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# PRESS RELEASE

## **Indian authorities must urgently combat sexual violence against women**

The Canadian Sikh Association (CSA) expresses its grave concern over the glaring problems with prosecutions for sexually motivated crimes in India. The recent arrests of 7 men in the northern state of Punjab on Friday continue to highlight the alarming trend within the country on this critical issue that has many around the globe, including expatriates, very worried about the welfare of women and girls in India as well as the resulting negative international image of the country.

The recent death of the 23 year old student who was gang raped on a Delhi bus in December 2012, along with other recent incidents of sexual violence, must serve as a important reminder that government officials must do more to protect the mothers and daughters of the country. Although that case is making its way through the court system, there are still other similar assaults occurring on a regular basis without proper investigations and prosecutions.

Rape is the fastest growing crime in India. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the number of rape cases registered in India increased by 873.3 %, from 2,487 in 1971 to 24,206 in 2011. New Delhi recorded 572 rapes in 2011; that total is up 17 percent this year.

In order to be credible in their response to this crisis, Indian politicians and officials must act swiftly to update India's archaic rape laws and do more for the victims of these heinous crimes, including instituting a proper system of investigation and prosecution.

The CSA supports the reforms put forward by organizations such as Amnesty International, which calls on the Indian government to bring their current rape laws in line with the highest of international standards. However, similar to Amnesty International's recommendations, the CSA also does not favour the death penalty or chemical castration as punishment for those convicted.

# CANADIAN SIKH ASSOCIATION



The CSA supports criminalizing all forms of sexual and gender-based violence as well as minimizing the potential for re-traumatization of victims and ensuring the provision of adequate support for victims. In this regard, there is a pressing need for rape shield laws to be enacted in the Indian criminal code. The government must also act immediately to support victims especially when they take part in prosecutions against their alleged attackers.

The CSA urges the government to broaden the scope of the crime of rape to include any non-consensual sexual conduct involving penetration and also remove immunity from criminal prosecution for sexual and gender-based crimes where members of the police and armed forces are the alleged perpetrators.

The CSA also calls for immediately discontinuing the dehumanizing and repulsive ‘two-finger test’ during medical exams. The test is still considered acceptable courtroom evidence. It is conducted during medical examinations of alleged rape victims where a doctor inserts two fingers into a woman's vagina to determine its laxity and whether the hymen is broken, signaling previous sexual activity. It is a practice of many doctors to record such unscientific methods and degrading treatment to invariably discredit those who report these crimes.

Friday’s attack bore similarities to the high-profile case of the 23-year-old woman who was gang raped, beaten and then thrown out of a bus in Delhi. Her case has sparked unprecedented interest and condemnation not only in India but also across the world. This has led to protests across India and has caused this issue to attract more media attention.

Furthermore, the female survivors of the Sikh genocide of November, 1984 who were raped and or murdered are still awaiting justice from the authorities in India. These women survivors and their families continue to deal with the trauma without assistance or support from the authorities. The victims of those attacks have been long seeking action from the authorities for action on sexual violence, but to date the authorities have not offered a credible response.

The recent tragic case of the 23-year-old woman has again brought to the forefront this tragic state of affairs facing women in India. The tragic circumstances and seriousness of this recent incident has rekindled a sense of urgency and importance of addressing this issue especially among women. The CSA calls on the authorities in India to act immediately to protect the mothers and daughters of that country by implementing the necessary legislation, providing the necessary resources and support for victims as well as providing adequate protection for women to move freely within India without any fear.

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