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ISLAMABAD: Chairperson, Benazir Income Support Programme Farzana Raja addressing a seminar on Widows and Single Women in Public Policy at a local hotel.—PO photo

## BISP supporting widows, single-women: Farzana Raja

ISLAMABAD—Chairperson, Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Farzana Raja on Thursday said that the BISP was supporting widows and it had so far registered 9.5 million women out of which 3.8 million women were un-married and 2.5 million were widows.

Addressing a press conference after concluding ceremony of a two-day SANWED South Asian Consultative Workshop held here on Mainstreaming Rights of Widows and Single Women in Public Policy, Farzana Raja said that the BISP would take all steps needed to improve the situation of widows in Pakistan.

She said that instead of using the term 'Poverty Survey', she uses the term 'Poverty Census' as for this, surveying teams go door to door to collect data on poverty score. She said that Pakistan was the only country in the world which has completed its poverty census.

Maria Rashid, Programme Director, Rozan, invited the SANWED representatives to present their country review in terms of the

progress and challenges faced by their regional chapters to their struggle for mainstreaming widows' and single women's rights in public policy. Lily Thapa, Founder, Women for Human Rights (WHR) and General Secretary, SANWED, in her country review, informed the participants about the insertion of article 32 in Colombo Declaration which specifically mentions the rights of widows, which was a major achievement for widows.

Ferdous Ara Begum, Gender Issues Specialist, former member UN CEDAW Committee, Bangladesh, in her presentation said that the situation of widows in Bangladesh needs special attention and they are trying to establish SANWED group to mobilize widows to stand their rights. Shanthi Anusha Sachithanandam, Chief Executive Officer, Viluthu, Centre for Human Resource Development, Sri Lanka, talked about the recognizing of widows in conflict and post-conflict era.

She also shared with the participants that in Sri Lanka, they use the term women-

headed households instead of widows. Dr. Mohini Giri, Chairperson of Guild for Service, India, in her presentation said that most of the time widows are themselves rigid and they need to change their mindset. Dr Rakhshanda Parveen, Executive Director SACHET, gave a detailed presentation on the situation of widows in Pakistan and complained about the lack of data on widows in Pakistan. She also emphasized that in the context of widows' issues, not only the sex but class shall also be considered.

Naeem Mirza, COO Aurat Foundation, shared the details of the drafting process the declaration for widows' rights. He also announced the unanimous selection of Dr. Masuma Hasan, President, Board of Governors, Aurat Foundation, as the representative of Pakistan SANWED chapter in the central SANWED secretariat.

At the end of two days' South Asian consultation, a declaration, titled the Islamabad Declaration for Mainstreaming Widows' and Single Women's Rights in Public Policy, was presented and adopted unanimously.—APP