

Statement

# **After India/Delhi gang-rape: No to sexual assault! Solidarity with the international movement against violence against women**

Monday 7 January 2013, by [Socialist Alliance \(Australia\)](#) (Date first published: 5 January 2013).

## **No to sexual assault! Socialist Alliance statement in solidarity with the international movement against violence against women.**

January 5, 2013 — The Socialist Alliance (Australia) stands in solidarity with the growing movement in India fighting violence against women. Progressive forces in that country have braved police brutality and repression, mobilising massive turnouts at protests against gender violence.

The wave of protests was sparked by the horrific rape on December 15, and the consequent death, of a 23-year-old woman in Delhi.

Indian activists report that a significant new movement against sexual violence has risen up and is putting serious pressure on the government to eliminate the institutionalised gender bias in laws and investigation mechanisms. Young and old people, women and men, who have never before participated in public protests are taking to the streets to demand gender justice.

The mass mobilisations in India's capital, and across the country, express an outpouring of anger at the endemic and growing prevalence of sexual violence experienced by women. Since 1971, incidents of rape in India have increased by 791%, while conviction rates have dropped to a mere 27%.

Like in Australia, many rapes go unreported, due to the anti-woman judiciary, traumatic police investigations, and suspicion and blame that women face when they speak out against their abuse.

The protests in India have also targeted the completely inadequate government response to sexual assault, and highlighted the involvement of police and military forces in perpetrating much sexual assault. Dalit and adivasi [Indigenous] women, in particular, are targeted by army and police personnel, while Indian security forces in Kashmir use rape systematically to subjugate and terrify the local population.

In 2012, Australia had the largest mobilisations in decades against sexual violence, following the brutal rape and murder of a young woman in the Melbourne suburb of Brunswick. Thousands of people rallied and marched to demand the right of all women to live without fear of sexual violence – in the streets or at home.

Australia has a high rate of sexual assault, with an estimated 20% of women over the age of 15 having experienced sexual abuse. [\[1\]](#)

Like in India, many women in Australia who report sexual violence find that they are not believed, or that they are themselves blamed for the assault. This is the result of a sexist society that reinforces gender inequality and stereotypes through the mass media, and religious, social and government institutions.

Sexual assault is also the most under-reported crime: an estimated 85% of women never report it because of shame or fear of recrimination and isolation (most perpetrators of gender violence are known to the victim).

And only 1 in 6 reports to police result in prosecution in Australia. This is a serious indictment of the gender bias within the legal system: from an assaulted woman's first contact with the police right through the court process.

Across the globe, including in First World countries such as Australia, sexism and discrimination are facts of life for most women. The oppression of women is woven into the fabric of capitalist society: in the home, in religious and educational institutions, in the media, in the judiciary and even in parliament. In such a society, sexual violence and the threat of it is used to control women.

Women's oppression benefits the capitalist rulers in many ways, from the unpaid labour that women perform in the home, to the divisive role of sexism in the working class which helps justify lower wages in traditionally "female" occupations.

In the wake of the brutal rape in Delhi, some establishment politicians and commentators have used the commitment to "protect" women to implicitly or explicitly propose further restrictions on women's freedom of movement and participation in society. One news outlet made a point of reporting that the young woman who was raped "wasn't dressed provocatively", as if this rape was unacceptable only because of the clothing she wore!

The Socialist Alliance condemns false "solutions" to the problem of sexual violence, including restricting women's freedom, dictating their behaviour, or allowing the state to reduce civil liberties through measures such as increased CCTV surveillance (one of the suggestions raised by mainstream commentators and politicians following the Brunswick attack).

The Socialist Alliance also opposes calls for the death penalty or chemical castration for rapists. This reactionary moralism fails to acknowledge that rape is a symptom of a misogynist social system and needs to be dealt with as such.

Women don't need paternalistic, moralistic "protection". We need equality, control over our bodies, and the right to participate fully and as equals – economically, socially, politically – in society.

Public protests against sexual violence are critical in helping to bring about this change. Women, with male supporters, taking to the streets to assert our rights is itself an empowering act that defies women's socially prescribed role as apolitical, passive, nurturing and silent.

Such protests also deter sexual violence by showing that women will not remain silent about it, and they add to the pressure on governments to take steps to eradicate sexism.

The Socialist Alliance supports calls for democratic reforms that improve women's safety and ability to participate fully in society, including: gender education from an early age, fast-tracking of judicial processes for sexual assault cases and gender-sensitive laws.

Sexual violence is a product of the inherently sexist nature of capitalist society and the Socialist Alliance campaigns for women's rights as part of our broader efforts to help create a society based on cooperation, respect and equality for all, regardless of sex, gender, race and ability.

Building such a society necessarily requires the full and central participation of women. For this reason, the Socialist Alliance welcomes and acts in solidarity with the mobilisations in India, which are bringing women onto the streets to demand change, just as we supported and participated in the larger-than-usual Reclaim the Night rallies around Australia last year in the wake of the Brunswick attack.

Until women are free, nobody will be free – in India, Australia and around the world.

---

---

**P.S.**

\* <http://links.org.au/node/3169>

---

## **Footnotes**

[1] See also Socialist Alliance's Charter for Women's Rights at <http://www.socialist-alliance.org/page.php?page=330>.