

South Asian countries urged to take action on widespread sexual violence

A new coalition of civil society organizations in South Asia is calling for reform of sexual violence laws to increase access to justice for survivors.

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[/EINPresswire.com/](https://EINPresswire.com/) -- A new coalition of seventeen civil society organizations is urging South Asian countries to take immediate action on high levels of sexual violence and low conviction rates. [South Asian Movement for Accessing Justice \(SAMAJ\)](#) is advocating for comprehensive legal reforms to close protection gaps in sexual violence laws, address flaws in criminal justice systems, and invest in holistic support services for survivors. These reforms are crucial to providing women and girls with better protection and ending widespread impunity for perpetrators.



SAMAJ is calling for urgent action to tackle sexual violence in South Asia.

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South Asian countries urgently need stronger laws, gender-sensitive criminal justice systems, and support measures that prioritize the experiences, needs, and insights of sexual violence survivors.”

South Asian Movement for Accessing Justice (SAMAJ)

Many sexual violence laws in the region suffer from inadequate legal definitions that fail to encompass the full spectrum of sexual violence. Some penal codes contain provisions that discriminate against women and girls, and poor enforcement of laws further contributes to abuses going unpunished.

The formation of SAMAJ marks a significant advance towards rectifying serious weaknesses in legal frameworks, policies, and practices that prevent sexual violence survivors and victims’ families from accessing justice and support.

Comprised of human rights organizations and individuals working in Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, SAMAJ is calling for the adoption of a multi-sectoral approach involving close collaboration between government bodies, civil society organizations, law enforcement agencies, healthcare providers, and education sectors.



The development and effective implementation of sufficiently funded multifaceted strategies are needed to provide better immediate and longer-term assistance to survivors and for ongoing prevention efforts necessary to tackle the root causes and consequences of sexual violence.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE SURVIVORS FACE MANY CHALLENGES

While some progress has been made in strengthening legal protections against sexual violence, survivors still encounter significant obstacles when filing cases with the police and pursuing prosecution. Problems include prolonged delays in criminal investigations and trials, onerous levels of proof required for litigating cases, courts permitting evidence about the sexual history of victims, and difficulties obtaining legal aid. These challenges are exacerbated by pervasive gender discrimination, victim-blaming, and social stigma associated with sexual violence.

Women and girls from marginalized communities, including Indigenous people, designated lower castes, and those with disabilities, are especially vulnerable. They experience severe intersectional forms of discrimination linked to their gender, class, caste, disability, and religion, which increases their exposure to human rights violations and curtails their ability to escape harm and receive justice.

At present, the journey through the criminal justice system is arduous for most survivors. A successful outcome is unlikely as conviction rates for sexual violence crimes are low throughout South Asia. The path for those from marginalized groups is all the more challenging.

Enabling perpetrators to avoid criminal liability raises the risk of assault for women and girls as impunity emboldens offenders who see they are unlikely to be held accountable by the state. The few cases that currently make it to court are generally for the most egregious crimes, such as when the victim has been killed or is a young girl.

REFORMING SEXUAL VIOLENCE LAWS

SAMAJ emphasizes the urgent need for stronger laws, gender-sensitive criminal justice systems, and support measures that prioritize survivor-led solutions, centering the experiences, needs,

and insights of women and girls.

Unique challenges faced by marginalized groups must be acknowledged and addressed. Amplifying their voices is crucial for dismantling systemic barriers and creating inclusive pathways to justice for all, regardless of background.

To achieve the best possible outcomes in sexual violence cases, comprehensive legal and procedural reforms should be enacted to close gaps in protections, with national and state laws meeting international human rights standards.

Advocating for states to fully comply with global conventions and treaties that mandate the protection of human rights is a key priority for SAMAJ, with international mechanisms and treaty bodies utilized to increase accountability.

SAMAJ is championing a unified response to sexual violence in South Asia. Sabin Shrestha, Executive Director of [Forum for Women, Law and Development \(FWLD\)](#) in Nepal, explains, "We have always been together in our joint struggle for justice and equality. The creation of SAMAJ forms a common front against the endemic problem of sexual violence in the region.

"This partnership demonstrates how deeply rooted we are to the idea of safe communities and empowered victims. Our many voices will resonate louder and as one, reinforcing, pushing ourselves, and bringing about meaningful changes. Our working together is a symbol of optimism, resilience, and an assurance for a safer world ahead."

Shyamala Gomez, Executive Director at the [Centre for Equality and Justice](#), in Sri Lanka, expands, "Member organizations of SAMAJ are coming together with a common goal - to advocate at international and regional level for strengthened criminal justice processes in our respective countries so that victim-survivors of sexual violence get justice and accountability. We need to act as a pressure group on our governments to take concrete measures to make this a reality."

Working regionally, Equality Now's Nawmi Naz Chowdhury concludes, "Anchored in cross-country learnings, SAMAJ will foster, sustain, and grow a South Asia-focused, civil society-led regional movement. The coalition will use collective action in evidence gathering, research, and advocacy to address legal and structural barriers faced by sexual violence survivors in their pursuit of justice, and to bring an end to sexual violence.

"Connecting national-level advocacy with international human rights mechanisms, SAMAJ is a united regional voice and force that is determined to uphold the rights of women and girls to live a life free from sexual violence and to have equal protection under the law."

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