

Tuesday, April 10, 2012

## HR activists seek early passage of domestic violence bill

By A Reporter

ISLAMABAD, April 9: Civil society organisations and human rights activists on Monday said they appreciated the passage of a number of pro-women laws by the parliament and expressed the hope that the domestic violence bill will also sail through soon.

Speaking at a press conference, Marvi Sarmad, Tahira Abdullah, Naeem Mirza, Arifa Mazhar, Shabana Arif, Aqsa Khan, Ambreen Yaseen and Samina Malik said: "The bill has been under debate, revision and modification by committees of both the houses of parliament for over three years now, and around 10 years in all. Achieving 100 per cent consensus is a noble objective but we remind

the honourable parliamentarians that in democracy a simple majority is enough."

They said a large number of independent and reliable national research studies (some even government-commissioned) had provided data and factual evidence demonstrating that domestic violence, particularly against women and girls, was common and widespread all over the country.

"Enacting a strong law to criminalise this horror will help women break the silence, sensitise the police, media and the public and enable the government to effectively tackle the issue."

They said in 2009 they wanted to improve the bill substantively but were told that it

was not possible since the NA had passed the bill and it was pending in the Senate.

They said women in Pakistan had been struggling for several decades for their fundamental rights, especially the right to life (Article 9). "Our struggle is indigenous in the context of our national situation and issues. We also remind the parliamentarians that we are carrying out our lobbying and advocacy activities as per our democratic responsibilities and constitutional rights."

They said it was disturbing and ironic that when civil society carried out its activism on women's constitutional rights and indigenous problems it was immediately labeled as "western, foreign-funded agenda", but there

was no objection from anyone when the accusers themselves utilised foreign funds (both loans and grants) provided for the use of the government, armed forces and the legislatures.

The activists said: "We urge parliamentarians belonging to all shades of political ideologies not to allow themselves to be swayed by attempts to misuse the domestic violence bill as a bargaining chip or a quid pro quo for achieving a consensus and a unanimous vote on the parliamentary joint sitting's current agenda of Pak-US relations, drone attacks and Nato supply routes. We demand and expect that the political parties will rise above politics regarding the bill."