

 **SMT. MEIRA KUMAR LAUNCHES NATIONAL DRUG AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TARGETING YOUTH**

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The Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, Smt. Meira Kumar launched the National Drug Awareness Campaign aimed at preventing drug abuse among young people here on Monday evening on the occasion of the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. Smt. Kumar called for expanding the campaign into a movement involving civil society, government departments, teachers, corporate leaders and the NGOs so that "our citizens remain healthy and productive". She said the Campaign would target the youth in the age group of 10-18 years irrespective of whether they are in or out of school. Stressing the need for directing the campaign towards the vulnerable groups like street children and children with disabilities, the Minister said social workers and teachers have a special responsibility. Smt. Kumar wanted the campaign to also focus on corporate sector, as substance abuse is harmful to both enterprises and workers. Smt. Kumar said, "Drug and alcohol abuse not only affect work performance in general, but also results in higher rates of absenteeism, accidents, illness and mortality with all related costs to the economy and the society". She said the theme of her Ministry for this year's International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking is "Don't mess with your life – Stay away from drugs". The Minister said the drug awareness campaign strategy would be two-fold, one, addressing the community using peer led networks etc. and secondly, making use of the electronic and print media.

Earlier, the Secretary, Social Justice and Empowerment, Smt. Sarita Prasad said that capacity building of governmental and non-governmental organisations working in the field of prevention and rehabilitation of drug abuse victims is a priority area in her Ministry. She said that the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry is assisting around 350 voluntary organisations under the Scheme for Prohibition and Drug Abuse Prevention. They are running 379 Treatment-cum-Rehabilitation Centres and 52 Counseling Centres across the country.

The Minister released four posters on prevention of substance abuse devised by Regional Office of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for South Asia.

In a message read out on the occasion, the UN Secretary General, Shri Kofi A. Annan said, "Our efforts must focus especially on young people—through outreach, peer-to-peer networks, and using opportunities such as sport to keep young people active, healthy and confident."

Children drawn from the slum areas of Delhi enthralled the audience with their lively performances highlighting the vulnerability of youth to drugs and their resolve to resist them.