

## **Dalit Women United! – Nepal**

Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) organized the **National Conference of Dalit Women** with the theme *“Dignified life, Inclusion and Social Transformation”* from May 11-13, 2011. Over the three- day- long conference held in Kathmandu, Dalit women activists from 75 districts of Nepal, human rights activists, representatives from different international and domestic NGOs, media personnel; and international delegates from Denmark, UK, Sweden, Hongkong, India, and Bangladesh, participated.

A huge rally was organized, marching through different parts of the town chanting various slogans related to Dalit women’s rights and the upcoming new constitution. It took place early in the morning at 8:30 am, and more than 800 activists participated. The rally began from Bhadrakali and concluded at City Hall, Kathmandu. The Dalit women activists, along with various like-minded organizations from all over the country, also joined for solidarity regarding the objectives of the conference and for Dalit women’s issues.

After the rally, the participants were taken to a conference hall after the registration. Opening the conference, FEDO President Durga Sob gave welcome remarks highlighting the conference objectives and its background where she put forward the issues of Dalit women. The conference formally began with an inauguration by the Chief Guest Subash Chandra Nemwang, Chairperson of Constitution Assembly. Earlier, FEDO president Durga Sob chaired the conference and other guests took their respective seats. The Minister for Local Development, leaders of political parties, the UNDP Nepal Resident Coordinator, civil society leaders and international delegates were among the special guests.

Following the inauguration session, special guests gave their remarks and congratulated FEDO for organizing such a conference that would support to assertions of the rights of Dalit women. Saradha Pokharel, Chairperson of Security Pressure Group, extended her best wishes to the organizer for being able to create pressure to incorporate the agendas of Dalit women in the upcoming new constitution and for making the conference a huge success. The chief guest Nemwang said that the conclusion and recommendation of the conference would be fruitful for the constitution-making process, especially in addressing the agendas and issues of Dalit women. “The constitution-making process is really challenging, but we can turn this as an opportunity to favor the marginalized, disadvantaged groups and bring their issues into the mainstream,” Nemwang added.

Urmila Aryal, Minister for Local Development, stated that the recommendations from the conference are very important and that said she would do her best to address them. Similarly, Rikke Nohrlind, Coordinator at the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), expressed that the conference would be a milestone to pressurize for the participation of Dalit women in the decision-making level and state-restructuring process. Professor Vimal Thorat, from India,

stressed that the leadership, representation and reservation for Dalit women will ensure their rights. Dr. Ruth Momorama, a human rights activist from India, expressed that Dalit women and other marginalized and disadvantaged women need to be united so that the voice of voiceless can be heard. At the same time, three political parties' leaders also expressed their best wishes for bringing out the strong recommendations and gave their commitment to raising the issues of Dalit women in the new constitution.

In between the remarks sessions, Anuradha Koirala, President of Maiti Nepal and 2010 CNN Hero of the year, was honored by the chief guest and FEDO President for her contribution in the social sector, especially for working constantly with the issue of trafficking of girls in Nepal.

After the inaugural session, working papers on various themes were presented.

On Day one, two papers were presented and brought to the discussion among the participants, and comment was made by the commentator which was facilitated by the chair assigned for the paper. Following are the details of paper presentation on the first day:

**1.**

**Topic:** “Constituent Assembly and State Restructuring and Issues of Dalit women”  
**Presenter:** Bishwo Bhakta Dulal (Ahuti) (CA Member)  
**Chair by:** Dr. Surya Dhungel (Constitution expert)  
**Commentator:** Sapana Malla Pradhan (CA Member)  
Yam Bahadur Kisan (Advocate)

**2.**

**Topic:** “Madhesi Dalit women and their problems”  
**Presenter:** Ganga Mahara (Activist)  
**Chaired by:** Sarita Giri (CA Member)  
**Commentator:** Ranju Thakur (Advocate)  
Shanti Devi Paswan (Activist)

After each presentation, there was intense discussion on the theme of the paper by women from the districts, and they expressed their opinions, views and feedback

### **Second day**

On Day Two, the remaining papers were presented.

**3.**

**Topic:** “Badi women and their problems”  
**Chaired by:** Dr. Renu Rajbhandari (Activists)

**Presenter:** Uma Badi (Dalit Activist)

**Commentator:** Binod Pahadi (CA Member)  
Dhana Kumari Sunar (NWC Member)

4.

**Topic:** Sharing international experience

**Panalists:** Rikke Nohrlind, Coordinator, IDSN; Dr. Ruth Manorama, India; Ms. Moni Rani, Bangladesh;

Cintia Lavendera, Program Manager, WOMANKIND Worldwide, UK)

**Chaired by:** Dr. Sumitra Mamandhar Gurung

5.

**Topic:** “Issues of Far western Dalit Women”

**Chaired by:** Dr. Arju Deuba Rana (CA Member)

**Presenter:** Ganesh BK (Political/Social Activist)

**Commentator:** Hari Ram Sripailee (CA Member)  
Gyanu Gaire (NDC Member)

6.

**Topic:** “Impact of Inter-caste marriage on Dalit women”

**Chaired by:** Teku Nepali (Politician)

**Presenter:** Sabita Singh (Women Activist)

**Commentator:** Ambika Gajmer (Women activist)  
Kamala Hemchuri (Activist)

The paper presentation was followed by a cultural program to refresh the participants, and was performed by the *Kritika* Group (a group of disabled, marginalized, minority women). They performed various dances and songs reflecting the issues of marginalized women. The cultural program was highly entertaining, with most of the participants dancing and singing with the performers. This program was able to convey a strong message that there is a need for women’s solidarity to acquire various rights. In conclusion, they performed a drama that portrayed a story of women affected by domestic violence, rape, witch accusations, disability, issues as single women, discrimination and untouchability.

### **Third Day**

The third and last day began with a group discussion. Women participants were divided into groups according to five development regions, with women from the districts discussing the major issues confronting Dalit women from that region. Later on, the conclusions from each discussion were shared. After the tea break, Cintia Lavendera, Programme Manager of WOMANKIND Worldwide, shared the experience of international agencies working on the

issues of Dalit women in Nepal and showed her commitment to contribute to the rights and empowerment of Dalit women.

In the second session of the last day, the FEDO General Secretary presented a memorandum to the group that was to be submitted to the CA Chairperson, Prime Minister after being finalized. In the memorandum, different provisions were included on various issues affecting Dalit women, including political, economic, socio-cultural, education, health and legal agendas. In this regards, an open discussion was held where participants brought out very significant points to be included so as to incorporate the rights of Dalit women into the new constitution. At the end of the session, Durga Sob thanked all the people who gave support to make the conference successful and officially closed the conference.

Overall, the conference went well and the whole event was covered by different television and radio channels, newspapers and magazines. The first day was broadcasted live by a radio station where the reporter talked with participants from the districts and the team that organized the conference.

(FEDO)