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Nepali feminist meets local activists

By Xari Jalil

LAHORE: Civil society activists converged together to pay their respects to leading Nepali women's rights activist Chandni Joshi who had come to Pakistan to attend meetings on the discussion of women representation at SAARC level.

In a candid meeting with Lahore-based activists at the Aurat Foundation office, Ms Joshi talked about her experiences of working in Pakistan with the women rights activists like Shehla Zia, Nigar Ahmed, Farida Shaheed and Khawar Mumtaz.

Although belonging to Nepal, Ms

Joshi played a great role for the women of Pakistan. She set up the first South Asian Regional Office of the United Nations development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in Pakistan and India.

"I remember how Nigar Ahmed and I used to discuss problems of peasant women because these were the women who were the worst off in terms of economic and social rights," she remembered. "Today, the issues are the same."

Discussing the women issues in Nepal and Pakistan, Ms Joshi said it was superfluous to compare the conditions of the two countries because the problems of women were the same more or less every-

where.

"Whether it is a South Asian country or a developing country the point is that women, who make up a huge chunk of the global population, are not given the respect that they deserve," she said.

"In South Asia too, a few of the millennium development goals revolving around women's rights have been achieved."

Mr Joshi said that it was important to see the prevailing perspective in a country. "Is the woman being treated as a commodity? Because it's the mindset that causes gender inequality. Meanwhile, women of different tiers face slightly different issues."

In Nepal, she added, the new constitution has made the representation in the parliament compulsory for every community whose population exceeded 20,000, including women and transgender persons. The country has a woman president who struggled her way to the top and was not handpicked. It also has a woman as the Speaker and chief justice.

Besides the members of the Aurat Foundation, officials of South Asia Partnership (SAP-PK), Women in Struggle for Empowerment (WISE) and Strengthening Participatory Organisation (SPO) were also present.