

Gender Advisory Committee:

Submission from the Natal Indian Congress/Transvaal Indian Congress.

In respect of Working Group 1.

1. Political Intimidation:

Reading through the reports and minutes does not clarify the following issues:-

- What comprises political intimidation
- Would the question of women who are unable to participate in the political processes because they have been conditioned by male domination in their homes and in the political processes, to submit to male instructions, be considered to be political intimidation?

We believe that this does form part of political intimidation, and needs to be addressed creatively and with appropriate affirmative action.

We believe that steps should be taken through the media and through active campaigns to empower women, and to ensure them that they are able to exercise their full and free rights at the polls.

Women are also intimidated by threats from people in authority (mostly males) by suggestions that they would lose their homes, their land, their pensions etc. if they do not vote for particular people. Such intimidation should be punishable by law.

But also it is necessary to inform women of their rights, through a concerted campaign, more especially in the rural areas, which comprise almost 60% of the population.

We also believe that under 1.3. under the terms of reference we need to include freedom from sexual harassment. We believe that all levels of political processes should be free from sexual harassment. If this proposal is accepted then we would define sexual harassment in clear terms for legal purposes.

We also believe that an independent group of women should be authorised to monitor the election procedure officially in every area.

1. Security Forces:

a. Their role:

In light of the recent allegation of rape by the 32 Battalion in Phola Park, it is important that people, and more particularly people with authority and possessing armaments need to be brought under strict and responsible control.

The many acts of violence committed against women by the armed forces are an indication of lack of strict control. We therefore suggest:-

1. that the position of high ranking officers who are unable to maintain adequate control over the forces, be urgently reviewed.
2. that such crimes against women be treated with stricter and more stringent disciplinary action.
3. that legislation in respect of such crimes be reviewed and made more stringent eg. policemen accused of brutality against women should be immediately suspended from duty pending court action.
4. that when searches of homes are conducted women police accompany male police.

b. Composition:

We suggest:-

1. Any peace keeping force should include women within their structures at all levels.
2. Apart from this there should be a group of gender conscious people to monitor the treatment of women by these forces.
3. That this group could also provide women with skills to defend themselves and with information on their rights so that they are not intimidated by unscrupulous forces.
4. This group should also ensure that the police are trained appropriately to be gender sensitive and ensure that they do not violate the rights of women.

c. International Monitoring Forces:

In view ^{of} the ongoing violence in the country, and the number of refugees, we should support all those organisations that are calling for an International Monitoring Force in South Africa. We also wish to add that women should form part of such force, so that women could also feel safe and be able to exercise their rights free of intimidation and fear.

That this group should also be responsible for ensuring the safety of the refugees, who are presently living in fear.

3. Media:

Media has for centuries been a stronghold of male domination, and a mechanism used to create stereotypes of all kinds. The media has been used in many ways to perpetuate superiority and to create a stereotype image of women, be it homely housewifery image or a sex symbol image etc. If we are serious about a new humanness, a recognition of the worth and value of every person then we need to carefully monitor the very basis of the propaganda machinery which is the media. We therefore make the following recommendations:-

1. that there should be an independent monitoring group to monitor all media.
2. that this group should have a strong presence of women, and gender conscious people.
3. that the group should immediately begin to identify the stereotyping process and prevent its dissemination.
4. that in fact it should encourage, as an affirmative action, programmes to educate people, particularly women on their rights and provide information on procedures they can follow to ensure adequate legal recourse.
5. As there is a large rate of illiteracy among women, in particular, the question of informing women about their voting rights should be undertaken by this group, using creative means of disseminating information.
6. this group should also ensure that women are encouraged to participate in the decision making processes, through creative media, depicting female role models, and actively discouraging popular current stereotypes.