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Assembly elections

Women lawmakers demand 10% quota for general seats

Legislators also discuss allocation of funds, seats according to constituency

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Women parliamentarians from across the country demanded a mandatory quota of 10 per cent of general seats in the National Assembly, Senate and provincial assemblies on Saturday.

The demand was made at a press conference held after the inaugural session of a two-day national consultation on provincial legislative issues and developments after the passage of the 18th amendment, organised by NGO Aurat Foundation's Legislative Watch Programme for Women's Empowerment.

The consultation aimed to bring together national and provincial women legislators and public representatives to discuss gender-related issues including honour killings, present law and its major flaws, a domestic violence bill and the local government system.

Women parliamentarians from all four provincial assem-

blies demanded that political parties develop consensus among themselves to amend the Political Parties Act so as to provide a mandatory quota of 10 per cent of general seats to women in order to bring them into the mainstream of the electoral process before the next elections, in addition to the already available reserved seats for women.

"We believe that the provision of reserved Seats for women is the Constitutional right of women of Pakistan under Articles 25, 34, 51 and 106," said Deputy Speaker of the Sindh Assembly Shehla Raza while briefing media.

Raza added it must be acknowledged that all important gender-related legislation which had been passed in parliament over the last nine years would not have been possible without the initiative and consistent efforts of women parliamentarians.

Allocating funds

Responding to a question about the allocation of funds for contesting women candidates who could not afford to do so on their own, Raza said

that they should find financial resources themselves.

Pakistan Muslim League-Functional MPA Amna Ulfat suggested that parties should allocate funds to contesting women candidates who were not wealthy, so that no one would be deprived of the opportunity to contest elections.

Which constituency?

Earlier in the consultation Pakistan Peoples Party Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Assembly member Shazia Tehmas triggered a debate when she said that the reserved ten per cent of seats should be from 'winnable', not 'weak' constituencies. Pakistan Peoples Party Punjab Assembly MPA Amna Buttar said that the ten per cent of general seats should be in addition to the reserved seats and that the procedure of nominations on reserved seats should also be changed into an election contest amongst women only. Raza opposed the legislators' demand about allocating only winning seats. This was against the spirit of democracy, and the decision of allocating seats should lie with parties, she said.