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# Civil society demands abolition of Federal Shariat Court

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD, Dec 24: Rejecting the judgment of the Federal Shariat Court (FSC) knocking down some clauses of the Women's Protection Act 2006 as an attempt to reverse the gains made after a long struggle, the civil society on Friday demanded abolition of the FSC.

"In view of the history of Federal Shariat Court for giving anti-women decisions and blocking the protective legislation for women and religious minorities, we demand that the government should take immediate actions to abolish Federal Shariat Court and challenge its decision in the Supreme Court," representatives of prominent civil society organisations said at a joint press confer-

ence.

They asked the parliament to immediately initiate legislative measures to not only repeal all discriminatory laws against women and religious minorities – blasphemy laws, Hudood Ordinances, Qisas and Diyat and all clauses under sections 298 of PPC that single out and persecute a religious minority – but also to abolish all parallel judicial systems.

The civil society also announced to launch a countrywide movement for dismantling all parallel judicial systems, expressing its resolve to frustrate attempts to reverse gains of the Women's Protection Act.

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Development Advocacy's Samina Nazir, Aurat Foundation's Naeem Mirza, Sungi's Arifa Mazhar, Rozan's Shabana Arif, Pattan's Sarwar Bari, Sisters' Trust Pakistan's Rehana Hashmi, and Acid Survivors Foundation's Valarie Khan expressed their views on the occasion. The organisations are part of Insani Haqooq Ittehad (IHI), a coalition of 30 NGOs.

They called upon democratic and progressive forces to join the citizens' movement to safeguard the rights of people and preserve the vision of Quaid-i-Azam's Pakistan in which the state would not use religion to run its business.

They said women's rights groups strug-

gled for more than 27 years to repeal Hudood Ordinances. They said plethora of evidence was gathered through research to show the anti-women nature of Hudood Ordinances and their massive misuse, particularly Zina Ordinance. They said thousands of women languished in jails under Zina Ordinance while the acquittal rate of women charged under this law was more than 90 per cent.

In response to women's demand for the repeal of Hudood Ordinances, the Women's Protection Act was adopted by the parliament in 2006 to redress the violation of women's rights under these laws.

The civil society representatives said a

recent study of National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) has shown that the Women's Protection Act has brought tremendous relief to women's lives. Currently there's hardly any woman who is in prison under Hudood Ordinance.

They observed that the institution of Council of Islamic Ideology and parallel judicial structure of Federal Shariat and Appellate Shariat Court was a part of the political project of military dictator Ziaul Haq who used religion to legitimise his dictatorial rule.

They regretted that despite a consistent demand from civil society organisations and women's movement for the re-

peal of all forms of parallel judicial system, successive civil governments failed to take any concrete action in this regard. "We strongly demand that all citizens of this country should be treated as equal, under one law and one judicial system."

The decision by the FSC was given on four identical petitions, filed between 2007 and 2010, challenging the Women's Protection Act. During proceedings, the FSC also examined two laws pertaining to Zina (adultery) and Qazf (levelling untrue allegations of Zina), commonly known as the Hudood Ordinance of 1979, promulgated by late military ruler General Ziaul Haq.