

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: MDE 04/003/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 042
21 February 2005

Gulf States: Letter to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on the recommendations of the "Conference on Violence and Discrimination against Women in the GCC"

Amnesty International (AI) today wrote to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) urging it to implement the specific recommendations of the Conference on Violence and Discrimination against women in countries of the GCC which specifically relate to the GCC. The Conference took place in Bahrain from 8-9 January 2005.

Participants in the Conference called on the GCC governments to "introduce special legislation criminalising violence against women" and ensure that there is no impunity for the perpetrators of such violence. Participants also called on the GCC to "establish a regional centre to collate regular statistics on violence against women and to conduct studies on social, legal and Islamic law issues concerning the topic of violence and discrimination against women."

For a full copy of the recommendations, please see below.

The organization called on the Secretary General of the GCC to ensure that the recommendations of the conference are brought to the attention of member countries of the GCC, and that the issue of violence against women is put on the agenda of forthcoming meetings of relevant bodies of the GCC, including the forthcoming GCC summit in 2005.

Background:

The conference was organized by Amnesty International and brought together non-governmental organizations, women's organizations, lawyers, judges, academics, and human rights activists. Participants deliberated over two days on concrete measures to combat violence and discrimination against women in GCC countries. The conference is part of Amnesty International's six-year global campaign, Stop Violence Against Women, launched in March 2004.

Conference on Combating Violence and Discrimination against Women in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries - Manama, Bahrain (8-9 January 2005)

Recommendations

On 8-9 January 2005, under the patronage of the Supreme Council for Women in the Kingdom of Bahrain, a conference was held in Manama, Bahrain, on combating violence and discrimination against women in the GCC countries.

This conference was organized by Amnesty International in cooperation with the Bahrain Social Partnership for combating violence against women and attended by activists from civil society organizations in the GCC countries. This conference follows a research mission conducted in the summer of 2004 by Amnesty International concerning the topics discussed.

1: The role of legislation and the judiciary in protecting women from violence and discrimination

This conference calls upon the governments of the GCC countries to undertake the following:

- 1 - Introduce special legislation criminalising violence against women.
- 2 - Ensure that the authorities and law enforcement bodies in their countries respect the rule of law and implement it in relation to violence against women and end impunity for such acts of violence.
- 3 - Raise awareness amongst relevant members of the executive, judicial and legislative authorities in the GCC countries and provide them with legal studies concerning international human rights standards.
- 4 - Adopt legislation criminalising all forms of discrimination against women in jobs and professions.
- 5 - Amend labour laws in the GCC countries to include domestic workers.
- 6 - Ratify the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). For those countries who have ratified the convention, to review their reservations in order to ensure that the provisions of the convention are implemented and to bring national legislation into line with CEDAW and in agreement with the spirit of the Islamic faith, to eliminate discrimination against women. These countries are further called upon to ratify the optional protocol to CEDAW.
- 7 - Allocate part of their national budget to support initiatives and mechanisms working to combat violence and discrimination against women.
- 8 - Enable and give women the right to fully participate in political life in order to support their efforts to combat violence and discrimination against them.
- 9 - Enact or amend personal status legislation in their respective countries to ensure the human dignity of women.
- 10 - Enact or amend welfare, social services and nationality legislation to guarantee equality and non-discrimination against women.

2: Social and cultural issues relating to violence against women

The conference makes the following recommendations for progression in the social and cultural spheres with the aim of bringing about positive development combating violence and discrimination against women:

1 - Educational curriculum and practices are improved in order to change the stereotypical image of women and to introduce human rights education to the curriculum at all levels.

2 - Raise social and legal awareness through multimedia and civil society institutions about women's rights and to combat violence and discrimination against women.

3 - Relevant authorities raise awareness amongst those who are about to begin married life and prepare them for the responsibilities of family life and inform them about reproductive health.

4 - Institutions working with young people raise awareness and inform young people about the rights and duties of married life.

5 - Guarantee services for women who face violence by creating hotlines linked to institutions that offer protection to such women and provide safe houses to protect women and children from violence.

6 - The GCC establish a regional centre to collate regular statistics on violence against women and to conduct studies on social, legal and Islamic law issues concerning the topic of violence and discrimination against women.

3: The role of organizations and activists in the GCC countries in combating violence and discrimination against women

All participants of this conference from the GCC countries and Amnesty International will work towards:

1 - Strengthening the resources and capabilities of civil society organizations in order to support them in their role in combating violence and discrimination against women.

2 - Establishing community partnerships comprising of members of all the relevant sectors of society, including religious scholars and journalists, with the purpose of ending violence and discrimination against women on both the local and regional levels in the GCC countries,

3 - Lobbying official institutions and decision makers to support the work of local organizations in combating violence and discrimination against women.

4 - Developing proposals for introducing legislation and suggestions on how to amend existing legislation relating to combating violence and discrimination against women and presenting these to the relevant authorities.

5 - Using the media to promote a legal culture, raising awareness amongst the different sections of society about the issues involved in combating violence and discrimination against women.

6 - Create a strategy to urge authorities in the GCC countries to implement international treaties on women's rights, such as CEDAW and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

7 - Develop a strategic plan to train law enforcement officials (the police, public prosecutors and judges) in the GCC countries and present this to the relevant authorities.

8 - Work to establish centres to protect the victims of violence and provide them with access to the facilities they require, (financial, legal, physical and psychological rehabilitation).

9 - Facilitating and promoting women's participation, as equal to men, in civil society organizations in the GCC countries.

Executive Recommendation

An official letter about the conference and a copy of these recommendations will be sent to the secretary general of the GCC with a request that it is sent to all GCC member countries.