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All praise for anti-women practices bill

■ **DATELINE REPORT**

CIVIL society activists Thursday hailed passage of the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Bill, 2011, and called for the submitting of the legislation in the Senate as soon as possible.

The consultation was arranged by Legislative Watch Programme for Women's Empowerment of Aurat Foundation. Dr Donya Aziz, PML-Q Member National Assembly, was the chief guest at the occasion while Anis Haroon, Chairperson National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) presided over the function.

Speakers included Senator Nilofar Bakhtiar, Tahira Abdullah, Sammar Minallah, and Rehana Hashi.

The National Assembly Tuesday passed the bill aimed at prohibiting practices leading to the exploitation and discrimination against women. The bill specifically targets forced marriages, marriages to the Holy Quran and denial of the right of inheritance.

Dr Donya Aziz, who had moved the bill, said it is a private member bill of Chaudhry Shujhat Hussain, submitted in the National Assembly in 2008. She appreciated the efforts of civil society organizations in this respect.

Aziz said there were several practices and customs in vogue in the country which were not only against human dignity but also violated human rights.

She said the bill provided that such customary norms, which were contrary to Islamic injunctions, should be done away forthwith and the persons, who continue such practices, be dealt with severely by providing penal and financial liabilities.

Rights activist Tahira Abdullah urged for amending some key sections of the bill. "The word 'fine' in the bill must be replaced with 'compensation' that would be given to the aggrieved party instead of government," she demanded.

She also called for abolishing jirga and panchayat system for effective implementation of laws, particularly laws that deal with women issues.

In her address, Senator Nilofar Bakhtiar urged for taking back decision of the devolution of the women ministry. She said provinces do not have enough resources required for functioning of the ministry.

She opposed naming 32 crisis

centres after Benazir Bhutto and asked the government to establish new centres and name them after the slain leader, not the existing ones.

Anis Haroon opined that as there are no major flaws in the bill, it should be moved to the Senate. She announced submission of the bill against domestic violence in the National Assembly shortly.

The bill says, "Whoever gives a female in marriage or otherwise compels her to enter into marriage, as *badla-e-sulh*, *vani*, or *swara* or any other custom or practice under any name, in consideration of settling a civil dispute or criminal liability, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term

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which may extend to seven years but shall not be less than three years and shall also be liable to fine of five hundred thousand rupees."

Donya Aziz, who moved the bill in 2008, said that there were several practices and customs in vogue in the country which were not only against human dignity but also violated human rights.

She said the bill provided that such customary norms, which were contrary to Islamic injunctions, should be done away forthwith and the persons, who continue such practices, be dealt with severely by providing penal and financial liabilities.

Strengthening Democracy Through Parliamentary Development (SDPD), a parliamentary development programme of the UNDP, has welcomed and appreciated the passage of Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Bill 2011. The bill terms a landmark achievement for women empowerment.

Marvi Sirmed, National Manager of SDPD congratulated Dr Fehmida Mirza, Speaker National Assembly, Dr Donya Aziz, author of the bill, Members of Women's Parliamentary Caucus, Women Rights Activists, and all the women of Pakistan for this achievement.



WELCOME: Senator Nilofar Bakhtiar talks about the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Bill, 2011. — Dateline photo by Sohail Shahzad