



## **Safe Campus Program**

**December 7, 2020**

*Women Empowerment Desk - Central Tibetan Administration  
with the Martha Farrell Foundation*

### **Background**

The Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) has a long standing partnership with the Women Empowerment Desk (WED), Department of Finance, Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamshala to address the issue of gender and countering gender-based violence in schools, colleges and settlements.

The partnership has led to the formulation, ratification and implementation of guidelines for prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) that are holistic, convergent in nature and keep the victim/survivor of SGBV at the centre. The guidelines have been framed and institutionalized with a view of establishing and strengthening this mechanism, and clearly outline strategies to bring tangible results in preventing and responding to SGBV for the Tibetan community in exile in India. It is the first ever document to do so.

### **Context**

Since the pandemic triggered a nation-wide lockdown in India, the movements for safety and countering gender based violence across the breadth of the nation has been set back by several decades.

As the 16 Days of Activism 2020 fell on the cusp of organisations, governments and educational institutions as well, the time was apt for a conversation with college students of the Tibetan community in India, and taking stock of their status of safety and security in their university spaces.

Through their inputs, the Martha Farrell Foundation and the Central Tibetan Administration would jointly share some of the key recommendations to the Association of Indian Universities (an apex inter-university organisation tasked with the growth and development of higher education institutions in India) to secure the rights and safety of every student on the campus.

### **The Safe Campus Program with Tibetan Students**

The Safe Campus Program with Tibetan students in India kicked off with a two hour conversation with 14 college students for the first round of discussion on December 7, 2020. The key themes of discussion were as follows:

- What are some of the most common situations of lack of safety in the colleges and campuses you have studied in/are studying in?
- Have you ever experienced a situation when you've felt threatened or unsafe on your college campus? What was the kind of institutional support you received from the authorities when you experienced this?



- Have you ever felt unsafe because of your race, identity, the food you eat or the cultures and customs you follow?
- Did you know that there are laws to protect you from instances of violence and harassment on campus? Where do you think the gaps lie in ensuring you're able to access justice?

## Key Learnings

- Sexual harassment, bullying, ragging, threatening behaviours with the use of weapons on campus, racist comments and harassment, are some of the most commonly faced issues to safety that continue to prevail on Indian university campuses by Tibetan students.
- There is an additional layer of race and identity that compounds the issues of safety felt by Tibetan students on campus spaces.
- Racism has been normalised to the extent that it has now become a point of jesting and humour among students on campus, including among people of the Tibetan community.
- Sexual harassment behaviours such as stalking, groping, catcalling and staring are faced, especially by women students of Tibetan origin. In cases, the instances of sexual harassment are perpetrated by members of their own community, as well as strangers who enter campuses at night. Further, authorities don't take much action in case of complaints filed.
- The UGC Guidelines for safety of students from sexual harassment on campuses were unknown to all the students. The information, in fact, remains unknown to a majority of students across the country, as revealed to Martha Farrell Foundation over many other conversations held under the Safe Campus Program.
- Redressal mechanisms for instances of violence are largely unavailable to students from the Tibetan community, as well as students at large.

## Recommendations

- Create a culture of safety and safe spaces on campus by regularly training students, faculty and administrative staff on creating safe, inclusive spaces for all, including personal steps they must take to ensure they don't encroach upon other people's safety and comfort.
- Draw out more conversations on racism and identifying instances of racism and behaviours that perpetrate it, to counter the normalisation of the behaviour.
- Authorities in the Indian as well as Tibetan governments must provide information on the laws and policies in place to ensure the safety of students of Tibetan origin on campuses.
- The UGC Guidelines to prevent sexual harassment on campuses are not being followed on campuses. Several students remain completely unaware of the existence of Internal Committees to take their grievances to. This must be countered by ensuring and establishing proper mechanisms, not just for redressal of grievances, but also for prevention and prohibition of instances of sexual harassment in campus spaces.
- Students must have equal and easy access to information about the Internal Committee set up for their protection through mandated display of the contact details of committee members across the campus spaces.
- Gender sensitisation and training to end the culture of violence and sexual harassment within the Tibetan community, as well as the Indian community is essential to counter gender disparity and lack of safety on campus spaces.
- More conversations on safety and security need to be held to break the heavy silence surrounding topics of violence, harassment and sexual and gender-based violence among students of the Tibetan community residing and studying on Indian college campuses.