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Honorable Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs  
9<sup>th</sup> Floor, Akbar Bhavan, Chanakya Puri  
New Delhi - 110021

August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007

**Subject: Denial of opportunity to 'Rakshak' representatives to appropriately present the NRI viewpoint at the meeting chaired by Mr Nirmal Singh of MOIA on July 25, 2007.**

Dear Sir,

With due respect we wish to bring to your notice the high handedness and dismissive manner in which the representatives of 'Rakshak', an NGO registered in USA, devoted to preserve the institution of family and prevention of elder abuse, were treated at a pre-scheduled meeting, by Mr Nirmal Singh, Secretary MOIA, who chaired the meeting.

Sir, you are aware that 'Rakshak' has been at the forefront in trying to address issues concerning NRIs in the USA in particular and more so relating to failed NRI marriages. In this regards, our representatives have also met with you in San Francisco, New York and Chicago during your visit to the USA in 2006. We have been working hard to have the issues relating to failed NRI marriages be handled in an unbiased, and gender-neutral manner. It is also our hope that any of the laws being enacted to handle this problem are free from prejudice, are based on facts, deter their misuse and take into account the special hardships that are likely to be faced by the NRIs involved when falsely implicated.

We have been making representations to your ministry for last two years to allow us an opportunity to be heard and present our concerns at meetings, workshops, conferences, etc. organized by your ministry for discussing NRI issues. Subsequent to our persistent efforts, we were happy to have received the invitation to participate in the meeting called by your Ministry to discuss the matter of 'Abandoned NRI Brides' - as per Mr Nirmal Singh who chaired that meeting.

Right from the beginning, we were made to feel unwelcome. First we were told that the committee meeting is going to be in the second week of June. We made arrangements to send our representative from USA. We were told later that it has been postponed. On our repeated enquiries, we were assured that the meeting would be positively held in the first week of July. Fortunately, we had enough time to cancel the itinerary and obtain a new reservation for our representative. Our representative from USA arrived in India as per the meeting schedule. At the last minute we were told that the meeting has now been postponed to the 25<sup>th</sup> of July. Consequently, our representative traveled, in vain, all the way from USA to India, incurring significant time and cost. While we can understand that meetings can sometimes be postponed, but lack of effective communication for the same resulted in considerable hardship for our representatives.

For the proposed meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> July, we had to strongly persuade your ministry to provide a proper written invitation in writing for participation in that meeting in order to avoid any last minute embarrassment for our representatives. After several phone calls from USA and India to the officials in your Ministry over a period of many days, the people of your ministry agreed to send the invitation only via e-mail. Even then, the meeting was postponed yet again to 25<sup>th</sup> July. We wonder if this is how your officials normally inform invitees from overseas?

On 25<sup>th</sup> July, the representatives from 'Rakshak' reached the venue in time for the meeting. We had informed your Ministry officials that we would be presenting our views via power point slides and would like to request that projection facilities be made available. I am sorry to report that when it was time for our presentation, the projection facilities were not in order and it caused avoidable waste of time and annoyance.

Mr Nirmal Singh exhibited a strong dislike towards our representatives from the beginning. We are convinced after this meeting that he is highly prejudiced and is quite incapable of bringing an unbiased, properly considered view on such an important issue for your Ministry's consideration. He practically denied our representatives the opportunity to present the data and arguments concerning the issue being debated. He asked our representatives to leave after the time that he grudgingly allowed them for presentation. Some pertinent questions arise here:

- Are some invitees to a meeting 'more equal' than others?
- Is it appropriate to ask some invitees to a meeting to leave and deny them participation in the full discussions?
- What was it that Mr Nirmal Singh was afraid of discussing in their presence?

Our representatives requested for more time to present the data but the request was denied.. It was obvious that the half hearted invitation by your officials was mere lip service and this was the reason why they had tried to shake us off several times. One illustrious member, namely, Mr Ramuwalia, was particularly belligerent towards one of our lady representatives, during her presentation and Mr Nirmal Singh overlooked this behavior and feigned ignorance. We are enclosing a rough transcript of the events that transpired during the meeting.

The National Commission for Women (NCW), Ministry for Women and Child Development (WCD) and your Ministry (MOIA) in their documents and utterances in public have bandied around the figure of 30000 abandoned brides, for quite some time. However, this figure has never been authenticated, as was admitted by the WCD representative in the meeting. Your own ministry has gone on record in Parliament by submitting that the number of 'complaints' of abandoned brides received by your Ministry was 100 till March 2007. We firmly believe that important decisions and stringent laws that affect millions of NRIs must not be based on unsubstantiated statistics.

Sir, we feel very frustrated in our efforts to bring the viewpoint of NRI community to the officials of your Ministry – the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. Our efforts are aimed at initiating a healthy debate based on facts on all issues concerning NRIs and particularly the issues relating to NRI families and their Indian roots and values. We would like India to enact laws that are free from gender-bias, are free from prejudices, provide deterrence against their misuse and take into account the special problems faced by NRIs.

We request you to kindly have this complaint investigated and ascertain the facts. We would appreciate to hear from you as to the steps taken in this regard.

With respectful regards,

Sincerely yours,

Raghvendra Sisodia  
for  
The Rakshak Team

Enclosures

1. Rough transcript of the events that transpired during the meeting of Rakshak Representatives and MOIA subcommittee on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

Copy to:

1. Smt. Pratibha Patil, President of India
2. Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India
3. Nirmal Singh, Secretary, MOIA
4. Leading News Paper Editors