

Rich tribute paid to Nigar

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Islamabad

Glowing tributes were paid to late Nigar Ahmad, the founder of Aurat Foundation and one of the pioneers of Women's Action Forum with passionate vows to continue her mission of establishing a peaceful, tolerant, just and caring society at a remembrance ceremony on Thursday. Nigar Ahmad passed away on 24 February, 2017 in Lahore.

Organised by the Aurat Foundation, the ceremony was attended by people from all walks of life, including foreign dignitaries, political leaders, academicians and members of various minority communities from all over the country.

The event started with the screening of a short video about Nigar's life and her journey towards becoming one of the leading voices for the emancipation of women and the pioneering founder of the women's movement in Pakistan. The screening was followed by the small speeches from those who worked closely with Nigar.

A number of speakers, some in tears, spoke about Nigar's revolutionary ideas and described her as the visionary feminist leader of women's rights movement in Pakistan and South Asia. She was remembered as the torchbearer of change and development for poor and vulnerable sections of the society.

For her co-workers, family and close friends, Nigar's extraordinarily kind, humble and caring approach was the best part of her personality where as her students and co-workers praised her intellect, selflessness and pain for the vulnerable.

I.A Rehman, legendary human rights activist, spoke about Nigar's real understanding that change is only possible through the emancipation of women. "Nigar strongly believed in this and this was visible through her life long struggle through Aurat Foundation," he said.

Tahira Abdullah, well-known rights activist, said Nigar was Pakistan's quintessential renaissance woman. She spoke about Nigar's commitment to rural, poor women, particularly labourers. She ended her tribute with a poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, often recited by Nigar. Ubaidullah Chaudary, a close friend and previous colleague of Nigar's at AF, described Nigar as a complete human being.

Istaqbal Mehdi, a friend from Nigar's government college days, spoke about Nigar's student days and her love for life, heated discourse, defiant nature, cricket and her insatiable desire to change the world. Dr Alia Khan, professor Quaid-e-Azam, a student of Nigar's spoke about her time with Nigar as a teacher and mentor and how she encouraged her to become an academic activist.

Anis Haroon, ex-chairperson NCSW, spoke about Nigar's warm and ever giving personality that she applied to her work till the end of her life. She spoke about how Nigar's vision is seen today in AF and the best way to pay tribute to

her life would be keep struggling for the things we believe in.

Kishwar Naheed, well known poet, paid tribute to her dear friend with an ode that spoke of Nigar's belief, commitment and struggle for the people of Pakistan and their emancipation. Alia Mirza, feminist poet and dear friend of Nigar's spoke about the love and encouragement Nigar showed to her friends and ensured that others always realised their full potential. Naheed Aziz, activist and well-known professional, said that along with Nigar's passion for women's rights, she was also passionate about children's rights and mobilised a huge protest in Lahore in the 1980s, when AF was newly formed, to raise awareness around the rights of children.

Shohiab Sultan, AF board member and initiators of the Agha Khan Rural Support Programme spoke emotionally of Nigar's life and commitment towards which she worked to the end of her life. Masooma Hassan, President of the Board of Governors, AF, begun by saying that Nigar's life should be celebrated. She also highlighted how the working culture of AF has always carried Nigar's belief in a caring work environment.

Earlier, Naeem Mirza, AF's Chief Operating Officer, begun the session by welcoming all the people that gathered to pay tribute to Nigar. He started by giving a brief background as to how Nigar Ahmad and Shela Zia founded Aurat Foundation.

Younus Khalid, Chief Policy and Strategy Officer, AF, spoke of his first interaction with Nigar, her inspiring leadership skills and her commitment and devotion to all staff members. Mehnaz Rehman, Shabina Khan, Mumtaz Mughal, directors AF, moderated the session, each giving their personal account of their interaction with Nigar as a friend and colleague. Saima Munir, of AF, spoke of Nigar as a diligent and tough but also caring boss and friend.

Nigar's son Bilal Siddiqui said that if one wanted to really understand his mother, it was to emphasis the one quality which she believed and carried with her in her personal and professional life that being a caring person and working towards a caring society is the only way to change the world.

Kate, her daughter in law, took to the stage and spoke passionately about Nigar's personal attributes of generosity and affectionate nature. Kate said Nigar never treated her like a daughter in law and always encouraged her career. She said the country and the world would be a better place if Nigar's message, in terms of public policy and her personality and interaction with people, was promoted and followed by more people.

Nigar's drivers, personal assistants, and those personalities from all over the country that she interacted with, both professionally and personally, recalled fondly memories they had of Nigar, her work and her positive impact on their personal life. The evening was sombre, filled with memories to cherish a pioneering personality but it was also reflective and inspiring.