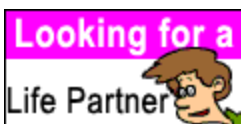


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## Pro-women's laws misused, say civil society groups

New Delhi | August 25, 2008 8:35:07 PM IST

Lashing out at the National Commission for Women (NCW) a day before Women Equality Day, two civil society groups Monday said that the pro-women, progressive legislations in the country were being misused, and demanded that the legislations be made gender neutral.

The Mothers and Sisters Initiative (MASI) and All India Forgotten Women (AIFW) in a joint statement said that the laws for the protection of women and their rights - like the legislations against rape and sexual harassment, adultery or domestic violence, divorce or child custody - should be made gender neutral.

The two organisations said that a Right to Information (RTI) application has revealed that information given by the NCW was false. NCW chairman Girija Vyas's statement that in 70 percent divorce cases men try to escape from providing maintenance to their former wives by alleging adultery, in response to the RTI application was found to be completely false and far fetched, they said.

Sandeep Bhartia of Gender Human Rights society, which helped both these organisations in logistics, said that an RTI filed by them last month revealed surprising results.

"The NCW keeps making fleeting statements not backed with proper logistics and data. To their own claim that in 70 percent divorce cases men try to escape providing maintenance by alleging adultery, they responded to the RTI that they don't have any such data," Bhartia told IANS.

The organisations went on to say that the NCW grossly exaggerates data of dowry harassment, dowry deaths and domestic abuse in order to attract funds from foreign agencies like the United Nations Development Fund for Women (Unifem).

"On the occasion of Women Equality day, the organisations want to say that in the name of women empowerment, lets not punish elders, children and innocent people who, without proper investigation, are arrested under the Domestic Violence Act, Dowry Prohibition Act and the likes."

"All that we demand is that provisions of the Domestic Violence Act, adultery laws, laws against rape and sexual harassment and family laws (divorce, maintenance and child custody) should be made gender-neutral," Bhartia said on behalf of members of MASI and AIFW.azr/ak/vt

(381 Words)25082012NNNN (IANS)

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