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National Human Rights Commission
Research Unit-II (PRPP Division)

Minutes of the Meeting of the Core Group on Women held on 14th September 2021

A meeting of the Core Group on Women was organized on 14th September 2021 from 11.30 A.M. to 1.30 P.M. on the agenda '**Participation of Women at International Forums**', under the chairpersonship of Smt. Jyotika Kalra, Hon'ble Member, NHRC. A list of participants of the meeting is given below:

Core Group Members

1. Dr. Indu Agnihotri, Ex-Director, Centre for Women's Development Studies
2. Dr. Viney Kapoor Mehra, Vice-Chancellor, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar NLU, Sonapat
3. Dr. Charu WaliKhanna, Former Member of NCW, Advocate, Supreme Court of India
4. Dr. Manjula Batra, Professor, North Cap University, Gurugram
5. Dr. Yuthika Mishra, Member-in-charge, All India Women's Conference
6. Dr. Vijay Raghvan, Professor, TISS, Mumbai
7. Dr. Ritu Gupta, Professor, NLU, Delhi
8. Dr. Jyoti Chauthaiwale, Bhartiya Stree Shakti, Delhi
9. Dr. Rukmini Sen, Professor, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University

Representatives from Government Ministries

10. Shri Satyajit Mishra, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions
11. Shri Daya Shankar, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Women & Child Development
12. Shri Ninad S. Deshpande, Director, UNES Division, Ministry of External Affairs
13. Dr. PR Thulasidass, Legal Officer, UNES Division, Ministry of External Affairs

Special Invitees

14. Dr. Pam Rajput, Emeritus Professor, Centre for Women's Development Studies
15. Ms. Shovana Narayan, Kathak Guru and Padma Shri awardee
16. Dr. Ranjana Kumari, Director, Centre for Social Research, Delhi
17. Ms. Pip Dargan, Deputy Director, Asia-Pacific Forum, Sydney (Australia)
18. Dr. Nisha Mendiratta, Head, Climate Change Programme, Department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Science and Technology, Govt. of India
19. Ms. Rani Rampal, Captain, Indian Women Hockey Team
20. Ms. Sanya Seth, Representative from UN Women

NHRC

21. Smt. Jyotika Kalra, Hon'ble Member NHRC
22. Shri Bimbardhar Pradhan, Secretary General
23. Shri Surajit Dey, Registrar (Law)

24. Smt. Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary
25. Smt. Manzil Saini, IPS, DIG (I),
26. Smt. Roopa Naik, Additional District Judge, PO
27. Dr. M.D.S Tyagi, Joint Director (Research)
28. Dr. Seemi Azam, Research Officer
29. Ms. Sakshi Thapar, JRC
30. Ms. Diana Thomas, JRC
31. Ms. Chandrali Sarkar, JRC
32. Ms. Nihal Kaur, JRC

In her welcome address, **Smt. Anita Sinha**, Joint Secretary, NHRC reiterated the objectives of the meetings of the NHRC Core Group on Women and the agenda discussed in the past. She then commented upon the agenda of the meeting and apprised that despite conventions and treaties, Indian women are under-represented at international fora. She further added, although many Indian women, in the past, broke the glass ceiling by overcoming all the barriers and patriarchal stereotypes in diverse fields, yet their representation at other key sectors is quite dismal. Therefore, there is a need to identify factors that led to lower participation of women at the international fora and to take measures to enhance their participation.

Shri Bimbadhar Pradhan, Secretary General, NHRC, in his opening remarks stated that India ranked at 140th position among 156 countries, slipping 28 positions as compared to the last year as per the Global Gender Gap Report (2021), released by the World Economic Forum. He apprised that in terms of educational attainment, one-third of women in India are illiterate while in terms of political participation, the proportion of Indian women in political and public life remains stagnant at 14.4 per cent. He further added that in terms of health, India is among the five worst countries where one in four women faces intimate violence in her life. Therefore, to ensure gender parity at the international level, women's participation in politics, diplomacy, bureaucracy, military and other spaces of decision making needs to be enhanced.

Smt. Jyotika Kalra, Hon'ble Member, NHRC, in her inaugural address, drew attention towards Article 8 of the CEDAW that puts an obligation on the Government to ensure to women on equal terms with men opportunity to represent Government at the international level and to participate in international organisations. She emphasized that equal opportunity should be given to women to represent India at the international forums. She expressed her concern that most of the Government policies and in particular, the Draft National Policy on Women, 2016, didn't incorporate any component to promote women's participation at the international level. She further added that since gender parity cannot be achieved automatically, concerted efforts need to be made to ensure that women represent at the international level equally in this country so that India gets enriched with the exposure, experiences, values and systems that they share with fellow citizens.

Dr. M. D. S. Tyagi, Joint Director (Research), NHRC, then welcomed all participants to share their views and suggestions/ inputs on the agenda. Key points highlighted by the participants as well as the key recommendations that emanated from the proceedings of the meeting are given in the following sections.

All the participants, participated and expressed their views, same have been put in bullets below:

I. Reasons for lesser participation of Indian women at the international level :

- Due to social and family obligations, Indian women don't opt for international assignments.
- Regarding civil services, due to family and social commitments, Indian women tend to opt for other civil services like Indian Administrative Services, Indian Police Services, or other services and not the Indian Foreign Services.
- There is limited access for Indian women entrepreneurs who are engaged in the MSME sector to contribute to India's foreign trade policy.
- No policy related to women, ever deliberated upon participation of women at International level. Even in the Draft National Policy on Women, 2016, there is no component that encourages women's participation and their representation at the International Fora.¹
- Indian Women have not been nominated, till date, to the post of sherpas or seo-sherpas at G-20.
- Many offices including the foreign offices do not publicise their complaints committee mechanisms and their gender policies.
- Indian women's voices and opinions are inadequately represented at the international forum.
- There is a lack of opportunities for Indian women from other diverse fields, apart from foreign service officers and ambassadors, to represent India at the international level/ UN bodies.
- There are schemes which assist girls and women in getting education in foreign countries but in most of the cases, these girls and women opt to settle abroad and the society remains deprived of the gains these women got from foreign countries.

II. Recommendations to improve participation of women at international level, emanated from the deliberations are listed below:

Action by: PMO; Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, GOI

- Government should realise its commitment to CEDAW and work in the directions of its obligations in article 8 of CEDAW.
- Encourage greater participation of women at the parliament through gender mainstreaming. Also, the Parliament Committee Mechanism for nominating women representatives needs to be reviewed.

¹ The Ministry of Women and Child Development has prepared the draft National Policy for Women after considering suggestions/comments received from stakeholders in 2019. The Draft envisions a society in which women attain their full potential and are able to participate as equal partners in all spheres of life. The draft policy addresses the diverse needs of women through identified priority areas : (i) Health including food security and nutrition, (ii) Education, (iii) Economy (including agriculture industry, labour, employment, NRI women, soft power, service sector, science and technology), Violence against women, (iv) Governance and decision making (v) Violence Against Women (vi) Enabling environment (including housing, shelter and infrastructure, drinking water and sanitation, media and culture, sports and social security) (vii) Environment and climate change. However, the draft policy has still not been finalised, it has been entrusted with a new committee of experts to conduct further studies.

- Thrust should be put on a stronger commitment to mainstream gender at the policy level especially in matters of security since India is a Non-Permanent Member of UNSC.

Action by: Ministry of External Affairs, GOI

- There is a need to apply gender-lens in the decision making at every level and every forum including peace negotiations, security, foreign trade, climate change and other key sectors.
- There is a need to maintain and make available in public domain the disaggregated data indicating sex, showing the percentage of women in foreign services or engaged in international work on behalf of the State, including representation of women in government delegations to the international conferences, and in peacekeeping or conflict resolution roles, etc., as endorsed by the General Recommendation No. 23 on the CEDAW.
- More Indian women delegates should be sent for Conference Of the Parties (COP) and peace keeping negotiation at the international forum.
- The Indian government should engage with the national diaspora to promote change in the representation of women at international fora.
- Need for gender inclusive staffing pattern in the foreign offices and if required, through gender quotas. For this, monitoring of foreign policies needs to be done for gender balancing of skewed ratios, wherever found.

Action by: Ministry of Women and Child Development

- A specific policy component on women's participation at the international level needs to be incorporated in the Draft National Policy for Women, 2016 by the Ministry of Women & Child Development.
- A working group should be made to identify structural issues faced by Indian women resulting in their insignificant rate of participation at the international level.
- Promote research on the issue of inadequate representation of women at the international level.
- There is a need to provide opportunities to Indian women in terms of employment, hand-holding, capacity-building, training and other avenues to learn and work, culture and values abroad and thereby contribute in nation-building.
- Need for developing a roadmap to organise and provide training to women so that they get requisite expertise in the fields of security, trade negotiations, environment, disaster risk mitigation, maritime trade and transport among others. The feminist analytical approaches will lead to an inclusive perspective and improve outcomes.

- Gender sensitisation workshops and training programmes must be organised for not just higher officials but for everyone in all the institutions. The components of these training sessions may include: a) development of leadership roles; b) discussions around women representation; c) issues around gender equality; d) international humanitarian law training on UN mechanisms and their working and other protocols etc.

Action by: Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

- Promote small and medium enterprises for Indian women entrepreneurs at the international level via bilateral or multilateral trade relations and negotiations.

Action by: Ministry of Education , GOI

- Introduction of updated curriculum and mechanisms to teach in schools and colleges about the contribution of the 15 women who were in the Constituent Assembly in order to sensitise children about gender parity.
- Government should come up with fellowship programmes for women leaders from different sectors for their training, exposure and attachment to various international bodies.

The meeting culminated with the concluding remarks of **Smt. Jyotika Kalra**, Hon'ble Member, NHRC and vote of thanks by **Dr. Seemi Azam**, Research Officer, NHRC.