

# **Suggested Policies and Programmes for Consideration of Congress Government (2014-2019): Women's Empowerment and Protection of Children**

## **Preamble**

The Indian National Congress is a party that has gone beyond the rhetoric and hyperbole, relied on by most parties, when it comes to the empowerment of women and the welfare of children. Several strides have been made to improve their status since independence under Congress governments. Smt. Indira Gandhi emerged as an icon for women's empowerment, not only for women in India, but for women across the world. It was the vision of our late Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi, that greater political representation of women at every level would lead to more women oriented development and also allow for sensitization towards women's issues. It was under his leadership that the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, which gave one-third reservation for women in local self-government institutions, were conceptualized.

The Indian National Congress, acknowledging that our sisters and mothers have suffered certain historical disadvantages, is ever mindful of a pressing need to take far reaching measures to correct these injustices

The Indian National Congress, taking cognizance of the need for stronger legal protection, and equality of opportunities for women and children, has instituted several progressive laws and policies.

## **The Open Manifesto Process**

The Indian National Congress has pioneered an entirely new way in which political party election manifestos are prepared. It is our firm belief that the Indian National Congress Manifesto must reflect the voice and aspirations of the people and a new vision for the country. There were several consultations held across the country over a five-month period (from October, 2013 to March, 2014) with different stakeholders, to get their inputs on India's future growth, development and inclusion agenda.

The All India Mahila Congress (AIMC) organized several Consultation Meetings with women stake holders as per the vision of the Congress Vice President, Shri Rahul Gandhi. Our Manifesto is the voice of women in organized and unorganized sectors such as, ASHA workers, Anganwadi Workers, NGOs, SHGs, Women Farmers and land less agriculture labour, House Wives, Activists, Academicians, Elected representatives from different levels of Governance, Professionals, Entrepreneurs, the Corporate world, retired Officers and so on.

In addition to this a dedicated website ([www.incmanifesto.in](http://www.incmanifesto.in)) was established to invite suggestions from all citizens for the Manifesto.

We received many suggestions through these consultations on the websites and social media platforms, phones, emails, etc. These suggestions were carefully considered and have been included, wherever feasible.

We believe this unique exercise has made the Manifesto inclusive and fully reflective of the voice of the people of India.

### **Major Achievements of the Congress Party for the Empowerment of Women and Protection of Children**

1. To protect and support the welfare of children, the Congress-led UPA set up a National Commission for Protection of Child Rights in 2006. New laws have also been passed to prohibit child labour and child marriage.
2. We enacted the Right to Education Act 2009. As a result, primary and secondary enrolment ratio of girls to boys has gone up from 89.9% in 2004 to 98.4% in 2011. In other words, there are now as many girls enrolled in primary and secondary schools as boys. Female literacy level also saw a significant jump as compared to males, from 54 % in 2001 to 65 % in 2011. The male literacy, in comparison, rose from 75 % to 82 %. Several new scholarships with an earmarked 30% for girls have been launched.
3. The Congress-led UPA established an independent Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2006 for the empowerment and upliftment of women.
4. In the health sector, Fertility Rates have come down. Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is improving, from 301 per 100,000 live births in 2003 it has come down to 212; Institutional deliveries have risen from 41 per cent in 2006 to 73 per cent in 2009.
5. It has been the Indian National Congress's concerted effort to provide easy access to quality and affordable health care through programmes like JaniniSurakshaYojana (JSY) and JananiShishuSurakshaKaryakaram (JSSK). JSY has achieved good success in increasing the number of beneficiaries from 7.39 lakh in 2005-06, to nearly 113 lakh pregnant women in 2010-11.
6. The Indian National Congress has enacted several Acts to ensure dignity, safety and prosperity for women and children, including the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act 2005, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006, Maternity Benefit (Amendment Act) 2008, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012, Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2013 and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013.
7. We have also ensured that gender equality and child care facilities are mainstreamed in government schemes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, where the participation rate of women is around 50% per year. Government's other Schemes like the RashtriyaKrishiVikasYojana (RKVY) are also striving to include a quota for women. The MahilaKisanSashaktikaranPariyojana (MKSP), launched in 2010-11, seeks to empower women in agriculture by making systematic investments to enhance their participation and productivity, as also to create and sustain agriculture based livelihoods of rural women.

8. The Congress-led UPA government has been promoting hygiene for girls and women through construction of toilets and programmes like Promotion of menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls for providing low-cost Sanitary Napkins in rural areas for girls in the age group of 10-19 years.
9. The Indian National Congress launched Ujjawala-a new comprehensive Scheme for prevention of trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration of victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

### **The Detailed Action Plan 2014-2019**

*The Indian National Congress will ensure the safety and security of our women and children. We will provide them equal access to social, economic and political opportunities.*

1. The Indian National Congress will ensure that all laws for the welfare of children including the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences will be strictly enforced.
2. We will further strengthen and expand the scope of the the National Commission for Protection of Children Rights, set up in 2007.
3. We will also ensure that the strongest possible action will be taken to prevent child trafficking.
4. The quality of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) programme will be vastly improved and special incentives will be given to Anganwadi workers.
5. The Indian National Congress is committed to the enactment of the Women's Reservation Bill to reserve 33 % of all seats in theLokSabha, and in all State legislative assemblies for women.
6. We will initiate immediate action to formulate a Citizens Charter for Women's Safety and Security.
7. The Indian National Congress has placed a high premium on the education of women. We will continue with this focus to achieve gender parity in literacy level.
8. Fast track Courts will be established with 'in camera' and video proceeding facilities in State headquarters and in regional centres. The purpose of these Courts will be solely to address crimes against women. Mandatory procedure for the rapid conclusion of cases where custody of children is involved shall be put in place.

9. We will increase the number of girl's hostels, particularly in tribal areas and hostels for working women, with day care, to encourage women to become well educated and earn their own livelihood.
10. We will ensure that all measures are taken to make women feel safe and protected. We will expedite such measures as the creation of functional helplines in all major towns and cities and rural areas for prompt grievance redressal for women, exclusive 24 hour transport facilities and gender sensitivity classes for police men and women, particularly in registering and investigating complaints made by women.
11. The Indian National Congress will open "One Stop Crisis Centres" for women in all hospitals to provide medical, legal and psychosocial aid in cases of rape and domestic violence against women.
12. The Indian National Congress, true to its long-standing history, will take measures to enable increased participation and reservation for women at all levels within the government. We will ensure that at least 25% of the total police officers, sub-inspectors and constables at every police station in the country will be women, over the next five years. We will ensure the number of women police stations in the country goes up from 500 to 2000 in the next five years.
13. The Indian National Congress will earmark at least 30% of all funds flowing into panchayats and nagarpalikas, for development of women and children and focus on the special needs of female agricultural labour and women cultivators.
14. We will encourage the setting up of "Poorn Shakti Kendras" at block level to provide a single window mechanism for awareness, information, access and utilization of government schemes and programmes.
15. The Indian National Congress will provide land rights for women especially single women and women-headed households whose husbands have migrated from the villages.
16. The Indian National Congress will strive to clear all pending compensation to women with missing husbands in areas of unrest and conflict and especially border areas including providing employment to war widows and their families.
17. We will set up an institutional arrangement to target access to credit, training and marketing for women in the unorganized sector in peri-urban and rural areas.
18. The Indian National Congress is deeply distressed with the continued sexual exploitation of tribal girls at various places, such as hostels, and continued trafficking in young women belonging to tribal communities. This matter will receive the highest priority and will be taken up with all State Government and special Schemes introduced, like through the

National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) for securing livelihoods.

19. The Indian National Congress will work with women's Self Help Groups for the distribution of free sanitary napkins for adolescent girls.
20. The Indian National Congress believes that society should be more sensitive to the rights of the transgender community. This issue will receive separate and continued attention.
21. Through the NRLM we will provide low interest loans, of uptoRs. 1 lakh, to women for livelihood activities.
22. The Indian National Congress will provide a special youth development package (entrepreneurship/employment) for Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas with special focus on women and SC/ST.
23. We will continue to support Self-Help-Groups (SHGs) and assist the poor to set up small businesses. We will set up more branches of the BharatiyaMahila Bank and women only branches of other public sector banks. Our target is to ensure the formation of 7 crore SHGs by 2019.
24. The Indian National Congress will provide concessional loans to groups/collectives of small, marginal farmers and women farmers uptoRs. 5 lakh to enable them to gain better access to inputs and services.
25. An overwhelming number of women, especially in rural India still use polluting biomass for cooking, which puts an unbearable health burden on them. The Indian National Congress is committed to providing clean cooking fuel across the country in an accelerated manner in order to address this
26. The Indian National Congress will implement a Universal Pension Scheme, for the elderly, destitute, widows and other similar groups (based on certain exclusions).

**The promises detailed above reflect the Indian National Congress' commitment towards the empowerment of women and children, in response to the wide range of aspirations articulated by these communities in our consultations. We recognize that there are some more expectations expressed by these groups, which will continue to guide the Indian National Congress' efforts towards their development. The Indian National Congress is committed to finding a way forward towards meeting all such expectations of these groups, by putting in concerted efforts, as detailed below**

1. Ensure implementation of Vishakha Guidelines in all private and government organizations to protect women against sexual harassment in the workplace
2. Ensure audiovisual recording of all FIRs in police stations
3. Effective implementation of 'Ahimsa Messengers', a program aimed at preventing violence against women and children by creating awareness of basic legal rights, procedures and provisions amongst women and children
4. Eradicate honor killings through mass social awareness programs and strict criminal action against all instances of honor killings
5. Zero tolerance approach to human trafficking
6. Ensure safety of women tourists in our country
7. Increase the number of Old Age Homes for Women and Shelter Homes for homeless women
8. Review pension schemes for senior citizen women, widows, single women, disabled women and endeavor to increase sanctioned amounts
9. Special measures to increase women's enrollment in ITIs to encourage their financial independence
10. Ensure early detection of cancer in women by increasing access to screening facilities and healthcare
11. Ensure that all women in India have access to banking facilities by holding special camps for their enrolment
12. Create domestic and international marketing linkages for women in SHGs to sell their products
13. Provide subsidy for small loans to women engaged in livestock activities such as cattle rearing, poultry, fisheries, piggeries, beekeeping, mushroom cultivation, etc
14. Rebate in registration fee of agricultural land purchased in the name of women
15. Provide reservation in employment for women in central and state government departments along the lines already being provided in some states
16. Ensure gender parity in wages
17. Ensure implementation of minimum wage for women
18. Bring a national policy for domestic workers
19. Work with state governments to ensure uniform honorarium and benefits for anganwadi workers in all states
20. Bring out a human resource policy for anganwadi workers detailing their honorarium, benefits, promotions and other working conditions
21. Ensure parity in honorarium for Mini Anganwadi Workers and Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)
22. All Congress party led state governments will increase reservation for women in panchayat and urban local body elections from 33% to 50%
23. Open an Academy for Political Empowerment to provide elected women representatives legal and administrative education and develop their leadership skills
24. Ensure transparent and fair selection process for National and State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights, Child Welfare Committees and Juvenile Justice Boards
25. Constitute Special Courts for Children and ensure sensitization of judges and staff

26. Ensure allocation of accessible play areas for children in all building plans, master plans for urban areas

### **An Appeal to the Women of India**

We appeal to all our women friends to support the INC so that we can fulfill the promises made in the Election Manifesto

For the Indian National Congress, a Manifesto is more than a catalogue of promises and pledges to be forgotten after elections are over.

It is an agenda for governance to be followed diligently and meticulously.

It is an agenda for good governance on which progress must be reported to the people of the country, regularly, in a transparent manner.

It is in this spirit that the Congress-led UPA government has been releasing a “Report to the People” every year. This will continue.

The 2014 Lok Sabha elections will offer stark choices.

On the one side is the Indian National Congress with its long track record of achievements and accomplishments, with its vision and values bequeathed to it by a most remarkable generation of Indians led by Mahatma Gandhi.

On the other side is an ideology of hate, bigotry and prejudice, an ideology that negates the very idea of India that has been cherished by us for centuries.

On the one side is the Indian National Congress, which celebrates and rejoices in the multitude of diversities of India.

On the other side is an ideology that seeks to impose uniformity in the name of unity.

A vote for the Indian National Congress is a vote for fulfilling the aspirations of the youth of our nation, for ensuring that women lead a life of dignity.

Economic growth, social harmony, empowerment of weaker sections and strengthening of democratic institutions have to all go hand-in-hand.

It is only the Indian National Congress that will, by its very character, ensure that this happens.

**Vote for Congress for Women’s Empowerment.**  
**“SashaktMahilaSashakt Bharat”**