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Mukhtaran Mai case SC verdict shocks civil society

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ISLAMABAD — The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and members of the Insani Huqooq Ittehad (IHI) Thursday expressed shock and disappointment over the Supreme Court verdict given in the Mukhtara Mai gang rape case.

The NCSW and member organisations of the IHI including PODA, Meherghargh, Aurat Foundation, Rozan, Sungi, Bedari, Ethno Media, Pattan and SPO also convened an emergency meeting early in the day.

Although the judgment did prove that Mukhtaran was raped because one accused did get life imprisonment, while others were acquitted.

The statement issued by NCSW said: "We are surprised to see why only one accused was punished and others were acquitted on a charge of gang-rape."

The Commission and members of civil society felt that this was the reflection of a

biased and inefficient criminal justice system. This case has been a classic example of how the facts were distorted and documentation of the evidence was tampered with at all levels.

The group expressed concern at the long delays to dispense justice.

The victim was raped in 2002 at the behest of the local *Panchayat*.

In 2005 the chief justice of the superior court took suo moto notice of the case.

Despite the intervention it took more than nine years to come up with this decision, which is a source of concern for the women of Pakistan.

It is feared that this decision might further strengthen the anti women parallel legal and judicial systems and mechanisms in the country.

"We feel that the criminal justice system too is not pro women and is patriarchal in nature. Impunity is the order of the day," said the statement.

In cases of complaints women victims are burdened to provide series of evidenc-

es which is not possible for them. Currently, methods of recording evidence by police are biased against women; and that is one reason that they do not get justice from the courts, the civil society activist believe.

Women's lack of proportionate representation in lower and upper judiciary is paving the way for verdicts against women victims, the protestors added.

"Today's judgment has shaken the confidence and sense of security of women of Pakistan to stand up for their rights," civil society members said.

Adding, it reflects a faulty investigation of the police and the loop holes that are left intentionally to side with the power brokers.

The outcome of Mukhtaran case discourages survivors of rape and gang rape to report.

However, "we are proud of Mukhtaran Mai, who stood bravely against all intimidation and harassment and has refused to buckle under life threats," they said.