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INTERVENTION

Johaira Wahab / Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsa Moro

PHILIPPINES

AGENDA ITEM # 6: National Practices and Experiences – Positive Measures/Affirmative Action and Role Models

Thank you, Madame Chair.

Today, we are not only in conversation with governments, we are also negotiating with cultures.

In relation to Draft Recommendation no. 30, I would like to share the experience of Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsa Moro (NISA) in our campaign for the amendment of Presidential Decree no. 1083 or the Code of Muslim Personal Laws in the Philippines.

NISA works with clear recognition that advocacy for women's rights in minorities treads not just law and policy but also the domain of minority cultures. Such discourse on cultures does not take place with governments, nor with majority communities. Rather most of it happens among the members of the minority itself.

We in NISA are all women from minority communities. We acknowledge the legitimacy of our cultural and religious identities, the dynamics of discourse and the structures of political and social influence. We acknowledge these realities, and we have been developing our campaign around them.

In advocating for change, here are some of the strategies we found useful:

1. **Targeted and focused advocacy:** In the past 4 years, NISA has specifically targeted the issue of gender justice in the Muslim family as a way to advance women's rights. We believe that there can be no equality in society without equality in the family, so we focused on rights of women in the private spheres as a starting point.
2. **Research and data:** NISA invests significant amount of its resources and programs on social research, with meticulous analysis of impact and not just the gathering of disaggregated data. With reliable data, good scholarship and analysis, policy makers will have less excuse to ignore one's recommendations.
3. **Alliances with similar organizations:** NISA is part of MUSAWAH, a global network of organizations and individuals that works particularly for equality in Muslim families. This network is a good source of reference materials, scholarship, resource persons and exchange of regional experiences.

4. **Closed group advocacies:** Dealing with sectors of the minority community separately, depending on factors, i.e. relative openness or receptiveness to women's rights, relative social or political influences, or relative opposition to the issue, and nurturing relationships with them also help. This way one can address specific concerns, challenges and potential objection to one's advocacy. It is also an opportunity to turn potential spoilers into allies.
5. **Study sessions:** NISA started with organizing in-depth study sessions and training of trainers for minority women to address discomfort or knowledge/awareness gaps on women's rights in Islam. This way, one can address apprehensions or fears that claiming women's rights may be inconsistent with one's cultural or religious beliefs or identities. Thus, this strategy is both transformative and empowering.
6. **Packaging:** In many cases, oppositions to minority women's issues can be addressed with compromise in terminology, though not in substance. For example, instead of insisting on the use of "women's rights" which invites opposition, NISA uses "justice in Muslim families" or "gender justice" as a way to advance the same issues.

In minority communities where there is a prevailing sense of need to preserve identities amidst threats of cultural assimilation or integration, we must work with internal processes of evolving norms and dynamics of discourse, to effect change in social behavior, attitudes and opinions.

Even if we succeed to amend a law, if the minority community or the minority women themselves are not receptive to this change, out of fear or apprehension that it undermines their cultural and religious identities, then the advocacy will have been for naught.

Once again, my name is Johaira Wahab speaking for NISA UL HAQQ FI BANGSAMORO from the Philippines.

Thank you for your attention and wassalam.