UN Volunteers ride the bus against gender based violence in Bangladesh

To focus on gender and transportation, an issue often raised in discussions with Bangladeshi citizens, UN Volunteers in Dhaka joined the 16 Days Against Gender Based Violence 2014 campaign by riding city buses, distributing flyers and engaging with the public.

The 16 days of activism campaign is a global initiative to raise awareness and combat all forms of gender based violence. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme joined the 2014 campaign in Bangladesh and decided to focus on an issue often raised during discussions with Bangladeshi citizens: gender and public transportation.

Bangladesh has experienced incredible urbanization rates in the past years, making Dhaka one of the most densely populated cities in the entire world. The city is therefore struggling to meet the requirements of its ever growing population and public transportation needs.
inhabitants, especially in terms of providing adequate services such as public transportation. Buses are constantly crowded and do not follow fixed schedules. Girls and women especially face difficulties using public transportation, as they are often confronted with harassment or even barred from using buses completely.

On all buses there are specific seats reserved for girls and women, however in many cases these seats are occupied by men, who at times show little willingness to make them available to women. UNV, together with local volunteers, therefore chose this issue for their planned activities contributing to the 16 days of activism campaign.

UNV, with the support of online volunteers, designed flyers using the slogan: "Let's all move together with respect, without discrimination and without harassment." On 7 December the team joined local volunteers on the streets of Dhaka distributing the flyers and riding buses to raise awareness for the challenge women face on their daily travels.

The volunteers were met with a lot of enthusiasm and positive feedback, showing clearly that this is an issue about which the citizens of Dhaka feel deeply affected. "We are touched, pushed or even barred from getting on the bus. We really face harassment and someone needs to do something, because at the moment we receive no help," two sisters complained on one of the buses the UNV team had boarded.

During a discussion with women outside a local school many related their stories of difficulties and harassment they faced when trying to use public transportation in the Bangladeshi capital. The UNV team was approached by many citizens and encouraged to increase the outreach of the campaign, calling for national media campaigns to promote safe public transportation for all.

"It is so important to raise this issue, because even when we as individuals try to speak up and change something the next time we enter a bus we still face the same problems," one young mother says relating her daily struggles.

As another component of the UNV activities, the Bangladesh Field Unit is supporting a young woman in her development of a digital story, which speaks of her personal challenges using public transportation in her home city. The story will include a call for action to ensure that in the future all citizens can enjoy safe and hassle free public transportation and contributing towards an equal society free of violence for all. The UNV Bangladesh Field Unit looks forward to sharing it widely upon its
completion.

• Bangladesh • public transportation • gender • violence

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 5: Gender equality