

Shocking apathy towards Sexual Harassment law

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INVC NEWS New Delhi, Amid the general apathy towards implementing the provisions of the Anti-sexual Harassment Act by companies and state governments, the Union Women and Child Development Minister Mrs Maneka Gandhi's initiatives to ensure compliance with the law are praiseworthy, Mr Vishal Kedia, founder and director of compliance advisory company Complykaro Services Pvt. Ltd., said. Mrs Gandhi issued a stern warning to Corporates to comply with the Act or face action. Mr Kedia pointed out in his keynote address at a conference on Women at Workplace, organized jointly by ASSOCHAM and Complykaro in the capital today, that it is mandatory for companies employing more than 10 people to set up Internal Compliance Committee (ICC) and create awareness about the provisions of the law. The Women and Child Development Ministry is the nodal ministry for implementation of The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. Mr Kedia said the Ministry's observation that several organisations have not even constituted the ICC vindicates the Complykaro experience. A survey in Mumbai business districts showed that just about three percent of organisations complied with the law and a whopping 86% are not even aware of the Act. Mr. Kedia suggested enlisting support of all statutory bodies for creating awareness and ensuring implementation of the law Sexual harassment is now punishable and companies must comply with the Act or face severe punishments. For instance a company at Chennai - where a case of sexual harassment was reported - was recently fined Rs 1.68 crores for not complying with the law or risk criminal prosecution of management as it amounted to abetment of the crime, Mr Kedia pointed out. The Act that came into force 9th December 2013 offers women the right to demand a safe working environment and safety from the persons coming into contact at such premises. If a women is harassed in an office, mall, railway station, airport etc the management of such premises is legally obliged to assist the aggrieved women make a complaint against the accused, if she desires to do so. "The law is there and it is up to the managements to comply with it," he said. Even most of the State Governments have demonstrated apathy towards the Act. The States and Union territories have to monitor implementation and compliance of the law through the office of District Officer for each district who in turn nominates a Local Complaints Committee (LCC) and Nodal Officers. But shockingly, most States have not complied with it, Mr Kedia regretted. The entire emphasis of the law is on prevention and its puts specific emphasis on organization's obligation to organise awareness programmes for sensitization of employees with the provisions of the Act as well as skill building programmes for ICC members. Such details have to be disclosed in the annual report to be filed by the ICC with the District officer. Mr Kedia offered his company services to spread awareness about the Act and educate organizations on the various provisions and further they have developed online cost effective training solutions in this regards.

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