

## **New book on women in political decision making positions**

*By Aroonim Bhuyan*

A new book born out of three years of intensive research across northeastern India and parts of Myanmar and Bangladesh focuses on the role of women in political decision making positions, especially in conflict-hit areas.

The book, "Where are our Women in Decision Making?", is a compilation of essays, papers, testimonies and stories with the UN Security Council's landmark Resolution 1325 on women and peace and security that was adopted in October 2000 as the guiding document.

Edited by Binalakshmi Nepram, Secretary General of Control Arms Foundation of India (CAFI), and released by Friederike Tschampa, Head of the Political Section of the European Union Delegation in India, earlier this week, the volume also contains recommendations in the form of a National Action Plan on peace and security of women and role of women in political decision making.

Starting in 2014, the research work was conducted by CAFI in association with Anando Foundation of Bangladesh and Welthungerhilfe of Germany with support from the European Union.

Researches visited all eight northeastern states - Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura - as well as Shan state in Myanmar and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh to identify women leaders and make them understand UNSC Resolution 1325.

"In doing our work, we came across very unexpected findings," Nepram told IANS.

"Women in Sikkim, for example, said that this was the first time that they saw a meeting on a gender issue being held in their state," she said.

"Same was the case in Tripura with people there saying that it was the first they have seen a women-led organisation like CAFI holding such a meeting."

(This seemed rather strange to this correspondent so a senior journalist who is an expert on Sikkim was approached to understand this. His explanation was simple: The women do most of the work anyway and so don't feel discriminated against. Thus, the need for a discussion on gender issues does not arise.)

Nepram said that the research work revealed that though the women of the northeastern states were divided by religion, language and ethnicity, the problems they faced in society were similar.

"It is a strain on the society till women are raped, murdered, kidnapped, face domestic violence, marital rape, sexual violence, molestation and are trafficked," an annexure in the book highlighted.

In the course of their work, the researches also organised two editions of Northeast India Women Peace Congregation - the first in Imphal in March 2015 and the second in Guwahati in August this year.

It was in the second edition in Guwahati, held after the Assam assembly elections, that the idea of an all India women political party was broached in detail.

Nepram said that women political activists cutting across party lines attended the congregation and said that they were "tired of being used just as decorative pieces".

"We have evolved a blueprint for India's first all-women political party in this book," she said.

Based on all the civil society consultations held across these three years, the book also includes a "National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security for India".

Nepram said that copies of the NAP have been handed over to Union Minister for Women and Child Development Maneka Gandhi, Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju and National Commission for Women Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam.

In this connection, a parliamentary consultative meeting will be held in the national capital on December 12.

Nepram is of the view that though the NAP has been drawn up from work focused on northeastern India, the recommendations in it can be implemented all over India.

"Two-thirds of all illiterate people in India are women and girls," she said. "Every 22 minutes, a woman or a girl is raped. Around a million girl children are killed in the mother's womb every year."