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NCW says no to dilution of anti-dowry law

AASHA KHOSA

 TO EDITOR  EMAIL  PRINT

Posted online: Friday, November 25, 2005 at 0308 hours IST

NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 24: The National Commission for Women (NCW) and womens' groups have again rejected suggestions to dilute the anti-dowry law, saying it would be an insult to thousands of women who are killed by greedy in-laws.

The Commission, which kicked off consultations for reviewing the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, rather asserted that the law needs to be made more stringent.

Justice Malimath in his report on review of the criminal justice system had suggested that Section 498A be made bailable and non-compoundable as it was being misused too.

"Demands are made from the woman's family by in-laws for years after the marriage and this does not constitute dowry under existing laws," NCW chairperson Girija Vyas said.

"For this reason the NCW wants that the very definition of dowry be widened."

The consultations were attended by chairpersons of all the state women commissions, directors-general of police, and NGOs engaged in ensuring women their rights.

"The meeting rejected, in one voice, the suggestion to make bride-burning a bailable and non-compoundable crime," Vyas told the Express. "In fact, we are doubly sure now that Section 498A is the only weapon to avenge the killing of women for dowry."

Speakers at the meeting said, "Which law is immune to being misused, and why target a pro-women legislation?"

However, Vyas said the government could streamline the implementation of dowry laws to minimise misuse. Vyas said that even today, "the bulk of criminal cases pertaining to women are about dowry".

The key points raised at the meeting:

- Massive overhauling of anti-dowry laws to address to the changing times where greedy in-laws have found new ways to circumvent existing laws
- Members of legislatures, and public servants should be made to sign a mandatory declaration that they have not asked for dowry at the time of their of children's marriage
- Men and women holding public offices should conduct marriages without vulgar display of wealth
- A woman who has slapped charges of dowry harassment on her in-laws should be free to go to court where her parents reside
- Strict guidelines should be issued to the police for investigation cases of dowry deaths on the lines of one existing for custodial deaths.

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