

National Women's Day

Awareness needed to improve women's status, Mukhtaran Mai

Staff Report

ISLAMABAD: Women in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to oppression by family and society because of lack of education and awareness in the rural areas hence timely measures must be taken to improve the status of women by providing equal educational opportunities. Speakers at a seminar 'Tribute to Women's Leadership at grassroots level: Actions and Achievements' were of the view here Friday.

Last year the Government of Pakistan has officially declared February 12 as Women's Day of Pakistan. The importance of February 12, 1983 is with reference to the struggle put up by women's rights activists in Pakistan. The day marks an important milestone in the history of women's

movement in Pakistan, when women protested and successfully challenged the promulgation of the Law of Evidence by the military dictator Ziaul Haq. To mark Pakistani Women's Day, Aurat Foundation in collaboration with OXFAM-GB organized the seminar to voice the concerns of the rural women especially.

Mukhtaran Mai- Pakistani women known worldwide for her struggle against feudals and influentials who gang-raped and maltreated her- was chief guest on the occasion.

Mai on the occasion said there was a "Need to increase the level of awareness in rural areas as the women in these areas are found least concerned about their rights and this is the reason they become victims of violence."

Naeem Mirza of Aurat Foundation said, "National

Women's Day was observed every year to mark the police brutality against women in Lahore on February 12, 1983." On this day, Punjab Women Lawyers Association protested against Ziaul Haq's law of evidence that reduced the testimony of women in court to half that of men. Several women from Sialkot, Bhakkar, Jacobabad, Attock, and Hyderabad participated in the seminar and shared their touching stories with the audiences.

"Every year, women's day brings a reminder of the women's movement's but today we are especially focusing on our women of rural areas," he said. Naeem Mirza called Mukhtaran Mai "an icon of struggle and courage for women in Pakistan and abroad" and said nowadays many exploited women look up to her to attain courage.

Halima Bhutto, a karo-kari victim from Ghotki, Sindh, was also present at the occasion that narrated her heart-wrenching story with participants. Mirza while sharing the story of Halima with the participants said, "Halima's husband fabricated charges of Karo Kari on her in a bid to take over her land property. Halima after failing to get justice in Sindh came to Islamabad for saving her life and seeking justice along with two-year son, mother and a brother."

Sungi (NGO) Executive director Samina Khan pledged all support to Haleema and said that all women organizations must join hands to work for women rights. Human rights activist suggest that women themselves should be encouraged to play an active in reducing the rate of violence on them.

Fareeha sings to bring out struggle for empowerment

Staff Report

ISLAMABAD: Celebrated singer Fareeha Pervaiz enthralled audience through her resonant voice at Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) while presenting famous ghazals from Faiz Ahmed Faiz 'Aaj Bazaar May Babjolan Chalo' and 'Lazim Hay Kay Hum Bhi Dekhain Gay' to mark 'National Women Day'.

The speakers unanimously urged parliament to claim its right of lawmaking and remove the discriminatory laws that are recommended or imposed by other institutions. They said that the law making was solely the right of parliament but this right has been hijacked many years ago.

The event was organised

by National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW), Potohar Organization for Development and Advocacy (PODA) and Aurat Foundation (AF) at PNCA.

NCSW chairperson Anis Haroon on the occasion said women had to face discrimination in the name of religion, customs, tradition and extremism. "The Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani has promised to announce the autonomous status of NCSW on March 8 after which the commission would play its effective role to end the discriminatory laws," she added.

She also informed participants that the efforts to table the law against domestic violence in National Assembly was continued, however, whenever there was some-

thing related to women, it comes between CII and FSC.

Advisor to PM on social sector Begum Shahnaz Wazir Ali on the occasion said that the struggle for the rights of women has just begun. "There were very few women when we started this movement but now we have a lot with us in this mission," she stated.

She said that women even during democratic government should be aware if their rights were being violated.

National Assembly Law committee Chairperson Naseem Chaudhary said women could only be benefited from legislations through their struggle. "To be aware with their rights, it is important for them to be educated," she maintained.

The women including the names of Rahana Nasreen, surraya Manzoor, Nasreen Nasir and Zahid Memon shared their success stories on the occasion and were largely applauded by the audience. The famous poem "Aadhi Gawahi" by Rehana Nasreen has infused the spirit of activism among the audience.

The event was concluded with the awards distribution to women who made marvels in their field or are inspiration for other women. The names of award winner included All Pakistan Lady Health Worker President Bushra Arain, Mukhtaran Mai, Athlete Naseem Hameed, Women Rights activist Rakhshanda Naz, Dr Quratulain and Samar Minallah.