Inaugural Address by Mr. Shrinivas Dempo, Trustee, International Centre Goa and CMD, Dempo Group of Companies at the Regional Seminar on “Women in Media: Fighting Stereotype – Identity & Gender” Jointly organized by Media Information and Communication Centre of India, the International Centre Goa and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung – India

- Dr. Pramod Salgaonkar, Chairperson, Goa state commission for Women
- Nandini Sahai, Director, Media information & communication Centre of India
- Mr. Rajeshwar Dyal Media advisor, FES India
- My colleagues at the ICG, Ayub Zickriya and Arjun Halarnkar
- And members of the pristine gathering

At the outset, I would like to congratulate The International Centre, Goa, the MICCI and the FES-India for coming together to sensitise the society and all the stakeholders on a very important subject that I believe would shape the future of media in India and that is “Women in Media; fighting Stereotype – Identity & Gender”

I also feel privileged and honored to deliver the inaugural address at this Regional Seminar. I would also like to add to the welcome of Ayub of ICG in my capacity as a Trustee I welcome all of you’ll, especially members from out of Goa who have made all the efforts to come here and carry on this brainstorming session which will go on for the next two days.

As we are all aware, for many, many years the media was male-dominated. Enough has been said on this. Media organizations, whether in India or abroad, largely had male employees in the reporting and editing departments.

But today, I’m an optimist and strongly believe that the scene has changed. Today, there are more women in media than ever before. And this is true not only of the print media, but also of other forms of media such as radio, television, advertising and films.

I will give you our own example. For many years after my grandfather founded the Navhind Times, the editorial department was hundred percent male. During the past few years, many women have opted for journalism. I am very happy to tell you that today, women make almost fifty percent of The Navhind Times editorial department. In a way, I think this is the perfect gender balance.

A still more encouraging development is that women journalists not only in Goa but also in other states of India and the world are reporting and writing on all fields of life. In the earlier phase, women were expected to work only in SOFT AREAS such as social and cultural features. Now, they are working
even in TOUGH AREAS like politics and crime which used to be male domains.

Yet another interesting development is that more and more women are now holding senior editorial positions in the media. At one time, all three editors of the Pakistani daily, The News, which is published in Karachi, Rawalpindi and Lahore, were women. In Pakistan, women hold senior positions also in the news departments of Pakistan’s national television channel, PTV, and private television channels.

In India too, women journalists today occupy leading positions in the new departments of media which were considered to be male preserves. After Rajdeep Sardessai left, people thought NDTV would have nobody to take his position as leader in political news reporting. But Barkha Dutt has proven them wrong. She has done as well as men in political reporting and political analysis. In fact I think she has done better than men in many areas.

As in politics, women journalists are in leading positions in business reporting and analysis. The leading business dailies and television channels have several women in key positions. They have proven all those wrong who used to think that business journalism is a male domain. Similarly, today there are many women directors of feature films as well as advertising agencies.

These women are not only providing role models for younger women who aspire to become journalists, but are also challenging the old, wrong concepts about women being fit only for housework. They have shown that women can be intellectually as much sharp as men in understanding the various currents of society. By succeeding in their profession, they have expanded the public space for women in general and increased the acceptability for their talents and skills among employers and male colleagues.

However, I need to emphasize and draw your attention to the fact that everything is not perfect and rosy for women in media in this country and abroad. I am sure the key speakers at this seminar will present the various problems and constraints faced by women in media during the two days of deliberations, but I would like to share a few concerns with you on the issue.

First, I think, that although women are moving into TOUGH AREAS like politics, business and crime their number in these fields is still very small partly, of course the reason is that women themselves prefer to work in magazine sections or on soft features. But it is equally true that even those women who are ready to work in the so-called tough areas are not given encouragement. I feel editors and managers should all encourage more and more women into areas like politics, business and crime.
I will cite a simple example of how editors and managers can take a progressive step in this direction. Today, as in the past, we hardly have women as news photographers. News photography continues to be a male domain. Maybe, editors and managers can begin by looking for, identifying and recruiting one or more women as news photographers for their organizations that could set a trend for other younger women interested in hard news photography.

A special point I want to make is about the attitude of male colleagues towards female colleagues in the media. Studies in India and abroad have shown that although male journalists have accepted the increasing presence of women in newsrooms, studios and reporting fields, male journalists still make an exclusive group. They may work with women colleagues but do not allow integration of female colleagues into their groups.

Such attitudes leads to gender disparity in editorial departments. Such disparity should not be allowed. We are into times when more and more media organizations are making no gender disparity. They provide men and women equal training, equal pay, equal job security, equal health cover and equal insurance. Why should there then be disparity in allocation of work and formation of teams for carrying out work and formation of teams for carrying out work?

Apart from these, women in media face problems like working the night shift. Women have to fulfill a double responsibility – both at home and workplace. In media, night shifts are very important as most of the news stories break and flow in these hours. Because most women are unable to work late nights, their ability to compete with men in hard news reporting and editing becomes that much lesser. I hope the participants in this seminar would deliberate on this issue at length.

I have mentioned some of the constraints that women in media have face. But overall, I would like to conclude that there are very positive signs of women coming up in larger number in the media and even occupying senior editorial positions.

I am sure the illustrious speakers and participants in this seminar will share valuable information and insight about the problems and positive developments regarding women in media.

I wish the seminar total success.

Thank you.