

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE WIN-G NORTH-EAST INDIA CONFERENCE & OBSERVATION OF 16-DAYS ACTIVISM ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE ON 25TH NOVEMBER, 2018 AT HOTEL CLASSIC GRANDE, IMPHAL

Mrs. Kowtal, Convenor, WinG India,

Dr. M. Binota, Chairperson, Manipur State Commission for Women,

All WinG Members present here.

All the participants,

Friends from Electronic and Print Media,

Distinguished Invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you all today in the Women in Governance (WinG) North-East India Conference and the 16-Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence Campaign. I wish both the Conference and the Campaign a grand success. It is also heartening to know that during the campaign, eminent women leaders, women human rights defenders, women activists and many more from across the country and the North-East States are participating for such a worthy cause.

WinG was initiated in the year 2009 with women representatives from WinG North-East and women from marginalised communities across India and work towards promoting leadership within local governance. The general objective of WinG is to help in grooming women leadership as change agent in peace building process with awareness and capacity building. This year the main agenda of the conference is to reflect, deliberate and march ahead with the slogan – from Victimhood to Survivor to Change Agents. The conference will take stock of its interventions, advocacies, campaigns and deliberate on how to take forward achievement of the past year(s) and also look into the context of the current situations. The conference is an attempt to scale up campaign, strengthen, expand the WinG network and stand in solidarity with

individuals who are victims and survivors of violence and deliberate on emerging issues that affect women and women's decision making at all levels.

We are well aware of violence perpetrated against women and girls in the world today. It is very unfortunate that such violence is on the increase. Violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive human rights violations and also an important public health issue. Women's health and domestic violence against women are very much interlinked and it has been a bane on the human society down the ages. Further, one could easily say that Gender inequality is at the root of violence against women. Beliefs and practices that value women less than men are normalized, excused and tolerated – a substantial proportion of adolescent girls and boys believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife. While violence against women is prevalent in all demographics, most vulnerable are persons who experience multiple forms of discrimination, such as sex workers, migrant workers, women living with disabilities, women with refugee status, indigenous women and transgender women. Although the issue of violence against women is multidimensional and complex, together we can combat it by speaking out and taking action to ensure attention is focused on the most underserved and disadvantaged groups of women and girls.

Violence against women continues to be an obstacle to achieving equality, development, peace as well as to the fulfilment of women and girls' human rights. All in all, the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – to leave no one behind – cannot be fulfilled without putting an end to violence against women and girls. Our endeavour should be for helping women to live free from all forms of violence through changes in social norms, rules, institutions and law. Violence and the fear of violence form a significant barrier to women's participation in the decisions that affect their everyday lives and its effects are felt not just by women, but also by

communities and societies as a whole. Though participation of women in democracy is basic to governance, the number of women in decision making bodies at different levels in the context of our country is still very limited. This issue needs to be addressed appropriately.

Women in the North-East are known for their economic contribution in the family and in the community. They play an important role in the developmental activities as well. In Manipur particularly, women have been in the forefront of all social activities, confronting different challenges that come their way. Manipuri women's significant contribution has been in the field of economic and political rights of their communities rather than their own rights and status. One vivid case is 'Ima Keithel' believed to be the only all women market in the world. About 4000 vendors in this market are economically independent and support their families. History stands testimony to the great women uprising better known as 'Nupi Lan' in the year, 1939 when Manipuri women rose as one against the export of rice by the British while the people faced starvation. I am confident that the Conference will come out with recommendations for the way forward to achieve gender equality and most importantly provide space for women leadership building and standing in solidarity. I am also hopeful that WinG will continue to pursue their efforts for the welfare of unfortunate and needy women and girls.

With these few words, I thank the organisers for inviting me to this function of far reaching consequence for the welfare of the women and girls.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.