

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE

Criminalisation of domestic violence urged

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Islamabad

Terming it vital for a society with zero tolerance on violence against women (VAW), the civil society has demanded the government to criminalise domestic violence through legislation.

Speaking at different events organised to commemorate International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the launch of 16 Days of Activism on Violence against Women, the activists said that most of the violence takes place in the private domain and there is no law that allows state to take action against this kind of crime.

The International Day on Violence against Women was first declared on 1981 by the first Feminist Congress of Latin America and the Caribbean to commemorate the violent assassination of Mirabal sisters on November 25 in 1960 in Dominican Republic. In 1999, the General Assembly designated November 25 as the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women to direct the world's attention to the urgent priority of ending the pandemic of VAW, which devastates lives, fractures communities and stalls development.

A large number of civil society representatives, UN officials and government dignitaries participated in the activities aimed at raising a strong voice against different kinds of VAW that exist in our society. They also paid tribute to the survivors of violence and reiterated to continue their efforts to eliminate this menace.

The eventful days started with the launch of one million signature campaign titled 'Take Action Now! Break the Silence



ISLAMABAD: Women looking at handicrafts made by beneficiaries of the Gender Equity Programme during 'Aurat Yakjehti Mela'. — Naveed Akram

to End the Violence against Women and Girls.' The campaign is an initiative of Ending Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Alliance and the Ministry of Human Rights.

The campaign will be a major activity during 16 Days of Activism on Violence against Women and will urge all stakeholders including government officials, service providers, police, media, lawyers and university youth to sign and tell one action that they will take for EVAWG. Advisor to the Prime Minister on Human Rights Mustafa Nawaz Khokher launched the campaign in an event that features mime presentation, song launch besides motivating speeches.

The campaign is aimed at raising voice about the pending legislations including Domestic Violence and Acid Crime and Prevention Bill and issues related to women and girls in cri-

sis, strengthening local work around VAW, establish link between local and international work and demonstrating solidarity with victims.

Speaking on this occasion, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Human Rights Mustafa Nawaz Khokher said that Pakistan is a signatory of numerous international treaties and covenants. Implementing these international commitments through national legislation is the state's prime responsibility," he said.

He said that he belongs to a rural background and has witnessed and heard about dreadful incidents of VAW. "It is unfortunate that we as a nation are not able to provide proper legislative mechanism to stop this injustice." He said that the campaign should not end in 16 days but should continue 365 days of the year.

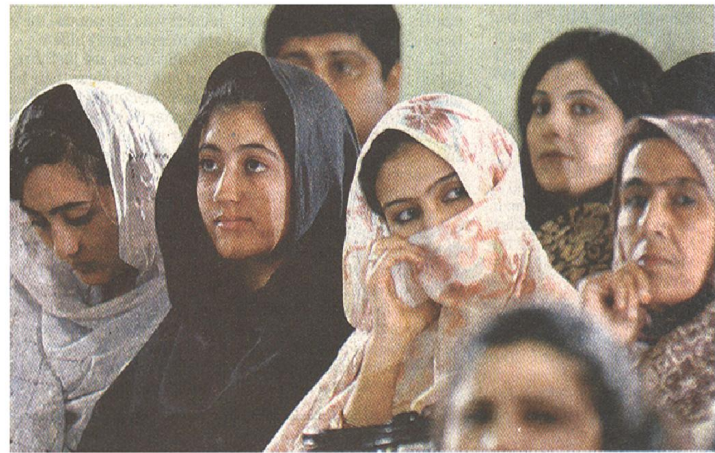
The United Nations Resident

Coordinator Tino Pakkala highlighted the UN's efforts on gender equality and women empowerment. "Significant effort has been made in past to control VAW in Pakistan but still a lot needs to be done," he said.

Senator Nilofer Bakhtiar said that after the devolution of Ministry of Women Development, no national agenda for women is owned by the state. She urged the government to establish a body at federal level that can act as a watchdog on implementation of women related legislation.

Country Representative for UN Women Alice Shackelford stressed the need to criminalize domestic violence. She said that VAW is not a private act as it eventually affects the economy and development of the country.

Another important event organised to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against



ISLAMABAD: Participants listen to a speaker at a ceremony to commemorate International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women at the Lok Virsa. — INP

Women was the 'Aurat Yakjehti Mela' organised by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Aurat Foundation. The 'mela' is one in a series of events that are being organised 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 of USAID Mission in Pakistan addressing participants of

the event. "We all, men and women, need to take an active role in addressing and preventing violence, changing gender attitudes, and increasing the commitment by community and government leaders on the issue." Anis Haroon, the chairperson of National Commission for the Status of Women (NCSW), highlighted the need to challenge militarism and end violence against women by bringing together women's, peace, and human rights movements. She said that peace in home means peace in the society.

She said that the National Assembly Standing Committee has approved the bill that gives autonomy to NCSW, a long lasting demand of the civil society. She stressed for acknowledging positive developments while pointing out things that need to be done.

Aurat Foundation Chief Operating Officer Naeem Mirza

discussed the Prevention of Anti-women Practices Act 2011, which criminalizes violent and discriminatory practices against women and girls and was recently passed by the national assembly.

Simi Kamal, the Chief of Party for the USAID-funded Gender Equity Programme, outlined the strategy that the programme adopted to combat gender-based violence.

Black Box Sounds presented a USAID-funded media campaign that will highlight stories of struggle and courage of working Pakistani women through different TV, radio channels, and newspapers.

The event also featured stories of women-survivors of violence, handicrafts made by the beneficiaries of the Gender Equity Programme, and a theatrical performance 'Khali Kanra' by renowned artiste Feryal Gauhar.