

Sunday, February 1, 2014

# Civil society demands action against Muzaffargarh gang rapists

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Islamabad

Civil society representatives and human right activists held a protest on Friday in front of busy Super Market to condemn the alleged gang rape of a widow on the order of 'jirga' in Muzaffargarh.

They were holding placards and chanted slogans against the discriminatory parallel judicial system and demanded the government to immediately arrest the rapists and all those who participated in this Jirga and give severe punishment to all those responsible within the shortest possible time.

They held the federal and the provincial government responsible for this brutal act as they have failed to ensure the implementation of the Supreme Court order that declared 'jirga' and 'panchayat' as illegal. "We demand the Supreme Court (SC) to take notice of the blatant violation of SC orders," said Rehana Hashmi of Sisters Trust.

They said that male feudal and tribal elite continue to treat women as private property of men. The local disputes are often settled on the lives and bodies of women through exchanging them, violating and humiliating them as they are considered repository of male honour. "Enough is enough. We all need to stand against this mindset," said Fatima Atif from Bytes For All, Pakistan.

Human Rights activist, Dr. Rakhshanda Parveen said that only thinking of such punishment is a crime. She demanded capital punishment for the perpetrators. "Such cases reflect on the social mindset that largely prevails in our society where honour is for men and women is nothing more than an object," she said.

The protesters also criticised media for insensitive reporting of the issue and putting the victim in difficult position of narrating the incidents again and again through interrogative questioning. "We appeal to the media for showing sensitivity towards the victim and contributing in the ordeal of the violence survivor," said Dr Rakhshanda.

Rabeeya Hadi from Aurat Foundation suggested civil society to file Public Interest Litigation against increasing number of rape cases and low conviction rate. Coordinator Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls (EVAW/G) Ambreen Ajaib had there been a decision in Mukhtara Mai's favour, nobody would have dared commit such heinous crime again in the same area.

Human Rights Activist Farzana Bari urged courts and law enforcement agencies to take immediate action against the perpetrators. "Civil society can only protest and pressurise the administration to take these cases seriously. Unless we are



ISLAMABAD: Civil society activists carrying banners participate in a protest at Super Market against Muzaffargarh gang rape incident. — Naveed Akram

able to ensure strict implementation of law, the mindset could not be changed," she said.

A young human rights activist, Abdur Raheen Khan, said that such incidents are a shame for all men in the society. He demanded exemplary punishment for the perpetrators and 'action not words' from the government.

Kashif Ali from Rozan said that he feels helpless as a man. "It is the responsibility of all sensible men to protest such mindset and stand against such decisions," he said.

"This is not one off incident that reflects the brutal mindset of our local power brokers. The decisions of 'jirgas' and 'panchayat' are often anti-women and anti-poor that uphold the

elite consensus at the local level," said Farkhanda Aurangzeb from Aurat Foundation.

The statement issued on the occasion demanded of the government to provide protection, medical and counselling services and all kind of support to the survivor. It urged the Supreme Court to take its responsibility and deliver justice on people's doorstep by making judicial system more effective, efficient and accessible to women in general and women in particular.

The statement also demanded that the police should take the responsibility to monitor the conduct of these 'jirgas' and 'panchayat' on regular basis and make it as part of the crime reporting.