

Sunday, March 27, 2011

## Aurat Foundation launches National Advisory Forum

■ MUNIR AHMED

ISLAMABAD - Having failed to get government's support at its launch earlier, the Gender Equity Programme (GEP) of Aurat Foundation Saturday announced the launch of a National Advisory Forum.

It comprises over 20 members from the federal and provincial governments, civil society and international organizations.

The event was linked to the 100th International Women's Day on March 8. Dr Nafeesa Shah, Chairperson of the National Commission for Human Development and Secretary General of Women's Parliamentary Caucus, was the chief guest.

Among those who spoke on the occasion were Anis Haroon, Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), Dr Marilyn Wyatt, USAID's Communications, Outreach and Gender Expert, Saadia Danish, Advisor to

Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan, Ghazala Gola, Balochistan Minister for Women Development, Sitara Ayaz, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Women Development, Tauqeer Fatimah Bhutto, Sindh Minister for Women Development and Social Welfare, and Kamran Michael, Punjab Minister for Women Development.

A documentary "Main Safar Main Hoon" (I am journeying) was screened on the occasion. The documentary focussed on women's struggle during the last 100 years.

Briefing the participants on the Gender Equity Program (GEP) and National Advisory Forum (NAF), Chief Operating Officer, Aurat Foundation Naeem Mirza said NAF would provide broad policy guidelines to GEP to align it with government's national and international gender commitments.

GEP's Chief of Party Simi Kamal said: "NAF is an important national forum for consultation; through brainstorming on gender equity

and equality strategies it can provide direction to all gender entities in the country."

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Nafisa Shah said: "GEP would deliver effectively the much-needed financial support for women's rights. The integrated strategies would serve the objective of women empowerment in true spirit."

She called for land rights and assets in the name of women to make them equally empowered as men. She said Sindh Government's policy for acknowledging women's right to land had given women the much-needed confidence and respect in their families and honour in the society.

Nafisa stressed the need for a stronger NCSW to influence women's rights agenda, and said Women Parliamentary Caucus was also working on it. She expressed the hope the joint efforts of government and civil society organization would surely result in a gender sensitive and just society in Pakistan.

Kamran Michael said the Punjab government has established a provincial commission on the status of women and also appointed a woman ombudsman to address the harassment complaints. He appreciated Aurat Foundation for its struggle for women's empowerment.

Dr Marilyn Wyatt told the audience about the United States' long-term commitment to improving the lives of women in Pakistan. She said all the US development strategies reflected the importance of women's core roles in raising families, providing health care, running businesses, providing education and feeding children.

She said: "We consult women as we design our programmes and we hold our programs accountable in terms of the impact they have on the lives of women and girls. We are using our resources everywhere to create educational and professional opportunities for women - especially hard-working, ordinary women who are the bedrock of our societies."



GENDER EQUITY: Chairperson NCHD Nafisa Shah speaking at the launch Saturday. — Dateline photo by Sohail Shahzad