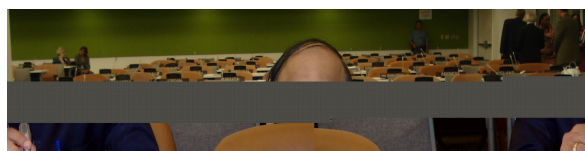

Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini's participation in the UN - ECOSOC High Level Segment MEETING United Nations HQ. New York June 28- July 1, 2010

A REPORT



1. Oral Statement at the ECOSOC Meeting

As many of you are well aware, in 2006, after prolonged efforts involving public-relations building at the diplomatic levels, Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini (RMP) had acquired the status of an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the UN, more particularly with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN. Thereafter, RMP has been consistently trying to engage with the UN system and build upon the status acquired. This status is more of a recognition and prestige and hence the importance of cultivating close relationship thereafter can never be undermined.

This year, ECOSOC organized its meeting known as High Level Segment (HLS), from June 28, 2010 onwards. Unlike in the past, this year this particular meeting was devoted for reviewing the progress made by member countries on one of the important Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and that was Women

Empowerment. On this backdrop, the ECOSOC had asked NGOs in consultative status to send proposals for making an Oral Statement at this HLS before the end of April last. Accordingly RMP had sent a draft of its Oral Statement for their consideration. The Committee on NGOs of the ECOSOC approved the draft Oral Statement sent by the RMP in its meeting on May 30, 2010 and shortlisted RMP along with 43 other NGOs for presenting this Oral Statements. RMP received ECOSOC's official communication and in response to that RMP Managing Committee decided to nominate me to go to the UN HQ and participate in the HLS of the ECOSOC. Accordingly, I participated in the ECOSOC HLS Meeting and represented RMP at the ECOSOC meeting. This meeting was held between June 28 and July 1, 2010. Besides RMP although there were other three other NGOs from India selected for being heard at the ECOSOC meeting, RMP was the only NGO participating in the meeting.

On 28th, ECOSOC HLS's Substantive session started in the morning. Mr. Hamidon Ali, Malaysia's Permanent Representative at the UN who is the current Chairperson of the ECOSOC declared the session inaugurated. After the President's opening statement, Mr. Ban-Ki- Moon, Secretary general of the UN addressed the council. Thereafter, Britain's Secretary of State for International Development Mr. Andrew Mitchel delivered his key note address. This was followed by addresses by video link delivered by Ms. Moushira Khattab, State Minister for family and population affairs of Egypt and by Ms. Michelle Bachlet, former President of the republic of Chile. Immediately after the first session as well as in the post-lunch session, Ministers belonging to member states made National Voluntary Presentations outlining the key policy and implementation issues concerning Women Empowerment in general. Ministers from countries such as Senegal, Brazil, Netherlands, Guatemala and Moldova made these presentations. In the discussion that followed NGO representatives were expected to make their Oral Statements. Accordingly, I sought the floor to speak. Accepting my request, session moderator Ms. Helen Clark of the UNDP granted me the floor and later I made some relevant points based on the contents of the RMP's Oral Statement.

Again, on June 30, 2010 in the morning session, national Voluntary Presentations were made by the concerned ministers belonging to Namibia, France and the United States. Guatemalan permanent representative in the UN Mr. Gert Rosenthal

was moderating the discussion. Before the discussion ended, Mr. Rosenthal called the name of RMP and I was given the floor to make the remaining points of the Oral Statement. The statement that I was given a floor to make is produced at the end of this report.

At this meeting I also called upon Mr. Hamidon Ali, President ECOSOC and Ms Jennifer Delaumentis, Secretary of the ECOSOC and presented them with a set of literature about RMP.

On June 30, 2010, in the afternoon, I also participated in the Meeting of the Development Communication Forum – NGO Consultative Group (led by Actionaid). At this forum, I mooted the idea of funding for Mindset Changing Training Programmes for commonality of views of the implementers and promoting greater conviction about and commitment to the cause of Gender Justice and Women Empowerment.

2. New Possibilities

Well wishers of RMP in USA have suggested that a young New Jersey based professional Mr. Krishna Reddy can possibly work for RMP and eventually become its New York representative. Accordingly, I had a long discussion with Mr. Reddy and I have also introduced him to some UN officials including Mr. Rahul Rai Sur and Ms. Meena Sur. Both, Mr. Reddy and myself also called upon Mr. Acqino Vimal, IFS; First Secretary at the Office of the Permanent Mission of India to the UN.

3. Other Interactions

Besides, I also interacted with Mr. Adapa Prasad and other office bearers of the Overseas Friends of the BJP, Mr. Randhir K.Jaiswal, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of India to the UN and Mr. Naraian Kataria and Mr. Arish Sahani, office bearers of the Indian American Intellectuals Forum.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

as

Millennium Development Goal

Draft of Oral Statement Shortlisted by the UN ECOSOC for its 2010

High Level Segment

Gender is one of the key goals of the MDGs adopted by the United Nations. While even in a stand-alone situation, the importance of this goal can never be undermined, But besides, what is more important is that three other goals too are intertwined with the success of this goal. Gender equality primarily aims at giving the women folk their due in the society, starting from their very own families. Once this is accepted by mainly the MEN, women will be in a position to play a pro-active and decisive role and that alone will lead to accomplishing a total of FOUR major goals. These goals are: Ending Poverty and Hunger, Universal Education, Child Health and Maternal Health. Women and their role is at the centre of the process of achieving all these goals. Hence, recognizing the essential equality of Gender is the starting point. The Statement that I desire to present mainly focuses this aspect and appeals the international community to take it forward.

During the last over 25 years, the societal perspective towards Gender issues has undergone transformation. This has happened mainly due to two principal reasons. Firstly, large scale self-realisation on the part of women has lead to greater awareness about gender issues in societies all over the world. Secondly, thanks to the sound theorization of gender equality due to the efforts of thinking community as also opinion making sections of the society, gender issues have acquired an element of political correctness. As a consequence, nobody dares to challenge the logic behind gender equality openly and that too in a public discourse. However, sadly but certainly; this pressure of political correctness has masked the mindsets of men — and at times even women – who still continue to be convinced that men and women are naturally unequal and any effort to bring equality is bound to fail. Sadly, this thinking prevails not only in the underdeveloped or educationally backward societies but also in the most advanced and progressive minded people.

This makes one realise that Women empowerment hinges, among other things; also on mindset changing of men. If men continue to not to understand the meaning of Women Empowerment,

more often than not it adds to the agony of women, already heavily under burden. For women empowerment to be really meaningful, men need to be awakened.

In traditional societies, when women started occupying all those spaces that were traditionally considered as the reserve of men, family-centric societies started experiencing upheavals. It also created a picture of apparent imbalance. To correct this, what was needed was men's entry into those areas that were traditionally considered as WOMEN ONLY walks of life. But men naturally were not inclined to do this and this added to the already stretched relationship between men and women.

To correct this, Building Capacities of Men through Mindset Changing Training is the only effective way. Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini has been doing this for the last over a decade right after quotas for women at the local government level were implemented in Maharashtra, India. Our experience in the context of a structured training aimed at Changing the male Mindset has been very insightful. My oral presentation at the 2010 ECOSOC High Level Segment will throw some light on several least explored aspects of this mindset-change training.

The main aspects of this experience sharing are as follows: -

1. Understanding the women's world: Women, their life-approach, their role in the family, their expectations and the typicality of the male view about these issues.
2. Empathising with the women: the psychological process and its intellectual understanding.
3. Recognising that Gender Equality is integral to the concept of social justice.
4. Promoting Women as Leaders: Understanding and pro-actively utilizing the inherent qualities of women leaders vis-à-vis men.

Dr. Vinay Sahasrabuddhe

Director General, Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini

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