

Sunday, May 12, 2013

# Aurat Foundation rejects election results from some constituencies

## Staff Report

**ISLAMABAD:** Over a hundred female election observers of Aurat Foundation monitored election activities from gender perspective throughout the day at 553 women polling stations in major cities of Pakistan in collaboration with international monitors of Gender Concerns International (GCI). Election monitoring was undertaken in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Swabi, Kohat, Swat, Abbottabad, Mardan, Lower Dir, Hyderabad, Thatta, Sargodha, Bhakkar, Vehari and Gujranwala.

Aurat Foundation and GCI will issue a preliminary report on their mission tomorrow (May 13). Some of the initial findings of Gender Election Monitoring (GEM) Mission are: Voting for General Elections 2013 remained peaceful and orderly by and large in the country except for a few untoward incidents. Long queues of women voters, particularly large number of young voters, were witnessed at the polling stations. This shows an anticipated high election

turnout and increased participation of women in elections, particularly on the polling day. In Sargodha, women voted for the first time in history in union councils Lilliani and Moazamabad.

There were reports of widespread violations of women's electoral rights in several districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where they were barred from voting forcibly through political party agreements or under threatening circumstances. In Upper Dir women were barred from voting in the entire district and only one woman was able to cast her vote in UC Darora. In Lower Dir women were stopped from voting in seven constituencies, and in Buner district women were not allowed to vote in 17 UCs. Women were also barred to vote in several constituencies in Mardan, D.I.Khan, Nowshera, Batagram and Malakand.

Aurat Foundation called on the ECP to declare elections null and void elections in these constituencies due to this flagrant violation of election rules and code of ethics.

Security situation at women

polling stations was satisfactory. Women police personnel were seen only at a few places, however, male police and other security arrangements were adequate.

The area identified the foundation included Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Kamangarah, Bajwaro, Pato, Bankot, Sari, Ouch, Buner, Mardan, Kotki, Katlung, D.I. Khan, Garah Essa Khail, Nowshera, Choki mumraiz, Batagram, Ajmera, Malakand, Dargai, Heroshah and Haryan Kot.

Women voters' knowledge about vote-casting procedure was of average nature in urban centres, however, in rural areas and in rural suburbs of cities women generally lacked information about voting. The ECP's SMS facility in vote tracking benefited literate women voters, in cities, however, many voters even in cities and mostly in rural areas had to approach political party camps for getting polling booth's code number and serial number of vote.

The environment of transparency in vote-casting in the polling booths saw much improvement and the system of checks and

balances in the procedure of vote-casting made overall environment voter-friendly.

The complaints of inadequate physical space within the polling booths were received from most of the polling stations and rooms were filled with women voters at the peak hours, which created chaos. There were no washrooms for polling staff as well as women voters at most of the stations.

Location of women polling stations was reachable by voters and no major complaints were received at the polling stations visited by the election monitors, except for some rural constituencies.

The polling staff was cooperative, however many were inexperienced. Polling staff at most women polling stations was female but there were male presiding officers at several combined polling stations and several polling women polling stations in Karachi. Several polling stations in Karachi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also complained of insufficient election material.