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### **South Asia Senior Citizens' Forum**

A regional body called South Asia Senior Citizens' Forum (SASCF) has been established on 12 July, 2016, in Kathmandu, Nepal, at the concluding session of a two day workshop on the issues of Senior Citizens in South Asia. Representatives from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and other SAARC countries were present at the workshop. The SASCF has been established on the basis of the 36 point Kathmandu Declaration signed at the 18th SAARC Summit meeting in 2014, focusing towards the 'Special Needs of Elderly Population' of the region. The Forum also reaffirms commitments to the Older Peoples Rights enshrined in the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002; General Recommendation no 27 of the CEDAW Convention on the protection of the Human Rights of Older Women (adopted in 2010) and Sustainable Development Goals aiming at leaving no one behind, in order to create a social inclusive society for all by 2030.

This Forum aims to work closely with the respective Governments, NGOs and Civil Society members of the region in order to improve the wellbeing and protection measures of the ageing population. South Asia Senior Citizens' Forum has emerged as an unified body to recognize, promote and protect human rights of older people as manifest in the policies, programs and legal instruments for senior citizens in the South Asia region.

This newly established regional body will also maintain a close liaison with the HelpAge International, (the global network which helps older people claim their rights, challenge discrimination and overcome poverty, so that they can lead dignified, secure, active and healthy lives), Open Ended Working Group at the United Nations, African Union and ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) and other International and regional bodies to exchange views and learn from the experiences of others and act jointly as a pressure group for an UN Convention on the rights of Older Persons.

South Asian Association for Regional Co- Operation (SAARC) was established in 1985, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, as a regional alliance with commonalities in culture, socio economic norms and values including demographic patterns of ageing population. At present the region is experiencing a huge demographic transition due to increase in the life expectancy, decline in the mortality and fertility rates including communicable diseases and improvement in the basic health care and living standards. According to UN DESA at present about 66 % of world's ageing population live in low and middle income countries, which will rise to 77 % by 2050 and less developed countries including South Asian Region will be the home of these huge ageing population.

These demographic dynamics however have huge socio economic consequences and human rights implications as this population group is not a homogeneous group and their status largely depends

on their age, level of poverty, education and social standing; which needs to be addressed in its right perspective with adequate resources, policy planning and action plan according to Madrid International Plan of Action on ageing.

It is thus important that Older Persons in the SAARC region soon collectively raise a common voice, to encourage governments for better recognition of realities they face, to better-implement and strengthen ongoing social protection measures through easy access and delivery of basic needs including economic and health security for older men and women. It will also work to strengthen the role of Senior Citizens in the election process in the South Asia region.

Major work agenda of the Forum in the region include the following:

1. Awareness raising and advocacy on the issues of population ageing among policy makers, parliamentarians and people at large.
2. Influencing planning process to adopt a 'life cycle approach' and budget allocation accordingly so that no one is left behind.
3. Creating an age and sex desegregated database of ageing population in the region
4. Exchange of knowledge, experiences and good practices relating to older people and promote mutual learning and sharing
5. Monitoring and watchdog function on the implementation of the ageing policies by the governments in the region and to undertake national and regional periodic reviews for measures initiated and mechanisms evolved as part of the progress achieved in the area of senior citizens' development
6. Advocacy to SAARC Governments for recognition of the principles of providing Minimum Survival with Dignity Services in the form of Social Security, Health Care, Shelter and Protection of Life and Property including protection from violence and abuse.
7. Promoting public – private partnership to address population ageing issues in the region.
8. Encourage participation of ageing people in the democratic election processes as a strength of the Senior Citizen Community to bargain for their legitimate place in policies, laws and programs with resource allocation in each country in the South Asian region
9. Advocacy to SAARC Governments for recognition of the need to establish separate Ministries/Departments for Senior Citizens' Development in each South Asian country in view of the rapidly expanding percentage of population of senior citizens including the need to form an Inter- Ministerial Committee to mainstream the ageing issues in the development process.
10. Advocacy to Governments for better recognition of the vulnerability of older women and need to prepare specific policies to address adequate protection measures for them on the basis of General Recommendation Number 27 of the CEDAW Convention, and back up such policies with adequate resources and assigned functions

**Towards this end, the delegates resolved to constitute a South Asia Senior Citizens' Working Group coordinated by Dr. Gauri Shankar Lal Das as Chairman, and Shri Chhatra Bahadur Pradhan as Member-Secretary, and Mohammad Edrees Omarzad, Ferdous Ara Begum, Sonam Tshewang, Digamber Chapke, Sugan Bhatia, Shyam Sunder Dhaubhadel, and Neela Gunasekera as Members.**