

Thursday, October 11, 2012

■ **ATTACK ON MALALA YOUSAFZAI**

Declaration of Oct 9 as 'National Day for Girls Education' urged

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Islamabad

The civil society activists have demanded the government to declare October 9, the day when child peace activist Mala Yousafzai was attacked in Swat, as National Day for Girls Education.

A large number of civil society representatives and human rights workers gathered in front of National Press Club to condemn the assassination attempt on the 14-year-old Malala when she was on her way back home from her school. Malala Yousafzai, a social activist from Swat, stood up and spoke for children's rights and peace in the time of militancy in the area. She was hardly 11, when she spoke to media for the right to education in Swat, which was banned by Taliban.

Even during the worst terror and peak of extremism in Swat valley, she was actively involved in action by writing a daily diary on BBC website with a pen name of Gul Makai. She is also the first Pakistani girl to be nominated for International Children's peace prize by Kids Rights Foundation. The protesters were holding placards inscribed with statements of praises for Malala's courage and pledges to take forward her mission of educating girls. They raised slogans against Taliban. Jamaat-e-Islami workers also

joined the protest. The protesters made speeches and marched towards Super Market.

The protesters urged the government to take full responsibility of the safety of its citizens and take substantive action against the perpetrators. They said that it was not only an attack on a Malala but it was an attack on the right of girl's education.

"This is the right time that we all should stand against these forces leaving aside our political differences," said human rights activist Nasreen Azhar, read statement of Women Action Forum (WAF).

The statement demanded all political parties, judiciary, media and civil society to collectively speak out against those who are terrorizing the country.

Talking to 'The News', Tahira Abdullah said that the attack has left her horrified and shocked. "It makes a mockery out of false and tall claims by the government and armed forces made in summer 2009 that they have cleared Malakand from militants. We have known this since that time, but the attack on Malala has provided us with the proof," she added.

Farzana Bari said that the civil society has declared October 9 as National Day for Girl Education and demands the government to declare the same officially. She said that the civil society has also made a call for a nationwide march in the

favour of girl education, which they plan in the middle of November.

Rehana Hashmi from Sister's Trust Foundation said that the new trend of targeting women is completely against Islam and also the Pakhtun culture. "They have tried to create an environment of fear for girls," she said terming it a conspiracy against the country.

Naeem Mirza from Aurat Foundation said that murder attack on Malala is a desperate act of extremist forces to frustrate youth of Pakistan particularly girls who have spoken courageously for their rights including right to education. "But they have failed as the incident has united the nation behind Malala's vision," he said.

Samina Nazir from Potohar Organisation for Development Advocacy (PODA) said that she strongly condemn the shameful act and demand strict action against the perpetrators. "This is one of the many times when the human and women's rights activists were threatened and attacked. The government must provide protection to those raising their voices for the rights," she added.

Valerie Khan from Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) said that the incident was the extreme violence against children and urged the government to pass pending legislation for the protection of children.