

Women's Human Rights Forum

Theme: Streams in the Desert: Women Inspiring Change



Grassroots Women's Pilgrimage to Reflect Prayer into Action

As the World Day of Prayer was commemorated in different Churches of Diocese of Calcutta- Church of North India on 7th March 2014 on 8th March on International Women's Day Women's **Human Rights Forum** was organized by **Diocese of Calcutta**. 80 grassroots women leaders from self help groups, Naya Adhikar Mancha & Church women gathered to share their testimony of faith and prayer reflected into action and their strategies to combat gender based violence.

Theme of Human Rights Forum: Streams in the Desert: Women Inspiring Change

Venue: Jeevan Jyoti Upasanalaya (Church of Epiphany Pastorate) Kalagachia Village.

Organized by: **Women & Gender Justice Concerns Desk, Diocesan Board of Social Service, Diocesan Women's Fellowship for Christian Service**

Aim:

- To celebrate women's power and spirituality reflected in action in building communities of justice and peace.
- To strategize, map issues, engage in advocacy & make concrete follow up action plans to mainstream Women's Human rights.
- To enhance networking among rural/ grassroots women leaders & women leaders of urban churches to combat Gender based violence.



Women's Rights are Human Rights. Promoting Women's Human rights is a spiritual issue. It is the sacred duty of the Church to empower and educate people and communities to reflect their prayer and faith into action.

Bijoya Das- Secretary – Diocesan Women's Fellowship for Christian Service (DWFCS)



Grassroots Women Leaders and Church Women Leader during Worship in Jeevan Jyoti Upasanalaya-

Violence on women and various forms of gender based violence is increasing in leaps and bounds in our country. Survey revealed that West Bengal State in India records the highest number of crime against women in 2012. West Bengal also records the third highest number of murder dowry deaths in 2012. Sexual violence and the culture of rape is increasing in West Bengal. Even little girl children are not spared from being raped. However in midst of violence women are not mere silent recipients and victims of violence. Despite their vulnerability in state of West Bengal – Bengali Women are harbingers of justice and peace and continuously make efforts to combat violence bring transformation in society. They act like streams in the desert continuously inspiring change to heal wounded community.

Outcome of this Forum :Women leaders strategized & decided (a) To promote the Diocese of Calcutta's Campaign "Zero Tolerance to Violence on Women and Children' (b) Identified immediate need for Trainings, advocacy to combat Domestic Violence, Child Marriage and Promote Women's reproductive health rights (C) Need for Women's income generating training programs.



Church women along with grassroots women leaders went around the village in procession singing songs as they gathered together in Jeevan Jyoti Upasnalaya. They used symbolic gesture of using sari to symbolize streams in desert. They marched together to the church carrying with elements like water pots, rice, mud lamps, paddy, and earth with banners in their hand .Slogans in the Banner: **Save our Girls! Save our Nation, Stop Human Trafficking , Right to Education is my Birth Right, We want a world where there is no more Dowry deaths , Zero Tolerance to Violence on Women & Children , Stop Rape – God Wants Justice, Our Daughters are not Burden : Stop Female Infanticide . Stop killing our Girls in the name of Honor**

There is need for paradigm shift in our mission and evangelization strategies. Churches need to move beyond charity. Women in our Churches are now evangelizing by spreading the 'Good News' -'Zero Tolerance on Violence on Women & Children' engaging in advocacy to combat gender based violence. There is need to adopt rights based approach in reflecting our prayers into action. Indian Women act like streams in the desert even in midst of violence inspiring change. The source of their strength lies in their spirituality & faith in God of Hope and Justice.

**Moumita Biswas- Women & Gender Justice Concerns Desk –
Diocese of Calcutta, Church of North India**



Let us speak! Let us break the silence! Let us empower communities to end gender based violence. Let us learn to appreciate and encourage one another. I never cease an opportunity to appreciate and encourage my young women students. Appreciating and encouraging one another helps us to understand that we women have the potential within us to be streams in the desert and bring transformation – Dr Ajanta Paul- Principal – Women’s Christian College – Kolkata



We women in our villages have organized Self Help Groups to help one another. The Diocesan Board of Social Service encouraged us to open bank accounts. Our financial independence has given us more power in decision making. Now if a child in a particular family is sick and needs money for treatment or a mother needs money to buy books for daughter’s education we collect money from each member of the samiti (Self Help Group) and give loan. In this way we help one another- Mrs. Nasker





Mothers came with children from villages to strategize and share testimonies how they combat violence in villages forming Self Help Groups and Naya Adhikar Mancha. The women felicitated Rev Paritosh Canning Vice President of Diocese of Calcutta- CNI with rice, water and mud lamp. **“We are sharing our blessings and power in healing community with you ”** opined Anjali as she felicitated Rev Canning. **Rice symbolizes- life in its fullness and ‘Right to food’ .No one should remain hungry in the world. Water symbolizes that natural resources are gift of God and everyone must get safe drinking water which is a Human right issue.** Today in the world women suffers when water sources are polluted as they have to walk miles to fetch drinking water. In India many women became victims of rape and sexual abuse when they have to walk longer distance through unsafe roads to fetch water for family where as our rivers and lakes are bought my Multi National companies. The women leaders said **“We need to acknowledge the support of many brothers in our pilgrimage to end violence on women and children.”**

Naya Adhikar Mancha (Village Self Help Group Pursuing Justice) was established in 2010 in Sona Mukhi village due to the support Diocesan Board of Social Service. Its main function is to help victims of violence especially women. Every week two three cases of brutal forms of domestic violence are reported to us; however most of the time issues of domestic violence are not reported. Domestic violence is further aggravated by alcoholism among men folks in the village and poverty- **Sulekha Mondol- Associate Secretary Naya Adhikar Mancha**



The aim of this women's human rights forum is also to engage Women's fellowship in Urban Churches to work in partnership with rural churches to combat gender based violence. Accompaniment model is the methodology that women have decided. An outcome of this Human Rights Forum is Women take their own decisions regarding how they will support one another. They have identified some issues like Domestic Violence, Child Marriage, Women's Reproductive Health Rights and need for Women's income generating trainings which the Diocese of Calcutta will follow up.

Suvobrota Das- Honorary Secretary – DBSS, Director Arunima HIV/AIDS Hospice

A poster for a Women's Human Rights Forum. The background features a woman in a colorful headscarf smiling and talking on a mobile phone, and a pair of hands cupped together holding water. The text on the poster is as follows:

WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM
STREAMS IN THE DESERT
WOMEN INSPIRING CHANGE
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION
8TH MARCH 2014

DIOCESE OF CALCUTTA (CNI)
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME : DBSS, DWFCS
WOMEN AND GENDER JUSTICE CONCERNS DESK
VENUE : JEEVAN JYOTI UPASANALAYA, KALAGACHIA