

SOUTH ASIAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE “WEAVING THE WEB”
KATHMANDU, 25 JANUARY 2019
ORGANIZED BY SANKALPA – WOMEN’S ALLIANCE FOR PEACE, JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY

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

Chief Guest, the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister & Minister for Defense of Nepal,
Madam Chairperson, *SANKALPA*,
Dignitaries on the Dias,
Distinguished Participants from the SAARC region,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address the Opening Session of the South Asian Regional Conference “Weaving the Web” organized by *Sankalpa* - Women’s Alliance for Peace, Justice and Democracy.

I wish to gratefully acknowledge the august presence of the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister & Minister for Defense of Nepal at this Opening Session as the Chief Guest. His Excellency’s presence at this Session amply signifies the importance of this Conference.

I wish to thank *Sankalpa* for organizing this Conference, bringing together eminent women representatives from the region. Since the promotion of women’s welfare and empowerment is at the forefront of SAARC’s agenda, we greatly value the holding of this Conference to strengthen partnerships among women in the region.

I also wish to welcome the participants to this Conference in Kathmandu. I must acknowledge that your participation in this Conference demonstrates your resolve to bolster the role of women in every sphere of human activity, including in promoting peace, justice and democracy.

Distinguished Participants,

As we all know, the role and status of women have been changing rapidly due to growing industrialization and globalization, supported by conducive social legislations and legal instruments. With the ever-changing socio-cultural values, and better education and skill development, women are engaging themselves in all walks of life.

Besides, more and more women are increasingly occupying higher positions in the Government, judiciary, parliament, and politics. We are proud that in South Asia, we currently have a lady Head of State in Nepal and a lady Head of Government in Bangladesh. Our region also has a large number of ladies occupying positions of Ministers, State Ministers and Members of Parliament, among others. Besides, our region is home to a number of successful women entrepreneurs. As such, the contribution of women toward the socio-economic development of this region has been remarkably significant and commendable.

Distinguished Participants,

As you are aware, SAARC is a regional organization created primarily to promote the welfare of the peoples of this region. As women constitute almost 50% of the region's population, since the inception of SAARC, our leaders have underscored the need to bring them into the mainstream of socio-economic development. Our leaders' unequivocal resolve to empower women culminated in the adoption of the SAARC Social Charter, which incorporates a broad range of targets to be achieved for women's social and economic emancipation.

Besides the SAARC Social Charter, SAARC has several other inter-governmental mechanisms dealing with the promotion of the status of women. They include Ministerial Meetings on Women; a Technical Committee on Women, Youth and Children; and a SAARC Gender Policy Advocacy Group. We have a Regional Convention to combat trafficking of women and children for prostitution. SAARC also collaborates with several UN Specialized Agencies, including UNWomen, in promoting women's welfare and empowerment.

Though we have made immense progress in empowering the women of this region, yet a lot still needs to be done for betterment of our society. The first and foremost pre-requisite is the education of our girls that will certainly be a catalyst for socio-economic development, improvement in the quality of life and reducing poverty. Educated women will be able to play even greater role in all walks of life, including at senior policy-making levels. The powerful tool of education will help in mainstreaming of women and making them economically empowered and financially independent.

This Conference is a good initiative to bring together a large number of women advocates from the region to contemplate measures to collectively address the challenges that women face.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to once again congratulate *Sankalpa* for organizing this Conference. I wish the Conference great success and the participants a pleasant stay in Kathmandu.

I thank you.
