

Monday, December 9, 2013

# Gender reforms & enactment of domestic violence bill demanded

**Our correspondent**

Islamabad

Strong demand for gender reforms and enactment of domestic violence bill came forward at a conference organised to commemorate 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence today (Tuesday).

The national moot 'Women, Peace and Social Harmony' was organised by Aawaz - Voice and Accountability Programme. The speakers were of the opinion that things have deteriorated, generally in the context of women's overall condition in the society, and in particular, with regards to state responsiveness on women's concern.

Aawaz, consortium of five well known civil society organisations of Pakistan including Aurat Foundation, South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, Strengthening Participatory Organisation, Sungi Development Foundation, and Sustainable Development Policy Institute with DAI being the managing partner, organised series of activities across 45 districts of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on this occasion.

The National conference was chaired by Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women Khawar Mumtaz. Other speakers include Federal Secretary, Law Justice and Human Rights Barrister Zafar Ullah Khan, Justice (r) Nasira Javed Iqbal, Chairman, Pakistan Ulema Council Allama Tahir Ashrafi, Chairperson, Provincial Commission on the Status of Women, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Neelam Toru and Chief Operating Officer Aurat Foundation Naeem Mirza and Executive Director Sungi Foundation Sajid Mansoor Qaisrani.



*A scene from the play.*

Sajid Mansoor Qaisrani said that justice can never be established in society unless women who constitute half the population are freed from violence. Naeem Mirza said with the women's ministry been devolved, the NCSW must be represented in the cabinet and the National Commission of Human Rights should be established without any further delay. He regretted that ministry of human rights has been downgraded to a wing in the ministry of Law and Justice. He pointed out that the gender crime cell was an ineffective body as only two out of twenty two vacancies have been filled and pointed out that represen-

tation of women in the parliament and local governments had been reduced which is worrisome.

"Though the local government in Balochistan has retained 33 per cent women seats yet women were not allowed to vote in some areas. Why there is no follow up of Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP) recommendations, the National Plan of Action 1997 and National Policy of 2002," he said.

While agreeing that they were still many areas which need improvement, Barrister Zafar Ullah was of the view that things had improved on many levels. He stressed that unless we have justice for all, there

will be no justice in society.

Allama Tahir Ashrafi said that peace and social harmony is not possible in a country where religion becomes a tool to achieve personal and political gains. "The state is also silent about those elements who have occupied mosques and using religion as business. He also criticised the government for appeasing banned organisations." He said that there are laws present to discourage hate speech and promote religious tolerance in Pakistan but are not implemented.

Things will not improve until the citizens stand up and reclaim the space that has been appropriated by ignorant and

retrogressive forces who use religion for political purposes." He said that Islam dictates that there should be no violence against women, children, the elderly and non-combatants, yet women and children are murdered in Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta and Karachi in the name of Jihad.

Khawar Mumtaz said that despite present difficulties, struggle for women rights will continue. "Laws were important but awareness at the local and national levels was also necessary." The event also included a stage play on Pakistan's political history was also presented in the end by the Interactive Resource Centre.