

KARACHI

KARACHI – The Aurat Foundation launched a campaign, ‘One Billion Rising against Violence against Women’ on Sunday. A seminar, a theatre and a musical concert on the theme were also organised to support the cause. Various non-profit organisations set up their stalls to showcase their works as well. Anis Haroon, ex chairperson of the NCSW, told the audience that “One Billion Rising” was a global campaign, started by Eve Ensler. “It is a movement to end violence against women. It is being taken up by different countries across the globe to mobilise the grass-root communities, individual men and women, intellectuals, politicians to raise their voices against violence against women.

“One Billion Rising” is about brave women survivors breaking their silence, telling their stories, risking their lives and helping others to do the same. It is about holding perpetrators accountable and ending impunity and speaking back to governments and international elites. It is about putting the issue of violence against women smack in the centre of the conversation, culture and media. It is about turning shame to strength and pain to power. During the launching ceremony, Anis Haroon said that society had weakened women. “Now question is how to empower women to face this curse.” She also emphasised on institutional mechanisms to provide social justice to women in distress.

She also said that “We are not claiming that women are victims of violence but UN reports claimed. According to the UN Reports out of three women one woman is the victim of violence. VAW is a global issue and is happening around the world but the difference between us and them is social and legal institutions which are in place to provide protection to women survivors”. She also linked domestic violence with OBR campaign, and said that “we must use this campaign to reduce domestic violence”. She vowed that passage of DVB was still in pending and needed due attention from all parliamentarians. Farhat Parveen said that Pakistan was a signatory of different ILO conventions but failed to give due attention to these conventions that demanded equal employment opportunity for women without any gender discrimination. She also linked domestic violence with OBR campaign, and said that “we must use this campaign to reduce domestic violence”. She vowed that passage of DVB was still in pending and needed due attention from all parliamentarians.

Farhat Parveen said that Pakistan was a signatory of different ILO conventions but failed to give due attention to these conventions that demanded equal employment opportunity for women without any gender discrimination. She also highlighted the hardships faced by industrial workers. She gave the reference of Ali Garments, where factory workers, including women were burnt alive, but the government failed to provide relief to the dependents of the victims. Renowned personalities from the development sector and civil society addressed the participants on the occasion. Babar Ayaz - a famous journalist - talked on ‘Extremism & its Impact on Women’, Justice (Retd) Majida Rizvi spoke on ‘Legal System and Violence against Women’, Farhat Parveen - Executive Director Now Communities presented her opinion on ‘Economic Aspects of Violence Against Women’ and Tauqeer Fatima Bhutto – Minister for Women Development – talked on ‘General Violence’. In 2011 the total number of violence against women cases reported in Pakistan was 8539, higher by 6.74% than in the previous year in which 8000 cases had been reported. But these figures do not represent a true picture.

Violence against women is widely prevalent in Pakistan but a vast number of cases are not registered by the police and the media only gets to hear about the most gruesome and shocking incidents. This is because violence against women is still considered a private issue. Women hesitate to speak out against the humiliation they have suffered, or are afraid of more violence in case they do speak. These factors make it difficult to report and fight violence against women. A number of guests from civil societies, education and development sectors, government and non-government organisations, media and students attended the event and pledged to work against violence against women. In the end of seminar Dr. Masoom Hasan, Chairperson Aurat Foundation Board of Governors, formally launched poster “Enough!” which says no more violence against women! On 14th of February one billion rising in every corner of the world in preparation, let us start mobilizing people and organizing activities now! This poster has been published with the support of Women Learning Partnership (WLP). WLP is an international NGO on women learning partnership. It is in 20 countries of the world mostly Muslim majority countries. Aurat Foundation is the only representative organization from Pakistan.