



# LEGISLATIVE WATCH

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## Local democracy crucial for empowering women

By Fauzia Yazdani

Devolution of Power Plan 2000 has been a key development in the history of governance in Pakistan as not only did it challenge the political status quo but substantially altered it for women and the marginalized in society. Recognizing the 33% quota for women in the Local Government System (LGS) created a critical mass while recognizing the struggle of women movements. The unprecedented number of 36,000 women councilors, later reduced to 26,000, laid the foundation stone for the political evolution in the country. It opened up enormous political space and created strategic opportunity for women to contribute in agenda-setting, debate and implementation of the agenda of local communities.

The history of politics and privileges for women in Pakistan has been checked because the political empowerment for them has been either (a) inherited - belonging to a political family (b) acquired - having struggled as political activist (c) grabbed - being promoted and/or part of a vested group like military and/or (d) legally provided

ed through reservation mechanism. It is in itself a paradigm that a "military government" facilitated women's empowerment, which should have come from a democratically elected regime.

Women around the world face socio-political constraints that keep them away from decision-making. Men generally are seen to dominate the political arena. In Pakistan feudalistic and tribal mindset coupled with strongholds of traditions contribute to such a situation where women reject, hesitate and/or disassociate to become an equal player in male-styled politics.

In Pakistan being in a political role is not that simple as it gets translated into

one's social life style, priorities and attitudes. When such masculine perception is coupled with socio-cultural norms it brings together concepts of frailty of a woman, on one hand, and abusive dirty nature of politics, on the other, which is not meant for women. Being in politics is also propagated as

Women are seeing this political space and power to themselves as an opportunity for real change for themselves and their families to demand access to their fundamental rights and social services. Social policy research in Pakistan and around the globe has also brought forward that women's representation in decision-making bodies at grassroots level produce better outcomes for women and communities. Hence, in Pakistan as well, we should not let the political whims do away with a legitimate tool of community and women's empowerment i.e. Local Government System, rather we must generate support for its survival.

"all time access" which is not socially perceivable for a woman. This struggle of almost a decade by women at LGS level has laid the foundation to carve and recognize the

fact that women in politics are not cosmetic appendix but 'politics has a gendered face and dimension' that include women. The major challenges faced by women were:

- "Masculine model" of political life, public space and of elected gov-

ernmental bodies

- Non-women friendly nature of electoral system & institutions
- Non-existent political party based vertical growth & support system
- Misinterpreted socio-cultural and religious norms and value system
- Lack of political education & training mechanism for leadership

Social & cultural barriers are the strongest push & pull factor for women that aim to enter politics at any level in Pakistan. A large %age of women at councilor level were self-motivated for want of social empowerment, which meant to be heard and known - "I am a living reality & can speak on my own". However, support of family and especially male family members cannot be denied as they recognized this as positive social recognition for the family's honor.

Mixed reaction from their children were also reported that ranged from elated to disgusted upon being taunted by the new role taken over by their mothers. Her new role affects her children and husband as well as she is pub-

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## DVB referred to Mediation Committee

The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2009, passed by the National Assembly on 4 August 2009, lapsed in the Upper House of the Parliament, the Senate of Pakistan, where it could not get passed within 90 days of its receipt, a constitutional requirement. Now, the Bill has returned to the National Assembly, where it would now be handed over to a "Mediation Committee" consisting of members of both the houses of the Parliament, under Article 70(3) of the Constitution, which reads: 'Where a bill is referred to the Mediation Committee under clause (2), the Mediation Committee shall, within ninety days, formulate an agreed Bill which is likely to be passed by both Houses of the Majlis-i-Shoora (Parliament) and place the agreed Bill separately before each House, and if both the Houses pass the Bill, it shall be presented to the President for assent.'

Representatives of 35 organizations from across Pakistan belonging to trade unions, media, youth organizations, minority groups, NGOs, academia, business, and the legal profession, gathered in Murree from 9 to 11 October to deliberate over the current situation in the country and to discuss pathways to peace. They unanimously agreed on the indivisibility of peace for all citizens, irrespective of gender, class, nationality, religion, occupation, age, etc.

They agreed to work together for peace by redefining the state's relationship with citizens, making a paradigm shift from a security state to a benevolent state responsive to the needs of all its citizens, especially the socially, politically, and systemically excluded. They rejected all forms of religious extremism and the use of violence.

The following obstacles to peace

## Aman Ittehad formed

## Peace for justice, equality and tolerance

were identified:

1. Trust deficit at all levels - between citizens and the state including its institutions; and, also among citizens
2. Fear, violence and fear of violence, suspicions, and helplessness among citizens
3. The role of the state as an imposer, oppressor, and non-deliverer
4. Lack of equality - between citizens, provinces, nationalities, and genders and different categories of workers
5. Dominance of religion in the functioning of the state
6. Dominant role of the military and its agencies in political and governance processes
7. Weak democracy, democratic institutions, and civil society
8. Inadequate access to information - related to rights, responsibilities, historical facts, and realities of people

ple

9. Distorted and parallel education systems
10. Negative and biased portrayal by the media
11. Citizen exclusion from decision-making, control over resources and their distribution

The following pathways to peace were agreed upon:

1. A Social Contract, with constitutional cover, between the state and the citizens based on the 1940 Resolution establishing equal rights of citizens (regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, etc.), provinces, nationalities.
2. A continuous democratization process and the supremacy of the parliament.
3. Accountability of the state and public representatives.

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licly talked about which can be positive or negative. She carries an extra and to some extent unnecessary burden of all of their expectations. Social recognition, sense of authority, respect & improved social standing within and outside family being in a decision-making role are "THE" gains felt by these elected women.

Women are major contributor to national economy through paid and largely unpaid domestic labor and house hold/ care economy. The cadre of elected women councilor had an average family of 6-10 in a joint family system and a woman of the house has many hats as per multitude of her relationships. They were expected to balance politics and home out in such a way that primarily the home does not get affected. This tax them at both ends to take care of the family needs, do time management to squeeze out the meeting time and above all know about council work.

Mobility constraints grew problematic as the council meeting locations were on an average far from most of their homes - approximately 25 km. Mobility remained a major expense in this sojourn as it was not only for them but for a family member as well that was designated to pick and drop. The missing economic opportunity cost was also an added dent on house hold budget. Generalized law & order situation also remained non-conducive for a female to travel alone for longer distances. This constraint is equally felt by the women voter and candidates as men do not want to be tied with them to and from polling station.

Despite being non political party based system, the party affiliations remained evident which were more flourishing for men then women for political mobility. Post 2002 General Elections the Provincial Assemblies could not accept the reality of grass root democracy that could do public decision making and had funds. This was seen as infringement on their political right and future. Hence all efforts were done to destabilize the LGS. Women of local governments were seen as cosmetic appendix. Political parties generally abstained from recognizing the reality of LGS and attempted to either win them over or cash strap them. Fortunately the political space so created could not be erased though their numeric strength was reduced in 2005.

Post 2002 a large number of women entered the national and political arena as well due the reservation of seat and introduction of education as eligibility criteria to contest elections. All of them belonged to a major political house hold which could not let the seat go vacant due to non availability of an educated male, hence females were allowed to enter the political ring.

Since then generally these women have also been to seen to look down on women councilors because they considered it to be below their status to be a mentor to them for various socio-political and economic differences. Hence we did not see many playing a mentor's role or being elevated by political party to contest from LGS to provincial level. Yet women councilors pursued all avenues which could get improve their political skill and training.

Limited education and non existent political skills were the biggest challenge to the women especially when dealing with bureaucracy. They burdened them with procedural technicalities of management and financial systems, political intricacies of the new system. The LGS in itself did not had an opportunity to help them through the process. Various international agencies and local NGOs took over the task of training the women councilors. Media still remains to use these elected women as panelist on range of issues or promote their struggle.

Politically they have established their right of political equity. Their political journey was not an easy one as women encountered non-conducive enabling environment despite a softened social stance. On empowerment front socially these women have started with achieving (a) their family support, irrespective of push and pull factor, to contest elections, which means acceptance of their right to be in political arena (b) having been accepted to take on the role of political decision making on behalf of their community; (c) equal political decision making right being an elected representative.

Politics by being defined as masculine is the first step to marginalizing women because it reflects social and communal attitude formation, which does not perceive women in a public-political leadership role. The role of women in LGS had brought forward that political leadership does not have a gender and is reflective of a state of mind. It requires extra effort from all stakeholders to engender politics for communal recognition and internalization. Political Parties and State has to invest in depersonifying the male face of politics.

The way forward is in continuation of system and process that has provided women with access to political decision making. Women have their own views and analysis of power & empowerment at all levels as per their social surrounding that figure prominently in their lives realities and are a reference point for future empowerment. Women are engaged in power contestation around the mechanism of control i.e. violence, resources, legitimization and public spaces & decision making. To resist, escape and overcome these mechanisms of control

women use strategies and undertake initiatives that can be up-scaled from individual to collective level. These efforts can also be organized and institutionalized so that it culminates in the achievement of the desired goal i.e. increased capacity to make autonomous decisions that influence and/or transform power relations, access to power and participation in public decision making.

The opportunity in the LGS for women constitute as a political nursery where not only women have been trained to understand power dynamics, system and processes but have also overcome socio-cultural and ideological barriers resulting in carving a socio-political recognition for themselves.

LGS is a forum for elected women for greater assertion of their rights and ability to relate to women rights efforts and movements as per its relevance at different level of State and with civil society organizations. As per the current milieu faced by Pakistan continuation of LGS and substantial women representation in it provides an opportunity to do away with misconstrued interpretations of culture and religion which are used as reference point to politically disempowering women. By maintaining the status quo of substantial reservation women at LGS will lead to development of a new social acceptability and attitudinal change that creates and promotes a time based justification for active role of women in politics.

Pakistan is in a transition phase with a range of crises at hand. State has to take on the function of information-sharing, socio-political cultivation and undertake political outreach and advocacy. Local Government System is an institutionalized tool/mechanism with the government that extends their outreach to each village of the country. Women in the system have access to all household being their home town and constituency that keeps them connected on every day basis. Hence this can be used to take the messages like social protection, security threat, energy conservation, protection of rights and accountability to each and every household through these women councilors.

Presence of women councilors has created a niche of political women leadership that has the mandate to exercise their power both at individual as well as collective level. The continuation and strengthening of women at LGS can lead to strengthening civil society movement against discriminatory laws by linking up to these elected women to generate debate in their respective houses. This can develop a momentum of support and policy feedback that will have political flavor, provincial realities and support of women at a much larger spectrum. —*The author is a gender and development expert, associated with The Researchers.*

## Aman Ittehad formed

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4. Recognition of ownership of resources and their equitable distribution by the federating units.
5. Establishment of the rule of law and justice through the reform of the judiciary, police and prisons.
6. Celebration of diversity and promotion of pluralism.
7. Reclaiming and expanding public spaces.
8. Promoting and reviving cultural activities like melas, mushairas, etc.
9. Access to information, demystification of the constitution, rights, laws.
10. Uniform and quality educational system; and equal opportunities.
11. Expression of solidarity with the oppressed and the marginalized.
12. Continuous engagement with parliamentarians, decision-makers, and those whose struggles we have supported (watchdog role of civil society).
13. Elimination of the space for external or internal non-state actors, especially religious extremists.
14. Internal cohesion and self-reliance to eliminate external interference and dependency on foreign aid.
15. Redefinition of the relationship with neighbouring countries and others like the US, Saudi Arabia, etc. based on the principle of non-interference
16. Recognition of our natural identity as South Asians including Afghanistan and making regional forums like SAARC effective

### The group decided upon the following actions to promote peace:

1. Develop and disseminate special messages, short videos in different languages, etc., for filling the information gap on rights, demystification of the constitution, laws, etc.
2. Engage with state institutions, the government, and the military
3. Engage with parliamentarians and political parties to influence constitutional amendments and policies
4. Organize public dialogue with political parties and public representatives
5. Engage rural and urban youth, students, and workers
6. Strengthen relations with the media to project the voices of citizens and apply code of ethics; with business towards promoting corporate social responsibility
7. Engage with people, express solidarity, restore trust through people's assemblies, exchanges, walks, cultural events, music, art, writers' forums
8. Celebrate Peace Week
9. Undertake research; develop profiles of violence-affected areas, monitor activities of religious extremist groups; correct the distortions in history
10. Promote connectedness between citizens and citizen organizations

# Swat: on way to normalcy

By Syed Irfan Ashraf

Finally, the fourth phase of Operation Rah-i-Rast has rescued Swat from the jaws of the militant and rekindled hope for a new life. The dreaded, long curfew spells have ended; so has the routine terror that had reduced Swat to a living hell.

Life on the roads and Mingora city's hustle and bustle are among the most conspicuous signs of a new beginning. There is almost a feeling that the city had never gone through upheaval. Women shoppers in the famous Chena Market can be seen enjoying their newfound freedom as they throng to shops selling cosmetics and jewellery. "This is our revenge on the Taliban," says one woman shopper, as she explains how previously they would be beaten in the markets as the militants wanted to discourage them from coming.

However, alongside this apparent optimism is a deep discontent in some circles. The intelligentsia and civil society have taken the lead in raising questions about the timeframe of the military operation. How long will it take for the army to withdraw from the inner city and roads, they ask. The answer is crucial to a permanent peace in Swat, they believe.

The matter was raised with Operation Incharge Lower Swat Major General Ashfaq Nadeem when he was presented with an open letter by a group of prominent civil society members. "The army's solo flight in Swat should not last long as a sense of deprivation is developing in civil society because of the all-pervasive role of the army in

every sector of society," reads the letter.

At present the army is playing a vital role in Swat. It is entrenched in the hills as well as the strategic plains to stop any infiltration from adjoining areas. Checkpoints and barricades have been erected along roadsides from the main town Mingora to Matta and Kalam in the north.

Such a tight security network and surveillance system has caused the graph of terror activities to plummet. A commendable job indeed - but at the cost of public freedom. Since the police force has resumed its duties and community policing and paramilitary troops also have a considerable presence (their combined strength is about 12,000), it is time to gradually begin handing over the reins of internal security to the district police and civil administration.

This move would relieve the army of some of the burden in congested city areas, and empower the newly designed local security system to contribute more positively to peace in the valley. Moreover, the army would be able to focus on the task of guarding only entry and exit points and carrying out search operations inside bordering areas where ragtag bands of militants are still waiting for an opportunity to strike.

Taking the army off the roads would impart a sense of normalcy to the tourists landscape and make inhabitants, most of whom still consider peace some way off, feel secure. When a TV correspondent asked a local vendor in Mingora how he felt about

resuming a normal life after hard days under the Taliban, the man replied, pointing to patrolling army vehicles, "Things won't be normal as long as guns rule Swat's roads."

A few months back, when people started returning to their homes, the NWFP government was expected to play a major role in post-Taliban Swat. The ANP leaders appeared committed to reconstructing conflict-scarred Swat but are now perceived as having done little to make good on their promises. One glaring example is that of the immensely important reconstruction survey which has not been completed yet despite the passage of many months. A district official with links to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority admitted that the survey was delayed a couple of times but said that it would be completed soon so that reconstruction could get under way.

As a matter of fact, development in Swat is dependent on government funds, which would enable people to reconstruct their destroyed properties. However, financial help is being awaited since July 13, 2009, when the Swatis were allowed to re-enter the valley after some parts were cleared of the Taliban. Since then life is going on mainly on artificial support as trucks loaded with edibles are sent in by international agencies and distributed among people standing in long roadside queues. One almost gets the sense that the provincial government is institutionalising beggary. This approach has also added to economic stagnancy with business not as brisk as it should be. Because people wait all day long for the free edibles, shopkeepers in

Mingora bazaar look out for buyers.

Nevertheless, it is encouraging that the private sector especially hotels owners have started playing a vibrant role to lead Swat in the new phase. Understanding that tourism is the mainstay of the local economy, hotel owners have announced a package inviting tourists from all over Pakistan to avail themselves of free accommodation in over 900 hotels of the valley from January 1 to 10. Apart from this, cultural activities have engrossed the youngsters. Instead of waiting for the government's financial package, many have started reconstructing their homes, shops and business centres to start life afresh. The revival of the tourism sector in Swat is dependent on these activities and can compensate at least to an extent the losses suffered over the last three years.

Unlike other militancy-hit agencies in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Swat's proximity to the provincial capital Peshawar and the urban lifestyle of the Swati people are enough to discourage another wave of militancy. In the presence of the army guarding the bordering hilltops adjacent to the districts of Dir and Shangla and effective policing inside the city areas, it is near impossible for militancy and religious extremism to return. In the past three years, during the nightmarish reign of the Taliban, the people of Swat learnt that progress does not lie in embracing Stone Age values, that, in fact, it depends on how far a nation is willing to move forward, in step with the rest of the world. — *The author is a journalist working with a national English daily.*

## People elect Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly

According to the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order, 2009, the Legislative Assembly of Gilgit-Baltistan consists a house of total thirty-three members, twenty-four from general seats and nine on seats reserved for women and technocrats. The first general elections for the Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) were held on 12 November 2009 under the Election Commission of Pakistan. In total, two hundred and sixty-four candidates contested against the 24 seats. Of these, 99 contested election on party-basis: PPP (23 candidates); MQM (20); PML(N) (15); PML(Q) (14); Gilgit-Baltistan Democratic Alliance (10); JUI (6); BNF (4); Awami National Party (3); Jamaat-e-Islami (2); and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (2). The other 165 appeared as independent candidates.

Only two women contested the general election though could not make it to the GBLA: Ms Fauzia Saleem contested as independent candidate from

GBLA-11 Sakardu 5. She received 2208 votes against the winning candidate Syed Muhammad Ali of PPP who won 3145 votes. Ms Amina Bibi was the second women candidate for the GBLA who contested on PML-Q ticket and grabbed 3963 votes against his opponent Mr Muhammad Abdullah, PML-N who received 4240.

The Election Commission of Pakistan on November 15, notified the polling results of 21 out of total 24 general seats of the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly confirming the lead of Pakistan People's Party that grabbed 11 seats. The results of two constituencies, LA-3 and LA-17, were withheld whereas election in LA-19 Ghazar 1 was postponed due to

death of a candidate. Later on, after the re-election on the withholding seats, two independents joined the PPP after winning the elections.

Those members of Gilgit-Baltistan, who took the oath include Syed Razi

### Party position on general seats

Political Party	Number of seats
Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)	13
Pakistan Muslim League (N)	2
Pakistan Muslim League (Q)	2
Muthida Quami Movement (MQM)	1
Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI)	1
Independents	4
Total seats with results so far	23

Ali, Wazir Hassan, Wazir Shakil, Bashir Ahmed, Haji Janbaz Khan, Haji Rehmat Khaliq, Haji Gul Bar, Abdul Hamid, Naseer Khan, Muhammad Ayub, Dr Ali Madad Sher, Muhammad Ismail, Mufti Abdullah and Muhammad Jaffar.

### Members on reserved seats

Women members elected on reserved seats are: Ms Sadia Danish, Ms Mehnaz Wali, Ms Yasmin Nazar, Ms Shereen Ms Fatima, Ms Gul Mira and Ms Amna Ansari. Technocrat members are: Mr Jamil Ahmed, Mr Mutabiat Shah, Molana Sarwar Shah. They were also administered the oath.

From nine reserved seats, four of the total six seats reserved for women also went in the PPP favour, thus raising the strength of ruling party to 20 seats in the present GB House of 32 (election on one constituency is still due).

The Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009, was passed by the Pakistani cabinet on 29 August 2009, and was later signed by the President. It granted self-rule to the people of the former Northern Areas, now renamed 'Gilgit-Baltistan,' by creating, among other things, an elected legislative assembly. — *AF report*



# Genesis of SCR 1325 and challenges ahead

(The article was written by Maha Muna and Rachel Watson, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, in October 2001)

Perpetué Kankindi longs for an end to the seven-year civil war that has devastated her native Burundi. She runs a successful animal husbandry project for women of all ethnicities at a time when divisions between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi are bloodier than ever. She hopes that this project will offer a building block for security in the villages where she works.

Each woman in Perpetué's project is given a goat to rear, on condition that when the goat has a kid, the owner hands over the kid to a woman of a different ethnic group. The women - Hutu and Tutsi - also share seeds and harvests. "The women had to say hello to each other and manage the project together," explained Perpetué. "The Hutu women who were doing the harvest came to visit the Tutsi women in the village. Little by little the fear began to diminish."

Last year activist women's groups across Burundi successfully lobbied for and secured the right to participate in the ongoing peace talks. Some of the 19 political parties involved in the negotiations agreed to include three women politicians in their negotiating teams. Though the women participants served as observers, their presence indicated official recognition of their capacity for establishing and maintaining peace. They presented a unified platform on the Arusha Peace Agreement, including proposals to ensure a women's charter in the new constitution and recognition of women's rights to land and property.

On the international stage, in October 2000 the UN Security Council (SC) passed an historic resolution (SCR 1325) which finally recognises and encourages the efforts of women like Perpetué and her Burundian colleagues. It calls on UN member states not only to protect women in times of war but also to include them in peace negotiations.

The resolution represented the effort of a broad coalition of civil society, UN and state actors: an NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (whose members are Amnesty International, Hague Appeal for Peace, International Alert, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children), UNIFEM, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women and the UN Mission for Namibia. Together they built on gains made in preceding years and took the issue all the way to a SC resolution.

The NGO Working Group was con-

cerned that while the SC had previously made references to women's experience of war under the general umbrella of civilian victims of conflict, it had ignored the particular ways in which women are affected by war. The group stressed that women experience war differently. Women organise their families and communities to cope during war and displacement; women's networks are essential for solidifying peace and women have valid concerns that may not be discussed if only men come to the peace table.

2000 also saw the five-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action on gender equality, development and peace. The Platform's chapter on women and armed conflict clearly stated that lasting peace depended on the participation of women in all aspects of peace initiatives. It reiterated that humanitarian and human rights law demands the protection of women and their rights during armed conflict. This was an important reaffirmation that women's rights are human rights, as understood in various international human rights instruments.

During preparations for the Beijing review process, the SC marked International Women's Day in March 2000 with a statement noting that peace is inextricably linked to equality between women and men. The SC had already held several 'thematic debates' on such topics as civilians in armed conflict, children and the spread of HIV/AIDS. The UN itself had appointed and received regular reports from a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and had developed a wealth of understanding relating to women's status and women's protection. At the same time, the Brahimi Report on UN Peace Operations and Graca Machel's review of the impact of armed conflict on children and women were under discussion.

The NGO Working Group worked closely with UNIFEM, the UN Mission for Namibia (a non-permanent member of the SC) and the Division for the Advancement of Women to table an open debate on women, peace and security in October 2000. Namibia was ideally positioned to take this initiative since it had spearheaded the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action on Mainstreaming Gender in Peace Support Operations, both of which recognised the important role of women in conflict prevention and resolution and called for gender equality in peace support operations.

## Getting female voices heard

Prior to the debate, women peace activists from war-affected regions around the world related their own experiences to members of the SC.

Invoking the 'Arria Formula' which allows non-governmental representatives to share their opinions with the SC, women from Zambia, Somalia, Guatemala and Sierra Leone told Council members that while women were at the forefront of grassroots efforts to promote peace and reconciliation, they were rarely offered opportunities to participate in peace negotiations.

Faiza Jama Mohamed, a Somali activist, spoke of how Somali society is organised into clans and sub-clans of which women are not considered full members. They are thus excluded from where decisions to make war are taken and denied a role in peace negotiations. However, despite their exclusion, women in Somalia have gone to imaginative lengths to restore peace and security in their communities. One women's organisation collected funds to provide uniforms, food and salaries for the local police force and then rebuilt the police station. By their actions, the women ensured some protection against armed militia and robbers who had previously attacked villages with impunity.

## Adoption of the resolution

The Arria session was followed by a two-day debate in the SC which led to the unanimous adoption of SCR 1325. The resolution calls for the inclusion of women in peace building, expresses concern at the adverse effect of conflict on women and urges specialised gender-sensitive training for all UN peacekeepers.

The language of the resolution moves beyond portraying women as vulnerable victims of war to acknowledge their role in supporting families and surviving armed struggle and their ongoing protection needs. It calls on all those involved in implementing peace agreements to protect the rights of women and girls under international law and to consider their special needs during repatriation, resettlement and post-conflict rehabilitation. All peace actors are urged to support women's initiatives for conflict resolution and to facilitate their involvement at all levels of peace negotiations.

The resolution validates and endorses the work of women like Mary Balikungeri, a Rwandan woman who established the Polyclinic of Hope, a hospital and training centre which promotes peace and reconciliation in a country torn apart by ethnic hatred. Mary recognised that long-term recovery for female genocide survivors would entail physical and psychosocial support and her project has gained international attention. Her Rwandan Women's Network has reached out to other women's organisations in neighbouring Burundi and the Democratic

Republic of Congo and found common ground at a time when conflict still engulfs the region. She believes the challenge is how to translate the resolution into action on the ground. "I see the implementation at two levels. Locally we need to be better organised so that we can better understand, implement and monitor such resolutions, and regionally and internationally we need to lobby strategically so that governments and the UN can implement this resolution. My dream is that our women politicians can encourage such strategies."

## Implementation challenges

This may be the major sticking point of SCR 1325. The challenge rests with the UN and its member states - its peacekeeping operations, its assistance organisations and SC missions - to follow through on promises and to translate good intentions into tangible improvements for women affected by war. Much remains to be done in such key areas as training for peace-keeping missions and moving towards gender-sensitive humanitarian programming.

There is no timeframe for the UN Secretary General to take the necessary steps to implement the recommendations in the resolution. As with many resolutions of this nature, the language used is woolly and tentative (using words like encourage, request and invite), indicating that the SC still has much to do to ensure that this resolution really is integrated into all the operational culture of the UN.

Refugee women have reported that civilian police forces overseen by the UN are poorly trained and inadequately supervised. In Kosovo and Bosnia, women have complained that some UN-supported civilian police officers use prostitutes and are sexually abusive towards the female members of the public they are supposed to be protecting. Training for police officers on gender issues such as sexual violence is vital. Codes of conduct need to be strictly enforced, and not just with the dismissal of the officers concerned. Immunity for UN staff accused of sexual violence needs to be addressed. UN staff who are responsible for protection must be held accountable for their transgressions.

Improved protection and increased participation have been proved to reduce the vulnerability of refugee women and enable them to contribute effectively to post-war reconstruction. Yet despite a proliferation of policies, guidelines and targeted programming, there remains a wide gap between what we know about improved protection and the realities that women face in refugee situations. — *Courtesy: Peace Women - Women's International Leagues for Peace and Freedom.*

## EDITORIAL

Pakistan, the land of diverse nature, peoples and cultures, has become a country of conflicts. Surely there are external factors and internal too, which led us to these conflicts. One factor, perhaps, is that we as peoples have ceased to appreciate the diversities of cultures, identities, thoughts, languages, expressions, life styles, opinions, ideas, beliefs and beauties around us. Paradigms of global market and free market economy have very swiftly overshadowed the core issues of maladministration, exploitation and inequitable distribution of our resources, resulting in crisis and scarcity of food, water and energy. Ineffective and unaccountable governance, lack of adequate policies and continual breach of existing ones exacerbated the inequality of access to education, livelihoods, technology and health. Weakening of political, democratic and parliamentary institutions led to military solutions instead of political ones.

There could be many more factors responsible for the conflicts we are surrounded by, and several way-outs. What to do with this Pandora Box of 'factors behind conflicts' and 'way-outs'? Same was the question which gathered the civil society organisations of the country to launch a campaign 'pathways to peace', and eventually coming under the banner of Aman Ittehad, a broad peace coalition of civil society. After deep deliberations, the civil society organizations agreed that 'rapidly changing context and circumstances in Pakistan demand an even more active citizenry'. For active citizenship in pursuit of peace, they selected four parameters: rule of law, justice, democratic governance and life with dignity.

In order to weave in the above-said four parameters into a culture of peace, the campaign for active citizenry needs to focus on three selected pathways. Firstly, we need to review the relationships between the state and the citizens. In this regard, we need a public debate on the legal framework of fundamental rights and the basic principles enshrined in our constitution. Secondly, we need to review and challenge such laws and customary practices which lead to discrimination and exclusion of the marginalized and vulnerable sections of society, the women, children and poor, and religio-ethnic minorities. Thirdly, but not lastly, we need to reassess the external factors which influence our governance and re-compose our relations with such external players. Before we consider the distant dreams, we better care about what is close by - our relations with India, Iran, Afghanistan and China, and in fact, must take a firm decision to strengthen them in all sincerity.



**LEGISLATIVE  
WATCH**



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## Dismay at gender in the Copenhagen outcomes

After weeks of negotiations, the outcome of COP15 (fifteenth UN Climate Change Conference, Copenhagen, 7-18 December 2009) is extremely disappointing. There are no firm and worthwhile commitments, only the acknowledgement of a declaration, which states that global temperature rise should not exceed 2°. Yet the atmosphere does not act under orders. It's us humans who ought to act, but the declaration remains silent on commitments.

Women's organizations comprising the Women and Gender Constituency under the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) including WECF, GenderCC, WEDO, LIFE and others said in a press release on 22 December 2009, that the lives of millions of people are at stake, entire nations are expected to disappear under the ocean, and yet world leaders in Copenhagen failed to commit to necessary measures for an equitable, just and legally binding post-Kyoto agreement to tackle climate change. "The women's organizations are dismayed by the lack of progress. Women are among the most urgently affected by climate change and, at the same time, key agents of change - and we see that there is no time to lose", the statement said.

As UNFCCC Executive Secretary Yvo de Boer puts it, the Copenhagen summit was "a rollercoaster ride". Far from a comprehensive agreement to tackle the world's most comprehensive problem, the outcome of the Copenhagen Conference of Parties was a mere "Copenhagen Accord", negotiated by a small group of the key countries, and "noting" the necessity to contain global warming to the 2 degree C limit. The Accord calls for commitments by industrialized countries and engagement of developing countries, but does little to specify how this will occur. Even

more concerning, not all countries even agreed to acknowledge this step due to the dominance of world superpowers in drafting the Accord.

The statement says: "With current promises on the table, global warming will reach well beyond the 2 degree limit; scientists on site urged that this type of inaction will actually result in a 3.5 degree increase this century. With even the most optimistic outlook, the outcome of Copenhagen suggests the inevitable: small islands will disappear, global economies and states' security will be in jeopardy, and those populations in already fragile positions will be further entrenched in poverty, the world over.

While gender-sensitive text remained in the negotiating documents until the end, these texts mean nothing without an overall outcome which will protect the lives and livelihoods of everyone on Earth. As the AWG-LCA process is now mandated to continue until COP-16 in Mexico, the strategies for ensuring gender responsive texts be maintained and strengthened must go hand-in-hand with the message that every country must step up and commit to action.

The Women and Gender Constituency further expresses grave concern over the issue of transparency and access at the Copenhagen COP. The failure to ensure conference accessibility to the thousands of accredited civil society representatives was a dire indication of the inability to tackle climate change in a comprehensive, equitable, transparent and just way. Many partners came well prepared with presentations, research materials, documentation and personal testimony - all ready to contribute to a real outcome of the COP.

## Women deprived of healthcare at key times

Women are often deprived of healthcare in the crucial years of adolescence and old age due to social inequalities and neglect in male dominated decision-making, the World Health Organisation said in while releasing a report on 9 November 2009. "It's time to pay girls and women back, to make sure that they get the care and support they need to enjoy a fundamental human right at every moment of their lives, that is their right to health," said WHO Director General Margaret Chan.

In its first ever cradle-to-grave report on "Women and Health", the UN health agency underlined that women were particularly vulnerable to a lack of adequate care in old age - when they often outlive men - and in their teens.

It also underlined that the lack of responsiveness to women's inherent health needs can be lethal, such as with complications in pregnancy and child birth or cervical cancer. "This points to another problem, the failure of health services to meet women's needs," Ms Chan told WHO member states. As a result, women provide the bulk of care - about 80 per cent - as health staff or household careers, yet the system fails to address their own needs adequately, the WHO said. Cervical cancer is the second most common type of cancer, with 80 per cent of cases and an even higher proportion of deaths in poorer nations, the report said. Yet it can be prevented with a vaccine, detected by early screening and treated early. "These deaths should not be happening," Ms Chan commented.

The report also found that treatable or preventable complications in childbirth or pregnancy were the leading cause of death among 15 to 19 year-old girls and women, including a "substantial" contribution

from abortions. Ms Chan underlined that men exercised political, social and economic control in many societies, affecting health services. "We will not see significant progress as long as women are regarded as second-class citizens in so many parts of the world," she said. The WHO report found that healthcare, especially in low and middle income countries, "may be biased against the old and is rarely geared to the particular needs of older women."

But the challenges of care for the elderly are equally acute in rich societies with low levels of fertility and growing proportions of older people in the population. "Perhaps one of the greatest challenges faced by the individual woman as she ages and by the society which surrounds her, is the disintegration of the self that occurs with dementia," the report underlined.

Some 58 per cent of the population above the age of 70 are women, according to the report. Chronic conditions, such as cardiovascular and obstructive lung diseases, account for 45 per cent of deaths in women over 60, and need to be tackled earlier in life by establishing healthier lifestyles, the WHO said. The world's 600 million adolescent girls, meanwhile, face environments "that are too often neither safe nor supportive" at a time of "huge physical, social and emotional changes," it added.

Girls' experiences of puberty can make a difference between ill and good health later in life, the report argued. Yet, many of them face "constraints and marginalisation as a result of poverty, harmful social and cultural traditions, humanitarian crises and geographical isolation," hampering their access to healthcare and support when they most need it.

# Recommendations on women's right issues for constitutional reform

## Article 8

1. Article 8 of the Constitution needs to be further strengthened with the addition of a specific clause saying in substance that all the provisions of the Constitution shall be interpreted so as to accord with the Fundamental Rights.

2. An exception is made in Article 8(3) in respect of conformity to fundamental rights of laws relating to the armed forces and the police and of laws in the First Schedule. A proviso should be added here saying that these laws shall not in any case be immune to the requirement of non-discrimination on the basis of sex.

## Article 11 (2)

While Article 11(2) of the Constitution does not specifically mention 'prostitution', the term 'traffic in human beings' is broad enough to cover the corresponding requirement in Article 6 of CEDAW. Amendments to this Article can make this prohibition more specific and watertight.

The prohibition against 'slavery, forced labour, etc.' in Article 11 (2) should include a specific bar on all forms of sexual exploitation and prostitution of women.

## Article 19

The phrase 'decency or morality' as a factor of restraints on freedom of expression in Article 19 should be deleted.

## Article 22

Prohibition of discrimination under Article 22(3) (b) on the basis 'only of race, religion, caste or place of birth' for admission to an educational institution aided from public revenues should include 'sex' and the word 'only' be deleted.

It must, however, be clearly provided that in the light of Article 25(3), this Article will not be applicable to institutions especially set up for women and girls.

## Article 25

This provision of the Constitution is perhaps the most important as regards discrimination of women. In its true spirit, it caters to all the principles of equality. It further allows the State to make whatever provisions may be necessary for the protection of women. However, the potential for misuse may be noted even in this provision.

Protective legislation can often result in being discriminatory to women, as has particularly been discussed under the chapter on labour laws. At times an initiative is taken as an affirmative action but its effect could be discriminatory. For example in certain areas quotas may be fixed for females to promote gender equality, but if more of the

The following recommendations are mostly contained in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women, 1997, an official commission constituted through an act of Parliament in 1994, which gave its recommendations in 1997. The commission was headed by a sitting Judge of the Supreme Court, Mr Justice Nasir Aslam Zahid, and included women's rights activists and people from other disciplines. Some of the recommendations were developed later by consultative processes among civil society organisations and other women's rights policy documents.

women begin to qualify for the quota on merit, that quota system will become a restraint rather than a facility.

Secondly, in the clause 'There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone', the word 'alone' is unnecessary. It suggests that sex, if coupled with some other factor may provide justification for discrimination. It may also be noted that in the cultural and social context of Pakistan the word 'protection' in clause (3) has the potential for a rigid and conservative interpretation which may even be considered to justify barricading of women.

1. From the bar against discrimination between citizens on the basis of 'sex alone' in Article 25, the word 'alone' should be omitted.

2. Article 25(3) be amended to remove the word 'protection' in the context of woman and replaced with words which connote that special affirmative provisions be made to enhance women's status and rights towards the promotion of gender equality.

## Article 26

1. From Article 26(1), which prohibits discrimination in access to public places on the ground only of ... 'the word 'only' should be omitted.

2. Article 26(2)(1) be amended to remove the word 'protection' in the context of woman and replaced with words which connote that special affirmative provisions be made to enhance women's status and rights towards the promotion of gender equality.

## Article 27(1)

In the safeguards against discrimination in services in Article 27 'on the ground only of ... ' the word 'only' be deleted. And in the proviso that some services can be reserved for either sex when they entail duties that cannot be 'adequately performed by members of the other sex' the modifying adverb 'adequately' should be left out.

## The Council of Islamic Ideology

The rights of women in Pakistan are closely interwoven with the constitutional structure of the State and with the development of the political process. Not only do the elective bodies have close to no representation of women, constitutional institutions like the Federal Shariat Court and the Council of Islamic Ideology too have an almost all-male membership.

The Council of Islamic Ideology should include members from various

walks of life and an adequate number of female members, so that it is more representative in character.

## The Federal Shariat Court

The Federal Shariat Court was established through President's Order No. 1 of 1980 by incorporating Chapter 3-A to Part VII of the Constitution. The provisions of this chapter take effect 'notwithstanding anything in the Constitution', as such making the Federal Shariat Court a supra-constitutional body. The superior courts of Pakistan regularly interpret Islamic law. In pursuance of the requirement to bring all laws in conformity with Islam (Article 227 of the Constitution) where necessary they seek ways to harmonise the spirit of the Constitution with the principles of Islam. As such a separate judicial forum with the same responsibility is not necessary. Therefore, Chapter 3A of the Constitution be repealed.

## Eighth Amendment

The Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, forced on the just-elected National Assembly of 1985 on pain of continuance of martial law, validated all the laws and constitutional amendments which had earlier been made by the military government without any public debate.

Parliament should debate the impact of the various parts of the Eighth Amendment and repeal all such of its provisions which are found to be against the letter and spirit of the original 1973 Constitution or adversely affect the rights of women.

## Judiciary

The Constitution lays down the principle of equality. The legislation passed by the Assemblies, or the ramifications of such legislation, have sometimes been examined for their conformity to this principle. This is a matter of interpretation and brings in the judiciary. It is therefore important to have not only an independent judiciary but also one which is free of gender bias. It has to keep pace with the development of attitudes and legal theories which promote the rights of disadvantaged people, who particularly include women.

1. A conscious effort be made towards achieving gender equality at all tiers of the judiciary.

2. A special programme should be devised to sensitise judges early in their careers and to purge them of any subconscious prejudices that have

become part of the social psyche.

3. The oath of office of the judges prescribed in the Third Schedule of the Constitution should be amended to include in the last sentence, after the words 'according to law,' the following: 'without bias, without discrimination on the basis of class, caste, sect, sex or creed and [...]'.

## Fifth Schedule

The Fifth Schedule to the Constitution clearly reflects gender discrimination. Section 5 of the schedule, for instance, only caters for the pension to be paid to widows; no equivalent section for payment of pension to widowers of female judges has been made. Section 6 of the schedule allows the pension to be divided between the children of the deceased till they reach the age of 21, but while a son may continue to receive pension even if he marries before attaining the age of 21, the same does not apply to the daughters of a deceased judge.

Therefore, widowers of female judges should be made entitled to pensions; daughters should be given their share of the pension until they are 21 years of age even if they are married before that; and the pension should be transferred to children only on the death of the widow/widower of the deceased judge or if the surviving spouse remarries.

## Definition of discrimination

There is no definition of discrimination against women in the Constitution despite being the fact that principle of non-discrimination has been mentioned at several places.

## Political & Legislative Representation

The reserved seats in the Assemblies must be raised to 33% proportion of representation, and must be filled through direct elections and be constituency-based. This is necessary for women to gain experience in directly dealing with the electorate and being accountable to a constituency, thereby enhancing their mainstreaming in the political system

The local government system should be retained with 33% proportion of representation; and must be given constitutional cover as the third tier of governance.

Prompt and strong action under the existing penal provision should be taken against candidates, pseudo-religious and other categories on individuals and bodies acting to restrain women from voting or contesting elections or otherwise creating difficulties in the exercise of their rights of franchise. Where the Election Commission finds evidence of large-scale non participation of women in voting, it should declare the election null and void. —

**AF report**



# Big 'No' to rolling back of local government system

A Conference on saving local democracy was held in Islamabad on the 22 October 2009, organized by DTCE, in association with other civil society organizations including FAFEN, Aurat Foundation, Pattan, LFP, The Researchers, was attended by a large number of Nazmeens belonging to all four provinces, at district, tehsil, town, and union level, political parties, Bar Associations, Press Club and representatives from civil society and people from all walks of life.

Mr Daniyal Aziz (DTCE), one of the pioneers of the Jeevay Pakistan Movement, said that any conspiracy against the Local Governments will not be tolerated. For the last 18 months, the so called flag holders of democracy have usurped the rights of the Nazims.



**Political party and civil society leaders at the stage of the conference.**

Former State Minister of Finance, PML-Q, Omer Ayub Khan, Mian Muhammad Aslam the leader of Jamat-e-Islami, Pakistan People's Party representative Ch. Manzoor Ahmed, Member of Jamiat Ulma-e-Islam, Fazal-ur-Rehman group Ghulam Ali, Waseem Akhtar, MNA

MQM, Pervez Shaukat President of PFUJ, Sardar Abdul Rauf President Haripur Bar Association, Yousaf Ayub, District Nazim Haripur, Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, Convener Sindh Local Council Association, District Nazim Quetta Maqbool Lehri, Musarat Qadeen, Chairperson

FAFEN and Sarwar Bari of Patan Development Organization spoke in favour of the local government system and gave strong reasons for its continuation. They said that civil society would resist any attempt to roll it back. Younas Khalid from Aurat Foundation moderated the conference.

## Civil society to defend local democracy

In the end, Ms Fauzia Yazdani from The Researchers, presented a joint statement of civil society organizations of Pakistan, together with other segments of civil society, social movements and political groups announcing their commitment to deepen, broaden, protect and revive the local government system and local democracy in Pakistan. The text of the statement is as follows;

Therefore, today, we the representatives of civil society organizations declare:

- Our determination to struggle and contest the on-going conspiracies against the local government system.
- our resolve to defend the reality of the Local Democracy through continuity of local government system that is inclusive of the marginalized social groups.
- Our belief that empowered social groups and society at large, through local democracy, is the strongest medium to ward off extremist forces and manage humanitarian crisis like IDPs.
- Our demand to the provincial governments to further the principal of autonomy by truly devolving powers to the local governments
- Our urge the Election Commission of Pakistan to announce the date for the next local government election without further delay.

We abhor any and all the efforts that attempt to eliminate and reduce the Local government system as mere administrative appendage of the provincial governments as it will be detrimental to the societal socio-political empowerment. We condemn the unilateral changes being pushed by the provincial governments to satisfy the administrative lust of bureaucracy as it disregards the public opinion and action research on the subject.

To consolidate our collective efforts, We the representatives of CSOs on behalf of our organizations and networks, from the Aurat Foundation, Liberal Forum Pakistan, Pattan Development Organization, FAFEN, DTCE and The Researchers, announce the formation of Jeevay Mouqami Jamhooriyat Tehreek (JMJT) and its National Executive Council.

JMJT will have larger representation of the civil society organizations, networks and groups and we extend our fullest support to the same.

## Role of women in local governments highlighted

In order to highlight women's roles and rights in local government system, Aurat Foundation organized a series of district consultation on the issue with all stakeholders.

The Citizen Action Committee (CAC), district Sukkur organized a consultation on the role of women in local government system on 3 December 2009, and invited members of women wings of political parties, councillors, lawyers, political activists and government officials to ponder upon the

issue. Resources person included Mr Ghulam Murtaza Ghangro, Naib Nazim, New Taluka Sukkur, Ms Fatima Soomro Advocate and Ms Ghazala Anjum, Member District Council. Dr Muhammad Naeem, Coordinator CAC, welcomed the participants.

Ms Ghazala Anjum, Member District Council, Sukkur, said that women councillors not only represented women in Union Councils, Taluka and District but also engaged in sensitizing particular needs and problems being faced by their male counterpart. She emphasized that mainstream political parties should engage skilled and literate women to further strengthen the local government system for the benefit of women at large.

Ms Fatima Soomro, Avocate, stressed the need for legal support to women who are in distress. Councillor Ms Fehmeeda Gulnaz attributed her success to the local government system



**Ms Farida Abbasi, Ms Mumtaz Abbasi, Faqeer Ibrahim Soomro and others at the district consultation, Larkana.**

which enabled her to take up the issues of women in her area.

Another such consultation was held by Citizen Action Committee (CAC) Larkana, on 12 December 2009 to discuss the local government elections and child marriages. Mr Javed Shah, Coordinator CAC, welcomed the participants, eminent lawyers, members of political parties, women councillors and political activists, and briefed them on stated objectives of the meeting to highlight the significance of local government system.



**Ms Ghazala Anjum, Dr M Naeem, and Mr Ghulam Murtaza Ghangro at district consultation, Sukkur.**

## Debate on local government system in Balochistan

In order to initiate further debate on proposed Local Government Act 2010, Balochistan, with the civil society, Aurat Foundation Quetta organized a seminar on 30 December 2009 at, Quetta. For information and deliberations on the proposed act, officials of the Local Government Board and UCs nazims were invited as panelists, namely, Mr Faisal Jamal, Secretary Local Government Board, Mr Aslam Rind, Nazim UC Liaquat Bazar, District Government, Mr Shahzad Kundan, Minority Councilor, Ms Shahida Parveen, Member City Council and Mr Qamar, Admin Officer Local Government Board.

Responding to general confusion about the future of local government that whether it would continue or not, Mr Qamar, Local Government Board,

in his presentation on the proposed Local Government Act 2010, stated that local government system would continue but not in the present form. His presentation also covered some salient features of the proposed local government Act 2010.

In the new law, women representation will be 33%, representation of minorities will be on the bases of their pop-



**Officials of the Local Government Board Mr Faisal Jamal, Mr Aslam Rind, Mr Shahzad Kundan and Mr Qamar, at the discussion.**

ulation, rural and urban divide will be enforced, audit will be done at provincial level, Quetta will be under metropolitan system, the elections under new local government system will be held within one year.

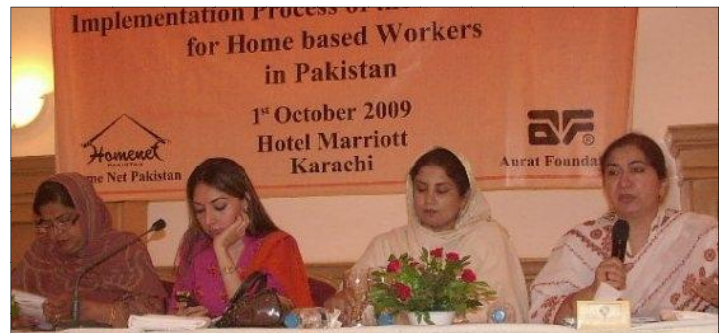


## Call to end discrimination, exploitation of HBWs

Aurat Foundation, in collaboration with Home Net Pakistan, organized an advocacy workshop on the 'Implementation Process of National Policy for Home Based Women Workers (HBWs)', at Karachi on 1 October 2009. Participants of the workshop also included parliamentarians, jurists, lawyers, government officials and political activist. Ms Laila Azher of Home Net Pakistan gave an informative presentation on the five guiding principles of the policy: equality and non discrimination, elimination of exploitation, empowerment of women, social and economic well being of the people and freedom of association. Ms Sharmilla Farooqi, Advisor to the CM Sindh, said that in general the behaviours and attitudes towards HBWs are discriminatory.

She concluded that provincial and federal governments both should take joint effort to resolve the problems of HBWs. Ms Toqeer Fatima Bhutto recognized the issue of ignorance on the part of government and other institutions. She gave commitment to take up the issues of HBWs at the floor of Sindh Assembly through a resolution.

Mr Zulfiqar Shah from PILER, presenting on the present situation of HBWs in Pakistan, said that in countries of un-skilled labour like Pakistan, globalization further exacerbates poverty by introducing updated technology in the factories. He informed the participants that there were 20 million informal workers in Pakistan, out of which 12 million are



Ms Tauqir Fatima Bhutto, Provincial Minister for Women's Development, Sindh, Ms Sharmilla Farooqi, Advisor to CM, Sindh, Ms Rubina Aman (AF) and Ms Ume-Laila at the workshop in Karachi.

home based women workers. The issue of Poverty among women is, thus, more as compared to men. Mr Saboor Ghayoor suggested that in the

population census form, there should be a column of profession so that the work and status of HBWs could be recognized.



### Solidarity Day to be observed on 1 January

Aman Ittehad, a broad coalition of civil society, announced the Solidarity Day in 37 cities on 1 January 2010, to be observed simultaneously at 3.00 pm across Pakistan. This was announced by representatives of the civil society organisations, including Mr Mohammad Tahseen, Dr Said Alam Mehsud, Mr Ali Asghar Khan, Ms Rukhshanda Naz, Mr Jaffer Memon, Prof. Dr Sarfaraz Khan, Ms Maryam Bibi, Mr Naem Mirza, Mr Naveed Shinwari, Mr Shahzada Zulfiqar, Ms Huma Fauladi, Mr Raza Niazi, Ms Shabina Ayaz, Ms Sameena Nazeer, Ms Salma Butt, Mr Asim Malik, Mr M. Y. Khan, Mr Mehboob Sada, Mr Zubair Malik, Mr Mohammad Yusuf Qureshi, Ms Zarqa Arshad and Ms Rashida Dohad, at a very well-attended joint press conference held at the Islamabad Press Club on 29 December 2009.



The Country Head of Oxfam GB Pakistan, Ms Neva Khan (right in picture above), visited Hyderabad to assess the current political situation and role of women through discussion with community women and women political leaders. Mr Asim Malik from Aurat Foundation, gave overview of Women's Effective Participation project interventions and progress in Sindh. Ms Neva Khan discussed the accomplishments and challenges faced by community women involved in the "Raising Her Voice" project. In her talk with the community, she shared the Oxfam GB role and priorities for women's empowerment. In meeting with Political Women's Leaders including women elected councillors and members of Sindh Assembly, socio-political context of women's political participation in Pakistan was discussed and the issues and challenges faced by women leaders also came under discussion. At the end of the meetings, Ms Feroza Zehra, Oxfam GB, gave a vote of thanks.

### Consultation meetings on peace

Two consultation meetings on the issue of "Peace" were held in Dera Ismail Khan and Swat, separately, on 21 November 2009. The objectives of the consultations were to assess the situation of peace in the conflict affected districts. Swat had gone through a brutal wave of Taliban insurgency and military operation, while D.I Khan had suffered from sectarianism. Though the government is claiming that peace has been restored in both districts, the findings at the meetings depicted a very different picture. The citizens of both districts were not satisfied with peace situation and called it a temporary phase. They said that women and children had been badly affected from the conflict situations and are suffering from psychological trauma but no one seemed serious in addressing this situation.



### Discussion on 'sexual harassment' bill

Citizens' Action Committee, Jhelum, organised a consultation on 'Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2009' relating to sexual harassment of women at workplace, under AF's Legislative Watch Program for Women's Empowerment, at Tehsil Council Hall Jhelum on December 11, 2009. Ms Nighat Perveen, MNA, PML-N, chaired the consultation meeting. Mr Malik Anwar Ul Haq, Advocate Supreme Court, presented the contents of the bill, and initiated the discussion on the topic. The meeting was attended



by civil society representatives, media persons, political workers, students and lawyers. In her address, Ms Nighat Perveen, appreciated the efforts of the organization for bringing such an important issues to the discussion table.

### Action week

Quetta office of Aurat Foundation organised an action week, under the project of Mobilizing Women Voters, for women to attain CNICs in five districts of Balochistan from 2nd of November 2009. During the planning of activities under the campaign it was decided that, though the campaign will continue for one week, however, the process of facilitating women in the process of attaining of CNIC would continue for more time. This was expected due to the large number of women mobilized during the campaign and commitment from NADRA regional offices for the provision of mobile vans in the focused districts.