

16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence

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16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence is a regular feature every year around the world as part of a global movement to raise awareness, to address policy and legal issues, to campaign for the protection of survivors of violence and to call for the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence. The 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence is an international campaign originating from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute sponsored by the Center for Women's Global Leadership in 1991. Participants chose the dates, November 25 as International Day for Violence against Women and December 10 as International Human Rights Day, in order to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasize that such violence is a violation of human rights. This 16-day period also highlights other significant dates including November 29 as International Women Human Rights Defenders Day; December 1 as World AIDS Day; and December 6, which marks the Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre. The 25th of November, the day that marks the start of the campaign, was declared International Day against Violence against Women at the first Feminist Encounter for Latin America and the Caribbean held in Bogotá, Colombia in 1981. This day was chosen to commemorate the death of the Mirabel sisters in 1960 by the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. The day was officially recognized by the United Nations in 1999 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Since the General Assembly designated November 25, as the international day for the elimination of violence against women, the circle of engagement has widened. More groups and individuals are getting involved to prevent and address these heinous violations of women's human rights. There has been significant progress at the national level as many countries have adopted laws and comprehensive action plans to address the issue.



Candle light vigil

Aurat Foundation organized a candle light vigil, on 25 November 2009 at Lahore, to raise the voices opposed to 'violence against women'. The purpose of the event was to mark the '16 Days of Activism' against gender-based violence. Ms Nigar Ahmad, Executive Director of Aurat Foundation and representatives of civil society organizations i.e. GJTMAP-Punjab, Kashf Foundation, MDM, SAP-Pk joined the vigil and chanted slogans like *Aurton per tashadud band karo, Zulmon say azad zindagi hamara haq hai, Zulm ke Zabty ham nahi manty* etc. Lawyers, social and political activists and media person also participated in the vigil to support the international call on women's rights.



Rally against violence

In order to mark the '25 December - the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women', Aurat Foundation organized a rally on 25 November, 2009, from Karachi Press Club to Maulana Din Muhammad Wafai Road. Women, children, civil society organizations, parliamentarians, media persons and people from different walks of life joined in the rally and enthusiastically displayed banners and raised slogans. The banners and placards reflected the problems of women in Pakistan. Ms Nusrat Sahar Abbasi, member Sindh Assembly from PML-F, Ms Aleemunnisa, city councillor, Ms Hina Tabassum of SAFHR, Ms Shazia of PPP, and Sayed Shams of HRCF made brief speeches on various aspects of the day.

Solidarity with police for saving citizens' lives

Country's police force has been under criticism for one reason or the other. In the current war against terrorism, however, they have emerged the targeted victims and need support from public and civil society. Realizing this need, Aurat Foundation Peshawar decided to celebrate Human Right Day this year with police on 10 December 2009.

The objective of the event was to acknowledge the services of police in current law and order situation. In order to show solidarity, a group consisting provincial assembly members, Ms Sanjida Yousaf (PPPP) and Ms Tabassum Shams (ANP), members of civil society organizations including Khewendo Kor, Shirkatgah, Noor Education Trust, CAMP, Director of Police Department Human Rights Cell and

media persons visited the two blast sites to present white flowers to police officials.

The group first visited the session courts and placed the floral wreath

on the blast site and presented white flowers to the police officials present there on duty. The group also visited judicial complex, placed floral wreath on the blast site, paid homage to the blast victims and presented

flowers to the officers on duty.

The team also visited the office of Mr Liaquat Ali, CCPO, for a goodwill gesture that the entire nation acknowledges police force's sacrifices for peace in the country. Mr Liaquat Ali appreciated the efforts of CSOs for showing solidarity with the police force and said that police feels encouraged knowing that their efforts to maintain peace and fight terrorism are being acknowledged. Peshawar's police department is defending the city without even the basic equipment of surveillance. Ms. Shabina Ayaz, Resident Director, AF Peshawar, said that the government should provide police with the latest surveillance equipment and compensate the families of the police officials who laid their lives while protecting the lives of the citizens. — *AF report*



This year, Aurat Foundation arranged a series of activities in all its five offices to mark the 16 days of activism against gender violence. Islamabad office launched the activities for 16 days of activism against gender violence on November 25, with an exposure visit of female section of Adiala jail Rawalpindi. Members of civil society Organizations, women rights activists and journalists were part of the delegation who visited female ward in Adiala jail.

Aurat Foundation presented warm clothes and shawls to women and toys to children. Surprisingly, the conditions at the jail for women were not as bad as normally perceived. There were no women prisoners sitting on the floor or staring from behind the bars. According to the jail officials, there are 140 women prisoners living in the female section, though capacity is for 120 prisoners, however, overall condition of the barracks was not very bad and these were clean and spacious. Prisoners were not confined to one place and they were allowed to move freely within their compounds. When enquired from female prisoners, whether the

unusual better conditions had to do something with the visit by the civil society delegation, they said the conditions had generally improved in recent years.

Majority of the women prisoners were charged with drug cases and most of them belonged to NWFP, basically they were only carriers because of the poverty without knowing the nature and consequences of the offence. These poor women were carrying drugs just for the sake of 500 or 1000 rupees and now they have to spend their rest of the life in jail. Prisoners involved in murder or kidnapping were mostly from Punjab. There were few foreigners as well who were mostly involved in drugs charges.

The saddest part of the story is that the majority of the accused women at prison were abandoned by their families. There was a girl who was confined under petty offence but because of the non-availability of

surety bonds she was ailing in jail and none of the family members was bothered to come and help her in getting out of the jail. There was another girl who was brought in prison for trying to seek admission in a nursing school with fake documents. The head clerk who prepared the forged documents was released on bail but the innocent 18 years old girl was sent behind the bars without realizing the fact that that the time she spent in jail would label her criminal for the rest of her life and when she would come out, she would be no more acceptable in society.

The positive change about female ward was that the government had appointed some educated and qualified female staff members; these young female officers are qualified and more sensible to deal with female prisoners. The jail officials told they were providing all possible facilities to women prisoners including skill trainings and reading material. There were about 14 children

imprisoned with their mothers some of them were born in jail. There is also a lady teacher appointed in female ward to give primary education to children and women. The Superintendent jail Mr. Saeed Gondal said with the implementation of the new judicial policy things were improving and during the last two months the number of prisoners had decreased considerably.

The visit to Adiala jail has revealed not only the bitter realities of the lives of numerous prisoners but it has also made us to think that another world exists inside the jail premises which is very different from the world we live and sometimes because of the unjust and corrupt legal system if some innocent women get trapped in prison, she has to suffer all her life, as our society would never forgive her for the crime she never committed. There is need to push government to bring changes in legal system, make strong laws and effective policies to improve the judicial system so that innocent women do not become victim of the existing unjust legal system and oppressive society based on patriarchal values of women's subordination. — **AF report**

A day with women prisoners at Adiala

Impact of war on women

AF's PDM-VAW team organized a focused group discussion on 'Situation of peace and security in Pakistan and its impact on women', at Peshawar on 4 December 2009. The participants of the discussion included Member Provincial Assembly Ms Nagis Sameen Khan, and members of civil society, media persons and lawyers.

Ms Shabina Ayaz, RD Aurat Foundation Peshawar, in her welcome address, said that women are treated as subordinates in this patriarchal system, therefore, in situation of conflict and security these were women who suffer the most.

Ms Shirin Javed, PDM-VAW, presented the bi-annual account of cases of violence against women reported in media and briefed the participants about the process and problems in collections of data on violence against women.

Mr Abdul Hai Kakar, senior journalist from BBC, whiles sharing his reporting experience in conflict zones, said that he has not seen a single working woman in these areas. The discriminatory practices adopted by Taliban were, thus, affecting social and economic lives of women there. Education is the most devastated among the social sector as nearly 300 schools mostly of females have been destroyed.

He said that agenda of Taliban of Swat is different from those operating in Waziristan area, as the former were forcing their ideology on common people through barbaric acts and women were the main target. — **AF report**



On the second day of activism, i.e. on 26 November 2009, AF Lahore organized a visit to Dar-ul-Aman of district Sheikhupura, so that to extend moral support to the sheltered women and children waiting for justice and care. The visiting group included Ms Sidra Hamayun from War against Rape (WAR), Ms Farwah from daily Ausaf, Ms Nabeela Shaheen and Abid Ali from Aurat Foundation. The group shared with the sheltered women the objectives of the '16 Days of Activism', asked about the circumstances and reasons they were forced to take refuge in Darulaman. The group also asked the Superintendent of Darulaman about the problems of resources and services.

Some moments with women in distress at a shelter home

Aurat Foundation embarked on the '16-Days of Activism against Violence and Discrimination against Women' campaign by visiting the hapless women in shelter homes on 25 November 2009. A team including civil society activists and journalists visited Darulaman in Rawalpindi, at Shamasabad, which is a shelter home for women in distress. A number of 40 shelterless women and seven children are presently settled in Darulaman. Most of the women were victims of domestic violence and main offenders in many of these cases were male members of the family. Dissolution of marriage or forced marriage was found the major cause behind these cases of domestic violence. According to the visiting team, women were admitted in Darulaman only after production of court orders. In emergency cases, however, the court process turns counter-productive as the victim needs immediate protection. Women are permitted to stay in Darulaman for three months which is extendable according to the nature of case. They cannot leave Darul Aman on their own without court orders. Most of the times, courts orders hand them over to their relatives who are mostly the offenders themselves. This practice needs review as in such a situation, the sheltered women hesitate to leave Darulaman. There is no mechanism for technical education of the housed women and no school or nursery for minors in Darulaman. The sheltered women demanded that court should take immediate action to solve their cases with special reference to domestic violence. The Shamasabad shelter home is functioning under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Punjab. — **AF report**

Feminist mushaira on violence and discrimination against women



Aurat Foundation organized a feminist mushaira (poetry reading event), as part of the activities under 16 days of activism, on 3 December 2009 at the Islamabad office. Eminent poetess and women's rights activist, Kishwar Naheed participated as Chief Guest. Shabnam Shakeel, Talat Farooq, Mehmooda Ghazia, Dure-Sharewar, Farah Deeba, Ali Yasir, Fatima-Tu- Zehra, Almas Shibi, Ghazanfar Hashmi, Noreen Talat,

Mohammad Rafiq, Mehboob Zafar and Akbar Abbas read their poetry on the occasion. Aliya Mirza moderated the event. Through their poetry, the poetesses and poets highlighted different aspects of physical and psychological impact of violence on women. In a poetic expression, they shared with the audience the feelings of young girls when they experience discrimination at the very outset of their bloom and which continues

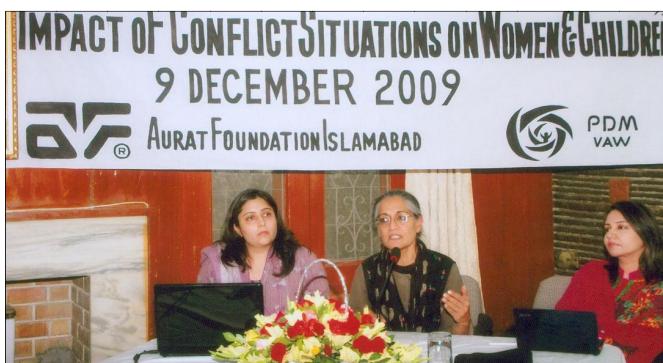
till dearth. Kishwar Naheed's famous poem "Wo jo bachion se bhi daar gay" (those who are afraid of little girls) received tremendous applause from the audience. The strong message in the form of crisp small verses delivered extempore by the great poetess was descriptive of the voice of a women poet. Dedicated to the menace of 'honour' killing, Shabnam Shakeel's "mery muhsin merey aadelo merey qatilo"

addressed all the actors involved in this heinous act in a very sensitive way. Her poem "meri taar taar muhabaatein" also received big applause. In her poem, "Tikoon", Talat Farooq's narrated the journey of a girl towards motherhood and in "Bilaunwan" she claimed that people of Quraish who used to bury their girls were better than feudal of today. Her poem 'Sonia Naz ki farayad' also moved everyone in the audience. — **AF report**

Impact of conflict situations on women & children

In order to reflect into and discuss the emotional and psychological distress which women and children gone through during the conflict in Swat, Aurat Foundation's PDM-VAW team organised a panel discussion on 'Impact of conflict situations on women and children', on 9 December, 2009 at Islamabad. Gender experts Ms. Zehra Kamal and Dr Rakhshanda Parveen were the resource persons and prominent women's rights activist Tahira Abdullah moderated the discussion. Participants included members from civil society organizations, academia, media and students from Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU).

Ms. Zehra Kamal and Dr Rakhshanda Parveen, the resource persons, discussed the socio-cultural, emotional and psychological impact of conflict situations on



women and children. Ms. Zehra Kamal said psychological effects of blasts are long-lasting and hence more destructive than the actual incident. Even the teachers and parents remain confused and agitated over these incidents with so many questions in their minds, one could imagine the state of children who

depend and trust on their teachers and parents for their protection. She stressed that as children react to the fears and anxieties of adults, so one should stay clam. She also explained the strategies to combat with such a situation and advised the audience to share these experiences further with friends and family members.

Dr. Rakhshanda Parveen talked about socio-cultural impact of war and conflict situations on women. She also shared her personal experiences where she referred to many refugees being offended by the provision of sewing machines and computers to the IDPs by some aid agencies. She told the audience that when a female IDP was asked about the outcome of Swat violence in her view, she simply responded trauma. She said that administering polio drops to kids in refugee camps is a positive development, which could not have been accomplished under the Taliban. Ms. Tahira Abdullah regretted the lack of information about the exact number of refugees hailing from Swat and South Waziristan, and denounced the use of the term 'beneficiaries' for women. — **AF report**



Continuing the activism against violence and discrimination against women, Aurat Foundation Lahore organized another demonstration in Mianwali, on 6 December 2009. Chanting various slogans, the participants demanded the government to effectively implement the available laws to reduce the gender violence.

Taking the '16 Days' celebrations to southern Punjab, Aurat Foundation Lahore organized a demonstration on 'violence against women' on 25 November 2009 at Bhakkar. The participants represented various walks of life, lawyers, human rights activists, women councilors and media personnel.



Asma for depoliticisation of human rights

Aurat Foundation organised a lecture by Ms. Asma Jahangir, Chairperson, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, on "Derogation of human rights in conflict situations" at a local hotel in Islamabad on 10 December 2009, to mark the International Human Rights Day. Dr Masuma Hasan, member Board of governors of Aurat Foundation and former cabinet secretary presided over the function.

Ms Asma Jahangir said that there should be rule of law in the country and depoliticisation of human rights should be discouraged. She said that the government is accountable for whatever is happening in the country. She said that human rights must be respected and preserved at all costs.

Asma Jahangir said that she would stand by the children of Taliban if they are picked up by the government despite her opposition to Taliban. She said we must make a noise whether the captive is a Muslim or not or the victim is a Muslim or not. She said it is time to think beyond biases and stop hating each other. She debunked the myth



that a Muslim cannot kill a Muslim.

She said that hullabaloo about NRO is not for ending corruption but it reflects chor machai shor (thieves make noise) syndrome. She said that we must take care of the institutionalised corruption. Can a judge call generals in the dock asking did they get plots out of their salary? What is role of ISI and under what law intelligence agencies work?

Ms. Asma said that under the cover of War Against Terror, army started

a war in Balochistan. There was so much disinformation that the operation was termed as only against some tribal chiefs who were against cantonments in Balochistan. She said that Army asked Bugtis to get hold of Murriss and when Akbar Bugti refused, there was tension between Bugtis and Musharraf and Dr Shazia's case aggravated the situation. She said that these Balochis are leftists and Musharraf referred to them as Jihadis before the Americans who strangely gulped the lie.

Why there was so noise on Kerry-Lugar bill, she asked. Who is asking to sell nukes like candies, she said adding that they wanted to ensure that money was spent for what it is being given. We must improve our image in the world which is going down, she said. She said that we have confirmed information of extra-judicial killings.

Ms. Asma Jahangir said that ICRC must be given access to all prisoners and UNHRC and humanitarian agencies be given access to investigate. She said it is an obligation of the government under international law to provide details about prisoners and disappeared people. During the question hour, she said that dictators all over the world do some window-dressing on women's rights. They pass some legislation in hurry usually having no teeth. She opposed giving farmlands to Saudis.

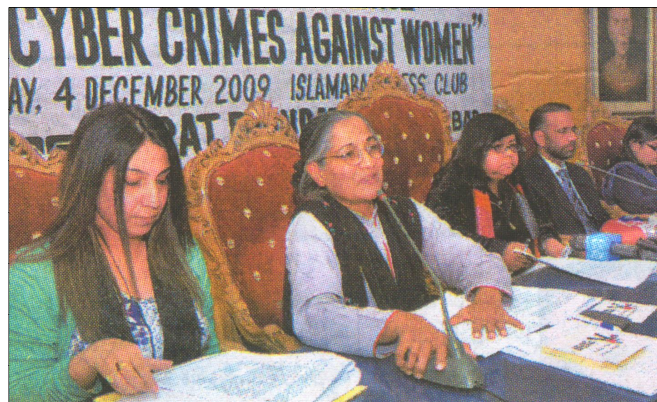
She also condemned US drone attacks in Pakistan. She said that poverty is not the root cause of terrorism; otherwise there would have been a revolution. The root cause is intolerance and fanaticism, she said.— **AF report**

Demand for end to cyber crimes against women

Aurat Foundation organized press conference on cyber crimes against women on December 4, at Islamabad press club in connection with the 16 days of activism against gender violence. Aurat Foundation, Violence against women watch group and p@sha, ISPs strongly condemned the increasing incidents of cyber crimes against women in Pakistan and termed it another form of violence.

President of Pakistan software House association for IT and ITES P@SHA Ms. Jehan Ara, Spokesperson Internet Services Providers Association of Pakistan (ISPAK) Mr. Wahaj-us-Siraj Members violence against women Watch group Ms. Tahira Abdullah and Ms. Shabana Arif, Ms Nayyar Shabana Kiyani from Aurat Foundation addressed the conference. Explaining the ways in which cyber crime is leading towards violence against women Jehan Ara said that internet is not creating new forms of crime against women and children, but is creating new ways and means for crime to be perpetrated.

She said that information and communication technologies encompass abroad range of technologies that



includes internet, mobile radio, and television and wireless technologies.

She pointed out that large number of Pakistani women and girls are victim of cyber crimes such as cyber stalking, pornography and morphing through internet and mobile phones. She said that Pakistani women also suffer exploitation through the misuse of you tube, face book, mobile SMS.

Sickening cut and paste manipulation of manufactured or personal and its wide dissemination through chat and pornographic sites and Cds immeasurably hurt young girls who face subsequent loss of personal

freedom, mobility, recreation and most importantly educational, employment and marriage opportunities.

Due to existing social mindset and lack of effective legislation on cyber crime, Ms. Jehan Ara said cyber crimes had added to the plight of Pakistani women who already had to face other violent crimes in Pakistani society such as domestic violence, Swara Wann, Watta Satta, Hudood Ordinances, discriminatory laws lack of mobility and empowerment and gender inequality. Thus, it becomes even much harder to come out in public and report cyber crimes.

Women's rights activist Tahira Abdullah said that the proposed bill carries massive violations of Fundamental rights, illegal invasion of privacy, sweeping arbitrary powers of investigation and prosecution given to FIA, vague definitions, huge lacunas in section 13(dealing with cyber stalking); and disproportionately severe penalties including the irreversible death penalty.

She further said that the current badly drafted bill ignores the existing sexist and anti-women abuse of cyberspace, which particularly targets women politicians, civil society activists, and professional women in all occupations, especially women artists and the media.

After the presentations Aurat Foundation Civil Society activists and Cyber and Soft ware experts issued a joint statement and demanded that the proposed Cyber Crimes Bill (PECO) must be opened for public debate and discussion, as well as soliciting inputs for improvement from all the concerned stakeholders. There can be no reduction in Cyber Crimes against women unless people are aware of the proposed laws and that there is a strong law against cyber crimes.— **AF report**