

# Unleashed Women Leaders Network

## Declaration of 5th National Convention

Dhaka; Date: 13 November, 2014

### Declaration 2014

We, over 1,200 grassroots women activists, who are members of the **Unleashed Women Leaders Network**, have assembled here today, the 13<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2014, from all parts of the country. Over the past decade and a half we have been taking a lot of initiatives in our communities, especially for improving the lives of women. We have gathered here to celebrate our successes, share our experiences with each other and set new priorities for the future.

We know that our country has already made significant strides towards reducing infant and maternal mortality rates, increasing child welfare measures including their immunization rate, increased participation of women in development activities and improving their overall quality of life. While we are encouraged by these positive changes, we observe with grave concern that violence against girls as well as women has been increasing throughout the country. According to Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, in the first six months of this year, 431 women were raped, of whom 45 were killed after. Two recent UNICEF studies show that Bangladesh leads South Asia in the area of child marriage – the age of brides is below 18 in two-thirds of all marriages that take place in Bangladesh. In addition, a large number of Bangladesh's girls and women are still victims of malnutrition, hunger and trafficking. The participation of women in decision making in all spheres of society and their access to basic services and opportunities both continue to be limited. **From this National Convention we demand the end of these unjust and inhuman types of discrimination and declare our unyielding commitment and determination to help create a prosperous and dignified future for all of our citizens, especially the women.**

We envision a future where women will have the same opportunities in every sphere of society and they will have equal participation in all decision making. We see a future where everyone's life will be safe and free from deprivation. We strongly feel that by mobilizing the women of Bangladesh, enhancing their level of awareness and unleashing their inherent power and creativity, such a future of self-reliance and dignity can be achieved for all our people. Inspired by this vision, we make the following pledges to further strengthen the phenomenon we have already fomented by unleashing the leadership of women at the grassroots level.

#### **We strongly and unhesitatingly declare that:**

1. Dedicating ourselves to our spirit of liberation, we, as members of the **Unleashed Women Leaders Network**, reiterate our commitment to fully express our innate capacity so that we can provide transformative leadership to help create a hunger free, self-reliant Bangladesh.
2. We will mobilize and utilize the leadership of other like-minded women so that the **Unleashed Women Leaders Network** becomes a strong platform for fighting for the rights of women of Bangladesh. To further strengthen this **Network**, we will mobilize the underprivileged women to form local self-help groups and take concrete actions to ensure their economic empowerment.
3. Political empowerment of women is a prerequisite for ensuring democracy, good governance and sustainable development. Therefore, we will take active initiatives to ensure the inclusion of women at each level of decision making. We will also be prepared to compete in elections at all levels of government. Furthermore, we will actively participate in mobilizing our communities, especially the women, to elect candidates who are honest, competent and committed to people's welfare.

4. We will, both individually and collectively, stand against and resist all forms of violence against women, dowry and trafficking of women and children, and child marriage. We will especially create mass awareness against and stop marriages where the age of the girls is below 18.
5. We will create mass awareness through campaigns against hunger and poverty and ensure food security in order to prevent malnutrition, especially of mothers and children. We will also create a movement to encourage our communities to move toward eco-friendly agriculture.
6. Union Parishads and other local government bodies play vital roles in providing resources and services to which the people of Bangladesh are entitled. Thus, we will carry out strong advocacy in partnership with the Union Parishad and other local bodies to ensure people's access to government-provided opportunities and basic services.
7. In order to improve the overall quality of life of the people, we will take concrete action to ensure safe sanitation, clean water, maternal care and safe delivery, enrolment of all children in schools, birth and marriage registration and opportunities for self-employment for women.
8. We will take effective measures to solidify the realization that 'girls are not burdens, rather they are assets' so that discrimination against girls ends, and they are afforded all opportunities from birth. We will also take measures to prevent girls from dropping out of schools and create a congenial atmosphere for the highest development of their potential.
9. As members of this **Network**, we will take initiatives to observe various national and international days, especially the International Women's Day, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, International Human Rights Day, Begum Rokeya Dibas, National Girl Child Day and others.

Finally, we strongly protest against the recent government proposal to lower the age of marriage in Bangladesh and we strongly urge the authorities to refrain from lowering the age of marriage to under 18 for girls and under 21 for boys.