



SWAN Press Release

New Delhi. July 5, 2011

A unique event took place in Dhaka over the weekend, bringing together the women of South Asia. The results of their deliberations highlight that the search for peace, ecological sustainability and equitable development in South Asia is intrinsically linked with the struggle for gender empowerment and equity. The one cannot be completed without the other.

Over 70 women from nine South Asian countries gathered in Dhaka, Bangladesh on July 2 and 3, 2011 for the Third Annual conference of the South Asia Women's Network (SWAN). The Conference was dedicated to the theme "Women of South Asia and the Green Economy". The distinguished participants were from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Among them were three Members of the National Assembly of Afghanistan, Justice of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, Deputy State Attorney of the Maldives, senior media representatives from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, leading women entrepreneurs from Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India, noted academicians, authors, theatre directors, cultural personalities and well-known educationists and successful NGO leaders from all the nine countries. Ms Vandana Shiva, renowned environmental activist, delivered the Key Note Address.

SWAN (South Asia Women's Network) is headquartered in Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi. Professor Veena Sikri is the Convener of SWAN. The Third Annual

Conference in Dhaka was organized as a collaboration between the South Asia Foundation (SAF), the Manusher Jonno Foundation (Dhaka) and Jamia Millia Islamia. The South Asia Women's Network brings together eight individual SWANs, respectively on Arts and Literature; the Environment; Women in Peacemaking; Health, Nutrition, and Food Security; Education; Crafts and Textiles; Micro credit, Livelihood, and Development; and Women in Media.

The Dhaka Conference created and signed the Dhaka Declaration as an assertion of the solidarity women in the region offer to each other. We believe our local economies have always been in harmony with nature, have used resources prudently, and shared them equitably. Today, those who have created the ecological crisis talk of the Green Economy. For them, the Green Economy is appropriating the remaining resources of the planet for profit — from seed and biodiversity to land and water as well as our skills, such as the environmental services we provide.

For us, the privatization and commodification of nature, her species, her ecosystems, and her ecosystem services cannot be part of a Green Economy, for such an approach cannot take into account our traditions. The resources of the Earth are for the welfare of all, not the profits of a few. They generate creative and dignified livelihoods and they provide the basis for poverty alleviation. Our Green Economies are diverse and decentralized and therefore are a path of empowerment for all. Women are the storehouse of this knowledge.

However, sustainable development is not possible without peace in this region. A critical concern of all women in the region is about the women of Afghanistan, who are on the verge of determining their future, and that of the next generation. The peace we ask for cannot ever be at the expense of women's rights. We acknowledge that there can be no sustainability and Green Economy without peace. SWAN supports a conflict free Afghanistan with the inclusion of women in every process and decision. SWAN is working on the South Asia Women's Peace Charter in order to present our collective views on issues of peace in South Asia.

We stand committed to peace in our region and strengthening these life-giving traditions. We will deepen this concept and make it the basis of defining the Green Economy. As women, we will work towards retrieving the frayed geo-political and ecological condition of our region. We commit ourselves to working together to show that a better world is possible for South Asia through regional cooperation. The South Asia Women's Network (SWAN) stands committed to forging ahead on sustained regional cooperation through each of the eight individual SWANs. We commit ourselves to making our voices heard at all important regional and multilateral forums where these issues are being discussed.