**Orange the world**

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The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is marked every year on November 25. In order to raise awareness for the prevention of abuse, gender inequality and domestic violence, a special and unique theme is issued by the UN every year.

This year, under the theme of ‘Orange the World: End Violence against Women Now!’, various public and prominent places in the world are being decorated with orange colour to convey the message that even in the 21st century, women are victims of various forms of violence. The theme also suggests that transforming our society free from violence is everyone’s responsibility. The secretariat of the Pakistan Hindu Council is also painted in orange to express our commitment to a violence-free society.

Historically, November 25 commemorates the assassination of three political female activists known as the Mirabal Sisters from the Latin American country of the Dominican Republic. They were killed on November 25, 1960, at the behest of then-dictator Rafael Trujillo. After their murder, several activists in Latin America and the Caribbean attributed November 25 as a day to combat and raise awareness of violence against women. Finally, the date also received its official status through a UN resolution in 1999.

According to various reports, one in three women has to face physical or mental abuse at some point in their lives. Situations like epidemics, natural disasters and armed conflicts intensify the plight of women. UN Women has recently collected data on women from 13 countries for its latest report, which found that two out of three women have suffered from violence and malnutrition since the Covid-19 outbreak. Reportedly, only one woman out of ten spoke to the police for help.

Although violence against women is a serious matter in Pakistan, it is also considered a sensitive issue. Unfortunately, a majority of women victims of violence do not prefer to inform anyone or seek help. Reporting violence to the police is seen as an attempt to discredit the honour of the family, and those who make such attempts are handled aggressively.

In cases of honour killings, the murderers are usually related to close relatives, so they are freed after being pardoned/reconciled by the family despite being caught by the law. Different reports suggest that only a minority of victims report to the police for help; an even smaller number of victims prefer to approach civil society organisations and only a few opt for legal action against their abusers.

In Pakistan, many women’s rights organisations are working on ending domestic violence, sexual harassment at the workplace, and gender discrimination. However, whatever data is collected on violence against women in these reports is based on press coverage, but it is also a fact that most of the incidents of violence against women remain unreported.

Another source of statistics on incidents of violence against women in Pakistan is the police record whose ‘easy access’ is another separate matter. One of the worst forms of violence against non-Muslim women in Pakistan is forced conversion and marriages. Minor girls under the age of 18 are abducted by powerful elements.

Under the auspices of the UN and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, all government agencies, local and global NGOs, educational institutions and, most importantly, the media must play their due role in ending violence against women. Today, we need to conduct awareness programmes that truly highlight the importance of women in our society.

The 16-day global campaign of activism under the UN has also started, which will end on December 10, International Human Rights Day. All responsible citizens must join hands for participating proactively in the activities and events being held in these sixteen days.

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