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CEDAW hails increasing literacy among women

The Committee for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) noted with appreciation the emphasis given by the present government in Bangladesh on increasing literacy among women and girls aiming at achieving education for all by the year 2000, reports BSS.

In its report adopted after the CEDAW's 17th Session held in the United States recently, the Committee noted with satisfaction the existence of constitutional guarantee to equality between women and men as well as laws ensuring protection of women in Bangladesh.

State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Dr Mozammel Hossain leading a high level delegation attended the session where he reiterated the priority commitment of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the advancement of women in Bangladesh.

Dr Hossain informed the CEDAW Session that various constitutional and policy measures were introduced in Bangladesh by the present government including adoption of a national policy for women's development and the elaboration of a national action plan for the implementation of the Beijing platform for action.

"There are ground-breaking documents to make real changes in women's status and position in Bangladesh," Dr Mozammel Hossain said adding the Bangladesh had now been able to achieve considerable progress in the advancement and empowerment of women, despite serious obstacles.

While describing interventions and strategies to improve the status of women in Bangladesh, he said the present government assisted by NGOs had taken special measures to promote girls' enrolment and retentions at the primary and secondary levels of education.

"A quota system has been introduced to accelerate recruitment of female primary school teachers", he said adding that the quota system was also applicable to all types of public employment, reserving 10 per cent of recruitment to gazetted posts and 15 per cent to non-gazetted posts, with a view to facilitating entry and thereby increasing the number of

"The national action plan offered detailed action programmes to implement the platform for action in Bangladesh", the Committee was also told.

The committee in its report adopted after the session appreciated the constitutional guarantee to equality between men and women as well as laws ensuring equality and protection of women in Bangladesh. It also expressed satisfaction at the high status given to the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

The committee noted with positive impact the presence of 30 reserved seats for women in the Parliament and local bodies as well as in the public sector. It especially appreciated the fact that Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world with a female Prime Minister and a female head of the Opposition in the Parliament.

The committee also lauded government's active role in spreading education among women and girls, collaboration with NGOs for implementing programmes on women and popularising the convention by translating it into Bangla.

The committee strongly recommended more proactive measures to hasten the implementation of education programmes to eliminate illiteracy from Bangladesh side by side undertaking an impact assessment of development plans for women.

women.

The committee was informed of momentum of women's economic participation as a result of employment generating credit programme run by the government and non-governmental organisations. The Bangladesh experiment of providing women access to credit.

The session was told that Bangladesh made history by empowering two women to succeed one another as Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition in Parliament. "The phenomenal turn-out of women in the 1996 parliamentary elections showed that women as voters are gaining visibility and political strength in the country", he said.

The leader of the Bangladesh delegation described the multisectoral action programme undertaken by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in Bangladesh to address violence against women.

Turning to the legal framework, he pointed out that disparity between De Jure And De Facto Rights was due to ignorance of women and men with regard to legal action as well as various weaknesses in enforcement of law.

He said a permanent Law Commission was established by the present government to review the existing laws and enact new ones to safeguard women's rights and to prevent violence against women.

Dr Mozammel Hossain also described the national machinery and institutional framework to combat gender inequality in Bangladesh. A 44-member National Council for Women Development headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina comprises ministers and secretaries of different ministries, public representatives and eminent individuals, he said.

"Bangladesh had been one of the first countries in the world to establish a full-fledged Ministry of Women and Children Affairs including a Department of Women's Affairs as its implementing arm", he said.

The committee was informed that Bangladesh took serious steps to implement international commitments to the follow-up in the 4th World Conference on Women and the International Conference on Population and Development as well as legal obligations enshrined in the convention on elimination of all forms of discriminations against women, and convention of rights of the child.