

PRESS RELEASE

Women's groups challenge patriarchy in religion; four activists to be felicitated

New Delhi; 2nd March 2008: To celebrate 100 years of International Women's Day and decades of South Asian women's solidarity, four civil society groups – Asmita, Jagori, Kriti and Sangat – have come together to honour four courageous women activists who have challenged different patriarchal traditions and religious norms that have oppressed women. The occasion will be also be marked by the staging of *Peace on Earth*, a Bharatanatyam ballet that celebrates women's radical interpretation of religion.

The four women to be felicitated are Dr. Gabriele Dietrich, Jameela Nishat, Rinchen Khando Choegyol and Uma Chakravarty.

Gabriele is a well-known social activist and professor of Theology who enabled a comprehensive course on Social Analysis for the Bachelor's degree in all colleges affiliated with the Senate of Serampore, the prime coordination of protestant theological education. A German by birth and a naturalized Indian, she has been working since 1975 with grassroots movements such as Dalit, trade union workers, women's groups and so on.

Rinchen Khando Choegyol runs the Tibetan Nuns Project that started a course of non-sectarian higher education in Buddhist philosophy, a ground breaking concept that enables women gain the highest degree (Geshe) towards full ordination for nuns in the Tibetan tradition, equivalent to men. The second woman in the history of Tibet to be appointed as Cabinet Minister in the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, she was also one of the founding members of the Tibetan Women's Association (TWA).

Jameela Nishat is a feminist poet of significance in the Urdu literary scene. She runs a women's resource and welfare centre to fight violence against Muslim and Dalit women. Over the years, she has built a cadre of young women who fight discrimination and oppression in the family and community. Despite the fatwa that was issued against her, Jameela has continued her work undeterred. Jameela is also closely involved with efforts to preserve and project Deccani culture.

Uma Chakravarti is a distinguished feminist historian who has taught at Miranda House, Delhi University, the Institute of Women's Studies, Lahore, and Women's Studies at the Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University in Wardha, India. Uma's critical analyses of the Hindu brahmanical textual tradition, her essays on women Bhakti poets and reinterpretation of Sita are particularly well-known and influential. As a prominent activist, Uma has confronted complicity of the State in riots and pogroms.

Kamla Bhasin, Advisor, Sangat, a South Asian feminist network and well-known feminist activist, says, "I am delighted to celebrate 100 years of the declaration of international women's day. This celebration reminds me that I stand on the shoulders of our feminist foremothers. They made it possible for us to be where we are today. Let us all try to make things better for the next generation by fighting for gender equality. I believe gender equality will also free men. On this day let us call upon men to challenge patriarchy, which is de-humanises and brutalises them".

The Bharatanatyam ballet *Peace on Earth* is an experiment in fusion that celebrates the spiritual quest of women from different religions who redefine devotion and worship. Erasing the lines drawn between earthly love of human beings and the love of god, they sing their passion for god in terms that are erotic, exquisite and spiritual. Radical in their approach, they dismiss patriarchal norms to redefine faith. The ballet is written and directed by Vasanth Kannabiran and performed by Rajeshwari Sainath and troupe.

Please join us at 7.00 p.m. on Tuesday, 2nd March, 2010 at the Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi.

For more information, please contact:
Amrita: 98100 73245