



16 days

'Gender violence is everyone's problem'

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Gender-based violence is not and never has been a women's issue. It is a human issue, a fundamental issue of human dignity and human rights.

This was said by USAID Mission Director Andrew Sisson on Friday at a conference on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the start of 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, which is an international campaign. The conference was arranged at Lok Virsa and a ceremony was held at Jinnah Convention Centre in connection with both events.

16 days of activism

The launching ceremony for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence campaign was organised by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) Pakistan. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Human Rights Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, who is also the national convener of the campaign, launched the proceedings.

The campaign originates from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute, sponsored by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership in 1991. It contributes towards United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's campaign, UNITE to End Violence against Women.

In Pakistan, the Ministry of Human Rights and the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWC) Alliance joined hands with other development partners together to mark the 16 days of activism.

They have developed a framework that

they hope will translate into a sustainable 365 Days of Action to end violence against women in Pakistan.

EVAWC Alliance also launched a One Million Signatures Campaign, through which people from all over Pakistan signed cards to highlight their commitment to ending violence against women and girls.

During the launch ceremony, women rights activist urged on the need for a strong strategy for the implementation of laws that are being made for the protection women.

They said members of the judiciary and law enforcement agencies need to be briefed on the laws for effective implementation.

The campaign aims to create awareness about pending legislation on domestic violence and acid crime and prevention bill and issues related to women and girls in crisis, strengthening local work on violence against women, establishing links between local and international work on the issue, and demonstrating solidarity with victims.

United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator Timo Pakkala said, "Significant effort has been made in the past to control VAW in Pakistan, but a lot still needs to be done."

Senator Nilofer Bakhtiar urged the government to act on announcements and commitments that were made and forgotten in the past. She said that after the devolution of the Ministry of Women Development, there no national agenda-setting body. She urged the government to establish a body at the federal level that can act as a watchdog on the implementation of legislation related to women.

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

Aurat Yakjehti Mela and conference

The one-day conference also included an Aurat Yakjehti Mela (women's solidarity fair). The conference began with an overview of the Prevention of Anti-women Practices Criminal Law Amendment Act 2011 by Aurat Foundation Chief Operating Officer Naeem Mirza, who highlighted details of the bill and why it mattered for women of Pakistan.

Then a media campaign highlighted stories of struggles and courage of working Pakistani women through different TV, radio channels, and newspapers. The event also showcased survivor stories of women who had fallen victim to violence.

The mela also consisted of handicrafts and embroidery made by female beneficiaries of the Gender Equity Program. Even though the aim of the conference was to highlight problems faced by women, the focus was on the community as a whole.

The day came to an end with a theatrical performance by Feryal Gohar called Khali Kamra (empty room), which highlighted issues faced by many women in the country.

The campaign ends on December 10, which incidentally is International Human Rights Day thus symbolically linking violence against women and human rights.

WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY SEHRISH ALI AND VAQAS ASGHAR

ILLUSTRATION: SAMIAD SADDIQUE

WOMEN ABUSE

1,469

incidences of violence against women were reported in Punjab during the first six months of this year. OUR CORRESPONDENT

VAW Cases registered during the first six months of 2011

Rape	123
Gang-rape	46
Honour killing	58
Kidnap	621
Suicide	65
Acid & stove burning	27
Beating	152
Harassment	20
Sold as commodities	7

GENDER VIOLENCE



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USAID Mission Director Andrew Sisson

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