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■ GENDER EQUITY PROGRAMME

National advisory forum launched to bridge gender gap



ISLAMABAD: Dr Marilyn Wyatt addressing the launching ceremony of National Advisory Forum at the Aurat Foundation. — Hanif Khattak

Myra Imran
Islamabad

As part of 100th International Women Day celebrations, the Gender Equity Programme (GEP) of Aurat Foundation has launched its National Advisory Forum (NAF) that will provide broad policy guidelines to GEP.

Aurat Foundation has received a \$40 million (over Rs3 billion) grant from the USAID-Pakistan for a five-year GEP that aims at advancing women's human rights and empowerment in Pakistan.

The Gender Equity Programme aims at bridging the gender gap in Pakistan by proactively supporting the development of women.

Aurat Foundation, as primary recipient of this grant, and the Asia Foundation, as its sub-contractor, will work together to award over 400 small, medium and large grants to local civil society organisations, concerned government gender entities, policy think tanks, academic research and training institutions, professional, business and media associations. The volume of grants will range from \$20,000 to \$200,000 in a grant cycle starting on a quarterly basis ev-

ery year through competitive applications.

The main role of NAF is to provide broad policy guidelines to GEP, align GEP with government's gender commitment, including international commitments and provide guideline for on-going cooperative with USAID.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief of Party GEP Simi Kamal stated that NAF is an important national forum for consultation and brainstorming broader gender equity and equality strategies and it can provide direction to GEP, as well as to the government and other gender entities in the country.

She said that GEP has four objectives, which revolve around core women's rights issues including enhancing gender equity by expanding women's access to justice and women's human rights, increasing women's empowerment by expanding knowledge of their rights and opportunities to exercise their rights in the workplace, community, and home, combating gender-based violence and strengthening the capacity of Pakistani organisations that advocate for gender equity, women's empowerment and the elimination of gender-

based violence.

The event featured short speeches by provincial ministers of women development in which they highlighted the efforts done by provincial government to empower women.

Secretary Women's Parliamentary Caucus Dr. Nafeesa Shah was the chief guest of the event. Dr. Marilyn Wyatt, wife of US Ambassador to Pakistan Cameron Munter, Chairperson National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) Anis Haroon and Advisor to Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Sadai Danish also spoke on the occasion.

A documentary titled 'Main Safar Main Hoon' was also screened at the event. The documentary focused on the 100 years journey of women all over the world, particularly highlighting the achievements and sacrifices of Pakistani women starting from 1911 to 2011. The objective of the documentary was to portray a positive image of Pakistani women and highlight their achievements in different fields of life. The documentary carried a very motivating message that women can excel and do everything they just need to be determined, committed and strong.

Provincial Minister Baluchistan Ghazala Gola, Provincial Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sitara Ayaz, Provincial Minister Sindh Tauqeer Fatimah Bhutto, Provincial Minister Punjab Kamran Michael briefed the participants about the steps taken by the provincial governments to empower women. Kamran Michael announced that the Punjab Government will soon establish women complaint cell and the Provincial Commission on the Status of Women.

Nafisa Shah said that there is no lack of role models for women in Pakistan as women have been able to achieve highest positions in every field especially politics but we are far behind in providing them smooth access to basic facilities like education and health. "To work in this direction, it is vital to have effective public private partnership," she said.

Dr. Marilyn Wyatt said that United States has made a long-term commitment to improving the lives of women in Pakistan, and that all US development strategies reflect the importance of women's core roles raising families, providing health care, running business, providing education, and feeding children.