



Institute of Social Sciences

8 Nelson Mandela Road, New Delhi - 110 070

Ms. Maria Leissner's Visit to the Institute of Social Sciences

30 March 2015

Ms. Maria Leissner, Secretary-General, Community of Democracies (CD) visited the Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), New Delhi on 30 March 2015. Ms. Leissner met with senior ISS faculty members, scholars, academics and activists, and held discussions about the issues related



Ms. Maria Leissner in discussion with senior faculty members of ISS and academics

to Democracy. Dr. George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences received Ms. Leissner and Ms. Kristine Luoma-Overstreet, Program Coordinator, CD.

Those present in the interactive session included Prof. Anand Chakravarti, S.K. Dey Chair Professor at the ISS, Mr.

Sankar Sen, Head, Human Rights Department of the ISS, Mr. Shripal Jain, Editor, *Panchayati Raj Update*, Dr. Santosh Singh, Senior Research Officer, ISS, Mr. Marcus Holknekt, Second Secretary, Embassy of Sweden, Rd. David Boyes, Convener, North-East India Forum Against Racism, Mr. Venkatesh Nayak, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiatives, Mr. Raj Liberhan, former Director, India Habitat Centre, Mr. S.D. Sharma, Senior Fellow, ISS and former Jharkhand State Election Commissioner and Prof. O.P. Mathur, Senior Fellow, ISS.

Prof. Anand Chakravarty underlined the democracy issues in India with special reference to its positive as well as negative impacts such as violence in the villages.

Dr. Santosh Singh described the increasing women's participation in decision making through democratically elected local government institutions.

Prof. O.P. Mathur argued the need for strengthening municipal governance through democratic process.

Mr. Venkatesh Nayak discussed the issues relating to the Right to Information (RTI) and democracy and how RTI as a movement has strengthened the democratic system.

Mr. Raj Liberhan emphasized the need for creating a Democracy Fund, which is necessary for promotion of democracy globally. The CD should take initiative to create such a fund, he said.



Dr. George Mathew presenting a souvenir to Ms. Maria Liessener

Mr. Sankar Sen observed that the vibrant democracy has helped a lot in achieving new goals in the field of Human Rights in India.

Rd. David Boyes explained the diversity in the eight states of North East India and how successfully democracy is protecting the rights of all.

Mr. S.D. Sharma gave an account of his experience as an Election Commissioner in conducting free and fair elections in backward regions of the country.

Dr. George Mathew said that the local government activism and democracy at the village council and municipal level are vital. That keeps the Indian democracy vibrant. Local democracy is very strong in India, paving new avenues for development in rural and urban areas. Democracy education is key to the Institute's mandate.

Ms. Maria Liessener appreciated the contributions of all participants and stated that the working of democracy in India is a great achievement. Local democracy and functioning of democratically elected local governments are key issues to be discussed in international fora. ■



From left (standing): Mr. Marcus Holknekt, Mr. Venkatesh Nayak, Mr. S.D. Sharma, Dr. George Mathew, Ms. Maria Liessener, Ms. Kristine Luoma-Overstreet, Rd. David Boyes and Mr. Shripal Jain
From left (sitting): Prof. O.P. Mathur, Mr. Sankar Sen, Mr. Raj Liberhan, Dr. Santosh Singh and Prof. Anand Chakravarti