

**DEADLY DISCRIMINATION: not just a case of sexist tea making policies.**

When researching the material for this article I was overwhelmed by how much information there is out there and just how little I know about the abuse of women and their rights. For example: More than 15,000 women are sold into slavery every year in China. We all believe, or at least we should, that every human being has the right to be treated with respect and integrity, yet we know this is often not the case. Violence against women is one of the most pervasive and well-hidden forms of human rights violations that exist in almost every country and which are committed on a daily basis. I have included here just some of the information I was shocked and sickened to discover.

*INDIA:* In February 2001, after an attack on a train in which 59 people, reported to be Hindus, were killed, ruthless violence targeting the Muslim community killed more than 2000 people in the Indian state of Gujarat. Large numbers of women were beaten, stripped naked and gang raped, stabbed with iron rods, swords and sticks, mutilated, disfigured and often burnt alive. Human Right's activists have stated that women's bodies were specifically targeted as symbols of honour as a way to attack the whole community. In many cases, victims were made to file reports with officers who either effused to record their statements, had co-operated with their attackers or who had themselves taken part in the violence.

*TURKEY:* Victims of sexual assault, by public officials as well as by private individuals, continue to be silenced by further humiliation, punishment and persecution. Forced 'virginity tests' can result in violent attacks and even death. The mere threat of a test, can be enough to cause 'stained honour' and psychological damage. Women that have spoken out, as well as their lawyers, have been subjected to threats and imprisonment. Inadequacies and inequality in the state legal system has meant little or nothing has been done to bring the perpetrators.

*RUSSIA:* Everyday, 36,000 women are beaten by their husbands or partners. Every forty minutes a woman is killed by violence in the home. However, domestic violence is not recognized as a criminal offence in the Russian Federation. Many women are forcibly caught up in the business of trafficking for the purposes of prostitution to countries such as Japan, USA, Canada, Germany, Italy, Greece, China, Syria, where they have no legal rights to protect themselves or would only face deportation and reprisals if they sought help.

*USA:* In the United States a woman is raped every six minutes. All women suffer the

daily threat of violence and harassment, and women of colour, disproportionately, further experience abusive treatment from the police, and other officials as well as unfair social policies. In prisons across the United States many women are sexually abused by other inmates and staff. Many states lack laws prohibiting custodial sexual conduct and some legislation allows the inmates to be criminally liable for sexual conduct with staff.

*PAKISTAN:* Most perpetrators of 'honour killings' enjoy virtual impunity in Pakistan due to discriminatory laws and the indifference of the police force. Women must accept male control over every aspect of their lives. Victims of rape are sometimes viewed as having brought shame on their male relatives and are so attacked or often killed. Customs, tradition, religion are used to cover up domestic violence, oppression and sexual discrimination. Women have no opportunities to respond to allegations or means to take legal action, even when a husband attacks his wife only because he dreamt of her being unfaithful.

*AFRICA:* Marital rape is not a crime in Kenyan law and so women who are attacked by their husbands have no avenue by which they can seek help or speak out. Violence against women is ignored or even condoned. In Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa social, economic and legal inequalities together with sexual violence means that many women are denied basic health care putting them at risk of contracting HIV and AIDS. In Ghana, women are still subjected to FGM, female genitalia mutilation. Sharia Law in Nigeria, followed in some northern states, allows women that are convicted of adultery to be stoned to death.

*MEXICO:* Rape has been frequently used as a form of torture by the security forces in Mexico. And women taking part in community organizations, peasant unions have risked being 'disappeared' or killed. Indigenous women are more at risk because they normally do not speak Spanish and are seen as more vulnerable. Women are too scared to make official complaints for fear of further attacks, and when they do, officials accused of human rights violations are mostly transferred or even promoted.

Just raising your awareness of the issues that women, and all humans, around the world face is an important step. Perhaps, when dealing with your own problems here in Japan, it can help you, on the one hand put things into perspective, but on the other see them as part of more complex questions that need to be addressed.

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