

23-6-11 June

Daily Times

LAHORE

Your Right to Know

AF starts campaign against closure of women crisis centres

By Shabbir Sarwar

LAHORE: In response to the Punjab government's decision of closing women crisis centres, Aurat Foundation (AF) has kicked off its media advocacy campaign with a press conference jointly addressed by women activists and women MPs held at the Lahore Press Club on Wednesday.

The campaign aims at saving the women crisis centres that were established to help women victims of violence.

The speakers of the press conference included Justice Nasira Javaid Iqbal, MPA Shamila Aslam, MPA Amina Ulfat, MPA Sajida Mir, Shamsa Ali, former crisis centre chairperson Nafisa Sikandar, MPA Riffat Sultana Dar, Aurat Foundation RD Nasreen Zehra, Shamaila Tanvir and Mumtaz Mughal from Aurat Foundation.

The speakers said that according to a report revealed by Aurat Foundation, more than 8,500 women become victims of violence each year and these centres play a key role to rehabilitate them and to

provide security to them.

They demanded that the Punjab government should immediately give recognition to these women crisis centres.

Secondly, they demanded that funds be allocated to these centres from the amount of Rs 13 billion granted in the Punjab budget for women empowerment.

Thirdly, they said that Darul Aman could not be considered the substitute of these crisis centres because the nature of work of both institutions was different and the crisis centres should have their own identity.

Nasira Iqbal said that instead of closing down such good initiatives, they should be further strengthened by the government functionaries. She said that women would be left with no place to go for shelter if these centres are closed, adding that the structure of Darul Aman and these crisis centres was different altogether.

PPP MPA Sajida Mir said that Shahbaz Sharif had wasted billions of rupees on mechanical tandoors and Sasti Roti Scheme

and on the other hand had stopped funds for women crisis centres that were necessary for rehabilitation of female victims of violence. She said that either the government appoint separate women SHOs in each police station to deal with women or take back its decision to close down these centres.

PML-Q MPA Amina Ulfat said that PML-N government had no agenda for women welfare. She said that the amount allocated for women in the recent budget must be used for these centres and the budgetary allocations for education and health sectors should be used separately for health and education projects focusing on women.

The speakers also pointed out the effective measures taken in this regard by previous governments. In 1998, during the PML-N's tenure, a women crisis centre was established at district level to provide free security, health treatment, legal aid and counselling facilities to women victims of violence. Women crisis centre services were extended to 12 districts of Punjab, namely Vehari, Sialkot, Muzaffargarh,

Khushab, Sahiwal, Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Faisalabad, Bahawalpur, Mianwali, Rawalpindi and Lahore.

Currently, these crisis centres are working across 25 different districts of the country under the supervision and guidance of Ministry of Women Development.

As per the AF's report, 14,429 women victims of violence had received temporary shelter, health treatment and legal aid services through these centres in Punjab.

Centres functioning in the districts of Vehari, Sahiwal and Khushab, helped rehabilitate 2,418 female victims. Some benefited from the micro finance schemes while hundreds through counselling were able to resume their family life. Unfortunately, in our society, very few steps are being taken to empower women and bring them to the forefront.

Aurat Foundation demanded from the PML-N government to keep political conflicts aside and own these crisis centres for the sake of women victims of violence.