

Saturday, November 26, 2011

Call to end violence against women

ISLAMABAD: The US embassy in Islamabad, through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Aurat Foundation (AF) on Friday held 'Aurat Yakjehti Mela' to mark the International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women at Lok Virsa Heritage Museum.

The mela is one in a series of events that are being held by local organisations and the international community across Pakistan and around the world as part of the annual international campaign titled '16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence.' The campaign begins on November 25, International Day against Violence against Women, and ends on December 10, International Human Rights Day, to symbolically link violence against women and human rights. "I would like to call upon all of us today to redress the status of women and girls that renders them undervalued and vulnerable," said Dr Andrew Sisson, director, USAID Mission in Pakistan, addressing participants of the event. "We all, men and women, need to play an active role in addressing and preventing violence, changing gender attitudes, and increasing the commitment by community and government leaders on the issue," he said. Dr Sisson's words were echoed by Anis Haroon, the chairperson of National Commission for the Status of Women, who highlighted the need to challenge militarism and end violence against women by bringing together women's peace and human rights movements. Naeem Mirza, chief operating officer of Aurat Foundation, discussed the Prevention of Anti-women Practices Act 2011, which criminalised violent and discriminatory practices against women and girls and was recently passed by the National Assembly. Simi Kamal, the chief of USAID-funded Gender Equity Programme, outlined the strategy that the programme adopted to combat gender-based violence. The event also featured stories of women survivors of violence, handicrafts made by the beneficiaries of the Gender Equity Programme, and a theatrical performance by renowned artist Faryal Gauhar. **ASMA KUNDI**