

## Press Release

### **Chennai Declaration of National Nutrition Conclave Recommendations and Launch of the Coalition for a Nutrition Secure India On October 3, 2007**

Venue: National Academy of Agricultural Sciences, NASC Complex, DPS Marg, Pusa, New Delhi  
110012, India, Tel: 91-11-25846051, 25846052, Fax: 91-11-25846054

***The first task of an independent India must be to eliminate hunger.***

Mahatma Gandhi had this vision for independent India. He felt that hunger was one of the cruelest manifestations of poverty. Yet, sixty years after independence, only half of India has achieved this vision. Over 50% of Indian children are still underweight and more than half suffer from nutritional deficiencies like anemia.

In the honor of Gandhi *Jayanti*, Mrs. Renuka Chowdhury, Hon'ble Minister for Women and Child Development released the Book of Proceedings, which contains recommendations from a group of over 100 experts on how to attain a nutrition-secure India. The recommendations came from the National Nutrition Conclave (NNC), a unique meeting where a diverse group including central and state Government officials, NGOs, civil society, corporate leaders, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, nutrition experts, activists and academics gathered to answer the question: *A Nutrition Secure India: How do we get there?*



Mrs Renuka Chowdhury releasing the NNC book of proceedings.  
Mr. Steven J White, Charge d' Affaires, US Embassy, India is sitting on her left.

Mrs. Chowdhury welcomed the recommendations and stressed that a strong and diverse partnership was needed to improve malnutrition in India. In her remarks, she referred to malnutrition as a silent emergency and supported the National Nutrition Conclave recommendations such as the formation of an interagency coordination mechanism, nutrition education and communication and the involvement of many partners including the media. She noted that these recommendations came at the right time, as the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan is being finalized, and that her Ministry was committed to helping move the recommendations into action.

Mr. Steven J White represented the US Embassy at the consultation and noted the long history of partnership in food and nutrition security between the US and India, which started soon after Indian Independence. He pledged continued partnership and support from the US Government through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to take the Conclave's recommendations into action and to achieve Gandhi's vision of a hunger free India.

Dr. Mahtab Bamji, a Fellow of the NAAS and one of the Nutrition Conclave participants shared highlights from the Conclave including the Chennai Declaration, released by the participants at the end of the Conclave. The Chennai Declaration calls for a "nutrition revolution" including a Citizen's Charter on Nutrition, a comprehensive nutrition strategy for children under two, and a national nutrition education campaign. The Book of Proceedings captures more detailed recommendations from the Conclave.

Professor MS Swaminathan, Member of Parliament and President of the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences noted in his welcoming remarks that three things are needed to address any problem: awareness, analysis and action. He said that India has failed in taking action and needs to mobilize the "power of partnership." He noted that an outcome of the Conclave was the formation of a Coalition for Nutrition Secure India which should lead in the country in action against malnutrition. The work of the Coalition should contribute to the Government's' Common Minimum Program, which includes a focus on food and nutrition security.

The release of the Chennai Declaration and Book of Proceedings was a part of a larger consultation today commemorating the International Day of Non-Violence and Gandhi Janthi called "*Where Hunger Rules, Peace Cannot Prevail – A Road Map for a Hunger Free, Nutrition Secure India*".

The National Nutrition Conclave was held from August 12 – 14 in Chennai sponsored by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, USAID and the Indian Council of Medical Research with support from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

India is at an important "tipping point" with respect to nutrition. There is increased political and public attention on the issue. Achievement of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) objectives as well as many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) depends on addressing the critical problem of malnutrition in India. Malnutrition also underlies many other public health problems, such as high maternal and newborn death rates.

For detail information contact: Mr. Laxmikanta Palo, Knowledge to Practice Advisor, the Vistaar Project (e-mail: [lpalo@intrahealth.org](mailto:lpalo@intrahealth.org); phone: 011-46019999)