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Rights activists for swift passage of women's rights bill by Senate

■ Threaten government of protest if Senate blocks the bill

Staff Report

ISLAMABAD: Rights activists and numerous lawmakers Thursday remarked that women's rights bill must be passed in the Senate swiftly and loopholes removed, while threatens government of sit-in in front of Parliament, if Senate blocked the bill.

Aurat Foundation's legislative watch programme for women's empowerment organised the reception ceremony to share information and the joy on the passage of the 'Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Bill, 2011, and Way Forward' on Thursday.

Donya Aziz, Member National Assembly (PML-Q), was the chief guest and Anis Haroon, Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women presided over the function. The panel of speakers included Senator Nilofar Bakhtiar, Tahira Abdullah, Ms Samar Minallah, Rehana Hashmi and Naeem Mirza, Chief Operating Officer, Aurat Foundation. All the speakers congratulated

Donya Aziz for bringing the bill and getting it passed from the National Assembly (NA).

Ms Aziz, while giving her remarks and responding to various comments and concerns raised by the speakers, said that she and other supporters of the bill in the NA and its standing committee faced a lot of resistance against the bill. She said that many members of the Standing Committee on Law argued that at least the punishment for forced marriages and marriage with the Holy Quran shall be lessened.

Senator Nilofar Bakhtiar, in her address, gave her commitment that she would not only fully support the passage of the bill from the Senate but would also create a support for its passage. Responding to the opinion from some speakers that the loopholes in the bill shall be removed in the Senate, she suggested that if the bill is further amended in the Senate then it will have to be resent to NA which would further delay the passage of the bill.

Earlier Mirza, referring to the

presence of Ms Bakhtiar, said that the civil society and women's rights organizations and activist are very much concerned that the ball is now in Senate and we all hope that the Senate will pass the bill to make it an act. If the Senate blocks the bill, the civil society would give 'dharna' in front of the Parliament.

Samar Minallah while giving her opinion on the passage of the budget said that when the bill will be presented in the Senate, it would be important if 'sung-chati', a kind of marriage similar to 'swara' and 'vani', shall also be added in the bill as liable to punishment.

Tahira Abdullah while analyzing the bill pointed out that although the passage of the bill is appreciable but still there are some loopholes that should be addressed when the bill will be presented in the Senate. She said that in column 8 of the schedule II, Act V of 1898 'or' should be replaced with 'and' in 'Court of Session or magistrate of first class' as magistrate does not have the authority to fine the culprits.