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‘Repeal discriminatory laws against women’

By Imran Ali Teepu & Zar Alam Khan

ISLAMABAD, Feb 11: Speakers at a function on Friday demanded the parliament to remove discriminatory laws against women introduced during the regime of Gen Ziaul Haq.

The function was held in connection with Women's Day being observed on Saturday to pay tributes to women who struggled for their rights. Aurat Foundation, Potohar Organisation for Development and Advocacy (PODA) and National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW) jointly organised the event at Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA).

Awards were also given to All Pakistan Lady Health Workers President Bushra Arain, Mukhtaran Mai, South Asian Federation games medal holder Naseem Hameed, women rights activists Rakhshanda Naz, Samar Minallah and Dr Quratulain.

PPP MNA Shehnaz Wazir Ali, giving a brief history of women struggle for their rights during Zia regime, said there was still a long way to go for the protection of the rights of women.

She said women had decided from day one when Zia took over that they would fight for their rights. The Law of Evidence, introduced by Zia, gave impetus to their struggle and they brought out a peaceful rally on February 12, 1983. "However the peaceful women protesters were baton-charged by the dictator's police," she said.

Zahida Hina, a columnist, in her brief statement said state of women deteriorated during the regime of military ruler Ziaul Haq.

"It all started when Ziaul Haq deleted all the clauses that gave equal rights to women," asserted Ms Hina.

The chairperson of the NCSW Ms Anis Haroon, in her address, said Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani would soon award her commission an autonomous status.

She pointed out that women had been facing discrimination because of extremism in the society.

Women from Gilgit-Baltistan Nasreen



SINGER Fareeha Pervaiz performs at a function held in connection with Women's Day at the PNCA in Islamabad on Friday. — Photo by Tanveer Shahzad

Nasir, Punjab's Rehana Nasreen and Suraya Manzoor and Sindh's Zahida Memon also shared their success stories.

Singer Fareeha Pervaiz sang two fa-

mous ghazals *Aaj Bazar May Pabojola Chalo* and *Hum Dakhain Gay*.

In another programme organised by Aurat Foundation at a local hotel, civil

society representatives and women rights activists demanded immediate restoration of the local governments system to provide a platform to women at

the grass-roots level to raise voice for their rights.

They said due to the uncertainty over the fate of the system, women had lost

representation at the local level.

The speakers also regretted that parliament had failed to get the anti-domestic violence bill passed before it lapsed and now the matter had been transferred to provinces after the 18th Amendment.

Aurat Foundation chief operating officer Naeem Mirza said under the Raising Her Voice project launched by the AF and Oxfam-GB; 50-member women groups had been formed in 30 districts who were working on raising leadership qualities among women to create awareness and eliminate intolerance, hatred, repression and injustices against women.

A number of women victims of harassment and domestic violence shared their experiences with the participants and spoke on how they fought back against the injustices and were now working to bring about change in attitude of the society.

Mukhtaran Mai said she was not the Mukhtaran Mai of 2002 and had stood on her own feet besides trying to help other marginalised women by providing them education and financial support.

Halima Bhutto from Ghotki said she was evicted from her house in March 2010 after being declared a Kari by her husband and his brothers who later occupied her property.

Dr Anna Mushtaq from Nawabshah said since 2004 she had been longing to meet her mother after she was forced to leave her home due to threat to her life from her maternal uncles against her decision to marry on her own will.

Anna Bano from Jacobabad said she came from an Urdu-speaking family but married in a Pushtun family. She said her in-laws never tolerated her and during pregnancy they tortured and beat her. As a result, she gave birth to a special child.

Others who spoke on the occasion included Samina Khan of Sungi Foundation; Razia Mudassir from Attock, Atia Batool from Hafizabad, Ghazala Anjum (Sukkur), Razia Sultan (Rawalpindi) and Suraya Manzoor from Gujranwala.