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## NGOs call for review of Mai verdict

'Criminal justice system is dominated by male judiciary with deep patriarchal biases'

■ ALMASHAIDER NAQVI

ISLAMABAD — Rejecting the Supreme Court's judgment on Mukhtaran Mai case, Insani Haqooq Ittehad (IHI) urged the government to file a review petition with the apex court on behalf of the women of Pakistan. The IHI is a conglomerate of dozens of Non-Governmental Organizations and works for human rights and social development.

Addressing a news conference organized by the Insani Haqooq Ittehad, Convener, Naeem A Mirza demanded setting up of a full and larger bench to hear the review petition. He said the judgment acquitted all the accused except one on April 21 which sent shocking waves across the country.

Mirza asked who will be held accountable for the six years the accused in the case spent behind bars? Why did the Supreme Court take so much time to decide this case after taking a *suo motu* notice, he questioned. He went on to add these questions which are bothering us undermine our confidence in the judicial system.

He said, through this conference they would like to reiterate that despite the decision, they would continue to celebrate Mukhtaran's resistance and courage for standing up to the decadent cultural tradition and will seek justice.

"She is a symbol of resistance whose vision and love for humanity will continue to guide in our endeavours to have a just and peaceful society" he added.

The ruling in this well-known case clearly shows that our criminal justice system is dominated by male judiciary with deep patriarchal biases incapable of providing justice to victims of rape and sexual violence, he said. "The level of impunity this judgment provided to rapists and the *Panchayat* has

created a deep sense of insecurity and lack of faith in the state's commitment to provide protection and justice to women against sexual abuse and violence" he added.

The split judgment, shows the ruling is not merely a matter of technicalities of evidence and witnesses, the dissenting justice Nasirul Mulk based on the same evidence recommended 10 years imprisonment each to five of the accused, he said.

Human rights activist, Farzana Bari said: "It was not a case of a single woman but it was the case of women of the country, the verdict has become a precedent for the sub-judiciary and may prove more vulnerable for women in a society."

"If Mukhtaran Mai, a woman with international fame could not find justice, it may not be possible to get justice for a common woman" she said.

She questioned if the court has established a panel of the *amici curiae* to assist the court in the Bhutto case, but why did the court not seek help of amicus curies in this case? Bari said retrial of the Bhutto reference case does not direct impact on the masses but the verdict may affect almost half the population of Pakistan.

"With this verdict, parallel judicial system as *Panchayat* and Jirga would be strengthened" she said. "Why social and culture context was not taken into account?" Samar Manillah, another activist asked.

Civil society representative body immediate initiation of judicial reforms starts by introducing amendment in the Evidence Act, investment in modernisation of the CJS by establishing modern DNA labs, swab text labs, strengthening the prosecution and investigation system, removing corruption, use of political influence in the police and judiciary, purging judiciary and police of patriarchal biases by making it mandatory for judges and police officials to attend gender trainings and their gender performance should be included in their assessments for promotion, appointment of women judges who are known for their understanding and work on human rights issues.



OLDING FORTH: Naeem A Mirza, Convener Insani Haqooq Ittehad, addressing a news conference against Supreme Court ruling in Mukhtaran Mai case. — Dateline photo by Sohail Shahzad