

CONCEPT NOTE

International Conference

Deepening Diversity, Women's Rights and Democracy

Working Towards Addressing Racial Discrimination and Gender Based Violence with Special Emphasis on Sexual Violence in Conflict Areas

Date: 19 -20 January 2018 **Time:** 9am-5pm,

Venue: Conference Hall 2 & 3, India International Centre, 40, Max, Muller Marg, New Delhi-110003, India

Organised by

Control Arms Foundation of India, Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network, Northeast India Initiative for Peace in collaboration with Multiple Action Research Group with support from European Union

“There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: Violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, and never tolerable.” ~ Former UN Secretary General - Ban Ki-moon

“It shall be duty of every citizen of India to promote harmony and the spirit of common brother/(sister)hood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.” ~ Constitution of India Article 51A (e)

The international conference ‘Deepening Diversity, Women’s Rights and Democracy: Working Towards Addressing Racial Discrimination and Gender Based Violence with Special Emphasis on Sexual Violence in Conflict Areas’ organized by Control Arms Foundation of India, Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network, Northeast India Initiative for Peace in collaboration with Multiple Action Research Group will be held in New Delhi, India on 19 -20 January 2018. The conference is an opportunity to deepen research, understanding of racial discrimination and gender based violence; to develop innovative strategies to end this discrimination and advocate for policy change. Participants of the conference would include global and regional civil society organizations, researchers, regional and global policymakers, students, lawyers and law enforcing agencies and other relevant stakeholders. The expected outcome of this international conference is to provide relevant way forwards, deliberations to formulate an anti racial law, national diversity policy and strategies to enforce implementation of laws for gender based violence. The conference will conduct a series of panel discussions, policy recommendations, film screenings and photo exhibition.

Background : All human beings are born free in dignity and human rights.¹ In the history of humankind, 17 million people are reported to have lost their lives in the transatlantic slave trade.² United States of America gave equal rights to all its citizens only in 1964. Similarly, the policy of Apartheid was in force till 1994. With 4 major racial groups and 7 billion people in the world, racial supremacy has had detrimental impact on the world’s ethnic minorities. 70 per cent of the world’s poor are women. One in every three women have faced some form of violence in their lives. Rape in conflict areas has been recognized as war crimes. 20,000 to 50,000 women were raped during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while approximately 250,000 to 500,000 women and girls were targeted in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

¹United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Retrieved May 10, 2017, from United Nations: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

²United Nations. (2008, March 25). *International Day of remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade*. Retrieved May 11, 2017, from United Nation: <http://www.un.org/events/slaveryremembrance/background.shtml>

Racial Discrimination in India: A country of 1.3 billion, India takes pride as the world's largest democracy. A significant element of a democracy is the protection of human rights of all citizens.³ In India, there are about 2000 ethnic minority groups and over 200 languages spoken across the country, 22 languages are officially catalogued in the Constitution, regional and local official languages, and minority and tribal ones, with as many as 7 religions practiced by the people⁴. Additionally, a homogenization of national identity has led to discrimination and harassment of people from diverse racial and ethnic background. 78 per cent of the Northeast population is subject to several kinds of humiliation because of their appearance in New Delhi.⁵ 54 per cent of people living and working in capital felt that New Delhi is the most "unsafe place" in terms of ethnic intolerance while 67 percent feel that they were victims of racial discrimination. Crimes against people from Northeast India have increased by 270 per cent. The Sikh community has filed a petition in Supreme Court demanding a ban on stereotypical jokes on sardars.⁶

Gender Based Violence with Special Emphasis on Sexual Violence: The situation of women and girls are deteriorating each passing day. The country stands at 108 position out of 145 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index in 2015. The World Bank in its findings contends that 51.90% of females from the age group of 15-29 in rural India and 52.40% in urban India drop out of schools to attend domestic chores. In 2014, another study from the International Center for Research on Women reported that 60 percent of men admit to having perpetrated violence against women⁷. The issue of rape and sexual-violence in conflict zones is a topic which hardly finds discussion in India. In North East India or Kashmir, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) restrains the rule of law, numerous cases of sexual violence and rape remain unpunished. The experiences of men and women in conflict situation differ immensely. Women are often the primary target of sexual violence and rape has often been committed in orchestrated campaigns of ethnic cleansing that seek to undermine familial structures. The concept of rape in international humanitarian law is based not on aggression, but instead underpinned by a conception of women as property and a spoil of war. Indeed, jurisprudences of international human rights tribunals, as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, included rape as a crime against humanity in a situation of armed conflict. In June 2008 the United Nations Security Council debated and passed a new resolution on women, peace and security, the UNSCR 1820, focused principally on sexual violence in armed conflict.

Rationale of conference: The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.⁸ In the Indian constitution a separate section on the Right to Equality is enshrined safeguarding the rights and ensuring equality and protection against discrimination. However, these sections have remained a formal reality and should be transformed into a functional reality. Also as per India's commitment to international conventions such as the

³ What is Democracy? | Stanford University; <https://web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/WhaIsDemocracy012004.htm>

⁴ <https://droitcultures.revues.org/3390>

⁵ Eastern Today | Crimes against Northeast people on the rise; <http://www.eastern-today.com/entries/editorial/crimes-against-northeast-people-in-delhi-on-the-rise>

⁶ Shashank Shekhar, H. V. (2017, February 8). *Supreme Court to issue order to block Sardar jokes on internet*. Retrieved May 11, 2017, from India Today: <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/supreme-court-to-issue-order-sardar-jokes-block-on-internet-sikhs/1/877486.html>

⁷ <http://www.pressreader.com/india/deccan-chronicle/20141111/281758447577812>

⁸ University of Oregon | Diversity : <http://gladstone.uoregon.edu/~asuomca/diversityinit/definition.html>

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Durban Declaration and above all the United Nations International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as well as in the interest of humanitarian aspect and the development of the country, the country ought to evolve an Anti Racial law, develop a National Diversity Policy and come up with measures to end sexual violence in Conflict zones.

Keeping these obligations in mind along with the growing number of racial attacks, the Bezbaruah Committee was constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2014 to address the grievances of the Northeastern residents of the metropolitan cities of India. The committee discussed suitable remedies that ought to be taken by the government. Its framework seeking to provide practical solutions to the issue of racial discrimination and to dispel the various myths surrounding the region.

Objectives & Expected Results: The constant presence of discriminations, the lack of acceptance and admission, the missing studies addressing causes and consequences of racism in India, leads to some interrogations and the urgent need for a national framework on diversity across the country. Therefore, this event aims to contribute to a better understanding of racism and sexual violence in the country. After a two year's work on the project on Deepening Diversity, Women Rights and Democracy in India, this international conference aims to bring together international and national academicians, researchers, survivors of violence, civil society organizations, local authorities, law enforcing agencies, lawyers, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders under one roof to deliberate and create a dialogue on the lacunae of racism and sexual violence in conflict zones in India. The first draft of a National Diversity Policy/ an Anti-Racial law and measures to tackle Sexual Violence in Conflict zones will also be launched for deliberations. The conference will include key note speaker sessions, panel discussions, question and answer sessions, movie screening and photo exhibition.

For any questions and clarifications, kindly contact:

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