

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE OBSERVANCE OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ON 8<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2018 AT RAJ BHAVAN, IMPHAL

Smt. Nemcha Kipgen, Hon'ble Minister (Social Welfare & Co-operation),

Smt. S. Satyabhama Devi, Chairperson, MSWDC,

All the participants,

Friends from Media,

Distinguished Invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to associate myself with this significant event and I feel humbled because one word "Woman" has become synonymous with the best of human virtues. That all the virtues – love, care, compassion, tolerance, concern and forgiveness – have found expression in one individual – a woman. Today, we are observing International Women's Day to uphold the above qualities possessed by a woman and also her multifaceted role in the society. I thank the Social Welfare Department for their efforts.

International Women's Day is celebrated on 8<sup>th</sup> March worldwide, commemorating the political, social and economic achievements of women. Over the decades, the objective of Women's Day celebration has evolved and embraced culture and ethnicity to emerge as a celebration of appreciation, respect and love towards women. Women's Day is also celebrated in schools nowadays and also forms an integral part of the curriculum to disseminate the awareness of women empowerment, their roles and achievements. Women's Day was first observed in 1909 in the United States and it is only in 1977 that the United Nations officially declared International Women's Day celebration on 8<sup>th</sup> March. On this occasion, we should endeavour building a better world where men and women live harmoniously, free of violence and discrimination.

This year, International Women's Day comes on the heels of unprecedented global movement for women's rights, equality and justice. This has taken the form of global marches and campaigns, including #MeToo and #TimesUp in the United States of America and their counterparts of other countries, on issues ranging from sexual harassment and femicide to equal pay and women's political representation. This year's celebration is focused on rural and urban activities which have helped the transformation of women's lives. I would like to make an appeal to you all to join together to translate the momentum into action, to empower women in all settings, rural and urban and to celebrate the activists who are working relentlessly to claim women's rights and realize their full potential. Friends, if pursued with determination idealism of today can become the reality of tomorrow.

It is well known that to build a healthy society there is need to remove age-old gender biases in educational, health, social, legal and economic sectors. Women must be recognised and accepted an independent social actor. It is a sad narrative that the role of women in the household and family care is often taken for granted without commensurate social recognition. There is a tendency to undermine women as an independent player in economic, political or social sectors. These attitudes stem from the traditional stereotypes and even in democratic societies women still suffer from the historical drawbacks. It is important that special provisions are made for the economic empowerment of women alongwith their political empowerment in order to enable them to use new opportunities in today's world. History has been unkind to women and religions and traditions have been manipulated to subvert the society by excluding women. I rose to be the first woman to hold the position of President of the Council of Inter Parliamentary Union but I must have been one of the lucky few.

Empowering women in India is important to ensure a level playing field and for this, gender equality is the first step. There should be an affirmative perception that woman is no less than man in carrying out their responsibilities. Our Indian women should identify their strengths and

abilities and move towards a world of empowerment. The first lesson that all of us learn start only at home and the rest follows with the kind of attitude we have got instilled in us. We can start with the empowerment right at home, you don't need to learn a lesson for it. For instance, we can encourage the ladies at our home, our mother, sisters and wives to pursue their dreams and excel in their career. A wholehearted support, be it, however, trivial, will boost their self-confidence and will have a transforming impact on the women's way of life. It is a healthy development that Indian women are emerging in more and more number in every sphere of public life. They are asserting their rights and taking challenges in their stride.

Women in Manipur as in some other north-eastern states are traditionally better placed in the social rung than their counterparts in other parts of the country. They have grown up in a more liberal society, facing less hostile challenges unlike in a male dominant environment. They have had more economic independence, even supporting the family without help from the male members. Ima Keithel is a glaring example of the economic independence of women in Manipur. I am also taking initiatives for making the women sufficiently skilled for earning a certain quantum of economic independence. I am also happy to see that atrocities against women in the state have been considerably diminishing during the last few months. Here, I would like to give the credit to various civil society organizations and women's associations or organizations in the state for their relentless efforts to fight against such anti-social evils. I am fully confident that with the help extended by the State Government, all these unhealthy trends will be overcome.

With these words, I wish the observance of International Women's Day a grand success and, once again, thank the organizers for giving me such a memorable opportunity.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.