

France to team up with India to uphold women's rights, French Minister informs FLO meeting on women's empowerment

NEW DELHI, October 28, 2013. The culture of France and India are completely diverse but both countries are marred by the same challenges when it comes to the issues related to women empowerment, said **Ms. Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, Minister for Women's Rights and Spokesperson, Government of France**, at an **'Interactive Session on Women Empowerment'** here today organized by **FICCI Ladies Organisation and French Embassy in India.**

Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem said the French government has resolved that 40% women will hold senior management positions in companies by 2017. Women face discrimination at the workplace and are experiencing it more so in the wake of the current economic crisis, which began in 2008.

To elevate the position of women at the workplace, the French government has come up with initiatives, which will help in reducing the gender gap such as parental leave instead of maternity leave in India. The maternity leave only allows a woman to take leave when she is in the family way but parental leave can be availed of by both the father and mother. Parental leave will help the woman in sharing the responsibility of taking care of the child with her husband, she explained.

She added, companies in France having more than 50 employees have been asked to list out the gender inequalities that they have been experiencing in their organizations and how to deal with them. The implementation of this programme is posing a challenge but non-compliance will invite heavy penalties and severe punishment. She informed that 400 companies have been warned against non-compliance and four companies have already been penalized.

Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem said that she was looking forward to establish partnership with India where both the countries would fight for women's rights. Opportunities must be created for women and they must be encouraged to take up entrepreneurial roles. The school curriculum now includes lessons on entrepreneurship and a student at the age of 13 years is introduced to the concept of business, which was earlier absent. The focus is on the girl child and the motive is to encourage more and more women to become entrepreneurs.

The Minister said that the biggest hindrance a woman faces in a start-up is lack of finance as private banks are wary of lending big sums of money, rendering the project unviable. Hence, the French government has established public investment banks catering to women entrepreneurs for funding their projects.

She invited the participants present at the meeting to Paris to attend the World Women Forum dedicated to women entrepreneurs, which will be held in the month of June next year. Delegations from countries all over the world will be participating at the mega forum.

Mr. François Richier, Ambassador of France to India; Ms. Malvika Rai, President, FLO and Ms. Pooja Jain, Senior Vice Chairperson, YFLO, also shared their perspectives on the issue of women empowerment.

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