate their rights.

In a [news release](#) issued in the Zambian capital, Lusaka, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo, voiced hope that the gender-based violence bill currently before Parliament will be adopted soon, and encouraged that measures be taken to ensure it is implemented.

“Experiences in other countries have shown that some legislation remains good on paper only, despite its intention to prevent, protect, punish and provide reparation for women who have been subjected to violence,” she said as she concluded her visit to the country.

Ms. Manjoo also pointed out that while laws are important, it is also vital to combat negative customary and religious practices that exacerbate discrimination against women.

She welcomed the efforts taken by State institutions to regulate some of these practices, including inheritance practices, sexual cleansing, marriage and land tenure systems.

“Legislative efforts must be continuously pursued alongside massive endeavours to educate and change the mindsets of men, women and children, through all available means including schools, traditional and religious leaders, and the media,” she said.

The Special Rapporteur, who reports to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council in an independent and unpaid capacity, also highlighted the need for Zambia to address the situation of female detainees, whether in police custody or in prisons, who have to endure harsh living conditions, including little medical attention for pre-natal and post-natal care and treatment.

In addition, women in detention facilities are subjected to abuse, violence and humiliating and degrading punishment in order to extract confessions, she said, adding that they are also offered release in exchange for sex.

During her visit, Ms. Manjoo met with State officials, representatives of civil society organisations and UN agencies, as well as victims of violence who shared their personal experiences.

“It is an exciting time for this country, a time which is seeing important constitutional and law review processes aimed at strengthening and accelerating efforts to eradicate violence against women and uphold women’s rights.

“These processes demonstrate political will and openness to tackle the current challenges that women still face in Zambia,” said the expert, who will present her full report to the Human Rights Council in June 2011.

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