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SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORKPLACE

Formulate law as per HC directive: speakers

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Speakers at a press conference yesterday urged the government to formulate a law to prevent sexual harassment at workplace, as per the 2009 directives of the High Court.

They also demanded implementation of a High Court directive to form committees at every workplace to prevent incidents of such harassment.

Gender Platform -- a coalition of six human rights and labour organisations -- held the programme at Jatiya Press Club. Ainun Nahar, coordinator of the platform, read out a written statement.

In the statement, she spoke of the context of directives given by the High Court in 2009.

“It is regrettable that no law has been passed yet, while no institution has taken initiative to implement those directives,” Nahar said.

On May 14, 2009, the HC issued a set of guidelines defining sexual misdemeanor, to prevent any kind of physical, mental or sexual harassment of women, girls and children at their workplaces, educational institutions and other public places including roads across the country, in response to a writ petition.

The HC directed the government to formulate a law on the basis of the guidelines, and ruled that the guidelines will be treated as a law until the law is implemented.

The HC directed the authorities concerned to form a five-member harassment complaint committee headed by a woman at every workplace and institution, to investigate allegations of harassment against women.

Majority of the committee members must be women, it ruled.

Referring to recent media reports, Nahar said, “The number of sexual harassment incidents at workplaces and in educational institutions has increased.”

She placed a three-point demand to prevent sexual harassment -- adoption of law, formation of committee at every workplace, and ratification of the convention 190 of ILO.

ILO’s convention 190 is a commitment regarding “elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work”.

Advocate Fawzia Karim Feroze, executive director of Bangladesh Women Lawyers Association; ZM Kamrul Anam, secretary general of Bangladesh Labour Foundation; Nazma Akter, executive director of Awaz Foundation; Sanzida Sultana, director of Kormojibi Nari; and Nazma Yeasmin, director of Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies, were also present at the programme.