

DAY 2: 27 AUGUST 2013, SEMINAR ROOM 1

India International Centre 40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi-110001

TIME: 11:30- 1:00 PM

The Session for Rights & Entitlements was taken by

1. Ferdous Ara Begum, *Gender Expert, Forum Member of UN CEDAW Committee & Former Director General, Bangladesh Television*
2. Reshma Arif, *Advocate, Supreme Court*
3. Dr. Jayashree Gupta, *President, Consumers India and Chairperson, Human Right Group*
4. Dr. Deepali Bhanot, *Associate Professor, JDM College, University of Delhi*
5. Dr. V Suresh, *Centre for Law, Policy and Human Rights Studies, Chennai and Supreme Court*

Topics Covered:

- a) Care for Elderly by Reshma Arif, *Advocate, Supreme Court*
- b) We can make a difference by Dr. Jayashree Gupta, *President, Consumers India and Chairperson, Human Right Group*
- c) Elderly Widows in Vrindavan by Dr. Deepali Bhanot, *Associate Professor, JDM College, University of Delhi*
- d) Rights of the elderly- fact or fiction! A Human Rights Perspective by Dr. V Suresh, *Centre for Law, Policy and Human Rights Studies, Chennai and Supreme Court*

Abstracts from this sessions are:

1. Title: Care of Elderly
Author: Reshma Arif, *Advocate, Supreme Court*

I compliment the organizers Stree Shakti and HelpAge India for holding this much required conference to discuss the problems and challenges faced by the ageing women. With the burgeoning population of elderly women in our country, it is important to urgently focus on the issue of feminisation of ageing, and which for far too long we have continued to ignore at a cost only to ourselves.

It is rightly said that two things never stop, i.e. Time and Ageing. Undeniably aging is a natural process bringing with it a host of challenges for the elderly, in the form of diseases, abuse, isolation and poverty. In 1999, during the International Year of Older Persons, Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had stated that women comprise the majority of older persons, are more likely than men to be poor in old age, and more likely to face discrimination. Also

focussing on population ageing and its myriad problems, the United Nations at the First World Assembly on Aging (1982) declared:

“The situation of older women everywhere must be a priority for policy action”. Hence it is crucial to ensure the integration of a gender perspective into all policies, programmes and legislation. The Government of India had drafted a National Policy on Older Persons, in 1999 which promised senior citizens a life of dignity, but was not implemented uniformly across the country. Unfortunately, the level of physical, mental and emotional abuse of senior citizens is such that the Government of India enacted Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007. But due to lack of awareness of their rights and law, women are unable to take the help of courts and the police. Feminisation of poverty can be reduced if women have effective and independent rights in land and property.

The discourse on plight of older women in India must include the plight of old Muslim women also. According to government reports Muslim women are educationally, economically and socially the most marginalized group in India. NCMEI reports that only 16.1% of Muslim girls from poor families attend schools, and as per 2001 Census, only one in 101 Muslim women is a graduate. Also due to poverty and illiteracy hundreds of divorced and old women live in misery and penury. The case of Shah Bano reflects the plight of an old divorced Muslim woman whose claim for maintenance in the apex court led to the enactment of Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986. It is here that the government agencies, NGOs and self –help groups should step in and provide all kinds of assistance to such women.

To conclude with a proper strategy of the Government, older citizens will be significant agents of social change and productive to society.

2. Title: We can make a difference

Author: Dr. Jayashree Gupta, *President, Consumers India*

Dr Jayashree Gupta, President, Consumers India highlighted the challenges being faced by India due to rapid increase of the proportion of the elderly in the total population. As per census 2011 we have 10 crores of elderly. This is projected to increase to 31.5 crore (20% of population) by 2050. Elderly women constitute a major portion of this population and they are the worst sufferers.

The weakening of traditional joint family system has posed new challenges in the care of the elderly population. While the family system is being weakened, alternate support systems have yet to be established in our society.

She highlighted the issues which have been taken up by Consumers India to address concerns of the ageing population. Some of them are:

Advocacy to develop geriatrics as a speciality in all medical colleges and make services of qualified geriatricians available in all hospitals for providing quality health care to our elders.

Advocacy for providing age-friendly housing with support infrastructure for transportation, healthcare, entertainment and other requisite facilities.

Advocacy for relief from tax burden for our elders, particularly on pension and fixed deposits.

Advocacy for revamping the present system of Health Insurance with a view to make it a viable option for the health care of our senior citizens.

After highlighting the issues mentioned above she explained how **we the people can make a difference to the life of ageing women** by taking up community based initiatives. She gave example of how she could transform a chronically sick company named Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Limited (IDPL), when she was posted as CMD, IDPL in June 2006 under Central Staffing Scheme.

The company, which was set up in 1961 as per vision of Pt Jawahar Lal Nehru, was going through pangs of 'To be or not to be'. It was referred to BIFR in 1992 and with VRS packages introduced from time to time, manpower was drastically reduced from around 13,000 to 350 only. She was able to **infuse new life into this chronically sick company** and bring about **1500 % growth** in production within less than 4 years. Per capita production increased from Rs. 14,000 per annum in 2002-03 to Rs. 50 Lakhs during 2009-10.

It became possible by following multi-pronged strategies ranging from uplifting the morale of employees to up-gradation of plants and introduction of performance based incentives. While she provided leadership, ideas for change came from the people.

In conclusion, she said that we should not underestimate the power of the people and come forward with community based solutions to address concerns of ageing women.