

70pc women attached with farming unpaid

Aurat Foundation report reveals govt avoids question on ratification of ILO Convention 177

OUR STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD – Approximately 70 per cent of the female labour force is engaged in agriculture and allied fields, such as tending and feeding farm animals, but this work is unrecognised and remains unpaid, working conditions of home-based workers too are not regulated by any law or regulation, says a shadow report on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) - 2012”.

The shadow report is primarily a commentary on the fourth periodic report of the government from 2005 to 2009, identifying gaps and presenting an objective analysis of the situation of women in Pakistan.

Aurat Foundation Thursday organised the launching ceremony of Pakistan NGO Alternative Report on CEDAW - 2012.

The report says that rural women do over 60 percent of the work in the agricultural sector, but they are not recognised as ‘farmers’ because a farmer (kisan) is a person who owns land, and most women do not own land. This has lowered the status of rural women in general and women farmers in particular, who despite doing more work than men remained unacknowledged when schemes for farmers are planned and in national statistics. The government has also avoided the question relating to ratification of the ILO Convention 177.

According to the report, various attempts were made by the government to improve the legal, socio-economic and political status of women are commendable, but they are few in number and have proven not to be very effective.

“The agenda for eliminating all forms of discrimination against women failed once again to make its place in the priority list of the government. As a result, there remain numerous issues

for women, resulting in de facto and de jure discrimination against them, which are either ignored by the government, or are not sufficiently dealt with’.

The report says that adequate budgets and resources were not allocated to women’s issues. This reluctance to allocate necessary budgets and resources for addressing women’s issues reinforces the absence of political will to work towards mainstreaming gender concerns and prioritising women issues.

The government claims that women’s presence in positions of decision making has improved substantially, but this is not the case in the judiciary and the gender bias is very obvious as currently there is no female judge in the Supreme Court and there is only one active female judge in the Sindh High Court (SHC).

The female literacy rate remained extremely low, 45 per cent as compared to 69 per cent for men in 2009. Approximately 70 per cent of the female labour force is engaged in agriculture and allied fields, such as tending and feeding farm animals, but this work is unrecognised and remains unpaid. Working conditions of home-based workers are not regulated by any law or regulation.

It says that personal laws in Pakistan are both inadequate and flawed. In cases of violence and discrimination, women from non-Muslim communities face double jeopardy on account of gender and religious difference.

Naeem Mirza, Chief Operating Officer of Aurat Foundation, briefing about the report said, technically called ‘NGO Alternative Report on CEDAW’, it attempts to examine the response of the government to the concerns expressed in the observations of the CEDAW Committee on the earlier Country Report in 2007.

An examination of these re-

sponses reveals that the major impediments to gender equality and the elimination of discrimination are an ambivalent political will on the part of the State, and resultantly its institutions; the absence of a firm commitment to the inherent principles; and a reluctance to own the State’s obligations under the CEDAW Convention.

Riffat But, one of the author, said 4th report covers the period from 2005-2009, Ministry of Women Development prepared but it was submitted by the Ministry of Human Rights in 2011. This report mentions the challenges of earthquake, poverty, political instability, issue of IDPs while having impact on the efforts of government to fulfil its obligation of the CEDAW Convention.

Maliha Zia, co-author of the report, said that although a number of pro-women laws were passed from the year 2009 to 2012 including Protection against Harassment at the Workplace Act 2010 and three amendments in Criminal Law during 2010 and 2011 which focus on harassment against women; customary practices including deprivation of inheritance, forced marriages, exchange of women in settlement of cases, marriage of women to the Quran; and acid crimes. However, the State continued to avoid the passage of laws or amendments that are considered more controversial due to the fact that they might affect the traditional set up of the family and society and above all their political alliances.

These include laws pertaining to domestic violence, social protection and child rights and amendments pertaining, among other topics, to citizenship rights of women and their spouses. It is pertinent to note that the majority of pro-women initiatives have been taken by Private Member Bills as opposed to Government Bills.