



Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America

<http://www.fezana.org>

Representing 25 Zoroastrian Associations in the United States and Canada

Contacts

On-site: Mantreh Atashband, UN NGO Committee, FEZANA, m_atashband@yahoo.ca Mobile: 416.994.3416

FEZANA: Behram Pastakia, FEZANA Media Relations: bpastakia@aol.com Phone: 301.493.9131

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY- Investing in women and girls

NEW YORK, Mar. 8, 2008 – Today, the world celebrates International Women's Day (IWD), a day which unites individuals globally to rejoice in a message of hope and inspiration. Underscoring the theme of this year's IWD "*Investing in women and girls*," United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, said: "failure of funding undermines not only our endeavors for gender equality and women's empowerment; it also holds back our efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals". He encouraged individuals at the global, regional and country levels to invest in the world's women and girls in order to achieve a dynamic and strengthened civil society.

The IWD brings to a close, the 52nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) held at the United Nations headquarters in New York from Feb. 25-March 7, 2008. More than 2,000 representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) from over 80 countries attended and participated in round table, panel and workshop discussions during the two week event. The theme of this year's conference was "*Financing for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women.*"

The Zoroastrian (FEZANA) delegation included Dolly Dastoor, (Montréal, Canada) International Service Chair 2008-2010 with *Zonta International*. Mantreh Atashband, Afreed Mistry and Shekufeh Zonji (all of Toronto), Homi D. Gandhi (Glen Rock, NJ), and Farah Minwalla (New York City), presented a panel discussion on February 29, 2008, on "*Technology and the private sector bringing solutions in financing to impoverished communities*". The team illustrated how micro financing, showcased by the success of the ICICI Bank in India, and cell phones play a role in poverty alleviation including the limitations inherent in such interventions. Examples gleaned from grass-roots volunteer experiences in Mexico painted a vivid picture of the complexity of poverty and the importance of understanding a woman's context when participating in any form of intervention. Contributions made to sustainable development by NGO's in partnership with the private sector were illustrated through a microfinance initiative in South Africa which has led to a decrease in gender based violence and a lower incidence of HIV/AIDS.

About ZOROASTRIANS

Zoroastrians have long served as effective bridge builders in interfaith dialogue as they see from their own faith, traditions of truth, righteousness, charity, beneficence and respect for creation reflected in traditions of the religions of both the occident and the orient. Zoroastrianism, founded circa 1500 BCE, is credited to be the oldest monotheistic religion, influencing post-exilic Judaism, which adopted some Zoroastrian beliefs such as the ultimate victory of good over evil and the resurrection of souls. These percepts were then transmitted through Judaism to Christianity, and later to Islam. Zoroastrianism flourished as the imperial religion of three Persian empires, those of the Achaemenians, Parthians and Sasanians, and was the dominant religion from Turkey, and eastward to China during those times. North America's Zoroastrian community includes those who arrived from the Indian subcontinent, known as Parsis, and those who came directly from Iran seeking religious freedom.

About FEZANA

Founded in 1987, FEZANA serves as the coordinating body for 25 Zoroastrian associations throughout the United States and Canada. FEZANA promotes the study, understanding and practice of the Zoroastrian faith in North America., represents the interests of its member associations, and carries out philanthropic and charitable activities worldwide. The *FEZANA Journal*, FEZANA's publication of record, circulates to Zoroastrian households in more than 22 countries, as well as to scholars, academicians and religious organizations worldwide. For more information visit: www.fezana.org.