

South Asia Meeting on Women II
Sadbhav House, Masigarh, Sukdev Vihar, New Delhi.
16th to 21st April 2007.

The 2nd South Asian Meeting on Women (SAMoW 2), was solemnly inaugurated with the celebration of the Eucharist presided over by Abp. M C Soosa Pakiam, Chairman of the FABC Office of Laity & Family on the evening of 16th April 2007. The homily was delivered by Bishop Patrick Rozario of Bangladesh. Bishop Patrick recalled his participation in SAMOW I in Sri Lanka, and said that the meeting was an eye-opener which motivated him to start the Women's Desk in the Bangladesh Episcopal conference.

After the Eucharist, Abp. M C Soosa Pakiam delivered the inaugural address. He referred to the working document of the 8th FABC plenary assembly and listed the threats to women and children in the region notably the tremendous bias against the girl child and trafficking of women and children. He encouraged the participants to put themselves whole heartedly into the meeting and share to learn from each other how we can "Respond to the Challenges to women & the family in the 21st century", which was the theme of the meeting.

On the second day the participants visited 5 exposure sites which were living testimony to the threats faced by women and the family, namely centres for trafficked women and children, a home for HIV/AIDS patients, women's home and two marginalized communities of mainly migrant workers. The encounter with the actual life situation of women and families enriched the reflection together with the presentation of the reports of the situation of women from the five countries – Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and India.

Women actively involved at the grass root level – Ms. Sudha Sundaraman, Dr. Rita Sarin, Dr. Monica John and Dr. Jyotsna Chatterji, provided valuable insights into our reality in the context of economic globalization and the pressures women face from what governments term as 'progress and development'. They showed how really this mask of economic development is leading to greater impoverishment of people and places a heavier burden on women in the family. Ms. Virginia Saldanha, spoke on how the recognition and value give to women's spirituality could actually provide hope to our world. Endorsing the need for partnership in the initiative for the empowerment of women, two men, Fr. Soosai Arokiasamy and Fr. Alex Vadakumthala (CBCI Health Commission) were also included as resource persons on the issues of religious fundamentalism and HIV/AIDS.

Daily prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist and reflection helped participants to search for alternatives to make a response in faith, to the situation of women in South Asia. The presence of four bishops with 42 women and 3 priests

demonstrated the partnership offered by the Church in addressing the issues concerning women and children in the region.

The women of the Archdiocese of Delhi, Joint Women's Programme (an Ecumenical initiative of women), Women's Desk of Caritas and CBCI Women's Commission helped with the local arrangements of the meeting.

The closing Eucharist was celebrated by His Eminence Telespore Cardinal Toppo, who encouraged the Church in South Asia and the women to go out in faith to make a difference in the countries of the region.

After the Eucharist His Eminence released a book entitled "Discipleship of Asian Women at the service of Life", edited by Ms. Virginia Saldanha, executive Secretary of the FABC Office of Laity & Family. The book contains the papers and proceedings of the three Bishops' Institute of Lay Apostolate on Women held from 1995 – 2001. Fr. Soosai Arokiasamy presented a review of the book.

Ms. Virginia Saldanha
Executive Secretary,
FABC Office of Laity & Family.