Press Release

Press Conference on celebrating the International Rural Women’s Day

**Rights- Based CSOs demand Increased Investment for Girl’s Education to Curve the Child Marriage**

Dhaka, 14th October 2021: Tomorrow is the International Rural Women's Day, on the eve of the day, the National Committee for the International Rural Women's Day Celebration hosted a virtual press conference today at 11.00am. The press briefing discussed the surge in child marriage rates during the COVID pandemic. The closure of educational institutions for one and a half years was mentioned as a key cause for this. Lack of effective monitoring and measures by the local administration and law enforcement authorities, the return of migrant workers who are seen as perfect grooms, a drop in income, and the perception of girls as a burden, among other factors played a vital role in this regard. Dropout rates of girls have increased, which can be seen in the attendance numbers after schools finally reopened. The speakers stated that our daughters will be pushed towards an uncertain future as there are hardly social and political commitment, along with increased investment for girl’s education.

Tamanna Rahman, Abu Hanif, Belal Hossain, Lutfor Rahman Labu, Masuda Faruque Ratna, P M Billal, Rashida Begum, Tahrima Afroz, Sheikh Asad, Khondoker Faruk Ahmed, Ashraful Hasan Taimur members of the district committee spoke during the program presided by Shamima Akhter, the chairperson of the committee. Mustafa Kamal Akhand from equitybd and Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Executive Director of COAST Foundation also spoke to the event. Ferdous Ara Rumee presented the keynote on behalf of the organizers.

Ferdous Ara Rumee mentioned, Bangladesh ranks fourth in the world in terms of child marriage rates, the country has more than 4 million child brides, according to UNICEF. Furthermore, it has risen at an alarming rate during the pandemic. Due to the continued closure of schools, insolvent rural families have found themselves in a precarious situation. Because the administration and law enforcement authorities are swamped by the pandemic, parents can easily marry off their daughters. The availability of so-called competent grooms, the need to please the elderly, the dread of children participating in romantic relationships, an increase in sexual harassment rates, a lack of social security, financial instability, and other factors all contributed to these weddings. Students would have been occupied with their studies if schools were open. Different clubs run by them would also have been active.

Tamanna Rahman said that the dropout rate of girls has increased, and most of them fell victim to child marriage. Most of these marriages are not registered. They will be deprived of any legal aid in the future because of this. Khondokar Faruk Ahmed said that at the beginning of the pandemic, parents married off their daughters at the first chance they got, as people’s movements were less. Masuda Faruk Ratna said that as administration and law enforcement agencies were busy dealing with the pandemic, they could not implement the initiatives taken against child marriage by the government. Guardians have used this opportunity to arrange child marriages. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury said that different studies showed that the rate of child marriage decreased when girls are engaged in higher secondary education and graduation level. Therefore, we should focus on increasing expenditure regarding girls’ education.

Lutfor Rahman Labu said that girls were facing various threats during the pandemic. Many guardians married off their daughters as they were concerned as to when schools would reopen, or how their families would be defaced if girls were to engage in romantic affairs. But this kind of thinking is faulty. Ashraful Hasan Taimur mentioned that on the positive side, educational institutions have reopened again following proper health guidelines. If schools remain opened, activities countering child marriage can take place at educational institutions.

Shamima Akhter said “boys and girls are not different” this spirit has to be introduced among guardians. Moreover, the state, government, and society have to contribute to ensuring free and safe movement for girls.

On behalf of the organizers, Mustafa Kamal Akand mentioned that more than 60 districts in the country are celebrating International Rural Women’s Day. Every year, rallies, seminars, demonstrations, fairs, and award-giving ceremonies for rural women with contributions in different sectors are organized to celebrate the occasion.

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