

PRESS RELEASE ON THE INAUGURAL CEREMONY OF THE SOUTH-ASIAN REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS ON GENDER AND ICTs

Amidst the melodious rendition of the traditional Indian patriotic song by the minority women from the extremely impoverished Seelampur minority ghetto “Vandemataram-Maa Tujhe Salaam” (Salute to you, O holy motherland) and lighting of the holy lamp by Mrs. Mridula Sinha-Chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board (Govt. of India) in presence of Dr. Gillian Marcelle—Founding convener of the WSIS Gender Caucus; the South Asian Regional Consultations on Gender and ICTs for WSIS titled ” Gender in Information Age” were opened for deliberations on Monday November 17th, 2003 in India’s capital city New Delhi. Over 100 distinguished delegates drawn from very diverse professional backgrounds of international donor agencies, Govt. officials, Civil Society Organizations, Private Sector and Media and that too from all over the world participated in the deliberations spread over two days.

In her opening remarks; Hon. Chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board emphasized empowerment of the Indian and neighboring countries women. While appreciating the role of technology in empowering women; she was skeptical if real difference was being made to the “poorest” of the poor women and that too from the rural areas. She also brought out the success of the women from Southern parts of India in forming their self-help groups for a variety of purposes ranging from education, environment to marketing of products and services. She wished the WSIS-GC, Datamation Foundation and partnering organizations to take up these challenges upon themselves to make the real difference to the “poorest” of the poor women.

The Hon. Minister for Rural Development Mr. Annasaheb M. K. Patil said India must emerge as a leader in the ICT for development sector as well, given its success in the Indian IT Industry. He said the world looks up to India for leadership in this area as well and hoped the Consultations agenda shall pave the way for the all-round development of the Indian ICT sector in the rural areas of the country. He wished the deliberations all success and congratulated the organizers for holding the Gender and ICT consultations in South Asia.

Dr. Gillian Marcelle urged participants to use the opportunity of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to ensure that ICTs are transformed for the service of all people, particularly women. She suggested that there was an important opportunity for India to take the lead in developing ICT applications that are suitable for people living in poverty and in rural areas.

Dr. Marcelle encouraged ongoing partnership among different stakeholders in South Asian countries and expressed great satisfaction for the organizations of the South Asian Consultations.

Mr. S. Ramakrishnan—Executive Director, C-DAC (Ministry of Communications & Information Technology-Govt. of India) also assisted the Chairperson in lighting of the lamp and congratulated the participants for coming from all over for the Consultations. He said the by working in true spirit of partnership and team work; the CSOs can help

implement the ICTs for development agenda and help implement goals and targets defined by the UN Agencies and the Govt. of India.

The inaugural session having got over successfully and in a very pleasant and friendly environment; the deliberations of the day started with very intensive deliberations between the distinguished panelists and delegates.

The Consultations proceeded as per agenda defined by the Organizers and WSIS-GC and very intensive recommendations, suggestions were made after every session. The recommendations and suggestions have been extensively documented and are proposed to be circulated amongst the delegates on the second day of the Consultations,