

15 November 2013



## PRESS RELEASE

# Hijra Habba celebrates transgender identities, advocates equality

**New Delhi:** More than 200 stakeholders from government, media, international agencies, transgender and hijra communities, and civil society came together today for the second National Hijra Habba to promote social justice and empowerment for transgender and hijra communities in India. The event was organised by Pehchan in collaboration with UNDP.

Addressing the event, Shabnam Mausi, a former MLA and the first transgender in India to be elected to public office, said, “In India, transgenders and hijras face repeated stigma and discrimination, often in violation of their basic human rights due to their gender identity. It is time that their priority issues are highlighted and they are empowered to be mainstreamed.”

Pehchan is a five-year programme that strengthens and builds the capacity of 200 community-based organizations in 17 states to advance HIV prevention. Pehchan collaborates with India’s National AIDS Control Programme and reaches 453,750 MSM, transgenders and hijras by 2015 and is the Global Fund’s largest single-country grant to date focused on the HIV response for vulnerable sexual minorities.

Held at Hotel Suryaa, the Hijra Habba included a ramp walk, experience sharing, community performances, and speeches by transgenders and hijra community leaders and participating stakeholders to initiate discussion on the following themes of key importance to these populations:

- Identity recognition
- Violence
- Stigma and discrimination
- Access to health and legal services

Senior officials from the Union Ministry for Social Justice and Empowerment, Department of AIDS Control, law enforcement agencies, media, UNAIDS, USAID and DFID along with community representation from across the country joined the event.

T.R. Meena, Joint Secretary with Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, affirmed the commitment of the government to empower the community and protect the rights of transgenders and hijras in India.

According to James Robertson, Executive Director of India HIV/AIDS Alliance, “The Hijra Habba is a vital forum to affirm the principle that transgenders and hijras are full citizens of this country. Their fundamental rights, including civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, need to be protected and guaranteed through equal protection under the law. India has been a global leader in defining an effective HIV prevention response for transgenders and hijras. The world has much to learn from this example. Even while progress has been made, the journey towards equality is not yet over.”

Speaking at the event, Priya Babu, a transgender activist from Tamil Nadu, said, “Each year, the Hijra Habba raises awareness of the day-to-day struggles of transgender and hijras and the oppressive social and legal environment they face. Due to their gender identities, they are denied opportunities to earn a living, to study, and to access health services.”

Adding to that, Prince Manvendra Kumar Singh Gohil said, “Even as MSM, transgenders and hijras achieve legal full rights as citizens, intolerance and discrimination against them continue. In spite of the reading down of Section 377 in 2009, members of these groups remain stigmatised and outside of the mainstream.”

Raveena, a hijra activist from Chhattisgarh, concluded by pointing out that legal recognition of their gender identities is one of the biggest challenges for the transgender and hijra communities. With proper IDs, these groups have difficulties accessing social entitlements and asserting fundamental rights of Indian citizens, like voting.”

\*\*\*

**About India HIV/AIDS Alliance:**

*The India HIV/AIDS Alliance (Alliance India) is a diverse partnership that brings together committed organisations and communities to support a sustained response to HIV in India. Complementing the national programme in India, it works through capacity building, knowledge sharing, technical support and advocacy. Through our network of partners, Alliance India supports the delivery of effective, innovative, community-based HIV programmes to key groups affected by the epidemic.*

**For details, please contact:** Sophia Lonappan: +91-98-9184-0309 or Ankita Bhalla: +91-98-1036-0492 at [media@allianceindia.org](mailto:media@allianceindia.org)

**For more information, visit:**

**Website:** <http://www.allianceindia.org/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/indiahiv aidsalliance>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/AllianceinIndia>