

Thursday, December 17, 2015

Civil society holds vigil in memory of APS martyrs

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Islamabad

Candles, placards, national flags and the pictures of martyred students of Army Public School (APS), Peshawar, were up in front of National Press Club on Wednesday evening where different civil society groups gathered to commemorate the first anniversary of the tragic incident.

Rallies, gatherings and candlelit vigils were organised all day on the call of different groups and alliances including Awaz Consortium, National Press Club, Pakistan Minority Forum, Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls (EAWG) Alliance, Insaaf Student Federation and many others.

The participants lit candles and chanted slogans against extremism and terrorism and said that all those who have soft corner for extremists are traitors. They appreciated the army operation against terrorists but said that only military operation and changing name of schools is not enough to eradicate the monster of extremism, as it is the war of mind and thoughts.

Participants call for countrywide campaign against extremism

They urged political parties to initiate a nation-wide campaign against extremism. "If political parties can invest millions of rupees on NA-122 elections, why can't they have same passion against extremists," said Chief Operating Officer for Aurat Foundation Naem Mirza.

They demanded the government and military leadership to take the nation into confidence about the results of APS incident investigations. "We should not wait for a tragedy to get united but we should always stand united against the mindset that spreads hatred," said Executive Director Peace and Development Foundation Romana Bashir.

Mehnaz Rehman from Women Action Forum said that no human being can even imagine killing innocent children

with such brutality. "They are wild animals and they can only be eliminated. There is no other option," she said.

Haroon Daoood, an activist from Quetta, urged parents to work on their children and make them a good human being. He condemned those who try to justify such attacks on religious grounds. The same condemnation came from other speakers as well.

"We ask the government that why no action has been taken against those who defend such elements in the center of the capital despite an FIR was registered against them," said Romana Bashir.

Hindu community leader, Haroon Sarab Diyal urged the government to work in underdeveloped areas of the country to counter terrorism and extremism. Human rights activist Kanwal urged the government to review the curriculum to check messages of extremism and hatred.

Recalling memories of the day, member Provincial Commission on the Status of Women from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shabina Ayaz said that she had never seen such number of am-

balances on Peshawar streets before APS episode. "Peshawar is the unfortunate city of Pakistan that has faced most of the terrorist attacks but this attack shock and united the whole country," she said.

Activists Maria Rasheed and Zahra Kamal said that December 16 is the day of questioning our military and political leadership of what they have done against extremists and terrorists. They stressed the need to also remember other people who have lost their lives in terrorist attacks.

Farkhanda Shaheen from Aurat Foundation said that they have gathered on this day to give a message that Pakistanis as a nation are not afraid of terrorists or their supporters. "We had a clear direction and this incident has made it clearer," she said.

William Pervaiz said that we should not wait for death to protect lives. "Unfortunately, this approach has remained unchanged. It is obvious all around us even today," he said.

In a statement issued by Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWG) alliance on this occasion, the civil

society said that in memory of the APS and all such killings and to secure the future of all our living children across Pakistan civil society activists continue to oppose the Government's proposal to carry out talks with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which were endorsed by all the political parties in Parliament, astonishingly including the progressive, secular parties," said the statement.

The statement said that civil society continue to honour the memory of brave Aitzaz Hassan Shaheed of Hangu; human rights defenders whom the TTP and their jihadi and sectarian affiliates targeted and killed in cold blood; military and paramilitary forces and civilian LEAs who have laid down their lives in the service of our homeland and unsung media heroes, targeted and killed for upholding the freedom of expression as their fundamental right, both by the terrorists and others.

The statement called upon the civilian and military leadership to ensure that the FATA IDPs are not repatriated until all the areas are cleared and the reconstruction process is underway and also ensure that

their repatriation and rehabilitation is unconditional and dignified.

They also demanded of the government to glorify peace and pluralism, not war, militarism and violence, through state-sponsored promotional media productions and undertake madrasa registration reform besides reviewing the

school and madrasa curriculum and textbooks, police law and criminal justice system reform.

The statement also called for simultaneous, even-handed action on all aspects of the NAP, without fear of political or terrorist backlash; without targeting particular segments, groups or organisations.