

Friday, September 06, 2013

Engaging citizens

## Civil society bodies vow to ensure people- centric governance

New forum  
 launched to  
 help in focused  
 lobbying actions

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
 ISLAMABAD

Civil society organisations from across the country joined hands on Thursday to launch a representative forum for promoting citizens' rights and bridging the gap between government and the people.

The "Pakistan Civil Society Forum" was formed during a consultation meeting convened by the South Asia Partnership-Pakistan. The consultation was attended by representatives of around 30 civil society organizations which will be part of the forum.

Participants said the forum would serve as a joint platform of action, coordination and engagement with the government, national and international institutions. They said it would promote efforts to strengthen democracy, protect fundamental human rights and place the people's concerns on the national agenda through focused lobbying and actions.

According to participants, the country was faced with serious governance problems, terrorism, lawlessness, rising poverty, energy crisis and economic challenges. They said the country's development and policymaking both had yet to see adequate public participation. Issues of gender discrimination, growing religious intolerance

and rising trends of ethnic and sectarian violence were troubling signs, they added.

The representatives said civil society must continue its struggle to strengthen democratic processes and ensure social and economic justice through coordinated actions. A national-level core committee for the forum — comprising of representatives from all federating units and rights-based organisations — was formed at the consultation.

The committee will engage other civil society organisations, public representatives, state institutions and concerned citizens to diversify its support base, participants said.

The event was  
 held at the office  
 of the Aurat  
 Foundation

Representatives also endorsed a resolution calling upon the new government to take democratic tradition forward and ensure people-centric governance. They also demanded a bottom-up participatory approach for planning and development. The resolution highlighted the need to take devolution process from the provinces to the district level with substantive institutional reforms and genuine representation of the public.

The event was held at the office of the Aurat Foundation, a non-governmental organisation working for women's rights.

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