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MPs urged to enact anti-domestic violence law without delay

OUR STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD - The representatives of civil society have reminded the parliamentarians that they have been carrying out their lobbying and advocacy activities as per their democratic responsibilities and constitutional rights, adding the human rights activists and defenders are needed to be protected rather than threatening or penalising.

The human rights activists and representatives of various non-governmental organisations showed their unity here at a press conference on Monday. Tahira Abdullah, human right activist, read out a statement at a press conference on behalf of other representatives.

The statement she read out said: "Our struggle is indigenous in the context of our national situation and issues. We remind the parliamentarians that we are carrying out our lobbying and advocacy activities as per our democratic responsibilities and constitutional rights, e.g. Freedom of Speech,

Freedom of Assembly and Freedom of Association (Articles 16, 19, ff). Human rights activists and defenders need to be protected instead of threatening or penalising."

She said unfortunately, over the past six days unnecessary confrontation, confusion and hostility have been caused between civil society representatives and parliamentarians through an absence or distortion of factual clarity (e.g. publicising names of some who were not present in Parliament, while omitting names of some who were).

There is also a deliberate provocation by the vested interests of those retrogressive elements who do not wish for Pakistani civil society to work in consonance, harmony and goodwill with progressive sections in the legislatures, the media and the government she added.

"We urge parliamentarians belonging to all shades of political ideologies not to allow themselves to be swayed by attempts to misuse the domestic violence



ISLAMABAD: Civil society activists addressing a press conference at a local hotel on Monday.—Staff photo by Syed Mehdi

bill as a bargaining chip or a quid pro quo for achieving a consensus and a unanimous vote on the parliamentary joint sitting's current agenda of US-Pak relations, drone attacks and NATO supply routes. We demand and

expect that the political parties will rise above politics regarding the Domestic Violence Bill."

The representatives through a statement said: "We see Parliament as the people's house, our house, where we, the people,

send our elected representatives to speak and act on our behalf. If we cannot voice our demands to the Parliament, where else should we do so? And to whom?"

The noted that a very small

section of the media are spreading disinformation.

They are deliberately distorting or withholding important facts, in order to sensationalize an already inflamed situation, with a clear view to further incite and provoke the Parliamentarians, and to turn public opinion against us and our cause.

They believed that it is disturbing and ironic that, when Civil Society carries out its activism on women's Constitutional rights and indigenous problems, it is immediately labelled as following a "western, foreign-funded agenda", but there is no objection from any one when the accusers themselves utilize foreign funds (both loans and grants, both bilateral and multilateral), provided for the use of the Government, Armed Forces, and Legislatures. No one accuses them of following anything other than a purely Pakistani agenda. Furthermore, when NGOs provide health and education services they are commended, but as soon as they start talking about

human rights and freedoms, they are again accused and labelled.

They also called upon the parliamentarians to enact the domestic violence law with no further delay. Civil society activists appreciated the passage of a number of pro-women laws by the Parliament.

In the same spirit, they urged the multi-party Committee of both Houses of Parliament, which has been set up especially to review the long-pending Domestic Violence Bill yet again, to recommend the swift enactment of the Bill.

This Bill has been under debate, revision and modification by Committees of both Houses of the present Parliament for over three years now, and around ten years in all.

Achieving 100 percent consensus is a noble objective, but in a democracy, a simple majority is enough.

Passage of the Bill in the current Joint Sitting of Parliament will pave the way for the provincial legislatures to enact similar legislation they maintained.