

# THIRD EYE EDITION

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## Voicing protest



It was Bob Dylan who sang "*Democracy don't rule the world, you'd better get that in your head. This world is ruled by violence/But I guess it better left unsaid.*" Violence against women is the stark reality all around the globe, cutting across cultures and ideologies. Not only is the woman unsafe in public spaces, but the four walls of her home conceal the tragic story of terrible abuse, deprivation and humiliation. India is a nation that reveres goddesses and then desecrates the sanctity of women in countless ways. There is a need to make a commitment against violence against women by making the government accountable and the society responsive for ending it. This is a battle not just against silence but also indifference, akin to apathy. It is truly disturbing to learn that up to half of all women who muster up the courage to leave an abusive relationship will return to live with the perpetrator, sometimes five or more times after escaping. However, it is heartening to note through the data collected that there is an increased awareness among the community to report such matters to the relevant authorities. Collection of information concerning domestic violence has been easy following measures taken by the police to introduce a special desk to educate the public to stop domestic violence in all districts.

North East Network (NEN) is a women's rights organisation working in the North East Region of India with a focus on women's human rights. Ever since its inception in 1995, its role has been that of a facilitator to empower women of this region around issues of livelihood, health, conflict and governance through capacity building, awareness raising, networking, research and advocacy. NEN was the first organisation in the North East to initiate the International Campaign to Stop Violence Against Women and Girls in 2002. Since then, both government and non-government groups have been observing the campaign at different levels. NEN has raised different issues related to women's rights violations such as witch-

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hunting, impact of ethnic conflict and displacement on women, marginal representation of women etc. Once again NEN has plans to be part of the International Campaign to Stop Violence Against Women and Girls 2012 from November 25 to December 10. This campaign was launched by the first Women's Global Leadership Institute, USA in 1991. The United Nations General Assembly declared November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The white ribbon has become the symbol for the day as well as the campaign. The campaign ends on December 10, which is the Human Rights Day. The dates symbolically link VAW and human rights, organisations committed to fighting VAW use this as an opportunity to mobilise public opinion against all forms of VAW and to draw more people into the struggle for women's rights.

After being the first to initiate this campaign in the North East in 2002, North East Network has been working actively to ensure a violence-free world for women. Since then, both government and non-government groups have been observing the campaign at different levels.

NEN has raised different issues related to women's rights violations such as this year, the highlight of NEN's campaign is 'Safety for Women in Public Places' with the message that women have the right to live without fear and insecurity. Plans are afoot to mobilise the youth to do a street survey in Guwahati on the issue of women's safety. The survey will attempt to bring forth the various forms of harassment experienced by women in public, understanding how women respond to harassment and the role of different stake holders in safeguarding the rights of women. As part of the campaign, NEN also plans to organise a poster exhibition to convey the message to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls, both in public and private spaces. The campaign activities will culminate in a play, *Eti Mrinalini* by Jirsong Theatre, in which a woman critically redefines selfhood by questioning the domestic oppression of married women in a family. This year's campaign coincides with the One Billion Rising – a global campaign that promises that millions of men and women will pledge around the world to end violence.

The campaign partners on this occasion are the Government College of Art and Crafts and Action Aid, Guwahati. Violence against women persists around the world and is a pervasive violation of human rights and a major impediment to achieving gender equality, development and peace. The international human rights conventions and treaties recognise the right to be free from violence as a human right for all. The world over, there has been different types of efforts to stop VAW. One such protest movement is the International Fortnight to end VAW, known as the 16 Days of Activism. November 25 is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, November 29 is the International Human Rights Defenders' Day, November 30 is the South Asian Women's Day for Peace, Justice, Human Rights and Democracy, December 1 is World AIDS Day, December 3 is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, while December 6 is observed as Zero Tolerance Day towards any form of VAW/White Ribbon Day and December 10 is International Human Rights Day.