

Saturday, February 12, 2011

Women pledge to continue struggle for rights

■ MUNIR AHMED

ISLAMABAD — Women from all walks of life pledged to continue their struggle until all their rights were assured.

The women activists also narrated their stories of struggle while renowned singer Fareeha Pervez sang popular poetry by Faiz Ahmed Faiz in front of a jam packed house.

The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) arranged this national event to mark the National Women's Day at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) that falls Saturday.

The collaborating partners included the Pothar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA), PTV and Aurat Foundation.

Themed on the poetic verse by Faiz, *Chalay chalo ke manzal abhi nahien aaei* (Keep moving, destination is still far ahead), the women representatives right from the grassroots level to the parliamentarians, women journalists, writers and intellectuals turned up to make the event a big success.

The government, with the support of allied political parties got approved from the Parliament February 12 as the National Women's Day last year.

The NCSW had recommended this initiative

on the demand of the Civil Society Organisations.

Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Prime Minister's Special Assistant on Social Sector, while addressing the audience reaffirmed government's commitment to women empowerment and development.

She said that all the women discriminatory laws would be repealed and reviewed. She asked the women leadership to be on their guard for their rights even in the present democratic system too. "Women's rights can be axed if not vigilant", she noted.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chairperson NCSW Anis Haroon urged the women and their leadership in particular to be vigilant of the legislative process as the family laws and the women protection act are being pushed back as decided in the Federal Shariat Court (FSC).

She asked the government to challenge the FSC decisions, and revive the local bodies system as it had empowered the women at grassroots level. She hoped that the government would not push them back to square one, when they launched their struggle against the Zia regime in 1981 by forming the Women Action Forum.

"Pakistani women's rights-based movement is an indigenous one, not donor-driven or project-based. Women will keep their struggle moving in any case," Anis said. "All women should be protected including Sherry Rehman."

She felt the government and the ruling party had isolated and targeted Rehman for difference of opinion.

"She has done remarkable work in drafting the women-friendly bills and putting them up in the parliament successfully", she added.

Anis also condemned by-elections in Shangla where the women were barred from voting. She asked the Election Commission of Pakistan to declare the Shangla by-poll null and void.

Well-known activist Nasreen Azhar said: "This day is dedicated to the courageous women who got injured and were arrested on February 12, 1983, as they protested in front of the Governor House in Lahore against the Zia regime."

She recalled "they were brutally baton-charged for raising their voice against the promulgation of the discriminatory laws against women including the most controversial law of evidence.

"Our struggle has led us to many milestones, but the ultimate destination is yet to come. So, we need to keep on moving."

Among others who spoke on the occasion included renowned literati Shabnam Shakil and Zahida Hina, Sameena Khan, the Executive Director Sungi Development Foundation, MNA Nasim Chaudhary, and the local women leaders Rehana Nasreen, Surryia Manzoor, Nasreen Sana (Tamgh-e-Shuja'at) and Zahida Memon.



ADDRESS: Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Prime Minister's Special Assistant on Social Sector speaks at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts Friday. — Dateline photo by SM Sohail