

Brief Report

International Women's Day

8th March, 2014 - PNCA, Islamabad



President, Mr. Mamnoon Hussain (3rd from Left) with other dignitaries (above picture) and a view of participants attending the event (below)



Organized by:

- Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights
- Aurat Foundation and AAWAZ Programme
- UN Women

PROCEEDINGS

The International Women's Day 2014 was celebrated in Islamabad on 8th March with the theme "Equality for women is progress for all". The event was jointly organized by Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights, Aurat Foundation & AAWAZ and UN Women at the Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA).

Honorable Mr. Mamnoon Hussain, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, was the chief guest. More than 500 representatives from civil society organizations, district level community representatives, ministries, government line departments including women guards from armed forces, diplomatic community including six ambassadors and the British deputy high commissioner, students, academics, journalists and lawyers attended the event.

Pakistan Television (PTV) was telecasting the event live from the hall that reverberated with the spirit of women's empowerment through feminist songs, enthusiastic and overwhelming presence of women and men and slogans highlighting messages for women's progress, ending violence against women and ending sexual harassment at work place.

The event started with recitation of verses from Holy Quran. Federal Secretary for Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights Barrister Zafarullah Khan said in his opening remarks that protection of women's rights was the priority of the government. He said: "the government respects its international commitments with regards to women and children. Therefore, government is planning to introduce special cells at Federal and Provincial level to monitor the implementation of international commitments." He also appreciated the support provided to the ministry by civil society, AAWAZ programme and Aurat Foundation.



Ms. Khawar Mumtaz, Chairperson National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), demanded of the government to declare women home-based workers as industrial laborers. "It will increase our ratio of women participation in labour market which is one of the lowest in the region," she said. The chairperson NCSW also elaborated on the efforts of the commission to get a comprehensive law passed by the parliament on acid crimes, as well as, on domestic violence.



Dr. Masuma Hasan, President Board of Governors, Aurat Foundation, while speaking on behalf of Aurat Foundation and AAWAZ Programme paid tribute to women legislators whose serious and committed efforts made it possible that many pro-women laws had been enacted in Pakistan in recent years. However, she said, "it is essential to recognize that while laws are necessary for the legal protection of women's rights; high level of impunity is continuing to produce a negative effect, both for victims of violence and for society as a whole".



She encouraged that "we would also like to reaffirm on this occasion that peace, democratic governance and the advancement of women are inextricably linked and that

there can be little progress on women’s rights within retrogressive and repressive ideologies. Women’s rights cannot and should not be made part of any bargain in the pursuit of much desired peace in the country”.

Ms Sangeeta Rana, Deputy Representative, UN Women, while paying gratitude to women who had struggled against oppression and discrimination, said” we all need to put coordinated efforts towards women’s empowerment and UN Women is playing vital role to achieve this target”. She laid emphasis on the implementation of laws that had been passed to safeguard the rights of women.



Speaking on the occasion, Federal Minister for Law, Justice and Human Rights, Senator Pervaiz Rasheed said the main hurdle in the empowerment of women was the patriarchal mindset of society which had always portrayed men as rulers and women as subordinates. “The pro-women legislation is there. Civil society supported by AAWAZ programme is also putting in all the effort. The only missing link is the will of people to grant space to their women and have faith in them”, he pointed out. He also discussed that how cultural barriers were affecting women’s mobility. But, now with the passage of time and with the positive effects of media and communication, women’s spaces and social acceptance has also increased, he said.



He appreciated the joint effort like the function on 8th March and encouraged the civil society organizations to mobilize more women to gain benefit from Prime Minister Youth Loan Scheme. He shared that currently women are entitled to 50% share of scheme but less than 2% applications were received from women. “The reason is same. We have never given enough confidence to our women. Those who have capability have no idea how to make good use of this opportunity,” he added.

Honorable President of Pakistan, Mr. Mamnoon Hussain, in his keynote address said that the government was committed to provide all support to women because it believed that there would be no development without women’s participation in all walks of life. “We want women to become active part of mainstream economic activities”.

Mr. Mamnoon Hussain said: “likewise, our commitment to a strong legislative cover and its implementation to address women issues is evident through the measures we are taking. We are encouraging young women to join private and public sector without any fear. Shelter Homes, Working Women Hostels, Transport Facilities to female employees and Day Care Centers are part of the services to resolve various problems of working women”.



“10% quota reserved for women in the Federal Government employment as well as the provinces, is being implemented, in true letter and spirit. Discriminatory laws are being amended. On the pattern of Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment) Act, 2012, we are taking

measures to remove lacunas in the laws and rules safeguarding rights of female heir”, he further added.

During the proceedings of the event, a popular song was sung by famous singer Ms. Humera Channa. A mime was also presented by Ms. Huma Naz and team. The mime depicted the status of women at home and the patriarchal thinking of the society towards her roles and responsibilities. It showed how women were deprived of their rights and once she was aware of her rights and family support was there, she could do wonders. A documentary titled ‘Women’s Voices’ was also shown, which highlighted several pro-women law enacted in recent years.

ANNEXURES

1. Speech by President of Pakistan

HONOURABLE MAMNOON HUSSAIN
PRESIDENT, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN
ON THE OCCSION OF
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY
(8TH MARCH, 2014)

Federal Ministers, Parliamentarians, Ambassadors, Representatives of UN Agencies, INGOs, NGOs, Human Rights Activists, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Assalam-o-Allaikum;

It is a pleasure to join you in the celebration of the 103rd Anniversary of International Women’s Day. Each year, International Women’s Day provides an opportunity for taking stock of the progress made and to reflect on the challenges that remain in the pursuit of Women Rights. This year’s theme for International Women’s Day: “Inspiring Change” is in line with the global changing scenario. We are committed to pursue this theme because it reflects our own vision.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate women around the world who are working tirelessly and inspiring change with commitment to make a difference. We believe that Women Rights lead to the modernization of society; therefore, we have always placed this agenda as our top priority, by encouraging women to come forward and contribute to the national progress.

International Women’s Day commemorates ordinary women who demanded their rights and made history a hundred years ago. It is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to participate in society on an equal footing with men. Today, we also pay tribute to the brave women, who played a major role in the creation of

Pakistan. Without their commitment, sacrifices, and struggle, it would not have been possible to realize the reality of Pakistan.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The Government of Pakistan is striving hard for the protection and promotion of Women Rights whether it is legislation, education, or implementation. The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan in accordance with Islamic injunctions guarantees Fundamental Rights to both men and women, which have always been upheld by the Government. The Constitution provides equal rights and equal treatment to all citizens, without any discrimination including on the basis of sex.

We always dreamed for democratic Pakistan as it is the democracy which guarantees the protection of Fundamental Rights. Let me assure you that our Government is determined to implement, in letter and spirit, its vision of a greater and stronger Pakistan, through women empowerment, despite various challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The present democratic Government is fully cognizant of the existing issues and problems being faced by women, ranging from domestic to national life. Therefore, the Government has taken significant initiatives for their social, political and economic empowerment. We are ensuring equal opportunities for women of Pakistan to progress as a successful nation in the world.

I remember a quote of the Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. The great Quaid said “I have always maintained that no nation can ever be worthy of its existence that cannot take its women along with the men. No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a great competition and rivalry between the two. There is a third power stronger than both, that of the women.”

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The Government is determined to mainstream women’s issues in its policies. We are also implementing Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). We have Women Caucus of committed women parliamentarians who have been addressing the agenda of women development and empowerment across party lines for the rights of women in Pakistan.

Similarly, an autonomous National Commission on the Status of Women and Federal Ombudsperson against Harassment of Women at Workplace are the major platforms for women. We are addressing the subject of Economic Empowerment of Women through Prime Minister’s Youth Programme and Benazir Income Support Programme.

Likewise, our commitment to a strong legislative cover and its implementation to address women issues is evident through the measures we are taking. We are encouraging young women to join private and public sector without any fear. Shelter Homes, Working Women Hostels, Transport Facilities to female employees and Day Care Centers are part of the services to resolve various problems of working women. 10% quota reserved for women in the Federal Government employment as well as the provinces, is being implemented, in true letter and spirit. Discriminatory laws are being amended. On the pattern of Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment) Act, 2012, we are taking measures to remove lacunas in the laws and rules safeguarding rights of female heirs.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am pleased to share with you that National Commission for Human Rights is being established to ensure protection and promotion of Human Rights of all citizens in the country. We are also setting up Human Rights' Defenders Network at the National level. Through this system we will ensure protection of citizens of Pakistan as enshrined under the Constitution. Promotion of Human Rights education is vital towards their protection; therefore, today, I am pleased to announce establishment of Center of Excellence for Human Rights, besides incorporation of Human Rights education in training and curriculum at all levels.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I take this opportunity to convey the appreciation to our international partners and the civil society organizations who are working for promotion of the gender agenda in Pakistan. I would also like to commend the Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights for organizing this event to commemorate the International Women's Day. I again reiterate that women are the most effective agents of change. Let us work together to create a society based on equality of opportunities, justice, tolerance and prosperity for our people. I believe we can inspire change to give our people a better tomorrow.

Thank You.

Pakistan Paindabad!

2. Speech by Federal Secretary of Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights

SECRETARY,
MINISTRY OF LAW, JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS
ON THE OCCASION OF
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
(8TH MARCH, 2014)

Honourable Mamnoon Hussain, President, Islamic Republic of Pakistan,
Honourable Senator Pervez Rashid, Minister for Law, Justice M/o Law, Justice and
Human Rights,
Diplomats, Parliamentarians,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalam-o-Alaikum,

It is indeed a matter of great privilege for me to welcome the Honourable Mamnoon Hussain, President of Pakistan for gracing this event as Chief Guest. I am thankful to all of you for your presence here on this auspicious occasion of International Women's Day which reflects your commitment towards Women Rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we all reaffirm our commitment towards protection and promotion of Women Rights in line with our national and international commitments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The education and research on Human Rights issues in Pakistan has not yet been started in an institutional manner. I, therefore, decided to involve universities and sought their support in this direction. As a result of my efforts the Vice Chancellors of Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad; International Islamic University, Islamabad; University of Peshawar; Balochistan University and University of the Punjab have agreed to establish Centers of Excellence for Human Rights Studies. These Centers will work as think tanks for the Government on matters related to Human Rights. The Ministry has also decided to extend financial support to these universities for a period of five years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me share with you that International Women's Day is also being celebrated by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Centers for Human Rights across Punjab.

I would like to acknowledge the selfless efforts of the team of Human Rights Wing, Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights for organizing this wonderful event. I would also like to appreciate UN Agencies, civil society, AAWAZ Programme, Aurat Foundation and other stakeholders for their support to the cause of Human Rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I again thank the Honourable Mamnoon Hussain, President of Pakistan for gracing this occasion. I am also thankful to all distinguished guests, media and civil society representatives for their participation.

Thank You.

3. Speech by President, Board of Governors, Aurat Foundation

Dr MASUMA HASAN

ON BEHALF OF AURAT FOUNDATION AND AAWAZ PROGRAMME (Aurat Foundation, South Asia Partnership Pakistan, Strengthening Participatory Organisation, Sungi Development Foundation, Sustainable Development Policy Institute)

ON THE OCCASION OF

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

(8TH MARCH, 2014)

Honourable Mr Mamnoon Hussain, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Ministers and Parliamentarians, Excellences, Colleagues and Friends

Today, as we commemorate International Women's Day, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations and deepest appreciation on behalf of Aurat Foundation and AAWAZ Voice and Accountability Programme to all those who have contributed to promote the human rights of women in their personal or institutional capacities, and to all those courageous women and men who continue to work for the empowerment and well-being of the women of Pakistan.

International Women's Day has a long and heroic history, both at the international level and at many national levels. While its roots lie in the movement for women's economic and political rights at the turn of the 20th century, it has since then been observed, both as a celebration of the achievements made in the arena of women's rights, and as a rallying point for the work remaining in other areas of social concern.

Aurat Foundation has struggled for and remained committed to the realization of women's rights since its inception in 1986. We continue to reflect on the deeper impact of the advances made. In the past two decades, women have made a remarkable contribution to economic progress in our country which has actually resulted in narrowing gender gaps in literacy, legal rights, political participation and service sector employment.

Over the years, there has been a sea change in women's participation in national life, especially in the urban sectors. They have engaged with the State for actualizing their rights. They are active participants in all professional fields and in all aspects of political, economic, social and cultural development in Pakistan. Girls are setting new records in education. They are conquering new peaks. And they have excelled in national sports and cultural pursuits.

Women have come out of their historic invisibility and marginalization. They are contributing their best in all walks of life. They are present everywhere – in politics, the media, the legal profession, commerce and business, banking, information technology and the armed forces.

I would like to pay a tribute to women legislators because of whose serious and committed efforts, many pro-women laws have been made in the Federal Parliament and the Provincial Assemblies.

However, on this occasion, it is essential to recognize that while laws are necessary for the legal protection of women's rights, high levels of impunity are continuing to produce a negative effect, both for victims of violence and for society as a whole.

Violence against women and girls continues to be the foremost distressing factor for Aurat Foundation and it is a matter of serious concern for the citizens of our country. Killing in the name of 'honour', acid attacks and harmful practices like 'vani and swara' are a blot on our collective conscience. Poverty is also a basic form of human rights violation, which affects women disproportionately.

Though women's suffrage has increased tremendously over the past two elections, women continue to be barred unlawfully from casting their votes at several places in the country. Moreover, millions of women are still not registered as voters while many more do not possess basic proof of citizenship.

We firmly believe that all these issues must be tackled on a war footing if the social exclusion of women is to be eradicated.

We would also like to reaffirm on this occasion that peace, democratic governance and the advancement of women are inextricably linked, and that there can be little progress on women's rights within retrogressive and repressive ideologies. Women's rights cannot and should not be made part of any bargain in the pursuit of much desired peace in the country.

We would like to emphasize that while we remember all those who gave their lives in the fight against terrorism and in defending national territory, the death of countless activists, social workers and human rights defenders who died defending ideas are no less worthy of commemoration, and should serve to instil a deeper sense of resistance against radicalized violence.

Lastly, but surely not the least, we reaffirm that Pakistan can only progress if it rises to the challenge of developing and investing in more than half of its population that comprises women and the girl-child.

As the theme for International Women's Day this year is "Equality for women is progress for all", Aurat Foundation and I personally, call upon the people of Pakistan to inspire and work for equality of women, tolerance and greater appreciation of basic human rights. These actions or gestures, no matter how small, will be our legacy in these distressing times and bear witness to our love for humanity in the generations to come.

I thank you very much.

EVENT PICTURE GALLERY



AAWAZ Voice and Accountability Programme

