

**Meeting on Trafficking, HIV, Labour and  
Migration: “Bringing the Centre to the  
People” and Building Positive Partnerships**

APRIL 6-10 2008

SILIGURI – DARJEELING – NEW  
JALPAIGURI

**NATIONAL MEDIA COALITION(NCAT)**

## APRIL 6-10 2008

- Engaging with the Government and local Governance structures to advance gender equality,

human rights and social protection

- Combating human trafficking and forced migration - both across borders as well as internally
- Reducing Gender based Violence
- Creating awareness towards reduction of HIV incidences
- Ensuring Care and support to survivors of violence
- Ensuring care and support to Persons living with HIV and AIDS
- Creating livelihoods options at local levels and exploring market linkages
- Facilitating safety nets against hunger, starvation and malnutrition, displacements
- Facilitating ground level voices at policy levels by supporting Parliamentary discussions and decisions around issues of gender, human rights and equality

The journalists were informed that the Darjeeling Positive Peoples' Network was asking for an ART Centre in Darjeeling and that all stakeholders, needed to work together to make a difference. All media persons were invited to the Meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> April.

### **Feedback of the Meeting:**

The Press reported the Event in a big way with all the National as well as Regional Newspapers of Siliguri and New Jalapaiguri

had related stories. All the News was focused on the Issues spelt out during the Press Conference.



*(Honourable MPs and Smt Manju Hembrum ,Member NCW)*

**8<sup>th</sup> April 2008: The Meeting on Trafficking, HIV, Labour and Migration: “Bringing the Centre to the People” and Building Positive Partnerships** was held in Siliguri on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2008.

Delegates were from diverse walks of life, working on a range of issues, including representatives from tea management, trade unions and NGOs. EHRTHNET was represented by members from ATSEC (India), ATSEC (Bihar), ATSEC (Jharkhand Chapter), ATSEC (Uttaranchal), CBATN (Cross Border Ant-trafficking Network), Churches of North India (CNI), DJPN+, GOLD East Himalayan Region, Impulse NGO Network, NCAT, NEDAN Foundation,>NNLRJ (National Network of Lawyers for Rights and Justice), Rahi Foundation, Vikalp dhara, Sanlaap, IRC, Geneva Global and Shakti Vahini. Government officials, advocates,

representatives of trade unions and management of tea gardens, positive peoples' representatives, activists, professionals and representatives of several NGOs attended.



*(Ms Mohuya ,Chairperson Media Coalition addressing the Guests)*

Present at the inaugural session were 3 MPs from the North East, and Ms. Manju Hembrun, Member National Commission for Women. The MPs were Dr. Arun Sharma from Assam, Mr. Nakul Das Rai from Sikkim and Mr. Dawa Narbula from Darjeeling. Ms. Mohuya Choudhury of NDTV and Chairperson of the National Media Coalition welcomed participants and Ms. Archana Tamang presented the objectives.



*(Ms Archana Tamang UNIFEM addressing the meet)*

Participants were informed that though most of those present worked on several issues, these would be specifically in relation to the tea gardens. It was noted that the Tea Centre has been neglected and human trafficking, hunger, denial of rights are widespread. It was highlighted that local partners play a bigger role and that exposing journalists to the ground reality was a part of the process of beginning transformation. Participants were asked to raise the issues/problems that they thought called for attention. AT said that these would be put before policymakers and that a solidified response to trafficking was needed.

The meeting was inaugurated with a Panel Discussion in which Ms Manju Hembrun and the Three Honourable Members of Parliament participated.

Ms Mohuya Choudhury , *Chairperson , Media Coalition* welcomed All the Honourable Guests and Dignitaries and in her Key note address said that the

Coalition has been doing tremendous work . She said that the Members of the Coalition which is spread across the country have a commitment which they have made to themselves i.e. commitment to cover developmental issues. National Coalition of Media Persons to Fight Against Gender Violence, Human Trafficking and HIV/AIDS is a civil society partnership initiative between Media and Civil Society to commit themselves for a unified fight against some of the dangers that loom large upon our society/ country. The coalition is a step to join hands, and strengthen and intensify the efforts of two important stakeholders, in fighting the injustice, prevailing in society and in affecting transformation of society in manner to move ahead for a more democratic, Rights based, just and equitable society. Media the fourth pillar of democracy is an important stakeholder in protection and promotion of Rights, exposing and fighting injustice, giving directions to social forces and shaping the social aspirations and patterns. Its contribution to the society are uncountable and its role invaluable. Today the liberalized and free media has emerged as one of the most powerful tool to fight socio-political evils/ injustice, affect empowerment and facilitate development.

The coalition aspires to channelize and streamline the immense potential of media power to inform, empower, train the masses to make them realize their 'Right' claims and 'Responsibilities' so as to enable them to stand, and assert their 'Rights' and claim

justified position in society as a valuable individual and responsible citizens. The coalition looks forward to initiate and practice a new mode of media and public interactions at the grassroots level; where, the responsibility of media does not remains confine to reporting of the fact and situations but to affect transformations by enriching and benefiting the masses by consistently bringing to them an opportunity to interact and work together with the most liberal, democratic, aware and alert sector of the modern democracy setup.

Through the coalition media as a frontrunner, aims at taking together the important stakeholders of Rights, in pursuing the dreams of democratic society based on Rights, Equity and Justice and to not only learn from them the basic problems at grassroots in realizing the dream but also involving them and their real aspirations in the process.

It aims at creating a unified national level platform of media persons to act with masses, social activists/ organizations, government and international bodies. It aspires to augment and reinforce the ongoing efforts of different stakeholders in a collaborative and effective manner, by intensely charging of the atmosphere, enhancing the capacities of different stakeholders, infusing sense of responsibility in each and every, causing action to happen and ensuring accountability; in relation to Gender violence/discrimination at various level of



socio-political and economic life, trafficking of human beings and HIV/AIDS.

She said that the Coalition which has a mandate to put issues like Trafficking, Migration, Gender Violence was concerned about the very serious problems affecting the Tea Gardens of the Eastern Himalayas Region. Also there has been a serious rise in Trafficking cases from the North East. It is to fight such issues that the Media Coalition was joining hands with the Various Networks like the ATSEC, CBATN, NNLRJ and NGOs in these region to form a Larger Network called the EHRTHNET (Eastern Himalayas Regional Network against GBV, Trafficking and HIV and AIDS). The idea she explained was to come together with each partner contributing their bit to fight the problems of the region. She then opened the panel Discussion and invited Smt Manju Hembrum Member National Commission for women to speak.



(Ms Manju Hembrum Member NCW at the meet)

**Ms. Manju Hembrun, NCW:**

*Smt Manju Hembrum Member NCW* spoke about the various initiatives of The National Commission for Women. She said that NCW The National Commission for Women is also dealing with the problem of trafficking in women and children. In 2001, NCW undertook study entitled 'Trafficking – A Socio-Legal Study'. Later in 2004, a study on 'Coastal Sex Tourism' was carried out by it. Along with these research studies, it has organized various seminars, training programmes and conferences on the subject of trafficking. Based on the above; it suggested amendments to ITPA in order to have a comprehensive law on trafficking. The Commission also organizes legal awareness campaigns to sensitize the women on various legal issues. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the National Human Rights Commission have requested all Chief Secretaries and Directors General of Police to sensitize the subordinate functionaries at the cutting edge on trafficking as well as other issues related to trafficking so that perpetrators of trafficking and its allied activities are severely dealt under the relevant provisions of law. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Women on their own and in collaboration with the civil society are sensitizing the judicial officers, police officers, government officers and various other stakeholders on issues

related to trafficking in human beings for various purposes.



*(Honourable MPs from the Eastern Himalaya Region)*

She spoke about the Draft National Plan of Action Prepared by the NCW in consultation of Various NGOs and Govt. authorities. Among the various recommendations she said that any intervention for prevention of trafficking should take into account the aspects of both demand and supply as a root cause. Central Government/State Governments/Union Territories should also take into account the factors that increase vulnerability of people to trafficking, including inequality, poverty and all forms of discrimination and prejudice. Effective prevention strategies should be based on existing experience and accurate information.

She also spoke on the Trafficking happening from Tribal States like Jharkhand , Chattisgarh , Orissa, North East and the Eastern Himalayas Region to Delhi, Haryana , Punjab for Maids. She said and expressed concern that many placement

agencies have sprung up across the region for placing these innocent women and children for Maids and in many cases they landed up in Trafficked situations. She said that there was a urgent need to tackle this problem and said that Media could play a role by spreading awareness across the region.

Ms. Hembrun highlighted the plight of domestic workers, particularly tribal girls, who came to Delhi, and who were often subjected to violence and abuse. She gave examples of girls from Assam, who were rescued at the bus stop in New Delhi, in partnership with the media coalition. She spoke of the importance of hiring girls from registered agencies only. To give Adivasi domestic workers (DWs) access and control over their earnings (money, often not given on time), she shared how NCW had facilitated this for 13,000 Adivasi domestic workers, who had gathered in Delhi, by opening of a bank account in their names and giving them ATM facilities. In this way agents were bypassed and they could send money home. Domestic Workers also had aspirations to advance themselves with vocational training, she said.

Other points made by her, included:

- Most HIV positive cases of girls are in Chhattisgarh, Orissa & Assam
- Health issues for girls in Haryana, where many brothers have one wife, trafficked for marriage, in most cases from the NE, West Bengal and Jharkhand

- Cases of wives being declared mad by husbands and committed to institutions in Haryana and Punjab according to revelations by some Adivasi girls in these states
- Cases of mothers-in-law, not allowing wives to live with their husbands, according to a report filed by 12 girls in Darjeeling



*(Dr Arun Sharma MP from Assam )*

**Dr. Arun Sharma, MP, Assam** said that illegal migrants from Bangladesh and Nepal has added to the problem of human trafficking in the North Eastern States. This is the opinion expressed by speakers from the North-east participating in a meeting of the National Media Coalition against Human Trafficking. Dr Arun Sarma drew a grim picture of the human trafficking scenario in the Region pointing towards the acute poverty among the people on account of lack of economic development, growing unemployment, militancy, ethnic turmoil, floods and illegal infiltration. He said that most of the women and children were

trafficked for employment. In some cases girls were promised marriage in Gulf countries. In the last two-three years, girls from the Region have been taken to various parts of the country and abroad, he added. The crisis has been compounded by the presence of a large population of Bangladeshi migrants in the Region. The cheap labour is a major attraction and there is no record of what has happened to the womenfolk who have been taken as cheap labour force, he added. He further added that flood have affected a large number of population in Assam and some 50,000 people are currently living in relief camps in pitiable conditions. Roads and embankments have been washed away and there is no living space available. These flood victims become easy prey for human traffickers, he said. He further added that the victims of ethnic riots living in refugee camps in Kokrajhar district have also fallen victims to touts.

He said that trafficking is the third largest organized crime in the world, after arms and drugs. He informed that:

- Victims are usually from vulnerable sections and poverty is a major cause
- Large scale violence among ethnic communities has made many families homeless and landless. Boys and girls are looking for employment and Adivasis are easy prey for traffickers. They form the majority in relief camps. Boys are trafficked for labour and girls into commercial sex



- A Government agency has to be pursued for action. A PIL can be a useful tool to get the Govt. to respond. He cited the example of Govt. of Assam, which was obliged to respond to a PIL, leading to sensitization of the Ministry of Labour
- Everyone needs to be alerted & there has to be good coordination among agencies for joint efforts

He proposed a forum with MPs (Parliamentarians' Forum on Trafficking) & Legislative Assembly members/Media and NGOs for networking and suggested that in every district, there could be an agency, which could be empowered to take action. He thanked NCAT for providing this forum and said he would be glad to associate with organizations and individuals in combating trafficking and GBV.



**Mr. Dawa Narbula, MP, Darjeeling** informed that his constituency consisted of people from the tea gardens. He made the following points:

- Root causes of trafficking are poverty and unemployment
- Though Darjeeling tea is famous worldwide, people making this tea are impoverished
- Presented a Bill to bring up the socio-economic status of people in the tea garden
- Women earn only Rs. 30 for plucking tea the whole day- way below the stipulated minimum wage
- Though the Govt. has given a big package, it has not yet reached Darjeeling
- Numbers of trafficking are rising
- All can help. The Govt of India is trying to alleviate unemployment by setting up cottage industries and that NGOs could be identified to link with this
- Awareness camps should be organized at the grassroots level, as people in tea gardens and interiors don't know about HIV/AIDS.

He said that it was a welcome step that the Media Coalition and the UNIFEM was focusing on very urgent problems in the region and said that he was always available to help for the cause.



**Mr Nakul Das Rai, MP, Sikkim** informed that tea gardens have multiple problems, which the Government has to solve. These include a lack of proper wages & opportunities. A Policy on HIV and trafficking needs to take ground realities into consideration and Govt. needs to formulate special policies. Govt. Doctors, NGOs, teachers need to work closely together. He would support these issues.



*Mr Nakul Das Rai, MP, Sikkim*

**Observations/ points made by Media Coalition Chairperson and facilitator, Ms. Mohuya Choudhuri (MC).**

- Though poverty is driving a lot of issues being discussed, trafficking is only one part of it
- There is also an element of debt
- Like the current Parliamentary forum on HIV/AIDS, a Parliamentary Forum on Trafficking and Violence, could be proposed. This would make it easier to push in Parliament.
- Recommendations from the meeting should be put down so that they can be taken to Parliament, which is meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> April
- This is not a one off event – but the beginning of a process of building positive partnerships towards social transformation
- Need to focus on: What the problems are; what are the solutions and what is the impact.



**Key Points made/ key issues raised during the Meeting**

ATSEC Jharkhand Representative Shri Sanjay Mishra said that he was happy that Smt Manju Hembrum accepted the

problems of the daughters of the Jharkhand State. He said that it was a victory for us as in 2004 no one was wanting to accept it as a problem. He said that it was important as Ms Manju Hembrum was also from Jharkhand . He said that in 2004 the Police , Welfare Department , and State Administration all refused to accept it as a problem . Infact he said that he was rebuked by them as they said that it was a livelihood problem and why your organization was wanting to stop this employment opportunities. He explained to them that it was not Livelihood opportunity as it was complete violation of Human Rights and they had to sell Human Dignity . The state Govt used to regularly ask for the figures / data . To bring forward the issue ATSEC Jharkhand did a study with UNIFEM which was called Childhood on Fire. He said that it was with this study ATSEC Jharkhand arrived at the figure of 56,375 girls and children had gone out for Jobs. In that study it was pointed out as to what was happening to these children and how they were being exploited. They placed the study before the Chief Minister .

It was with that study that the Jharkhand Govt first admitted that Trafficking was going on and it needed to be curbed. The state Govt with the support of ATSEC Jharkhand formulated a Plan of Action to combat Trafficking .

He said that presently the figure has touched 1,23,000 and district affected are Ranchi , Simdega , Gumla , Pakur, Dumka

etc. He lamented that there was no shelter homes in Jharkhand and it was a great problem for them as they had no place to keep the victims who were not accepted by their families.



*(Sanjay Mishra ATSEC Jharkhand)*

He said that the migration was so high that it was getting difficult for the boys in the region to get brides. He said that there was no livelihood opportunities for victims of Trafficking and the same needed to be setup. He said that the state Govt had not set up Project from the Swadhar or the Ujjwala Programme.

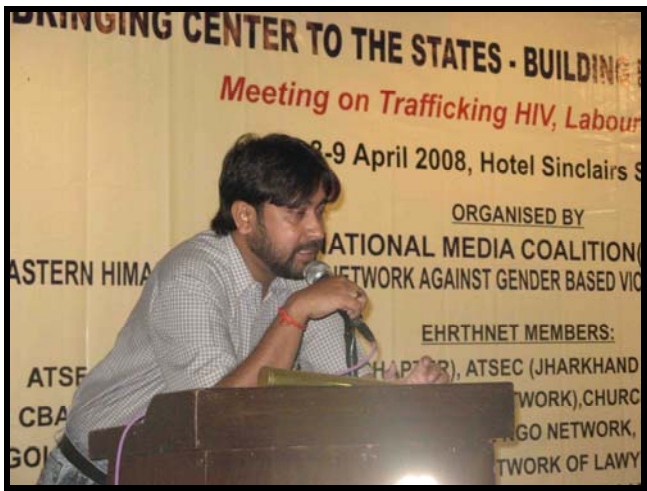


*(Ms Archana Tamang and Ms Mohuya Chaudhuri)*



He said that ATSEC Jharkhand had identified 365 placement agencies which were running illegally. He said that Delhi Police have not initiated any enquiry till date . He said that the problem has to be dealt from the supply side and the Demand side. He said that people of Jharkhand are being duped by these agencies. He appealed for greater advocacy in Delhi.

**Representative of the Bhorukha Welfare Trust** informed that they focus on prevention and have been working on the India-Nepal Border since 2001. Setting up vigilance committees at borders, have been helpful in tracing persons who go 'missing'. There is need for vigilance at the village level and to work at Panchayat level.



**Victor Bose ,Dooars , Jagran** said it was important to raise voices from the ground, to identify & address causes of trafficking, as well as look at property issues in this connection. He said that the problem with the Tea gardens was so acute that the Govt neither the Tea estate Management were ready to accept that there was a problem in

the region. He said that there was no proper employment opportunity neither pay parity. there was jobless labour sitting without any opportunities . He said that it was from these homes trafficking was happening. He said that though the labour was suffering from hunger and malnutrition the govt had not provided BPL cards so that they may get some relief. He said that the Tea Estate owners have to be brought under the ambit of the law .

He said that Trafficking of women and children was rampant in the region and it was high time that NGOs and administration could tie up with each other to get them booked.

He said and made a appeal that we all should come together to solve the problems affecting the Eastern Himalayas region.



**(Karuna Singh US Consulate Kolkatta)**

**Karuna Singh of the American Centre** informed that the Centre supports many NE NGOs like Gold & Impulse. She suggested the setting up of an office which would give

correct information to the media. She said that it was a welcome step that NGOs, civil society and media was coming together to curb this menace affecting the region. She said that the American centre would extend all its support for the same.



*(Manavendra Mandal ,Kolkatta ATSEC South Asia)*

Shri Manavendra Mandal , **ATSEC WB & Coordinator ATSEC India** raised several points, viz.

- (a) Migration, labour/trafficking, HIV/AIDs are inter-linked issues
- (b) Hazardous migration leads to trafficking
- (c) Rapes happen after trafficking, which is on the rise (false marriages/ job opportunities
- (d) Through visibility to the issue by the media is a very positive thing, the media should not overexpose the victims
- (e) Resettlement is difficult -important to undertake awareness programmes for adolescent boys and girls and conduct a study of livelihood and support programmes that the NCW and state governments may have for young girls

- (f) Need to work towards changing laws if necessary
- (g) The training given by NGOs and ATSEC is not enough to give a proper livelihood
- (h) In Bengal, there are 3 or 4 areas for trafficking
- (i) Naxalbari and Bangladesh border are transit points
- (j) Trafficking for Domestic Work is rampant in parts of W. Bengal
- (k) Lack of structures to trace migration/trafficking of domestic workers
- (l) There needs to be some mechanism which would give a record of where they are going
- (m) Need to work together

He also had a point of caution to the Media and said that the Media had a very positive role to play . He said that the Media should follow the various protocols so that Photographs of victims are not openly published. He said that there are cases when victims had to suffer a lot because of the Media publicity.

He pointed out that we have to focus more in the rural areas for awareness on Trafficking. He said that we have to break the trust which the traffickers develop when they identify a prospective victim. He said that there was an urgent need to focus on the missing children from these regions and have a proper investigation. He said that programmes should be prepared in such a way that they benefit the people.



He said that since the MPs were present it was a high time that plans , Programmes and policies needed to be redrafted. He said that the present livelihood opportunities provided by the Govt does not fulfill the needs of the victims and said that opportunities which connect with the market needs to be evolved.

Finally he welcomed that the organizations were focusing on these regions and said that Siliguri being a strategic point as the gateway to the North East as well as having porous Borders with Bangladesh and Nepal lot of Trafficking was happening in the region and it was time that the Investigating agencies found out how the children and girls in the region were vanishing



*(Professor Raina ,Law Faculty University of Delhi)*

**Professor Raina of the Law Faculty, Delhi University** endorsed this saying that undertaking research, which gives accurate data, is an important tool for solutions. There are layers of diverse issues, within trafficking. Law as a tool for social change can play an important role. Though many

laws are there, implementation is a problem. For an efficient application of laws, if states shrug the responsibility, a PIL can be filed.

He said that problems like trafficking are social problems and said that we the people had the solution and not the law. He said that the whole region of Eastern Himalayas and North East was of negligence from the mainstream. He emphasized that Ignorance from the mainstream can lead to multiple problems. He said that it was time that we found out the reasons of the negligence of the areas and addressed it accordingly.

Finally he emphasized that Unemployment, Labour problems, Malnutrition , Trafficking , Gender Based Violence , were negation of Human Values and it was the duty of the state to come to the rescue of the suffering masses.



*(Rev Naresh Ambala Bishop Eastern Himalayas)*

**Mr. Bhaskar Chalia from the Dooars Branch of the Management of Tea Gardens** provided his perspective on workers and why problems are multiplying. He gave a history of the Dooars area, which in 1840

was found suitable for tea. Chhota Nagpur was the labour catchment area, where 4 tribes were identified. Labour colonies have always been placed inside the garden so that they couldn't easily run away. Though 4 generations have stayed in the garden, the size has remained the same – thus the size of population has increased but the work has not increased. There is not much scientific content in tea garden work and there have been no new gardens since the 1960s. Plucking is the most important work (manual work – 80%) and management has not introduced mechanization (why?). The problems currently are:

- (a) excess population
- (b) susceptibility of tea gardens to fluctuations as any other business
- (c) not enough work (13-16 gardens closed)
- (d) Work force have not developed mobility of labour.
- (e) No mechanization of the estates

Training in other trades is very important. There is forced mobility of men to unskilled labour and women to domestic work. In order to prevent the harmful effects of such movement, it is important to focus on prevention. Business owner and worker are two sides of the same coin. Re-training can be an option. The 11<sup>th</sup> Plan has allocated 50 crores to re-training and training of garden workers.

*(Questions were asked on why profit margins were not ploughed back to the workers. It was remarked that a work culture should reflect*

*ethical behavior and transparency and that this was a dialogue to put pressure on systems.)*



*(Samir Roy, representative of a Trade Union)*

**Samir Roy, representative of a Trade Union** informed that as per the Tea Act, workers are denied their fundamental rights, with owners not willing to move forward. The Tamil Nadu Govt. gives Rs. 101 per day to workers but West Bengal only Rs. 52.90 – doesn't want to give minimum wage to workers. 2000 workers died of starvation, but the Govt. said they died of malnutrition. More than 100 girls trafficked from the gardens, which lack proper wages and medical facilities.

Among the points he discussed were including

1. Corporate Social Responsibility of Tea Garden Managements
2. Continuing labour exploitation in the whole region
3. Due the problems of Starvation women were forced to undertake the sex trade.

4. Lot of Trafficking from the region happening.
5. Reluctance of the State Govt to admit the Teas estates problem.
6. No way of stopping until and unless strong steps are undertaken as Traffickers were a organized gang and lot of young people of the region were becoming there victims, also he said that the demand and supply were supplementing the growth of the exploitation of the victims from the area.

**Rev. Naresh Ambala, Bishop of Darjeeling,** CNI informed that a tea cooperative has been established with 22 families in the Dooars area. Charmuni Tea Estate holdings, led to increased poverty, bonded labour, sex for money & lack of employment. Tea garden estate not serious about welfare schemes for workers. Need to pressurize governments to take action so that a margin of the profits can be diverted towards workers.

He said that there were 16 Tea Estates which were closed . He said that the Govt should think involving the laborers in t he management of Tea Estates . He also said that hunger and malnutrition was so much among the labourers of the Tea Estates that women had to sell their bodies to get Rs 5 to feed their children Milk.

He strongly said that the Real Estate Mafia and the Tea Mangement were trying to sell the land to these mafias so as to exploit the

area. He said that the EHRTNET should come out openly and speakj and lobby against the Building Mafias and developers. They cannot be allowed to remove the people from there only thing which is with them and that is land.

He said that Govt should come out openly to protect the rights of the laborers. He said that the Interfaith leaders should also be involved in providing support to the people and said that religious leaders had a great role in changing peoples perceptions. He said that change can come when it is from the heart and certainly religion has a lot to do with heart.

**Chintoo Dey, Chairman, Tea Mazdoor Association** informed that 50% of tea workers are women.

1. They get less than 17 calories a day; no sanitation; no potable drinking water; no maternity leave & GBV.
2. There is 27,000 labor just sitting with a back to the wall situation.
3. There is trafficking & male migration of boys from rural areas; deprivation (depletion of resources); & decline in cultivation, affecting the economy of the people.
4. Employment generation is needed to check trafficking/migration.
5. There is severe shortage of potable drinking water
6. The labourers who are mostly women have no work and when she has no food and hunger stairing that the people offer her work and take her to another round of exploitation.
7. Women have been exploited and the Govt is just watching silently.

8. There is no economic equality
9. There is no human dignity for laborers of the Tea Estates.



#### **Activist from Kalimpong:**

1. People in the Kalimpong region have been completely deprived of their livelihood and the problem is very acute and alarming.
2. Women are disappearing and many of them are being abducted to far off places
3. In the whole of the region Trafficking is happening .
4. Migration of young Boys and girls is also shocking and most of them end up Trafficked.
5. Due to depletion of resources people have to go and work as labourers.
6. This vicious circle of exploitation has brought and affected the human dignity.

#### **Rajan Pradhan:**

1. Workers are not educated, so that they don't rise.

2. Issues of education and health need to be addressed in Dooars region.
3. Information on Govt. Schemes is needed.
4. There are very less schools in the region .
5. NREGA has not reached the region.
6. NRHM has also not reached the region.
7. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is just lip service and there is a lot of corruption.
8. People have to be educated about the various schemes.
9. Mass awareness on Trafficking and Gender Violence is needed.
10. Education and Health sector have to be improved in the region to curb the exploitation.

#### **POST LUNCH SESSION**

**Archana Tamang (UNIFEM)** welcomed all the delegates to the meeting .She announced that the Health Minister was going to arrive any moment and remarked that the issues which are being discussed are issues which are pragmatic and outstanding . She said that the issues are very dear to the Health Minister Shri Ambumani Ramadoss. She said that there are people from diverse range like the Positive People Network, Tea Garden workers, Civil Society Lawyers , NGO, Media . She said that it was an informal gathering where we have gathered to discuss the solutions to the urgent problems affecting the region. She welcomed Dr



Ambumani Ramadoss for giving us hope that things are going to change.

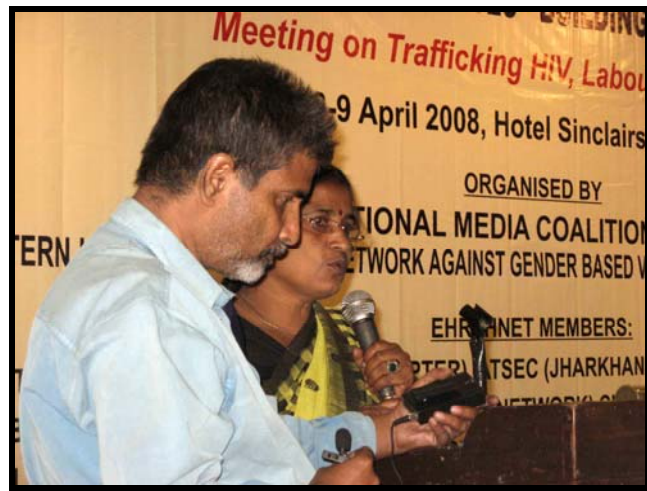


*(Dr Ambumani Ramadoss , Union Health Minister)*

**Mr Polson Lama , Shankar Foundation and DNP Plus :**

1. He thanked Archana Tamang and UNIFEM for giving us this great opportunity of letting their voices to be heard.
2. He asked for an ART centre in Darjeeling and said that there were many patients who had to suffer lot of pains as they had to travel long distances to get ART.
3. He requested and appealed to the Minister to make the ART Centre a reality.
4. He said that lot of issues regarding stigma and discrimination were there and the Govt needs to launch awareness programme so that stigma could be addressed effectively.
5. He said that the issues of Trafficking was closely associated with HIV as

many people fell into unsafe places and got HIV infection .



*(Representative of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Samiti)*

**Representative of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Samiti :**

*(DMSCis a Sex Workers organization having branches across West Bengal- They had requested time to from Media Coalition to present their views before the Honourable Minister)*

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee is a conglomerate of 65,000 sex workers in West Bengal, and is a part of National Network of Sex Workers that represent 60,00,000 sex workers in the country. We are a secular organization working towards elimination of social oppression and simultaneously vouching for a peaceful platform in the country. The organization was formed to create awareness among the community members and thus reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) has praised the Project and World Health Organization



(WHO) has designated it as a 'Model Project' working on the sexual life and the rights of the sex workers in the Sonagachi area.

### **What do we want?**

We want community involvement along with other development partners - in designing and implementing Anti-trafficking program to combat trafficking as well as to enable survivors of trafficking to lead a healthy life. It is not an unrealistic approach to conceive because Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), a sex workers' organization, from Kolkata, India, translated this approach into reality through **"Self Regulatory Board (SRB) Mechanism"**. The primary objective of SRB is to regulate new entry into sex work. **60% of the SRB members** are from sex workers community and **40%** (representative from Social Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal, doctors, Lawyer etc) **are members from administration and civil society**. Any new entrants are brought before SRBs who clarify their age, motives and process of entry. Girls below 18 yrs (medically examined) and unwilling entries (through counseling) are not allowed to join sex work and sent back home or rehabilitation centers.

### **What drove us to constitute Self Regulatory Board and why?**

Being challenged by the law enforcing authorities and by the state and the civil society alike. DMSC came up with a new

strategic vision. They floated the idea of Self-regulation and the concept of Self-Regulatory Boards by the year 1998.

We reasoned that these SRBs would serve as a double check to prevent entry of minor girls and unwilling adult women into the sex sector, control the exploitative practices within, regulate the rules and practices of the sector and, institute social welfare measures for and involving the sex workers and their children.

Moreover, there are no existing effective mechanisms to combat trafficking in the destination sex work sites and only a committed group of sex workers could prevent entry of trafficked or underage girls or unwilling women into the sex sector.

We trust that by the development of Self-Regulatory Boards, victimization of women both within and beyond the sex sector could be reduced, besides their social integration can be handled with due respect and dignity.

**Lessons learnt:** There are 33 SRBs operating presently. 8 are in Kolkata and 25 in other districts. 558 girls (84% below 18 yrs) rescued during 1996-2007 and 497 sent back homes and 61 to rehabilitation centers. Number of minors decreased from 25% to 0.7% and mean age of sex workers increased from 22 yrs to 28 yrs in Sonagachi as compared between 1992 and 2001 through various studies.



**Dr. Ambumani Ramadoss, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare** congratulated NCAT for **bringing the centre to the people** and for forming a bridge between the two, through the state governments. All issues are linked, he said. He conveyed regards, good wishes and regrets from Minister of State for Commerce, Mr. Jairam Ramesh, stating that Mr Ramesh had to cancel his trip to North Bengal as he had been given extra charges of the Ministry of Power, just the previous day, in addition to his own portfolio. He informed that the Govt. is doing a lot on HIV - NACP III now, with NACP I in 1990. Rs. 2500 – Rs. 3000 crores over the years. Almost 20% of people in India still don't know about HIV. Youth, which is the high risk group in the country, almost 600,000, need to be protected against risks posed by HIV/AIDS, tobacco, junk food etc



(Dr. Ambumani Ramadoss, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare )

He has asked the PM, if HIV can be mainstreamed in all other projects. India is the only country in the world, where the National Aids Council is chaired by the PM. National Rural Health Mission – 80% goes to NHRM. HIV is mainstreamed in this to dispense with stigma and discrimination. HIV, not only a health problem but a development and social and economic problem. 86% of HIV is through the sex route. Both sex and drug-use are linked, as in Manipur and Nagaland. Programmes are being rolled in for orphans/children/mothers/widows and increased targeted interventions on migrant labourers/truckers/sonargachi commercial sex workers (99% are using condoms here now). He further informed that:

- An ART Link Centre in Darjeeling will be opening ( *This is a success story for the PLWHA who had asked for UNIFEM's help in lobbying with the Government for an ART Center in Darjeeling, in August 07*)

- An Act on Stigma and Discrimination is in the making
- Efforts to change the Immoral Trafficking Act are being made
- Trafficking in persons is a priority issue for the Government
- Trafficking was an issue which is affecting our Children and Women and that needs to be tackled seriously.
- North East and Eastern Himalayas are very sensitive to the Trafficking problem as it had all the ingredients like Poverty, Migration, Cross Borders, Porous Borders,
- Indians form 1/6<sup>th</sup> of humanity. 75% of the budget is used on prevention; 25% on care and support; 40% of PLWHA in India are women
- Women need to be empowered more & given more choices – female condoms, microbicides vaccine – research ongoing
- Legalizing commercial sex needs to be debated and that India is not ready to legalize Commercial Sex
- NACP 3 HAS A FOCUS ON Trafficking And Migration.
- Rehabilitation of children needs attention
- Support of NGOs needed in some states. Govt. is riding on the back of NGOs in its work on malaria, HIV/AIDs, cancer, TB
- 85% of Mizoram uses tobacco products, with 68% being women
- Some announcements for North Bengal coming up he said in response

to someone commenting on there being no proper National Medical College He said that a National Medical College would be established in North Bengal and the north East

- Need for a trauma centre on national highways – golden quadrangle (north/west/south/east corridors will be fully functional in 1-2 years
- Mobile ambulance services will follow
- Leprosy is focusing on surgeries now

The Hon. Minister said he would return to the NE every 6 months to review progress. He said that the Ministries of Home, Defence, Panchayati Raj, Labour and Commerce are all involved in the issues discussed. He said that he would share his concerns and take the concerns voiced at the meeting back to the Centre – for more resources and more programmes. There is a need to fight HIV/AIDs jointly. He stated that he would be there for the Media Coalition, wherever they want him and for whatever. “We’re going to support these requests from NE.”



### **Field Visit to Tea Estate by the Media Coalition**

The Media Coalition and UNIFEM team visited the Ambootia Tea Estate. They met with Mr. Sanjay P. Bansal, the Director of the estate, who has taken over 10 sick tea estates and turned them into profit making enterprises. The farming is totally organic.

### **Field Visit to Darjeeling by the Honourable Minister**

The Minister visited the District Hospital in Darjeeling, the first time that a Union Minister of Health had done so. The Media Coalition and UNIFEM were present. A beginning has been made to improve the conditions at the district hospital. Another hospital close by, which had been closed, has been re-opened as a training centre for auxiliary nurses and midwives. Patients and residents of Darjeeling were very happy at the Minister's visit.

#### **General Remarks:**

- Participation of the Union Health Minister in the Meeting was a significant step in getting the Central Government's attention to the NE and the Eastern Himalaya Region – the first time that a Union Minister of Health had visited the region
- Linking the Centre to the State is a very effective strategy – needs to be persevered with

- The entire meeting was about diverse stakeholders looking at cross-cutting issues of marginalization & vulnerabilities across labour/migration/trafficking/health & HIV/AIDS
- It gave visibility to local voices (Media Coalition played a key role)
- The presence of the Media with the platform of the National Media Coalition, shared with CSOs, brought the media on board more strongly on the issues
- Convergence of diverse issues – holistic approach
- The meeting brought together an array of stakeholders who are looking at several issues specifically
- related to the tea gardens – it showed how local partners play a bigger role
- Local issues raised by local communities. The interface gave them a “voice”
- It exposed many of us to the realities on the ground which is one of the most important elements of being able to program for social transformation

### **NEWS CLIPPINGS FROM THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS**

#### **‘India not ready to legalise commercial sex’**

Statesman News Service

SILIGURI, April 8: India as a country is not yet ready to legalise prostitution and the

issue needs to be widely debated by the civil society before the government takes a decision, the Union health and family welfare minister, Dr Anbumani Ramadoss said here today.

The Union minister was addressing a workshop on human trafficking and HIV-AIDS prevention in Siliguri this afternoon. Referring to the growing cases of HIV infection in India, the Union minister blamed the widespread taboo about sex in the Indian society. Adding further, Dr Ramadoss said: "Talks about legalising the sex trade is doing the rounds for quite some time now. But I think, India has not yet come to the stage when you can legalise commercial sex."

Terming the yields from the three National Aids Control Programmes (NACP) in India beginning from 1992 to till date as "not satisfactory," the Union health minister stressed on the need to make the young generation aware of the deadly disease and the ways to prevent it.

"About 60 crore of India's population are youths and hence, our focus should be on them to contain HIV infection rate in the country. Unfortunately, even after running three NACPs till now, not even 20 per cent of our population is aware of HIV-AIDS. A lot needs to be done," Dr Ramadoss said. Referring to the situation in West Bengal, the Union health minister informed that four districts in the state are already in the 'Category- A' list signifying them as districts with most number of HIV infection cases. "The state government must take special care to curb the menace in West Bengal and

particularly in the north Bengal region, which shares boundaries with many countries," he said.

The minister also informed that to reduce the plight of HIV infected people, two Anti-retroviral Therapy link centers were being set up at the Darjeeling Government Hospital, Darjeeling and at the Malda district hospital.

### **Minister praises song, raps staff**

**VIVEK CHHETRI - *The Telegraph***

*Anbumani Ramadoss in Darjeeling. (Suman Tamang)*

Darjeeling, April 9: The district hospital here witnessed a sea change, thanks to a ministerial visit.

The defunct hospital elevator, which had not been functional for close to five years, was suddenly found working early this morning, and so was the tele-medicine centre. All the doctors of Saheed Durga Malla Hospital (the district hospital) had reported on time wearing their full uniform, probably for the first time.

Many recollect that it was also the first time that the toilets were spic and span and the water drums were filled to the brim. The medicine chart showed that the hospital had all of them in its store and the 500m stretch of the approach road had been carpeted.

Hospital authorities, however, had not taken these measures keeping in mind the



patients' welfare, but to ensure that Union health minister Anbumani Ramadoss was impressed.

As soon as Ramadoss entered the hospital premises around 9.30am, the nurses sang a welcome song in English. "This is the first time that I have received such a warm reception in a state hospital," said the impressed minister.

However an hour later, when he finished the inspection, the praise was not repeated. "The district hospital is in a pretty bad shape," said the minister.

Ramadoss had made enough queries that revealed the state of affairs at the hospital.

To start with, the minister had asked about the functioning of the Rogi Kalyan Samiti. The officials did mutter answers, but Maj. (retired) K.P. Malla, the secretary of the Indian Red Cross Society (Darjeeling) and a member of the Samiti, said: "I have not been called for a meeting for close to two years."

As the minister's visit drew to a close, the hospital employees breathed a sigh of relief. But the patients were the happiest among all.

"Why can't a central or state minister pay a surprise visit every month. Things will definitely improve," said Puran Subba, a patient's relative.

## **Union health minister upset with Darjeeling Sadar Hospital upkeep** *Statesman News Service*

DARJEELING, April 9: The Union health minister Mr Anbumani Ramadoss today expressed disappointment over the condition of the Darjeeling Sadar Hospital. "The hospital, which is supposed to be the district health headquarter is in pretty bad shape," was the minister's blunt observation after an inspection.

The minister who was on a day's visit to Darjeeling emphasised that upgrading health centers and other schemes would be of primary importance. "This is a difficult terrain and a lot more is to be done to improve the health condition in the hills," he said.

He expressed equal unhappiness with the lack of infrastructure and health amenities in the hills in spite of the funds sanctioned for the purpose. "The Centre under the National Rural Health Mission has provided all state governments including West Bengal an amount of approximately Rs 1,500 crore. Also in the last financial year an approximate amount of Rs 500 crore was allocated for upgrading health centers including those in the Darjeeling hills," said Mr Ramadoss.

"The North-Eastern areas and the Darjeeling Hills lag behind in terms of health facilities," the health minister stated adding that the National Urban Health Mission for urban

areas having a population over one lakh will be implemented in these regions soon. The new scheme would look into upgrading of staff, equipments and other facilities in the health centres.

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HIV awareness tops minister list  
OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT,  
TELEGRAPH

**Siliguri, April 8:** After 16 years of work under the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) and spending up to Rs 3,000 crore on it, 20 per cent of the country's population still does not know what HIV/AIDS is and how the disease spreads.

"From this, one can gauge the huge task before us and the reason why 75 per cent of the funds under NACP will be spent on prevention measures," Union health minister Anbumani Ramadoss said here today. "Of this population, 600 million youths will have to get priority to be protected from HIV."

Ramadoss also said a "national-level centralised medical institution" would be coming up in north Bengal. "We shall make the formal announcement after the panchayat elections."

He was speaking at a meeting to discuss measures to curb increasing levels of trafficking and HIV — two menaces affecting the tea gardens of the region. The programme was organised by National

Media Coalition and the Eastern Himalayas Regional Network against Gender-based Violence, Trafficking and HIV.

Attended by several stakeholders from north Bengal and the Northeast states, including government officials, civil society organisations and HIV positive persons' networks, the meeting heard various problems faced by HIV-infected persons and suggestions by NGOs for better intervention methods.

"We are facing problems in accessing anti-retroviral therapy (ART) as we have to come all the way to North Bengal Medical College and Hospital for treatment and medication," said Polsen Lama, a member of Shankar Foundation, a network of HIV positive persons in Darjeeling town.

The minister said a draft act has been prepared against stigma and discrimination faced by AIDS patients and was most likely to be introduced in Parliament in the monsoon session. The meeting adopted a Siliguri charter, the recommendations of which will be taken up in Delhi.

### **Sex trade flourishes in Darjeeling**

Manu Sharma NDTV 24X7  
Saturday, April 26, 2008 (Darjeeling)

Porous borders along Nepal and Bangladesh have fuelled the growth of cross border trafficking in and around the tea estates in Darjeeling. And here intense poverty and

unemployment, a deadly cocktail, has forced many to the flesh trade.

The Maichi Bridge on the Bengal-Nepal border witnesses late hour rush as visitors on both sides rush back home before the borders shut down for the night.

Besides the long lines of commodities waiting to be smuggled into India at the bridge are young men and women quietly pushing their business - soliciting for sex work.

And security personnel are the usual clients.

A few kilometers away is Khalpara, Siliguri's red light area where many teenagers from tea estates end up earning a livelihood for themselves and their families.

"In north Bengal mainly Jalpaiguri most of the tea gardens are closed which has lead to poverty. Children also see others of their age coming from Delhi and earning so much and get attracted to that and try and go that way. And in this situation *dalaals* take them to brothels," said Mrinal Ghosh, member, Child Welfare Committee.

But the money isn't so good there; the best options are tourists. With tourism picking up once again in the region, the onset of spring brings many young people to the hills.

Once the season ends they disappear earning them the nickname of flying sex

workers.

"Prostitution is flourishing in Darjeeling. We have figures, which indicate that girls between the ages of 10-18 have just vanished from the tea estates. Most of those being rescued are from this age group, they find themselves in Delhi, Mumbai and Nepal," Mrinal Ghosh added.

"If this trend continues, soon there won't be any girls left here," Ghosh further added.

The administration is waking up only now, but it's hard to track flying sex workers.

"This is a very big menace, it's not localised and everywhere," said Pandey, DM, Darjeeling.

However, it's no longer a law and order issue. Those who did get into part time sex work are paying a huge price. Sold into sex work, girls are abandoned when they return home.

"It was as if it was my responsibility to look after family," said Mohiri, victim of trafficking.

Darjeeling is a popular tourist destination but many young people end up turning to sex work and it establishes contours of this growing problem.

CNN/IBN, INDIAN EXPRESS /  
HINDUSTAN TIMES / NDTV / THE  
SENTINEL/ ASOMIYA PRATIDIN /THE

TRIBUNE ALSO REPORTED AND DID SPECIAL STORIES

**The Eastern Himalaya /N-E Region**  
**Accountability Charter**

Eastern Himalaya and the North East Regions are facing crisis of multiple dimension. Along with closure of Tea gardens, labour problems, unemployment, malnutrition and hunger, there are now increasingly reported cases of human trafficking and forced migration – both across state border as well as internally. Lack of Job opportunities and livelihood choices and displacement due to floods and famine like situation is reportedly driving young people into exploitative labour situations as well as into sex trade. Growing incidences of HIV and AIDS are being reported from areas in and around the regions.

We, the mega network of Civil Society Organizations, media, Positive People, lawyers, signatory to this Charter, are an independent non-profit Alliance that work locally, regionally and nationally to advance gender equality and human rights, sustainable development, environmental protection, peace and transformation and a violence free society.

We are founded on the principle of rights to freedom of speech, assembly and association in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We seek to advance international and national laws that promote human

rights, ecosystem protection, sustainable development and gender equality.

**Vision Statement:** We shall bring about social transformation by facilitating realization of women , men , girls and boys human rig and human obligations.

Where such laws do not exist, are not fully implemented, or abused, we will highlight these issues for public debate and advocate appropriate remedial action. In so doing, we will respect the equal rights and dignity all human beings.

**By signing this Charter:**

We commit to advancing equality and human rights, sustainable development, environmental protection, peace and transformation and a violence free society.

We seek to uphold our legitimacy by responding to inter-generational concerns, social and economic concerns through accountability for our work and achievements.

We seek to promote further the values of transparency and accountability that we stand for, and commit our members to respecting its provisions.

**How we will work**

We will complement but not replace the over-arching role and primary responsibility of governments to promote equitable

human development and wellbeing, to uphold human rights and to protect ecosystems.

We also seek to promote the role and responsibilities of the private sector to advance human rights and sustainable development, and protect the environment.

Through constructive challenge, we seek to promote good governance and foster progress towards our goals.

We seek to advance our mission through research, advocacy and programmes. It is common for our work to be at the international, national, regional and local levels, either directly or with partners.

### **The Charter's purpose**

This Charter outlines our common commitment to

- Engaging with the Government and local Governance structures to advance gender equality, human rights and social protection
- Combating human trafficking and forced migration - both across borders as well as internally
- Reducing Gender based Violence
- Creating awareness towards reduction of HIV incidences
- Ensuring Care and support to survivors of violence
- Ensuring care and support to Persons living with HIV and AIDS

- Creating livelihoods options at local levels and exploring market linkages
- Facilitating safety nets against hunger, starvation and malnutrition, displacements
- Facilitating ground level voices at policy levels by supporting Parliamentary discussions and decisions around issues of gender, human rights and equality

The Charter complements and supplements existing laws. It is a voluntary charter, and draws on a range of existing codes, norms, standards and guidelines.

### **Our stakeholders**

Our first responsibility is to achieve our stated mission effectively and transparently, consistent with our values. In this, we are accountable to our stakeholders.

*Our stakeholders include:*

- Peoples, including future generations, whose rights we seek to protect and advance;
- Ecosystems, which cannot speak for or defend themselves;
- Our members and supporters;
- Our staff and volunteers;
- Organizations and individuals that contribute finance, goods or services;
- Partner organizations, both governmental and non-governmental,



**With whom we work;**

Regulatory bodies whose agreement is required for our establishment and operations;

- Those whose policies, programmes or behavior we wish to influence;
- The media; and
- The general public

In balancing the different views of our stakeholders, we will be guided by our mission and the principles of this Charter.

Signed , on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April in Siliguri by  
EHRTHNET

**EHRTHNET NETWORK**

(Suported By Unifem)  
&  
National Media Coalition

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Manik Sanyal	CITU		
Mani Kumar Darnal	Intact		
Chittranjan Dey	Conv co- ordination committee for plantation workers union with 16 union		
Samer Rai	Conv Defence committee for plantation workers		

Rajen Pradhan	Trade Union Leader CPI		
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Women intelink foundation	Ngo Njp		
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Dooars Jagran	“		
IPARW	NGO NJP		
Bhoorakha			
Sini	North Bengal		
Sunil	Rahi Foun dation		
Mr Homeshwar	Manipur NGO		
Do-	NGO		

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