



# VOW

Voices  
of  
Women

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## New Beginnings

By Urmila Bhoola

Executive Director of IWRAW Asia Pacific

Dear Friends,

Greetings for the New Year! May this be a year of inspiration and strength in advancing the women's human rights agenda in the region and globally! "Forward ever, backwards never", a slogan we used in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, is an apt one to reflect on in this Chinese Year of the Horse. It reflects the challenges of maintaining the gains made in advancing women's human rights, ensuring non-regression and ending impunity in compliance with the international legal and normative framework endorsed in the last two decades - the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1993 Vienna Human Rights Declaration and Programme of Action; the ICPD Programme of Action (ICPD PoA) and the Key Actions (ICPD+5), and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). This year, as we embark on review of MDG goal 3; demand a human rights framework for economic development in the post 2015 Sustainable Development agenda as well as a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's human rights; continue to our engagement in the Treaty Body Strengthening Process; and advance a women's human rights paradigm in the ICPD Beyond 2014, we need to address the challenges presented to the women's movement by increasing cultural relativism, religious fundamentalism, and socio-economic inequalities. Women continue to experience discrimination as a result of intersecting and multiples grounds including race, ethnic and cultural origin, religion, rural and indigenous status, LGBTIQ status, HIV/AIDS status and disability. Women in conflict and post-conflict situations continue to experience brutal deprivation of fundamental



human rights, and violence against women and girls remains endemic. Repression of rights of women workers (often accompanied by extreme police violence as in Cambodia) is intensifying in the SEA region and women are particularly affected by land invasions and dispossession of land rights. This means our efforts to ensure due diligence and accountability have to focus not only on governments but also on business and international finance institutions.

2013 saw us undertake key activities to advance our vision and mission - including growing a cadre of 100 young women as CEDAW advocates from the ASEAN region; drafting a framework for indicators to measure access to justice; expanding our CEDAW Compliance Framework to audit laws for rights compliance; and expanding our litigation and law reform initiatives. It also marked our 20<sup>th</sup> year of existence since the organisation was started by Shanthi Dairiam in 1993. Shanthi chairs the IWRAW AP board and continues to guide our programmes and mentor staff. In December 2013 we finalised our strategic plan for 2014-6 with robust participation from our board, advisory committee, partners and staff at a retreat in Penang (pictured above). We look forward to forging ahead into our

21<sup>st</sup> year with renewed commitment and with the support of our key stakeholders and donors. We look forward to consolidating our capacity building and rights realization work in the region, to impacting on the ASEAN processes and mechanisms as part of the Women's Caucus, participating in the Beijing Plus 20 review process, and continuing our efforts to maximise women's participation in global, regional and national processes. Thematically, we will continue to explore and expand the interfaces between CEDAW and other international instruments such as UN ICESCR, and those relating to trafficking, business and labour practices to support harmonious interpretation and application by States towards holistic protection of women's human rights at the national level.

Thank you to all our national partners and constituents for your support. We also thank our donors, board and advisory bodies for their continued advice. Lastly, a word of acknowledgement for the formidable IWRAW AP staff for their commitment and support in my new role. I look forward to meeting and working with those partners I have not yet met, and to receiving your input and ideas for future collaboration. Forward ever, backwards never!

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# Highlights of 2013

*"We can change the world and make it a better place. It is in your hands to make a difference." - Nelson Mandela*

## **"From Global to Local":**

Intensive mentoring and capacity building for activists and NGOs from reporting countries to the 54th, 55th and 56th CEDAW Committee review sessions were held as we continue to support NGOs in their state reviews to take various measures to align laws and policies with CEDAW.

## **CEDAW Follow-up:**

During the 56th session we also participated in the Committee's day of discussion on rural women in a joint submission with FIAN coordinated by Denisse Cordova. Our staff supported NGOs from Andorra, Moldova, Colombia, Benin, Cambodia, Tajikistan and Seychelles in their oral submissions. We followed up a meeting with NGO-CEDAW in Cambodia in November to discuss the rights of garment workers, indigenous women and land invasions and the link to Concluding Observations. We facilitated a workshop in October with NGOs from the Caribbean region (Jamaica, Bahamas and Guyana) and the local women's machineries to identify areas for policy and law changes to comply with CEDAW.

**Access to Justice:** We held workshops on CEDAW monitoring and implementation with national human rights institutions in Timor-Leste and the Philippines, as well as a regional dialogue with Southeast Asian NHRIs and ASEAN human rights mechanisms on enhancing realisation of women's human rights and access to justice in the region.

In August, a regional consultation on CEDAW implementation in the context of access to justice was held with representatives of gen-

der machineries and the justice sector from seven countries in Southeast Asia. At the consultation, a framework was developed for indicators on access to justice for women in Southeast Asia.

## **Litigating women's human rights using CEDAW:**

In the midst of the conflict in Syria and the ongoing protests in Egypt and Tunisia, we conducted a Dialogue with Judges on trafficking as well as an intensive workshop in Beirut on litigating women's human rights using CEDAW for lawyers from Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt. Our work in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region culminated in a Seminar for over 100 lawyers convened with the Beirut Bar Council and Avenir Liban in Beirut, Leba-

non, in December, as well as a Jordan National Level Workshop for 18 lawyers in Amman organised in collaboration with Sisterhood is Global Institute to promote CEDAW as an effective litigation and remedial mechanism to address women's human rights.

## **CEDAW and ICESCR:**

In November 2013 we held a Regional Dialogue between Governments and NGOs to promote Justice for Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in South East Asia in Putrajaya, Malaysia. We focused on Optional Protocols (of CEDAW and ICESCR) for South East Asia countries in order to promote ratification of Optional Protocols and accountability of governments in the promotion of women's human rights.

## Declaration on Human Rights Defenders

On 29 November 2013 the General Assembly adopted the "**Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms**", abbreviated as the "Declaration on human rights defenders". This landmark Declaration provides protection for women human rights defenders, who are often killed, harassed, abused and discriminated against for their work in defending women's rights. Article 7 of the Declaration calls upon States to ensure that women human rights defenders, can perform their important role in the context of peaceful protests, in accordance with national legislation consistent with the

Charter of the United Nations and international human rights law, and in this regard to ensure that no one is subject to excessive or indiscriminate use of force, arbitrary arrest or detention, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, enforced disappearance, abuse of criminal and civil proceedings or threats of such acts. Article 8 requires States to exercise due diligence in preventing violations and abuses against human rights defenders and in combating impunity by ensuring that those responsible for violations and abuses, including gender-based violence and threats against women human rights defenders, committed by State and non-State actors, including online, are promptly brought to justice through impartial investigations.

# Programme Highlight: From Global to Local



Participants from 56th 'From Global to Local'

"From Global to Local" is a programme designed to fill the gap between human rights monitoring by the CEDAW Committee at the inter-national level, and grassroots activism of NGOs de-manding government accountability at the national level.

This is done by providing an opportunity for local and national non-governmental organisations, especially those focusing on women's human rights, to engage with and impact the CEDAW review process of States parties to the CEDAW Convention through submission of alternative information (shadow reports) and dialogue with Committee members.

Through the From Global to Local programme, We have supported national NGOs to have a continuous presence at CEDAW Sessions since 1997.

*"This is a space helping us to have a better understanding of the mechanisms of the CEDAW at the same time that allow the participation of national non-governmental organizations to provide input on issues related to the rights of women in the country"*

**Yolanda Sanchez Contreras, Colombia (G2L participant)**

## Quarter 1 Calendar

In Quarter 1 of 2014, we will continue with the CEDAW Compliance Framework (CCF) work with Vietnam, Timor Leste, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Thailand, and Lao PDR. The National Consultation with Women's Machinery work with Cambodia, Lao PDR and Timor Leste and the Young Women's Project in Lao PDR, Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia will also run concurrently. Also, we're working on a new website design, scheduled to finish mid-quarter 1.

In **January**, we will participate in the 3rd Regional Consultation for ACSC/APF 2014. We have also planned the National Workshop for Lawyers in Lebanon.

In **February**, the Optional Protocol Case Clinic is in the works for Macedonia. The 57th Session of 'From Global to Local' CEDAW Review Process for Bahrain, Cameroon, Finland, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Qatar, and Sierra Leone will be held in Geneva, Switzerland.

In **March**, IWRAW Asia Pacific will be part of the Drafting Committee for the ASEAN People's Forum that will be held in Yangon, Myanmar. A Shadow Report Training in Georgia is also in the works. Lastly, the Regional Training of Trainers for Young Women will take place in March/early April.

Watch this space for our quarterly programme updates!

## Who's at the Office?

In 2013 (and early 2014) we had to say goodbye to many of our Programme Officers: Wathshlah Naidu, Gauri Bhopatkar, Gayathiri Jambulingam, and Rebecca Everly. Thanks for all your hard work and we wish all of you only the best in your future endeavors!

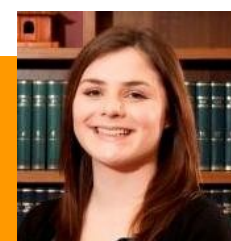
However, say hello to the new staff members! We welcome Norbaya Mohd Saini (Accounts Officer), Phang Lai Yoong, (Admin Officer), Shanti Uprety (Programme Officer), and Suraya Zainudin (Junior Programme Officer).

We are also proud to host

Sally Harris from Monash University, Australia who is interning in 'From Global to Local' programme as well as Alifa Bandali from University of Sydney who is working on a research paper.

**The current permanent team (top; from left): Lai Yoong, Shanti (Saan), Ayesha, Li Ping, Urmila, Dorothy, Audrey, Baya and Suraya**

**Researcher Alifa Bandali (right) Intern Sally Harris (furthest right)**





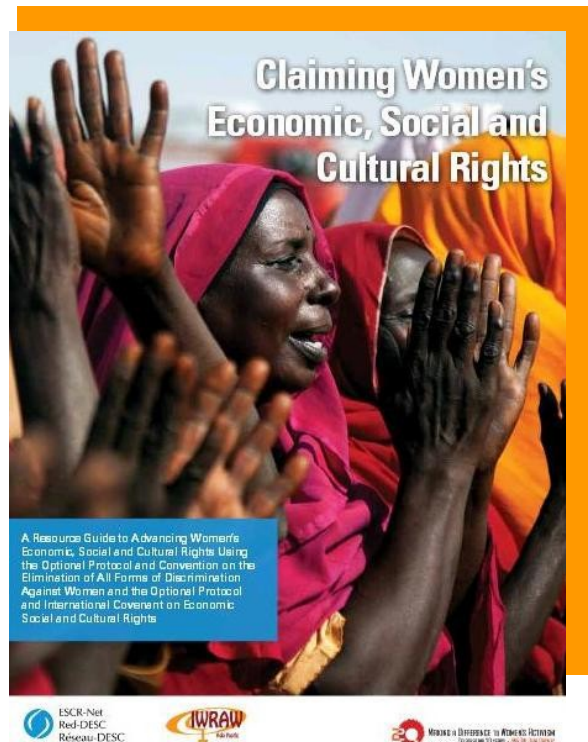
# Highlight: Our Publication

**Title:** Claiming Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: A Resource Guide to Advancing Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights using the Optional Protocol and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Optional Protocol and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2013).

This 178-page manual was jointly developed by IWRAW Asia Pacific and ESCR Net and was made possible through the generous support of Oxfam Novib, Ford Foundation, AJWS and Hivos.

This manual provides an overview of women's ESC rights and State's obligations, as well as guidance on argumentation, strategy and resources when submitting communications or seeking an inquiry under both Optional Protocols.

You can download the manual free of charge at our website: [www.iwraw-ap.org/publications](http://www.iwraw-ap.org/publications)



## ON GR30:

*On October 13, 2013 at the 56<sup>th</sup> CEDAW Session in Geneva, Switzerland, the CEDAW Committee adopted General Recommendation No. 30 on: Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations. The primary aim and purpose of the general recommendation as stated by the CEDAW Committee is to "provide authoritative guidance to States parties on legislative, policy and other appropriate measures to ensure full compliance with their obligations under the Convention to protect, respect and fulfill women's human rights. It also builds upon principles articulated in previously adopted general recommendations."*

## Remembering Sunila...

Award-winning Sri Lankan human rights activist Sunila Abeysekera passed away peacefully on 9 September 2013. She served as IWRAW Asia Pacific's Executive Director from 2008 to 2010 and leaves behind a legacy of humble and compassionate leadership. Sunila is remembered with fond memories.



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International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific is an international women's human rights organisation. Since 1993, we have worked to contribute to the progressive interpretation and realisation of the human rights of women through the lens of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other international human rights treaties.

We promote the domestic implementation of international human rights standards by building the capacity of women and human rights advocates to claim and realise women's human rights. We do this through our 3 key strategies Building Capacity for Change, Enhancing Realisation of Rights and Information, Dissemination Application and Exchange Strategy (IDEAS) which encompass training, communication, information, education, advocacy and support national level women's organizations and community groups working to improve the lives of women.