

VALEDICTORY SESSION
(05 SEPTEMBER 2018)

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS' SUMMIT-2018
"EQUALITY BEGINS WITH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT"

STATEMENT BY H. E. MR. AMJAD HUSSAIN B. SIAL, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

President of the South Asian Women Development Forum, Ms. Pramila Rijal,
Distinguished representatives of regional and international organizations and donors,
Esteemed Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders,
Distinguished Participants,

It is indeed a great privilege for me to address the Valedictory Session of the International Women Entrepreneurs' Summit-2018.

As a Recognized Body of SAARC, under able leadership of Ms. Pramila Rijal, SAWDF has been doing a commendable job in promoting the cause of women across the region. I wish SAWDF every success in its future endeavours.

I wish to place on record our deep appreciation to SAWDF and its partners for co-organizing this Summit, bringing together women entrepreneurs and business leaders, experts, and representatives from both the governmental and non-governmental entities. This Summit is highly conducive to carrying forward the global agenda of empowering the women.

The theme of the Summit, namely, "Equality Begins with Economic Empowerment" is amply relevant to SAARC's both Social and Economic Agenda. By economically empowering women, not only we promote gender equality but also socio-economic development. Once women are empowered, both the society and economy will transform.

Distinguished Participants,

We are living in an era when the environment has been socially, culturally, legally and politically supportive of women's empowerment. As a result, there is a growing realization among the women across the globe of their legitimate rights. Young girls are increasingly exercising their right to education. Single mothers and widows are gradually engaging themselves in home-based income-generating activities to become financially independent. A report on women entrepreneurship for 2016-2017 brought out by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor suggests that in 2016, an estimated 163 million women were starting or running new businesses in 74 countries around the world. In addition, an estimated 111 million were running established businesses. These data not only indicate the growing involvement of women in entrepreneurship, but also reaffirm their valuable contribution to the global economy.

Besides, more and more women are increasingly occupying higher positions in the Government, judiciary, parliament, political parties and business houses around the globe. Proudly speaking, in South Asia, we now have two lady Heads of State or Government, and a number of lady Ministers, while several other distinguished ladies have served in these

capacities, and as Chief Justices and Speakers of Parliament previously. This reflects the commendable talent and potential of the South Asian women.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a regional organization, SAARC attaches high priority to empowering women and promoting gender equality, which is manifest in the pronouncements of our leaders in the successive Summit Declarations. SAARC also has a Social Charter, which incorporates a broad range of targets to be achieved across the region in the areas of poverty eradication, population stabilization, empowerment of women, youth mobilization, human resource development, promotion of health and nutrition, and protection of children.

Another important regional instrument is the Convention on Combating the Crime of Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution signed in January 2002. The Convention provides a legal framework for the protection of women and children. A Regional Task Force has been formed to monitor and facilitate the implementation of this Convention.

The mechanism of Ministerial Meetings on Women, assisted by the Technical Committee of Women, Youth and Children, is another important mechanism that provides policy directives in taking forward SAARC's agenda of empowering the women.

In addition, under SAARC's affiliation, we encourage interaction, as this summit, among the professional bodies, private corporate sector and civil society groups, among others. So far, we have given affiliation to six Apex Bodies and eighteen Recognized Bodies, of which, Hindukush Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resources Management (HIMAWANTI), Self-employed Women Association (SEWA) and, of course SAWDF, are working actively in the field of women's empowerment.

In essence, our focus has been on promoting women's education; protecting their rights; ensuring that they are free from all sorts of discrimination, both at home and in society; promoting their active participation in socio-economic development; and above all, empowering them economically. I am confident that the outcome of this summit will be helpful in carrying forward SAARC's coveted agenda.

Distinguished Participants,

As you prepare to wrap up your three-day deliberations, I wish to congratulate all of you on successful conclusion of this important summit. The success of this event owes much to your own knowledge, experience, commitment and diligence that was perceptible during the three-day summit.

I am confident that the issues that you have addressed during this summit will facilitate in bringing women to the forefront of socio-economic development in the region and across the globe. Congratulations, once again, on successful conclusion of the summit!

I thank you.