

INAUGURAL SESSION
(17 JANUARY 2018)

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ON 'INNOVATION, INCUBATION & INDUSTRIALISATION'
VISAKHAPATNAM, ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA, 17-19 JANUARY 2018

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

Hon'ble Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh,
President of the South Asian Women Development Forum,
President of the Association of Lady Entrepreneurs of India,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a privilege for me to address the Inaugural Session of the International Conference of Women Entrepreneurs in this beautiful port city of Visakhapatnam. I wish to thank the Association of Lady Entrepreneurs of India, which is also a Chapter of a SAARC Recognized Body, South Asian Women Development Forum (SAWDF), for their invitation. I also wish to congratulate the Association for taking this laudable initiative in commemoration of its Silver Jubilee Year.

I wish to thank our hosts for very warm welcome, generous hospitality and excellent arrangements made for this Conference.

I wish to thank the Hon'ble Chief Minister and the esteemed Government of Andhra Pradesh for allocating five acres of land at Visakhapatnam for establishing the Women Entrepreneurs International Trade and Technology Hub (WITH). I am confident that this magnanimous gesture of support from the Government will be instrumental in economically empowering the women of our region. The Hub will be a one stop marketing and service centre for boosting women's participation in trade through commercial information, guidance, capacity building and product marketing.

I also wish to take this opportunity to applaud the work done so far by SAWDF under the dynamic leadership of Ms. Pramila Rijal and its Chapter in India being capably led by Ms. Rama Devi.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Conference brings together eminent women entrepreneurs and speakers from diverse fields. Being held in a trade hub like Visakhapatnam, this Conference is an opportune occasion for the distinguished women entrepreneurs to exchange their entrepreneurial ideas, experiences and knowledge about their professional skills. This Conference also offers a welcome opportunity for networking of women in the region to foster women entrepreneurship and intra-regional trade, thus promoting intra-regional economic connectivity, which is essential for the welfare of our peoples.

The theme of the Conference, Innovation, Incubation and Industrialization, is highly pertinent in the present context and is relevant to the SAARC process. All of us are convinced that sustained innovation, incubation and industrialization help redefine pathways for successful entrepreneurship.

Hon'ble Chief Minister,
Distinguished Women Entrepreneurs,

Women represent almost 50 percent of the population of South Asia, which is home to almost one fourth of the humanity. A large number of women have been meaningfully contributing to the region's socio-economic development, which is one of the important objectives of SAARC. Empowerment of women, therefore, is key to the success of SAARC. It is for this reason, SAARC remains committed to attain this goal.

In South Asia, we have had several female Heads of State or Government in the past. Women of our region have also served as Speakers of Parliament, Chief Justices and members of Cabinet and Parliament. At present, we have a lady President and a lady Prime Minister, which is amply demonstrative of the leadership role the women can play in South Asia.

Many women in the region are catalysts of change in the society, while many have had great successes as women entrepreneurs. Additionally, women's representation in the political arena in the region is encouraging, with Governments reserving certain percentage of seats in the parliaments for women. At the same time, women in our region do enjoy the equitable right to contest in polls on open seats. In essence, like men, women do have a great role to play in the overall development of our region.

In recognition of this fact, since the inception of SAARC in 1985, issues related to the advancement of women have figured prominently on its agenda. Moreover, in almost all the SAARC Summit Declarations, our leaders have underscored the need to bring women fully into the mainstream of development, paying focused attention to their economic empowerment and skill development, particularly of the disadvantaged and the marginalized ones, including widows. More specifically, at the Fifteenth SAARC Summit in Colombo in 2008, our leaders directed the relevant mechanisms to work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination and abuse against women in order to ensure their rights to live in the society in a dignified manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Promoting people-to-people contacts in the region has been another priority area for SAARC. Accordingly, in order to enrich and supplement the inter-governmental efforts in promoting the socio-economic development, SAARC has encouraged interaction among professional bodies, private corporate sector and civil society groups by granting affiliation to them. At present, SAARC has six Apex and eighteen Recognized Bodies. Some of these bodies have been formed by women in the region and in others they are playing a vital role, including as high-level office bearers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In today's globalized world, it is no more a mere moral compulsion of nations to advocate women's empowerment and their engagement in socio-economic development. It is in fact an economic compulsion, as without women's active participation in all spheres of activity, development and prosperity cannot be achieved.

We do believe that at the core of women empowerment rests the economic empowerment, and women entrepreneurship is the key to this end. I am confident that this important Conference will be immensely useful in promoting women entrepreneurship, which is crucial for the socio-economic development of this region.

In conclusion, I wish to assure you that the SAARC Secretariat will continue to play its due role in our collective endeavours for the advancement and empowerment of women.

With these remarks, I wish the Conference great success.

Thank you.
