

News Article from FEDO

Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) organized the **National Conference of Dalit Women** with the theme ***“Dignified life, Inclusion and Social Transformation”*** from 11-13 May 2011. In the three-day-long conference held in Kathmandu, Dalit women activists from 75 districts of Nepal; Human Rights activists, representatives from different I/NGOs, media persons; and international delegates from Denmark, UK, Sweden, Hongkong, India, and Bangladesh, participated.

A huge rally was organized and marched through different parts of the town chanting various slogans related with Dalit women rights and upcoming new constitution early in the morning at 8:30 am where more than 800 activists participated. The rally began from Bhadrakali and concluded at City Hall, Kathmandu. The Dalit women activists along with various like-minded organizations from all over the country also join for the solidarity towards the objectives of the conference and for the Dalit women issues.

After the rally, the participants were taken to conference hall after the registration. Beginning the conference, FEDO President Durga Sob gave the welcome remarks highlighting the conference objectives and its background where she put forward the issues of Dalit women. The conference formally began with the inauguration by the Chief Guest Subash Chandra Nemwang, Chairperson of Constitution Assembly. Earlier, FEDO president Durga Sob chaired the conference and other guests took their respective seat. Minister for Local Development, political parties’ leaders, UNDP Nepal Resident Coordinator, civil society leaders and international delegates were among the special guests.

Following the inauguration session, special guests gave their remarks and congratulated FEDO for organizing such a conference which would support to assert the rights of Dalit women. Saradha Pokharel, Chairperson of Security Pressure Group extended her best wishes to the organizer for being able to create pressure to incorporate the agendas of Dalit women in upcoming new constitution and for making the conference a huge success. The chief guest Nemwang said that the conclusion and recommendation of the conference will be fruitful for the constitution making process specially in addressing the agendas and issues of Dalit women. “The constitution making process is really challenging but we can turn this as an opportunity to favor the marginalized, disadvantaged groups and bring their issues in mainstream” Nemwang added.

Urmila Aryal, Minister for Local Development stated that the recommendations from the conference are very important and said she would do her best to address them. Similarly, Rikke Nohrlind, Coordinator, International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) expressed that the conference would be a milestone to pressurize for the participation of Dalit women in decision level and state restructuring process. Professor Vimal Thorat, from India stressed that the leadership, representation and reservation for Dalit women will ensure their rights. Dr. Ruth Momorama, Human rights activists from India expressed that the Dalit women other marginalized and disadvantaged women need to be united so that the voice of voiceless can be heard. At the same time three political parties’ leaders also expressed their best wishes for bringing out the strong recommendation and give their commitment to raise the issues of Dalit women in new constitution.

In between the remarks session, Anuradha Koirala, President of Maiti Nepal and the CNN Hero of the year 2010 was honored by chief guest and the FEDO President for her contribution in the social sector specially working constantly in girls trafficking issues in Nepal.

After the inaugural session, working papers on various themes were presented.

In Day one, two papers were presented and brought to the discussion among the participants and comment was made by the commentator which was facilitated by the chair assigned for the paper. Following are the details of paper presentation on the first day:

1.

Topic: “Constituent Assembly and State Restructuring and Issues of Dalit women”
Presenter: Bishwo Bhakta Dulal (Ahuti) (CA Member)
Chair by: Dr. Surya Dhungel (Constitution expert)
Commentator: Sapana Malla Pradhan (CA Member)
Yam Bahadur Kisan (Advocate)

2.

Topic: “Madhesi Dalit women and their problems”
Presenter: Ganga Mahara (Activist)
Chaired by: Sarita Giri (CA Member)
Commentator: Ranju Thakur (Advocate)
Shanti Devi Paswan (Activist)

After each presentation, intense discussion on the theme of the paper was done by women coming from the districts and they expressed their opinion, views and feedback to the presenter as well as the commentator pointed out the positive side and missing agendas in the paper.

Second day

In Day Second, remaining papers were presented.

3.

Topic: “Badi women and their problems”
Chaired by: Dr. Renu Rajbhandari (Activists)
Presenter: Uma Badi (Dalit Activist)
Commentator: Binod Pahadi (CA Member)
Dhana Kumari Sunar (NWC Member)

4.

Topic: Sharing international experience
Panelists: Rikke Nohrlind, Coordinator, IDSN; Dr. Ruth Manorama, India; Ms. Moni Rani, Bangladesh; Cintia Lavendera, Program Manager, WOMANKIND Worldwide, UK)
Chaired by: Dr. Sumitra Mamandhar Gurung

5.

Topic: “Issues of Far western Dalit Women”
Chaired by: Dr. Arju Deuba Rana (CA Member)
Presenter: Ganesh BK (Political/Social Activist)
Commentator: Hari Ram Sripailee (CA Member)
Gyanu Gaire (NDC Member)

6.

Topic: “Impact of Inter-caste marriage on Dalit women”
Chaired by: Teku Nepali (Politician)
Presenter: Sabita Singh (Women Activist)
Commentator: Ambika Gajmer (Women activist)
Kamala Hemchuri (Activist)

The paper presentation was followed by the cultural programme for the refreshment of the participants which was performed by the *Kritika* Group (group of disable, marginalized, minority women). They performed various dances, songs reflecting the issues of marginalized women. Cultural programme was highly entertaining where most of the participants were dancing and singing with the performer. This program was able to convey a strong message that there is a need for women solidarity to acquire various rights. At last they performed a drama which portrayed the story of women affected from domestic violence, rape, accusation of witch, disability, single women, discrimination and untouchability.

Third Day

The third and last day began with the group discussion. Women Participants’ were divided into group according to five development region where women coming from the districts discussed about the major issues of the Dalit women from that region. Later on, the conclusion from the discussion was shared. After the tea break, Cintia Lavandera, Programme Manager of WOMANKIND Worldwide shared the experience of international agencies working in the issues of Dalit women in Nepal and showed her commitment to contribute for the rights and empowerment of Dalit women.

In the second session of the last day, FEDO General Secretary presented the memorandum to the group which was to be submitted to the CA Chairperson, Prime Minister after it is finalized. In the memorandum, different provisions were included on various issues of Dalit women such as political agendas, economic agendas, socio-cultural agendas, education, health and legal agendas were included. On this regards, open discussion was made where the participants brought out very significant point to be included so as to incorporate the rights of Dalit women in new constitution. At the end Durga Sob thanks all the people who supported to make the conference successful and did an official closing of the conference.

Overall, conference went well and whole conference was covered by different television channel, FMs, newspapers and magazines. The first day event was live broadcasted by the FM where the reporter talked with the participants from the districts and organizer team of the conference.