

## **India needs to educate and empower women, enlighten men to change society's mindset towards women: Shashi Tharoor**

**NEW DELHI, December 19, 2013. Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for Human Resources Development,** today underlined the need for educating and empowering women so that they are conscious of their rights and are more willing to report any abuse against them. Society also needs enlightened and sensible men who have the will to give women their due status and respect.

Dr. Tharoor was speaking at a **FICCI Ladies Organisation's (FLO) 'Annual Interstate Meet: Celebrating 30 years of FLO: Together We Can'**.

Addressing the issue of crime against women, he said, educating a girl in the family meant educating the entire family and bringing about a change in the perspective of the male members of the family, which would eventually result in making men more sensitive towards women.

However, Dr. Tharoor admitted that a huge gender gap can be seen when it comes to education at the higher level. Although women are performing better academically but their number still remains small when compared with their male counterparts.

One of the major challenges to keep girls in school during their adolescence is lack of basic amenities like girls toilets, he pointed out. To resolve this issue, the government has passed a mandate that every school, be it girls or co-education, must have at least one girl's toilet and the government has allocated funds for it, Dr. Tharoor said.

A pledge on **'Women Safety'** was read out in the presence of the Minister who also signed the pledge.

**Ms. Usha Ananthasubramaniam, Chairman & Managing Director, Bharatiya Mahila Bank,** while highlighting the functions of the bank said that the bank will predominantly cater to women, although men will also be welcome to open accounts. But the main focus will be on women and women's empowerment through products and services, financial inclusion and financial literacy.

She said that women are the most under-utilized asset in any economy and suggested that the corporate sector should also play a proactive role in empowering women. They should look at corporate diversity and clear succession plan for women.

**Ms. Malvika Rai, President, FLO,** said that for the first time FLO had organized its Interstate Meet in Delhi and was overwhelmed with the participation of the members who came out in a large numbers to support and promote the cause of **'Creating a Climate of Respect – Keeping our Women Safe'**, the theme of the session. She added that the meet has created a platform for women to network and come together to work towards women empowerment.

**Ms. Naina Lal Kidwai, President, FICCI,** informed the participants that FICCI and FLO have for the first time set up a Task Force on Safety of Women. The 20-member Task Force, chaired by **Mr. Sidharth Birla, President-Elect of FICCI,** has made detailed recommendations on four aspects – physical, environmental, organisational and educational.

Speaking on the opening of the women's bank, she said, banks are wary of lending money to women because of instances of non-repayment of dues. Hence Ms. Kidwai urged women entrepreneurs and others seeking loans from banks to make timely repayment as it would open doors of the mainstream banks and many other women would be able to avail of these loans.

**Mr. Raj Biyani, MD, Microsoft IT India**, said to realize the full potential of India, we need to first optimize the potential of women society and make them secure. While, unveiling the Microsoft India's application on women safety 'The Guardian', he said that technology should and must play a role in making the life of women more secure.

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The following is the text of the pledge on 'Women's Safety' taken today:

"I Pledge my commitment to ourselves, each other and all together:

- To create a society where respect for women and their well-being are paramount at homes, workplaces and public spaces;
- To be active citizens in our political process to secure the rightful needs and interests of women;
- To raise our voices when we see injustices being perpetrated against women;
- To advocate for women who experience abuse and violence, and support policies to hold accountable people who commit such actions;
- To strive to increase the number of women in positions of leadership at workplaces and other institutions;
- To raise our children with the firm belief that their possibilities are not limited by their gender but they will be recognized for their character and contributions;
- To promote the education of women and girls because this is the key to economic security, stability and freedom of thought and expression;
- To honor the diversity of women; respecting each other's faith choices, ethnicities, customs, beliefs, characteristics, and qualities;
- To value women's health because the physical, social and emotional well being of women is essential;
- To protect girl children and the unborn girl child because life is sacrosanct.

With all this, I pledge to foster a nation where the advancement of women and girl children will be a national priority and where their contributions will be nurtured and recognized in India and across the world."

**FICCI Media Division**

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