



National Assembly member for Huaphan province Ms Amphayvone Lombounpheng is among the members debating the draft law.

NA demands tough law on violence against women

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Violence against women and children and the penalties to be meted out to offenders were hotly debated yesterday by National Assembly (NA) members as they discussed a draft of the Law on the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children.

The draft, drawn up by the Ministry of Justice, comprises nine parts containing eight chapters, which are divided into 82 articles.

NA members observed that some of the definitions contained in the law were unclear and would be obstacles to enforcement of the law.

NA member for Vientiane Dr Souvanpheng Bouphanouvong was concerned about the forms of violence that would be addressed by the law. Article 9 defines two forms of violence: violence committed by members within a family, and that committed by other persons.

Dr Souvanpheng said she wanted to see separate measures enforced against offences relating to the two forms of

violence, especially for the first form, so that other people could step in to prevent a situation from escalating.

Some ethnic groups still clinging to old traditions that permit the kidnap of women to force them into marriage.

Dr Souvanpheng praised government policies on the prevention of violence as defined in Article 5. This states that the government views violence against women and children as an offence and will not allow any custom that involves the use of violence.

But Dr Souvanpheng said she wanted violence to be defined more clearly and strictly to ensure the law had more teeth.

NA member for Xayaboury province, Mr Thongdy Phabbuavone, said he wanted unfaithfulness and polygamy (having more than one spouse) to be defined as a form of serious emotional violence against women.

While the draft law stipulated the principles involved in the prevention of violence, many Assembly members also wanted

decisive measures against offenders to be included.

"Nowhere in this law are decisive measures against offenders defined," Dr Souvanpheng said. But NA members disagreed on the extent of punishment, including both social and financial measures.

NA member for Savannakhet province, Mr Somphet Inthathirath, said he was unsure that punishment was the right way to resolve disputes. He cited possible penalties such as requiring an offending husband to pay a fine, go to prison, or have his official title revoked.

He said such measures would unduly affect the man's family if they had a joint share of the finances, while a prison sentence and the loss of the man's title would also adversely impact the family.

Other NA members observed that not every family included a husband who was the main income earner, and pointed out that some families would, if necessary, suffer financial hardship rather than continue to tolerate violence.