

SAARC to focus on six areas to end violence against women

The sixth South Asia regional ministerial conference, which ended here Saturday, identified six priority areas for the next two years to tackle gender inequality and violence against women.

The representatives of the eight South Asian Association for Regional cooperation (SAARC) countries deliberated on a range of issues related to the condition of women for three days here at the meeting hosted by India's Ministry of Women and Child Development and Unifem, the UN fund for women.

The conference, inaugurated by President Pratibha Patil, was a follow-up to the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

The priority areas of work include preventing violence against women and pursuing gender sensitive laws, encouraging women's participation and capacity building, promoting economic security, right to pass their nationality to their children and protecting human rights in conflict and disaster situations.

India's Minister for Women and Child Development Renuka Choudhury said in her welcome address that the issue of female infanticide was a matter of emergency.

She briefed the participants on India's gender budgeting initiative and said 53 ministries already had cells for the purpose.

Afghanistan's minister for women development said the country had been going through a difficult phase and violence against women was a major concern, according to a Unifem South Asia statement.

The minister said the representation of women in civil service was around 22 percent and 28 percent in the national assembly.

She said her country aimed to ensure women's representation going up to 30 percent in all government institutions by 2020.

Bangladesh's minister highlighted the marginalization of the ministry for women in her country and called for urgent steps to ensure security of women.

Nepal's representative informed the meeting about a 12-point agreement signed by the government in 2006.

The Maldives' minister said a national gender policy was passed in 2006 and a study showed that the employment of women had gone up from 37 percent in 2000 to 52 percent in 2006.

An NGO from Pakistan said the ministry of women's development in the country was marginalized within the bureaucracy and needed additional resources.

It said a national commission on the status of women did exist but had limited influence.

In Sri Lanka, as per the 2006 census, 89.9 percent women were literate but only five percent of them were represented in the government.

Afghanistan has proposed to host the seventh biennial ministerial conference in 2010.

(© IANS / India eNews)