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CM asked to change BB Crisis Centres name in case it irritates him

Closure of these centres to deprive women of a valuable facility: Nilofar Bakhtiar

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Islamabad

Senator Nilofar Bakhtiar has sent a message to Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif urging him to change the name of Benazir Bhutto Crisis Centres to Begum Kulsoom Nawaz Crisis Centres if it is the name that has irritated the Punjab government to the extent that they have rejected to accept these facilities.

The crisis centres were devolved to provinces after 18th Amendment, but the Punjab government did not accept them over the pretext of lack of funds. She said that such projects require huge financial and human resource investment. "Closing them will not only deprive women of a valuable facility, but will also in end in wasting the investment made in the past decade," she added.

She demanded that the Ministry of Women Development should be restored at federal level. While giving examples of local bodies and Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP), she regretted that there were many such initiatives that were shown the door instead of improving them.

The Senator was speaking at a reception organised by Aurat Foundation's Legislative Watch Programme for Women's Em-

powerment to share information and the joy on the 'Passage of the 'Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Bill, 2011, and Way Forward'.

Dr. Donya Aziz, Member National Assembly (PMI-Q), was the chief guest and National Commission on the Status of Women Chairperson Anis Haroon presided over the function. The panel of speakers included Senator Nilofar Bakhtiar, Tahira Abdullah, Samar Minallah, Rehana Hashmi and Aurat Foundation Chief Operating Officer Naeem Mirza.

The speakers congratulated Dr. Donya Aziz for bringing the bill and getting it passed from the National Assembly. They discussed different aspects that need attention to effectively implement the new law after the Senate passes it.

Senator Nilofar Bakhtiar gave her commitment that she would not only fully support the passage of the bill from the Senate but would also create a support for its approval from the upper house.

Regarding amendments in the bill suggested by some speakers, she said that if the bill is further amended at this stage, it would have to be again passed by the National Assem-

bly, which could further delay the process.

In her remarks, Dr. Donya Aziz said that she and other supporters of the bill in the National Assembly faced a lot of resistance against the bill. She said that many members of the Standing Committee on Law argued that the punishment for forced marriages and marriage with the Holy Qur'aan should be decreased.

She said that any amendment proposed by the senators or concerned civil society organisations are welcomed. She also suggested that for making the bill a perfect piece of legislation, the lawyers from the lower courts shall also be consulted with.

Naeem Mirza said the civil society and women's rights activist hope that the Senate would pass the bill to make it an act. "If the Senate blocks the bill, the civil society would give 'dharma' in front of the Parliament House."

Samar Minalah suggested that when the bill will be presented in the Senate, it would be better if the words 'sunchati' and 'Izai', the kinds of marriages similar to 'swara' and 'vani', and 'watta satta' are also added in the draft.

Sisters Trust Executive Director Rehana Hashmi appreci-

ated the government for giving importance to women's rights issues. She said the government now has responsibility to get the bill passed from the Senate. She said that government and courts also need to devise a strategy for smooth and just implementation of the bill.

Tahira Abdullah pointed out that although the passage of the bill is appreciable, there are some loopholes, which should be addressed when the bill will be presented in the Senate.

She suggested that the choice given between fine and imprisonment should be abolished and the word 'or' in column 8 of the Schedule should be replaced with 'and.' She said that magistrate does not have the authority to fine the culprits.

Advocate Mohsin Akhtar Kayan said that the person who arranges, facilitate the forced marriage must be included in section 498-B of the bill including maulvi, registrar etc under section 498-A.

National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) Chairperson Anis Haroon appreciated the passage of the bill and termed it a landmark towards women's empowerment. She said that the bill would also result in ending the violence against women.