

RESOLUTIONS OF THE 35TH TRIENNIAL CONVENTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN LAWYERS (FIDA) HELD AT THE LALIT ASHOK HOTEL, BANGALORE, INDIA FROM NOVEMBER 15 TO 18, 2014.

The 35th Convention of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) held at the Lalit Ashok Hotel in Bangalore, India from November 15 to 18, 2014. A total of 450 delegates from 14 countries –Bahamas, Colombia, Cameroon, Ghana, India, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Uganda, United Kingdom, Taiwan and India attended the Convention.

The theme of the Convention was: ***Changing Lives, Changing Societies, Changing Status of Women*** and members deliberated on various related subthemes and relevant thereto namely: Violence Against Women, Access to Justice, Health and Women's Rights to their Bodies, Economic Rights, Women as Leaders and Women at the Work Place. Topics discussed were: Female Genital Mutilation, Trafficking, Domestic Violence, Access to Courts, Access to Enforcement Agencies, Legal Aid, Surrogacy, Abortion, STDs and AIDS, Gender Equality through equal rights in property, Gender Equality as Smart Economics, Removing Barriers to Economic Inclusion, Access to Education, Women Leadership – Empowering Societies, Reservation – A Step Forward/Backward?, Corruption Free Society - the Role of Women, Ensuring Constitutional Compliance, Family, Motherhood and Development Goals, Barriers to Entry for Women Lawyers, Harassment at the Work Place and the Role of Women Associations.

At the conclusion of the deliberations at the Convention, FIDA members:

Recognising that the safety, dignity and physical integrity of women are paramount irrespective of cultural beliefs and practices;

Concerned that women and children need protection from cultural beliefs which affect their safety, dignity and integrity, and that legislation and education are required in that regard;

Concerned that trafficking in women and girls has continued at an alarming rate, in spite of national and international legislation prohibiting it;

Noting that many women and children have been killed or maimed as a result of domestic violence;

Acknowledging that Access to justice should be an active rather than passive right which must be recognised by all agencies of government;

Recognising that women have a right to take decisions regarding their own bodies and the duty of the state to recognise and protect this right through appropriate policies and legislation, as well as education.

Noting that gender equality, economic inclusion and access to education would aid the protection of women's economic rights especially their rights to property;

Acknowledging that women are sufficiently equipped to play leadership roles in society which governments through the enactment and implementation of policies and legislation can encourage;

Recognising that women constitute a majority of the poor and are likely to be more severely affected by corruption which affects poorer sections of the population;

Recognizing that women can play a significant role in combatting corruption which is a destructive cankerworm in all societies;

Noting that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is dependent on effective governance principles such as combatting corruption and embedding transparency and accountability principles in all the processes;

Recognising that the interests of women need to be protected at the work place especially given the critical motherhood and family responsibilities they bear;

Recognising that the peculiar challenges that women in the legal profession face vis-a-vis their other societal roles and the existence of a glass ceiling in a significant number of employment situations, limit the ability of female lawyers to aspire to and achieve the greatest heights of the profession;

RESOLVED to work through its various members, branches and affiliates to:

Female Genital Mutilation:

- Support and promote legislation as well as education that prohibits female genital mutilation as well as other practices inimical to the dignity, safety and integrity of women and children, while withholding support for legislation and practices detrimental to the interests of women;
- Ensure that the training of women is undertaken by cultural mediators who have a good knowledge and appreciation of women's rights, the law and local circumstances;

Trafficking

- Provide protection and assistance to all victims of trafficking and encourage the institution of education programmes in schools and universities among all communities, especially where trafficking is prevalent.

Violence against Women

- Support the passage of policies and legislation protecting women from violence and to ensure effective implementation of existing laws in favour of women
- Partner with the media to popularise laws prohibiting violence against women and facilities available for women to obtain relief.
- Partner with boys and men and involve them in all initiatives being undertaken to protect women.
- Support the passage of laws to empower victims of violence.

Access to Justice

- Urge states to recognise the vulnerabilities of women and accordingly, ensure that relevant legislation is in place where none presently exist and/or are updated and implemented where they exist; to promote access to justice by providing women easy and uncomplicated access for the protection and enforcement of their rights;
- Urge states to enshrine efficient and effective processes by its agencies for the treatment of complaints by women and the girl child and securing conviction and punishment of offenders to serve as a deterrent to others;

Corruption Free Society – The Role of Women

- Welcome the articulation of the Sustainable Development Goals which will be very beneficial to the cause of women and vulnerable groups if effectively implemented;
- Join the discussions with relation to the implementation of the SDGs and promote the integration of requisite principles of accountability and transparency which will serve to promote the interests of women;

Surrogacy

- Recognise that the practice of surrogacy is growing in response to the yearnings of families who are unable have children by other more traditional methods
- Enact legislation to regulate the practice of surrogacy in all states where none exist, in order to protect the interest of all the stakeholders in the process as well as the children who are the products of such arrangements;
- Actively combat all arrangements created and framed as surrogacy, but which in fact, which serve as conduits for ritual killing, trafficking in children and other acts inimical to the best interests of the child;

Abortion, STDs and AIDS

- Ensure that legislation and policies recognize the right of women to take decisions regarding their bodies;
- Work to ensure that governments pay greater attention to issues of women's health by improving access to safe and affordable family planning facilities and ensuring that health services reach young married women, and women who cannot leave the home;
- Encourage education and awareness of society as a whole on the dangers of STDs and provide for free or in the alternative, affordable and stigma free treatment of women who oftentimes are in weaker positions with respect to their ability to negotiate sexual relations with their partners and consequently bear the brunt of illness and loss of income, lives, etc.;

Gender Equality and Women Economic Inclusion

- Urge states to pass legislation and adopt policies or implement existing ones, which engender equality and protect the economic and property rights of women, consistent with constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination and advocating equality;
- Engage in programmes prioritising education and the economic empowerment of women, in the acknowledgment of the fact that investing in women and girls is smart economics;

Women Leadership and Reservation

- Work with governments to promote peaceful and equitable societies and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions to promote the participation of women in leadership and decision making;

- Promote the practice of reservation (affirmative action) to facilitate the entry and retention of women in leadership and decision making positions;
- Ensure the appointment of women to Boards of corporations by instituting and enforcing minimum gender balancing standards through relevant regulatory agencies;

Family, Motherhood and Development Goals

- Provide an enabling environment that recognises and supports the family and motherhood aspirations of women as well as their interest in participating in societal development by the institution of policies like flexible working hours and remote working facilities;

Harassment at the Work Place

- Recognise the right of women to fulfilment and self-actualisation in the work place and ensure the implementation of legislation and processes which protect these rights;

Barriers to Entry for Women Lawyers

- Work with Bar Associations and Employers' Associations to ensure a conducive working environment for female lawyers to ensure that they are able to practice and attain fulfilment and achievement at all levels in the legal profession and are not forced to seek alternative employment;

Role of Women Associations

- Work with women associations to reduce the social and economic marginalisation of women and create access to markets and credits;
- Encourage cooperation and strategic partnerships among women associations.

Dated the 18th day of November 2014
Bangalore, India.

Members of the Resolutions Committee:

1. Ezinwa Okoroafor (Nigeria) - Chair
2. Sugandhini Rajaruthnam (South Africa)
3. Gladys Mbuyah (Cameroon)

4. Sylva G Aguire
5. Karthika (India)