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International Women's Day

Women ride to reclaim public space



'Changing Lanes' sees women reclaim the social space

OUR CORRESPONDENT
ISLAMABAD

The capital saw a flurry of cyclists, young and old, women and men, come out to mark International Women's Day.

This is fourth year citizens came out to be part of the activity titled 'Changing Lanes'. The Do Good Mob organised the activity with the aim to encourage women to reclaim the public space, and to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Changing Lanes 2016 is an attempt to empower women. The event was open for all; calling on both men and women to join and show that women empowerment is a unifying cause for everyone.

The ride started with a casual gathering at the Faisal Mosque. Volunteers cheered on cyclists and tied balloons to their bicycles. The ride ended at the Trail 3 parking area. On the way, passersby greeted the riders with smiles and traffic police gave way for the riders to pass.

"Isn't it strange that women cycling are now considered a novelty? Whereas in the 1960s, women could cycle to schools and college; it was normal!" said Shama Butt, who cycled along with her three children.

"The response by people of Islamabad has been amazing. And what's important is that we all had a good time," said Fatimah Shah, co-founder of the Do Good Mob.

The event has seen increasing popularity every year, and has gathered the support of Critical Mass Islamabad and the Islamabad Cycling Association.

'Lets stand together'

Meanwhile, The USAid supported Gender Equity Programme of the Aurat Foundation celebrated the achievements of Pakistani women at a joint event titled "Lets stand together", in collaboration with the UN.

"I have been amazed by the many strong



UNIFYING CAUSE: The event was open for all; calling on both men and women to join. PHOTO: EXPRESS

women and girls in Pakistan who fight everyday battles against taboos and stigmatised social roles," said UN Women Representative Jamshed Kazi. "The majority of these women remain unsung heroines. Today I want to recognize Aziza, a 15-year-old child who challenged the tribal traditions through her education and is now half way through her PhD. I

want to highlight the struggles of Durdana, a landless woman and farmer who has freed 1,200 landless women and received land tenancy through a UN Women project, a first for Pakistan," he added.

Aurat Foundation CEO Naeem Mirza said there is a need to implement women empowerment laws in Pakistan. "We have made the

laws and now the debate should be focused on enforcement mechanisms and implementation, because that is not an easy question, particularly in a country like Pakistan where the culture of law does not exist. However, we must do some critical thinking to ensure implementation and enforcement of laws," Mirza said.

Attiya Naseer, a Rawalpindi based domestic worker spoke about her struggle of not being able to find employment despite being educated. "A few years ago, my husband faced some problems and I had to work. After not finding work anywhere I started doing packaging while at home and now my work has grown so much that I have involved other

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UN Women Representative **Jamshed Kazi**

people and even my husband has joined me to increase our output," she said.

Fazeelat, a Kasur home based worker told that she was a teacher, but that her income as a teacher was not enough to support her family. "I got in touch with an NGO that was supporting home based workers and then I gathered other women with me to register a group with 600 members. We work on addas and produce different kinds of traditional products. This has helped us work on social issues in our region and has generally improved the situation for women in our region," she said.

Students of NCA also performed a beautiful mime on women empowerment, highlighting the struggles of women.