Speech of His Excellency the Governor Shri K. Sankaranarayanan at the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Watsu Mungdang at Kohima on 2nd August, 2007

Dear President, Office Bearers and Members of Watsu Mungdang at Kohima, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to be here to participate in the Silver Jubilee celebration of Watsu Mungdang organized by the Ao women at Kohima.

It is a matter of privilege to be in the company of accomplished women who not only have recorded a marvelous literacy of 82.20 percent in 2001 census, but whose outlook towards the society is liberal. I have mentioned it before, and I must say again that I am impressed by the secular and inclusive nature of Watsu Mungdang’s founding principles. With such achievements and progressive thinking, the Ao women are well placed to lead the society on the issues of concern to women in Nagaland.

The Nagaland State Commission for Women was launched in Raj Bhavan on March 28 this year. In that function, I had mentioned that it is surprising that the Nagaland Legislative Assembly does not have any women member. This should change. We are going to have general elections for the 11th Legislative Assembly of the State in about six months. I call upon the political parties to also set up a fair number of women candidates for the elections. It will also have a positive influence on the way elections are managed.

While it is important to have women members in the highest law making body in the State, we cannot afford to ignore the issue of representation of women in the traditional decision making structures. The patriarchic society puts women at a disadvantage in matters of inheritance also. Such imbalances need to be corrected. An innovative approach is required here. Changes have to be brought about through cooperation rather than confrontation. The issues have to be studied in depth and debated through an extensive
consultation process. I am confident that the constitution of the State Women Commission will impart much needed momentum to this process.

In the field of education, it is a matter for concern that even amongst the women, there exist wide disparities. The women in Kipihiro, Longleng, Mon and Tuensang districts do not enjoy even half the level of education achieved by women of Mokokchung district. This gap needs to be bridged through focused and sustained interventions.

The women in the Naga society enjoy better health compared to women in many other States in the country. The infant mortality rate and maternal mortality rate is relatively low. There is a demand for adequate medical facilities for assisting childbirth. It is, therefore, clear that improving the delivery of medical services will benefit the women and children immensely. Women also need to have a greater say in reproductive health to protect themselves from the adverse impact of frequent childbirths as well as the HIV infection. The women groups, including Watsu Mungdang, can play advocacy role to empower women.

History has important lessons. As late as in the 19th century, feminists such as Annie Besant, were prosecuted for advocating reproductive rights. Women had no voting rights till the beginning of 20th century. We have come a long way since then. Tradition is not cast in stone. It is amenable to review and change based on contemporary concepts and requirements.

I wish the Watsu Mungdang all success in your activities for the advancement of women. God bless you.
Thank you.