

4. The participants accepted, as a common starting point, that their national constitutions also commit States to the fundamental principles of gender equality, the rule of law, independence of the judiciary and the promotion and protection of human rights.
5. The participants emphasized the significant and critical role of the judiciary in promoting gender equality and women's access to justice and the judiciary should take a leadership role for this purpose.
6. The participants agreed that gender bias can impede women's access to justice, particularly where judicial decision-making is based on stereotypical attitudes about the nature and roles of women and men. Thus they noted the need to deepen appreciation of gender socialization, unequal power relations, and gender expectations and how these shape the experience of the administration of justice and contribute to the differential access to justice.
7. The participants recognized that South East Asia is a culturally rich and diverse region with a plurality of justice systems, secular, customary and religious norms. They stressed the need to value cultures while at the same time emphasized that culture, customary rules, religion and traditional practices should not be invoked as justification for violations of the rights and freedoms of women.
8. The participants noted the uneven progress by States in the implementation of CEDAW obligations through domestic laws. Given that all SEA states have ratified CEDAW and bearing in mind the principle under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties that State Parties are obliged to refrain from acts that would defeat the treaty's object and purpose, the participants agreed that judges must strive to interpret domestic law in consonance with CEDAW.
9. The participants emphasized the relevance of international human rights standards, and in particular those contained in CEDAW, to litigation, noting that in general there was no constitutional or legal barrier to referring or invoking international human rights treaties. Among other uses, these standards might in appropriate cases, be used in order to elucidate the meaning of constitutional guarantees.
10. The participants invited judges and legal practitioners from SEA to take into account women's differential experiences, perspectives and needs of women in jurisprudential development and in court processes. They noted judicial developments in certain countries on battered women's syndrome, reproductive and maternity rights, and for the establishment of gender-sensitive and responsive court processes.

## Recommendations

1. Encourage the establishment of gender equality committees within judiciaries where appropriate to monitor and support the application of gender equality principles, gender-sensitive procedures and gender-responsive practices within the judiciary.
2. Encourage the formation of a regional network of judges to promote continuing dialogue, knowledge and information sharing regarding the application of CEDAW and other international human rights treaties in judicial systems.