



LEGISLATIVE WATCH

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Norwegian women have struggled long and hard for their rights Women enjoy equal rights in Norway

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry, Deputy Speaker National Parliament of Norway, talks to Legislative Watch

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry, the Pakistan-born Deputy Speaker of the National Parliament of Norway, was in the country to receive the Sitara-e-Quaid-e-Azam conferred on him by the Government of Pakistan in recognition for his services. Taking advantage of his presence, the Aurat Foundation spoke to him about women's rights in Norway, in particular their struggle for political and social rights, and measures taken to ensure their participation in the decision making process. The interview was conducted by Ms Nasreen Zehra, Ms Shumaila Tanveer and Ms Mumtaz Mughal from Aurat Foundation's Lahore office on 29 March, 2011. Details of the interview are presented below.

Question: First of all, we welcome you to Pakistan, and then, for the interest of our readers, please tell us about your childhood, education and family background.

Mr. Akhtar Chaudhry: Let me begin by thanking you for this meeting. I belong to a small village in Lahore and come from an average middle class background. My father was a teacher and my mother a housewife. I was born in the village. We were two brothers and one sister, but my elder brother, who was a lawyer in Lahore, died. My father was a very simple man, a fact of which I am both proud and consider my identity! I studied in the Model High School in Model Town, Lahore, until my Matriculation, and sat for the Intermediate examination, also from Lahore. After this, at the age of 20, I left Pakistan.

Question: Why didn't you continue your studies after your Intermediate?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: I have a friend, and he and I were both very good students. Yesterday, when we visited our school we remembered that we used to have a teacher, Master Fazlur Rehman. He was a heavily built man and had a long beard.

During the half hour recess, when children wanted to eat their snacks, run around and talk to each other, this teacher would make us pray, say our namaz. When we returned to class, he would bring a stick, and cane those who had been absent for the namaz!

I am convinced that this man did not produce a single namazi, but he was responsible for ruining the future of countless pilots, engineers and architects of the country, because many of us did not return to class after the namaz recess when the chemistry and biology classes were usually held. We used to miss those classes

"I joined the Socialist Left Party in 1990-1991 as an ordinary member. Then gradually, I became Executive Member of the local wing of the Party; then of the Regional Executive Committee; and then in 1995, I was elected Member of the Oslo City Council for the first time. My voters were the general public. This journey continued until in 2007, when I became MP. In 2009 our Party has to nominate one MP into the Presidium. There were 11 members. One of us would be candidate to be on the top of the hierarchy. There were also people who were senior to me. I then had only two years of experience in Parliament. I had 12 to 13 years experience in the City Parliament and 20 years in the Party. In the light of all this the decision was made in my favour"

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everyday. So the school instead of motivating de-motivated us! This was one reason why I did not continue my studies.

Then, my father died in 1976. My elder brother had his own family to look after; and the responsibility for managing the

household fell on me. So financial difficulties too proved to be an obstacle in continuing further studies. I did my Matriculation and Intermediate as private student. I was aware that I was intelligent and could study further, but at times circumstances do not permit you to move ahead. However, I had a strong ambition to make something of myself, and so I accepted every challenge that came my way.

Question: How did you decide to go to Norway?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: My mother was keen that I should go abroad. My paternal uncle (God bless him!) was living in Norway. My mother decided to marry me to his daughter, and so I joined my wife

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NCSW, CSOs protest as Mukhtaran Mai 're-victimised'

ISLAMABAD: In an immediate reaction, National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), Aurat Foundation, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and several other human rights organisations and activists expressed shock, anger and disappointment over the Supreme Court judgement in Mukhtaran Mai's case. Some of them described the decision of the Supreme Court as 're-victimisation' of Mukhtaran Mai.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan on 21 March, 2011, dismissed the petitions in Mukhtaran Mai gang rape case. The apex court concluded the suo motto notice and has upheld the decision of

Lahore High Court. SC maintained the punishment of main accused Abdul Khaliq and acquitted other 13 accused who were arrested for last six years on apex court orders.

A three-judge bench - comprising Justice Mian Shakirullah Jan, Justice Nasir-ul-Mulk and Justice Mian Saqib Nisar - rejected Mukhtaran Mai's appeals against the acquittal of her tormentors and for enhancement of their sentence, by a majority of two to one.

In his dissenting note, Justice Nasir-ul-Mulk partially accepted the appeals of Mukhtaran Mai to an extent, when he set aside the High Court's verdict of acquitting the accused.

The National Commission on the Status of Women and members of Insani Huqooq Ittehad, including Aurat Foundation, Rozan, Sungi, Bedari, Ethnomedia, Pattan, PODA, Mehergargh and SPO convened an emergency meeting to express deep shock and disappointment at the verdict given by the superior court in the Mukhtaran Mai gang rape case on 21 April 2011.

Although the judgment did prove that Mukhtaran was raped because one accused did get life imprisonment, while others were acquitted. We are surprised to see why only one accused was punished and others were acquitted on a charge of 'gang rape'.

The Commission and members of civil society felt that this was the reflection of a biased and inefficient criminal justice system. This case has been a classic example of how the facts were distorted and documentation of the evidence was tampered with at all levels.

The group expressed concern at the long delays to dispense justice. The victim was raped in 2002 on the instructions of the local Panchayat. In 2005 the chief justice of the superior court took suo moto notice of the case. Despite the intervention it took more than nine years to come up with this decision, which is a source of concern for the women of Pakistan.

Politics in Norway is not based on individuals

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and established my links with Norway.

Question: Tell us something about your children. What are they doing?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: I have, Masha Allah, four children. My elder daughter is studying law, while my son has a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. The two younger children are 13 and nine years old. My wife prefers to be a housewife, though I would dearly like her to participate more actively in social life!

Question: What did you do when you first went to Norway?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: I did everything that a man with an Intermediate degree can do, and I have no hesitation in telling you this. I did different types of work, for example, I washed dishes in hotels, worked at petrol stations, delivered newspapers and also worked as a bus driver. But at the same time I was conscious that I had to find some way to reach a better place in the world..

The great historian Toynbee once said that three different streams of thought were constantly agitating his mind. One, he keeps revising the book that he has written, and thinking of developments that have taken place after he has written it; secondly, he is thinking of the book he is presently working on; and thirdly, he is thinking of the book he will write next.

Of course, Toynbee was a very great man. We are not engaged in writing any books, but two thought processes also go around in my mind. First, that whatever I am doing it should be done as well and as sincerely as possible; and second, what should I do next? As precisely such a next step, I began working for the welfare of the Pakistani community in Norway in 1982 or 83, and sought employment in the Pakistan Norwegian Welfare Organization.

Question: What does this organization do for the welfare of Pakistanis in Norway?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: In the 80s and 90s the organization began facilitating links between Pakistani Norwegians and their mother country. It works hard to strengthen political, literary and cultural ties between the two countries. In addition, in order to keep Pakistani Norwegians informed about their culture, it invited eminent Pakistanis to Norway once a year. It has invited Hamid Ali Al-Makki, who was an old Muslim League worker, the famous painter & poet Aslam Kamal, editor of Hikayat Inayatullah, Mukhtar Masood the writer and philosopher, and people like Pareshan Khattak. We organize literary gatherings and seminars, so that children born in Norway can learn about their cultural heritage.

I started as an ordinary member of this organization, and later was elected Secretary General. I worked for twenty years in this organization.

Question: How did you learn about the organization?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: I am a man who takes responsibility. I found soon which organization would be the best to join.

We had good discussions in the organization. I was then young. Uses to criticize everything. An elder friend in the organization once said: "Instead of complaining, tell

Interview with Mr Akhtar Chaudhry



(From L to R) Mr Akhtar Chaudhry, Deputy Speaker of the National Parliament of Norway, with the interview panelists Ms Shumaila Tanveer, Ms Nasreen Zehra and Ms Mumtaz Mughal from Aurat Foundation's Lahore office on 29 March, 2011.

me what are you doing?". After this I made it a principle in life to not criticize, but join the struggle and help to improve things.

As Mohsin Naqvi said:
*'There is a double burden on our lives O Mohsin,
Not only must we see but we must also think!'*
So we must see, think and then act!

Question: So you also have a liking for poetry!

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Absolutely! In our day there was a generation of great poets:

"In our Cabinet, at least one third women are ministers and hold the necessary authority. In the past four or five elected governments, the Ministry of Defense has always been headed by a woman. Also, the Speaker of the Parliament has been a woman".

Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Ahmed Faraz, Iftikhar Arif, Parveen Shakir, Kishwar Naheed, Jon Elia, Munir Niazi, Habib Jalib, Ehsan Daanish. All of them attracted young people and gave them a world view, a philosophy of life. I can't think of any poet in the last fifteen or twenty years about whom we can say that he is saying something of importance. We are still surviving on what has been bequeathed to us earlier!

Question: You mentioned Toynbee. How did you become interested in acquiring knowledge?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: We used to read many books in those days. There was no subject that we did not explore! This sharpened my interest in reading and writing and literature.

Question: How did you enter politics? Was there anyone else in your extended family who was a politician?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: The family was not generally interested in politics, though my elder brother, the lawyer, used to attend public meetings in the late 60s and early 70s. He was a great admirer of Mr. Bhutto, I remember!

The political journey begins in the mind. I think, I began to develop political awareness during the 70s when the government of an elected Prime Minister was overthrown and; a democratically-elected

Parliament was dismissed. Then I saw my Prime Minister (Z. A. Bhutto) being hanged. Those five or six years were very important in my life. Coupled with this political consciousness, I had become the citizen of a country (Norway) that had strong and firmly established democratic traditions in place. When I started to work in the welfare organization, I began to learn the language and about many other matters.

Immigrants entered politics in 1981-82 when the laws were amended to allow those who had lived in Norway for three years or longer to vote in the local elec-

tions. They were studying in the same schools, using the same roads, being treated in the same hospitals and also paying taxes. Hence it was decided to include them in the mainstream as stakeholders, so that they should live and contribute as responsible citizens.

Actually, Norwegians had won the right to vote in 1909; but in 1981, non-Norwegians too were given the right to vote in local bodies. I think some were elected to local bodies in 1983. I joined the Socialist Left Party in 1990-1991 as an ordinary member. Then gradually, I became Executive Member of the local wing of the Party; then of the Regional Executive Committee; and then in 1995, I was elected Member of the Oslo City Council for the first time. My voters were the general public. This journey continued until in 2007, when I became MP.

In 2009 our Party has to nominate one MP into the Presidium. There were 11 members. One of us would be candidate to be on the top of the hierarchy. There were also people who were senior to me. I then had only two years of experience in Parliament. I had 12 to 13 years experience in the City Parliament and 20 years in the Party. In the light of all this the decision was made in my favour.

Question: Why did your Party elect you?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: It was recognition of my services to the minorities in general, and recognition of the services of minorities to the country. It may be the recognition of my 20 years services. I felt that what I had done in those twenty years had been done well. Also,

After the King, the Speaker comes next in seniority, so in this way I am fifth in line.

Question: What are the prominent achievements of this 20-year journey?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: It is difficult to identify any one thing. We don't have politics based on individuals. We work collectively. We are in power for the last six years, and ours is a left of centre government. I guess our achievement is that we have barred the way for the centre right, and especially the extremist right parties from coming into power! We believe that we need to work hard for the development of our country, and for that it is necessary to empower women.

We have a Law of Equality that ensures equal rights for all - men, women, minorities and disabled persons. However, the right wing party is very strong, and if it comes to power it will repeal this law because they say it is not required. We think that would be a tragedy!

This society has struggled for 100 years, and these people are working to undo what we have achieved. It used to be difficult for all parents to find places for their children in the kindergartens. When we came to power, the budget for kindergartens used to be 14 billion Kroners. We spend 26 billion Kroners every year, so that every child has the right to be admitted in kindergarten. Now it is demanded right that only children who were born before or on 31st August can be admitted when they are one year old in the following year; but those born on or after 1st September can only be admitted the year after. We are trying to institute twice yearly admissions, so that children don't have to wait more than six months to be admitted.

Question: Did you have to face any discrimination when you entered politics?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: There is discrimination in Norway too - against languages, religion and ethnicity. And one can feel this; I too feel it. In fact, in the last ten years, these attitudes have become worse, and this is very painful, especially for Muslims. And we do our utmost to ensure that everyone in the country should be entitled to equal rights and be treated equally, but there is one particular party that has assumed a harsh intolerant terminology, and people are influenced by them. We are trying to get them to soften their rhetoric and moderate their point of view. We all have to live in the country. Our children will become judges, teachers, bus drivers and parliamentarians, so we want that the harshness should be toned down and our opponents should become more moderate. But our opponents too are using all their resources to propagate their ideology against ours.

Electing Haji Tajik and me to Parliament was an honour and a responsibility, but it was also a way to fight back. The minorities are a part of the country and equal citizens. I am convinced that if minorities are

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Forced marriages in Pakistani community are a problem

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not given their just rights in the world, differences among people will grow.

Question: What are your views on women's empowerment? Are Norwegian women empowered, do you think?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Yes, they are empowered, there is no doubt about it, but there are still some areas, for example, women are given a year's maternity leave with pay according to the law. But when they come back to work they return to the same position, while their male colleagues have moved ahead.

Question: But this is natural! The government should promote them anyway!

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: You are right, but the difference remains. For example, when there are two or three children, what generally happens is that the husband works full time, while the wife either gives up work altogether or works four hours a day. This affects her career and her pension. So the equality we talk about is not there yet!

Question: Has your government taken any steps to address this?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Absolutely! We are proud to say that in the last four years we have established kindergartens, and all children who live with their mothers can avail of these facilities at reasonable rates after the age of one. The result is that mothers and those who want to work can conveniently leave their children in the kindergartens.

Question: Do Norwegian women enjoy the same rights as men?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Norwegian women have struggled long and hard for their rights. The truth is that if you yourself are not going to demand them, no one will give you your rights - women, youth, industrial workers, peasants, senior citizens - all. Our women have struggled, and our men too have understood that unless you make the women strong, you will not progress. Hence, both men and women have together worked for these rights. Women have the same rights as men, but even so they have not yet reached the same level.

Question: What is the percentage of women's representation in Parliament?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: About 45%, and they have all been directly elected. Women in Norway contest as equals, and there is no law for reserved seats for women or minorities. However, political parties have a sound tradition whereby some seats are reserved for women and candidates from the minority communities. The quota system prevails only in local bodies, and also committees that are formed, for example, the Health, Education, Law or other committees, are required by law to have 40% representation from men and women both.

Question: Is there any difference between male and female members of the Assemblies, or do women face any discrimination?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: There is no difference and no discrimination. If there is any difference, it is that the women are very powerful!

Question: Do women parliamentarians participate actively in the proceedings?

Interview with Mr Akhtar Chaudhry

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: As I mentioned before, it was in 1911 that the first women entered parliament. Then, in the 70s there was a virtual revolution that made women very powerful. The first woman Prime Minister was elected in 1986, and she was a very strong Prime Minister. She stayed so long that, according to her, her grandson once asked her: "Grandmother, can a man become Prime Minister?"

Her Cabinet had 19 or 20 members, of whom nine were women, and this was then big news in the country and abroad. After this no Prime Minister has been able to even think of a government without women! It is only when you work at such a high level that change comes about.

In our Cabinet, at least one third women are ministers and hold the necessary authority. In the past four or five elected governments, the Ministry of Defense has always been headed by a woman. Also, the Speaker of the Parliament has been a woman.

When young people are elected to Parliament, it is their responsibility to talk

"Pakistani society and its norms are reflected in Pakistani communities, and Muslim societies are reflected in Muslim communities wherever they are in a minority all over the world".

"The Penal Code in Norway, made in 1905, is currently being amended, and the argument is that the Penal Code was made by and for men, and so it needs to be changed".

on all issues, but people expect them to focus mainly on youth. Similarly, women, even though they have a point of view on all matters, they are expected to focus especially on women's issues. But this is changing. The Penal Code in Norway, made in 1905, is currently being amended, and the argument is that the Penal Code was made by and for men, and so it needs to be changed.

Question: How many Bills have been passed since your government has been in power?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: It is difficult to say, but I've heard that 27 or 29 Bills have been passed by your (Pakistani) Parliament. I think we pass that many Bills every day! Our Parliament is convened on the first Sunday of October and remains in session till the last Friday of June, and there are three to five sittings every week, starting at 10 o'clock in the morning and continuing till 10 at night, sometimes later, even up to 2 am until the Bill is passed!

Question: Which particular women's issues are being debated these days?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: One is that women should be represented in all walks of life. Also, rape is a big issue in our country. We are a small country with a population of less than 5 million, but each year hundreds of rapes are carried out. Nearly one-tenth of all these are reported. Women are in the forefront in taking up this issue and drafting legislation to

address it.

Question: Quite recently, a Bill against sexual harassment of women in the work place was passed in Pakistan. Is there a similar law in Norway?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Things are different in Pakistan and Norway. There is sexual harassment, but the context is different. Over here (in Pakistan) a woman cannot even walk to the end of the street to buy milk without being harassed. This kind of harassment is non-existent in Norway. We have actually strengthened our laws. Two years ago we modified our laws on rape to say that the man should himself be able to judge if the woman is not willing. He should not wait for her to physically resist him, or tell him that she is not willing, or indicate her unwillingness by her body language. It is his responsibility to decide if it is willing intercourse. If there is the slightest suspicion about it then the action will be considered rape.

Question: What is the situation regarding domestic violence?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: This is a huge problem. It is sometimes difficult to understand why there should be so much domes-

"Violence against Pakistani women and violation of their rights is a bitter reality. When women get married and come to Norway, most are unaware of Norwegian law".

"Women's representation in our Parliament is about 45%, and they have all been directly elected. Women contest as equals, and there is no law for reserved seats for women or minorities".

tic violence in our country. A substantially large number of women suffer every year because of domestic violence - even children are battered. I am a member of the Committee on Justice and spokesperson for my Party. There is much attention being given to this issue.

Question: Are laws being made for this?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Yes, with a sense of urgency. Laws are being made for the protection of women and the rehabilitation of men. The root cause of violence against women can be found in societal attitudes. My understanding of the issue is that men cannot tolerate being refused. When the woman refuses to comply, the man resorts to violence. He does not understand that the woman too is an individual in her own right, and she is entitled to refuse him or accept him.

Question: Are there any support structures for women victims of violence?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: The government has provided support since the past 30 years. But 40 years ago, women themselves, with some help from local governments set up some crisis centres. Now the government has established crisis centres in each union council. In the bigger cities, there are units smaller than the union council, and these are required by law to have crisis centres. Hence in each town and all areas there are these centres. But here too there are problems. Women who go to the centres are looked

down upon and are not respected by society.

Our law says that the one who is committing violence should move out of the house; not the person on whom violence is being inflicted. If the woman has to leave, the children too have to suffer with her.

Question: How can the man be asked to leave the house; because normally property is in the name of the man?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: No, it's not so. The property is owned jointly. Even if the man owns the property, he cannot throw the woman out of the house. She is protected by the law. The courts can rule that the man will not come within a distance of 100 meters or 200 meters of the woman. The woman is given an alarm that she can press if she sees the man, and the police will immediately come to her assistance.

But at times, the man breaks a window to enter the house and the woman sounds the alarm, but by the time the police arrive she has been killed! So, we have passed another law that a clamp should be fitted around the leg of such men, so that as soon as they step into the forbidden zone an alarm will immediately alert the police. Some people opposed this law, but the majority supported it. It has now been passed and efforts are being made to manufacture the clamp.

Question: Is there a pressure group within the Norwegian Assembly that influences legislation concerning women.

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Yes, there are such groups affiliated with different political parties. They have wings within parties.

Question: So, parties have women's wings there too.

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: There is no end of the road! In this journey you constantly need to strengthen yourself!

Question: Forced marriages seem to be a big issue in Norway. Are there many cases in the Pakistani Community? Often after marriage these cases lead to 'honour killings'. What steps has the government taken to deal with this problem? And have strategies like the 'Action Plan against Forced Marriages' been effective?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Pakistani society and its norms are reflected in Pakistani communities, and Muslim societies are reflected in Muslim communities wherever they are in a minority all over the world. That is why we try and interact with Aurat Foundation, Sungi and other organizations to strengthen our women. If there is some positive change here, it will have an effect in our country too.

Forced marriages are a problem in Norway. Violence against Pakistani women and violation of their rights is a bitter reality. When women get married and come to Norway, most are unaware of Norwegian law. They are not permitted to go outside the house. New arrivals are given permanent residential permits only after they have been here for three years. This is misused. The woman is told that she will be thrown out of the house. Heaven knows how she adjusts to these conditions! Even after three years if the man wants he may or may not give her passport.

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Norwegian assistance geared towards social development

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We have tried to address this issue too. If it is proved that the woman has been subjected to violence, the government can issue her an Independent Residence Permit, so that she should not have to put up with a violent situation only because of the fear that she will be thrown out of the house.

Problems have become magnified in our country. There are political elements who say minorities, especially Muslims, should not marry partners from Muslim countries, or from their own mother country, because it hinders integration. If immigrants are constantly coming into the country there must be integration. But, we believe that such a law cannot be passed to stop such marriages because it is your basic right to marry whosoever you wish.

Question: But is there such a lobby?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: There is, and it is very powerful! But we can also see that it is harmful. My children are not Pakistani children. My children were born there; they studied in institutions where other Norwegian children study. Their father migrated from Pakistan some time in the past. They will think kindly about this country - it was their grandfather's country - but the girl herself is Norwegian. If you marry her to a Pakistani man, even if he is as well-educated as she is, the difference in mindset will remain. For this reason there are clashes and the marriage breaks up!

Question: How successful has the Action Plan adopted by the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality been in dealing with such cases?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Denmark has forbidden marriages outside the country. We too have imposed certain restrictions, such as: the reunion age should be around 21 years, the partners should at least have a high school degree, or should have worked for at least four years after basic education, he/she should have a reasonable income. The purpose is that after home and school they should have developed some relationship with other people and should know about their basic rights. Also, his or her contacts with other people should be strong enough to be able to call upon somebody for help, if needed.

We have appointed Advisors in schools, especially schools where there are more children from the minority communities. There is also an Advisor in the Embassy of Pakistan whose job is to remain in touch with those who come from Pakistan to get married here, and be watchful that forced marriages don't take place.

Question: Is the violence against women situation the same in all countries?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Not at all! European politicians don't lie to you. They admit it if there is a problem. But European politicians are working honestly and sincerely to address the problem.

Question: Are martial laws (military rule) ever imposed in Norway?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: We have a pretty small army in Norway! Only 13 000 soldiers. But Pakistan always does things that are contrary to good sense! We Muslims had long ago decided that armies should be answerable to the civilian government. Khalid bin Walid was a very capable General. When he was serving outside the

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country for a while, Hazrat Omar (RA) recalled him. People asked, why are you calling him back? He has won many victories and expanded your kingdom, but Hazrat Omar (RA) said: He is a General and a General must not be more powerful than a civilian head of state. So this issue was settled a long time ago!

Question: How do you see women's rights in the context of the political, cultural and social situation in Pakistan?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: I am pained to see the situation in Pakistan. Those who are in responsible positions lack courage, and so the forces of darkness are strengthened. The tragedy is that those, in whom we had placed our hopes that they would dispel the suffocation and give women and minorities their just rights and scatter the dark clouds of religious extremism, are displaying lack of sense. They perhaps believe that they will win more votes this way, and with a bigger vote bank they will be able to implement their policies. I doubt that if you have come into power with the votes of these dark forces, you will be able to implement your policies! You will not be able to follow anything other than their agenda.

I was present in the President House when members of your Parliamentary Committee that finalized the 18th Amendment were given awards, and was sad to see that there was not a single woman among them. I asked about this and was told that there were no women members in the committee. Pakistan was a country of 180 million people in 2010, and there are no women in this important parliamentary committee! This would signify that no woman in the country is capable of contributing to the committee! But there are capable women! Those who put the committee together did not have the sense to realize that strong and independent women must be included.

The communication between our two countries must be maintained. I have met the Speaker Dr. Fehmida Mirza, and I will go back and tell them that the highest position after the President of Pakistan is held by a capable and accomplished woman. This is a very positive development.

Question: Do you think that the present religious extremism is worsening the problems for Pakistani women?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: When Salman Taseer was assassinated, if the President, the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, the Chief Minister of Punjab and Members of the National and Punjab Assemblies had been present at his funeral, it would have sent a strong and resolute message to the nation. But the message they are now sending out is that you are so powerful that we are supporting you! I told the Governor of Punjab that you have built these high walls around you, but if you think that makes you safe, it will not. You will only be strong if you, with 100 others, stand on the road and state firmly that such actions and attitudes are not acceptable in Pakistan. How many people will they kill?

About ten years ago, in Norway some extremist youths came out on the streets. They had only one plan: to kill a non-white person that day. They got hold of a 14-year-old boy and killed him. This was the first racist murder in our country. That same

evening all the important forces - the Prime Minister, the Justice Minister, the Police Commissioner, the City Mayor and Provincial Ministers came out in protest. And three or four days later, at probably the largest demonstration ever, where all the important people were present, they gave the collective message that this country would not tolerate such actions and behaviour.

The world does not have a good impression about Pakistan. Everyone believes that Pakistani women are suffering and are facing immense difficulties.

We are closely watching Pakistan, as is the whole world. This is a huge country with a population of 180 million. It is a nuclear power and has the fifth largest army in the world. But the behaviour of its people is worrying. This pains us, but Pakistan itself is suffering the greatest harm! The ex-Prime Minister of the country was assassinated; the Governor of the largest province has been assassinated, a Federal Minister has been assassinated. These are very dangerous portents. Pakistan must first of all address this extremist behaviour. Its politicians and leaders must act with courage. But unfortunately this is not happening! And not only politicians, but media and intellectuals too are not doing what they should be doing. Pakistan seems to be in a civil war, and whoever acts with boldness and courage will win!

I have spoken to several people here about this. Whether it was the Senate Chairman, Speaker of the National Assembly, Federal Ministers, Speaker of the Punjab Assembly or the Governor Punjab, I highlighted issues concerning women and minorities, told them that we were concerned and emphasized that greater efforts needed to be made to urgently address the situation.

Question: You have described some best practices. Should these be shared with the Government?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: We speak about it in our conversations. Norwegian funding in Pakistan too is focused; 40 million dollars funding in the next four years is geared towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and children in Sindh. And this year we are spending 6 million dollars on children's education in this country. Also, 3.5 million are being given to Women Organizations like Aurat Foundation to spend on women and minorities.

We divide our funding into three parts: one part we give to the United Nations, another part to NGOs and a smaller portion to government. There is some concern in our Parliament about corruption in the government; that is why we route our funding through the United Nations and through NGOs and organizations.

Question: What is your impression; do Pakistanis really love their country? Or do they just talk?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: They definitely love Pakistan very much, but many don't know how to express it! People think it means that we should always be ready to sacrifice their lives; when all it means is that if the rules say we should drive on the left side of the road, then you must drive on the left! Serving Pakistan means that if you have to be in the office at 8 am then you must be there at 8 am, not 0805 am!

Question: Why do you think Pakistan is not making progress?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: I feel sad to think that wherever revolutions have taken place, it was because there was exploitation, injustice and inequality in that country. The upper classes were exploiting the lower classes. Then the people of the country rose up against it and said: we cannot tolerate this any longer. But unfortunately, in Pakistan people say there is exploitation and injustice and corruption, but they too seek to become beneficiaries of the system, and don't oppose it!

Question: How do you feel about being awarded the Sitara-e-Quaid-e-Azam?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: It is a great honour for me. I have also won an award in Norway by being elected as Deputy Speaker, and I am grateful to God! But my Party thought and discussed about Sitara-e-Quaid-e-Azam. Our Party does not often accept awards. We are very careful and we seriously discussed whether the award should be accepted.

Question: Why did you have such reservations?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Because you have to consider why you are being given the award. You are just doing your job, so why the award? Awards can make us think too much of ourselves, that we belong to some special class, and the way we think affects our work. So we thought about it a great deal and decided that we can use this as a means to strengthen relations between our two countries. Otherwise too, the world has shrunk. Now no Pakistani is a Pakistani and no Norwegian is a Norwegian. It was in this capacity that I met with your government representatives and conveyed to them all the things which I considered very important.

A few days ago a young man in Stockholm exploded a bomb. Fortuitously, only he himself was killed. If ten people had been killed, there could have been mourning in Dina, Gujrat, too, because people from all over the world live in Stockholm. Now you can't kill only white people. Your own people also get killed.

Question: What is your message for the people of Pakistan?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Whatever I am saying is against my mandate, against protocol! I am the Deputy Speaker of a foreign country, and I am sitting in your country. And there is a principle that you will not interfere in the domestic affairs of another country. But I love this country, and while remaining within my limits I will stress that it is absolutely necessary to rid Pakistan of religious extremism, because this will be beneficial for everyone.

Those countries that have left religious extremism behind are the ones that are successful. All the maulvis combined could not have made this country. It was a secular man who did this. It is now necessary to call a halt to religious extremism, and to do this it is necessary to act with courage. The correct interpretation of Quran will help you to achieve this goal.

Our people have so much knowledge. You just have to read Allama Iqbal. In the last poem in Bal-e-Jibreel the devil is addressing his advisors. Iqbal has spelt out all the ways in which the Muslims will be destroyed. The Muslims must read this from time to time.

EDITORIAL

One of the landmark features of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, passed by the Parliament in April 2010, was the strengthening of provincial autonomy through abolition of concurrent list of the Constitution. Devolution of power and resources to the provinces has been a long-standing demand of the smaller provinces and exponents of people-centred development in Pakistan. Under the 18th Amendment, 40 of the 47 subjects in the concurrent list are to be handed over to provinces before June 30, 2011, the deadline set in the package. Under the implementation package, the process of devolution of several federal ministries including the Ministry of Women's Development, has either been completed or is near completion.

With regard to process of devolution and provincial autonomy, there is complete consensus within civil society organizations that maximum provincial autonomy should be ensured and all measures in accordance with the letter and spirit of the 18th Amendment must be undertaken and implemented in all sincerity. However, a number of women's rights organizations have serious apprehensions that some critical issues are being overlooked by the decision-makers vis-à-vis the devolution of Ministry of Women's Development (MoWD). These need to be elaborated here with the purpose of preserving the gains made by women's rights movement in exercise of affirmative action measures under the 1973 Constitution over the decades. The establishment of the MoWD has been one of the outcomes of this struggle. The foremost concern is that which mechanism will ensure that women's interests are cross cutting at the national level after the MoWD's devolution; which agency, ministry or mechanism will be responsible for policy suggestions, national laws and national plans; what will be the focal point at the national level and where provincial plans and programmes are integrated for national programme and plan processes and; which mechanism will be responsible for ensuring the implementation of international norms, commitments, conventions and policies. The civil society organizations believe that this role should not be dispersed under different mechanisms, e.g. to EAD, Planning Commission, Cabinet Division etc. None of these mechanisms have a women-specific focus or internal commitment which would ensure uniformity, connectivity, ownership, continuity and cross-cutting nature of women's interests that have been earned by them through a historic struggle, nationally and globally.

Let us not lose one gain in order to win another.



LEGISLATIVE WATCH



Legislative Watch is produced by the Resource Service of the Legislative Watch Programme for Women's Empowerment of Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation at Islamabad.

Advisory Board:

I.A. Rehman, Tahira Abdullah, Naeem Mirza

Editorial Board

Wasim Wagha, Sarwat Wazir

Letters, opinions and contributions are welcome. Please write to House 12, Street 12, F-7/2, Islamabad Tel: (051) 2608956-8, Fax: (051) 2608955 Email: lwprs@af.org.pk Website: www.af.org.pk

Layout & design by: Kashif Gulzar

Printing funded by: MFA, Norway

Women legislators outshine in third Parliamentary Year

ISLAMABAD: Women Members of the National Assembly accounted for almost half of the parliamentary agenda conducted during the third parliamentary year of the thirteenth National Assembly, according to parliamentary records and FAFEN's direct observation of proceedings between March 11, 2010 and March 4, 2011.

Women constitute less than one-quarter (23%) of the National Assembly's current 340 members - 77 female parliamentarians, 60 elected on reserved seats and 17 elected through popular vote. Despite their significant underrepresentation, women Members actively participated in the parliamentary business and remained more assertive and effective as compared to many of their male counterparts in the National Assembly that is headed by the country's first woman Speaker.

The women parliamentarians put up 2,458 parliamentary interventions during the entire third parliamentary year. FAFEN defines a parliamentary intervention as each of the instances when a Member of the National Assembly either submits an agenda item on the Orders of the Day (Calling Attention Notices, Questions, Private Members' Bills, etc.) or raises his/her concerns during a debate on the floor of the House (Points of Order, Supplementary Questions, Debate on Adjournment Motions, etc.).

Despite the fact that 18 women parliamentarians failed to participate in any form of parliamentary business during the entire year and 43 women parliamentarians came up with less than 10 parliamentary interventions, the remaining 34 female parliamentarians contributed almost half of the parliamentary business conducted during the year.

There were 10 female parliamentarians, who contributed more than 100 interventions each during the year. These 10 active parliamentarians can be credited for 60% of the participation registered by all female parliamentarians. In other words, these 10 women Members accounted for around one-quarter of the parliamentary activity in the National Assembly during the year. All the women parliamentarians conducting more than 100 parliamentary interventions have been elected on reserved seats and with the exception of one Member of PML, all belong to PMLN.

Female parliamentarians with more than 100 interventions include Ms. Shireen Arshad Khan with 176 interventions, Ms. Marvi Memon (171), Ms. Nuzhat Sadiq (164), Ms. Tahira Aurangzeb (161), Ms. Qudsiya Arshad (155), Ms. Nisar Tanveer (154), Ms. Khalida Mansoor (131), Ms. Tasneem Siddiqui (130), Ms. Nighat Parveen Mir (120) and Ms. Shaheen Ashfaq (114). With the exception of Ms. Marvi Memon from the PML, all of these parliamentarians are affiliated with the PMLN. On average, each of these 10 parliamentarians put up 112 questions. More than one third of the total questions (34%), which were tabled on the floor of the House were put up by these parliamentarians.

The women parliamentarians elected through popular vote contributed to only 8% of the interventions to the participation registered by all female parliamentarians. The popularly elected women make 22% of the parliamentary strength of female Members in the National Assembly. There were five popularly elected women parliamentarians who did not register any participation during the entire year, while another six parliamentarians made less than 10 interventions. There were five female parliamentarians -- four from PPPP and one PMLN -- elected

through popular vote, who made more than 20 parliamentary interventions each during the third parliamentary year in the National Assembly. Among popularly elected women Members Dr. Azra Afzal Pacheho (PPPP), Ms. Saira Afzal Tarar (PMLN) and Mrs. Shamshad Sattar Bachani (PPPP) put up 54, 34, and 30 parliamentary interventions, respectively.

Agenda-wise, during the third parliamentary year, 136 Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) moved 130 Calling Attention Notices (CANs), of which 37 (29%) were women Members. In total, female MNAs collaborated with their male colleagues in submitting 108 CANs (82%). CAN is an important parliamentary business through which Members call attention of some ministry to an issue of urgent nature.

Female parliamentarians' contribution to oversight of executive through putting questions was exemplary, as out of 3,339 questions raised in the Assembly during the third parliamentary year, more than half (1,685 or 51%) were put forward by female Members. On average, 22 questions were submitted by each female MNA, almost four times more questions than their male counterparts.

In legislation, which is a core business of the National Assembly, female parliamentarians were quite active in bringing up Private Members' Bills. Out of 34 Private Members' Bills on the Orders of the Day, half (17, or 50%) were submitted by single female Members, including the only Private Members' Bill passed by the Assembly during the third parliamentary year. More than one-fourth (28.9%) of the Members who took part in debate about the budget proposals were women, with a total of 33 female parliamentarians (44% of all female MNAs) taking an active role.

Women Members also sponsored 75 Resolutions (94.9% of Resolutions put forward) either independently or jointly with male or female Members, and more than half of all Resolutions (46, or 58%) were put forth by individual female Members. Resolutions are a crucial part of the parliamentary agenda, through which the House expresses its opinion on some issue.

Female MNAs also took part in other agenda items including Motions Under Rule 259 and discussion on Matters of Public Importance. Women MNAs were active in the submission of 55 (80.9%) Motions Under Rule 259, including 12 Motions (18%) jointly sponsored by male and female Members, eight Motions (12%) tabled by groups of female Members, and 35 (51%) Motions put forth by individual female Members.

Fourteen Matters of Public Importance were brought forth by 22 Members of the National Assembly, including 10 male Members (4% of 263 male Members) and 12 female Members (16% of 77 female Members). As many as 41 female Members (53.2% of all women MNAs) from six parliamentary parties participated in raising Points of Order during the third parliamentary year.

Women Members raised a total of 199 Points of Order during the year, including 23 POs related to non-inclusion of their submitted agenda items on Orders of the Day or seeking permission to take part in discussions on agenda items submitted by other Members.

(Courtesy to Free and Free Election Network - a network of 44 civil society organizations working to foster democratic accountabilities in Pakistan)

Citizens' Charter for rehabilitation of flood affectees

[In order to discuss and mark the common grounds between the government institutions, donors and civil society organizations, in the up-coming recovery and rehabilitation work for the affectees of August 2010 floods, the National Humanitarian Network - NHN (a network of civil society organizations) presented and discussed Citizens' Charter of Demand at a Round Table titled 'Reviewing Post-Flood Situation & Framing Way Forward on Citizens Charter of Demands' on March 2, 2011, at the Islamabad Hotel. We are reproducing important demands from the charter for readers' information.]



(From L to R) Karamat Ali, Samina Khan, Senator Jan Jamali, speaking as the chief guest at the round table, Naseer Memon, Sarwar Bari, Irfan Mufti.

1. End Monopoly: We urge social movements and CSOs to join hands for the implementation of the article 38 of the Constitution of Pakistan which prohibits the monopoly of a few families over the means of productive resources and guarantees housing, employment, and social services to the people. We also urge the government to introduce comprehensive reform package that eliminate monopoly of feudal/tribal chiefs and cartels.

2. End Disparities: Civil society members note that existing social, gender and regional disparities have worsened due to the floods. They demand that the state revisit its exclusionary national policies that lie at the root of the existing social and economic gaps, the burden of which has been borne by the poor and the deprived of Pakistan.

3. Announce Rehabilitation Plan: The governments should make the rehabilitation plan public and invite broader consultation for rehabilitation.

4. Decentralise Relief/Rehabilitation: We note with concern that the over-centralized disaster management structures and dismantling of the local government bodies worsened the damage caused by floods. The state needs to restore these structures and decentralize disaster management to enable a quick state response to disasters.

5. Cancel Foreign Debt: We demand the immediate implementation of the Senate resolution on debt write off. Rather than continuing with its unproductive spending, the state should introduce public austerity measures and control defence spending.

6. Disburse 2nd Tranche of the Watan Cards Now:

- The amount promised by the state under the Watan Cards system should be released immediately. The state must announce a date by which time the second instalment of the Watan Cards is released.

- The state should redevelop the criteria for issuing the Watan Cards as the existing one excludes people with no CNICs and widowed women by way of the provision for 'head of the family'.

- The current administration regulating Watan Cards is inadequate. In many parts of the country, the ATM machines are not operating. The government should set up mobile ATMs for the Watan Cards.

7. Improve Farmers' Package: There is substantial information gap with regards to the Farmers Package, its content and the mechanism concerning its distribution. Due to lack of information, farmers are unable to access the package. The state should address the issue of duplication of channels of distribution for the farmers' package as currently multiple government agencies are simultaneously implementing the Farmers Package.

8. Restoration of Infrastructure: The means of communication destroyed during the course of floods must be restored and their construction quality and design should incorporate risk reduction.

9. Restore Social Services Immediately: Schools and health units destroyed should be immediately reconstructed. The new reconstructed structures should be accessible to women. In this regard, mobile health units for areas with inadequate health facilities need to be initiated.

10. Rehabilitation of Women:

- State land should be distributed among flood affectees, especially to women involved in farming. As a starting point, women should be given two acres to initiate small-scale agriculture activities on their own. Women should be given assistance with seeds, water, training and seed-funding to cultivate their land.

- Full compensation for livestock losses should be given to the women directly since women are primary caretakers of household animals.

- Women artisans (home based handicrafts workers) should be provided tools and compensation on urgent basis to resume livelihoods.

- The health needs of women and children should be prioritized and traditional birth attendants should be re-recruited to assist women.

- Gender Discriminations Complaint Cells should be established at District or Tehsil levels to allow

women to register complaints of sexual harassment, gender discrimination and denial of services.

- Women should be included in decision-making processes at all levels in disaster mitigation efforts. Women shall be given representation in DDMAs, PDMA's and NDMA.

11. Protection of Children's Rights:

- Children's education should be resumed in all locations so that children can start normal life in order to lessen their trauma and stress. Since those who lost all their assets in the floods are in no position to continue the education of their children, the government should respond to the demands of the flood affectees to provide free education and stipend to the affectee's children.

- The continuous displacement and sluggish pace of rehabilitation has exposed children to a number of vulnerabilities including physical and sexual abuse and child labour. The government shall set up Child Rights Complaint Cells at district level that should be linked to facilities offering protection to children.

12. Vocational Training: There should be specific focus on youth of affected areas. The Benazir Youth Support Programme should create special provision of educational, vocational, and social programmes directed specifically at youth.

13. Cancellation of Outstanding Debts of Haris: The damage caused to the cultivated land and the missed crops cycle resulting from floods have already pushed haris (farmers) further down the poverty spiral. The government, therefore, shall cancel all outstanding debts of the haris from the affected areas.

14. Social Security for Flood Affectees and Agriculture Workers: Flood affectees should be registered for social security without delay. Workers who have lost their livelihood during the course of floods must be immediately provided unemployment allowance. Furthermore, the state should initiate specific social security schemes directed at agriculture workers.

15. Land Reforms: To address poverty, the poor need assets to sustain their livelihoods, which, in case of rural areas, are titles to land. The government must set up a commission to explore options for land reforms including the purchase of excess land holdings from landlords to distribute to the landless.

16. Pay Special Attention on Doubly Affected Areas: The areas such as Swat, Kohistan, Dir and Jaffarabad have already been affected by military operations; thus, the recent floods have aggravated their economic deprivation. These areas should be paid special attention for relief operations and rehabilitation.

17. Build on Existing Structures: Instead of creating new structures during emergencies, it is always better to work through existing social networks, as it is tested, effective and efficient. The government and donor agencies shall therefore, work with the local partners and re-build the existing structures.

18. Respect UN-Guiding Principles: All humanitarian interventions should incorporate UN-Guiding Principles, the Sphere Standards and the relevant articles of the Constitution of Pakistan.

19. Reinstate Local Councillors: Elected local councils provide the best structures to cope with any disaster. The NDMA Disaster Management Plan 2010 is also heavily dependent on elected local councillors. Therefore, we demand immediate reinstatement of the local councils.

20. Census: The forthcoming census should be inclusive, broad-based and represent the diversity in language, ethnicity, religious backgrounds, professional occupation and other aspects, that characterise Pakistan's population. The flood affectees have demanded that the union councils should register the village level population.

21. Peace and Security: State shall make efforts to curb extremism and militancy that has crippled the social, economic and political progress of the country. Fast track action is needed to stop the recruitment drive by the extremists to lure children and youth into furthering their destructive causes.

22. Safeguard Minorities Rights: During the recent floods, there have been host of complaints regarding discriminatory treatment meted out to the minorities in the course of the relief phase. The post floods rehabilitation order must outline minorities' rights as a priority agenda. In addition, the state should form adequate structures to monitor progress on addressing minorities' issues and their access to state institutions be facilitated.

National Advisory Forum of GEP launched

AF Staff Report

Gender Equity Program of Aurat Foundation, supported by USAID, celebrated 100 years of International Women's Day with the inaugural meeting of National Advisory Forum and launch of a documentary "Main Safar Main Hoon". Both the events were held on 26 March, 2011, at a local hotel in Islamabad.

Members of the National Advisory Forum include Dr Nafisa Shah, Secretary General of Women's Parliamentary Caucus, Ms Anis Haroon, Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women, Ms Samina Khalid Ghurki, Federal Minister Women's Development, Ms Shahnaz Wazir Ali, member National Assembly, Ms Yasmeen Rehman, member National Assembly, Senator Nilofar Bakhtiar, Ms Saadia Danish, Advisor to Chief Minister, Gilgit Baltistan, Ms Ghazala Gola, Provincial Minister on Women's Development, Balochistan, Ms Sitara Ayaz, Provincial Minister on Women's Development, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ms. Tauqeer Fatimah Bhutto, Provincial Minister on Women's Development, Sindh, Mr Kamran Michael, Provincial Minister on Women's Development, Punjab, Justice (Retd.) Majida Razvi, Mr Ehsan Sadiq, AIG, Islamabad Police, Ms Samina Pirzada, renowned TV



Dr Nafisa Shah speaking at the event as Chief Guest; on stage (L-R), Simi Kamal, COP GEP, Sitara Ayaz, Provincial Minister on Women's Development, KP, Ghazala Gola, Provincial Minister on Women's Development, Balochistan, Dr Marilyn Wyatt and Anis Haroon, Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women.

artist and women's right activist and Dr Alya Khan, Professor Department of Economics, QAU.

Dr Nafisa Shah, while addressing the participants, expressed hope that Gender Equity Programme of Aurat Foundation would deliver effectively the much needed financial support for women's rights. She expressed hope that the joint efforts of government and civil society organization would surely result in a gender sensitive and just society in Pakistan.

Dr. Marilyn Wyatt told the forum that

the United States has made a long-term commitment to improving the lives of women in Pakistan and that all U.S. development strategies reflect the importance of women's core roles in raising families, providing health care, running businesses, providing education and feeding children.

Ms Anis Haroon said women's struggle over 100 years has resulted in some important gains nationally and globally, which women must preserve.

Ms Saadia Danish, in her address highlighted the problems of women in

Gilgit Baltistan. Ms Ghazala Gola, stressed that women of Balochistan were not behind anyone; and they are determined to contribute to national struggle for equality and justice for all. Ms Tauqeer Fatima Bhutto said that women in rural areas are so much caught in making bread and butter for their family that they are unaware of their basic rights. Ms Sitara Ayaz said that people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are in a state of war, which is affecting women's very basic human rights. Mr Kamran Michael appreciated Aurat Foundation for its composed struggle for women's empowerment.

Mr Naem Mirza, Chief Operating Officer, Aurat Foundation, earlier welcomed and briefed the participants on the Gender Equity Program and introduced the National Advisory Forum (NAF) and its members. Ms Simi Kamal, Chief of Party, Gender Equity Program stated that NAF is an important national forum for consultation and brainstorming broader gender equity/equality strategies and it can provide direction to GEP, as well as to the government and other gender entities in the country.

A documentary "Main Safar Main Hoon" was also screened at the end of the event. The documentary focused on the 100 year journey of women all over the world, particularly highlighting the achievements and sacrifices of Pakistani women, starting from 1911 till 2011.

8,000 incidents of violence against women during 2010

AF Staff Report

Aurat Foundation released the statistics on violence against women in Pakistan during 2010. The data was released in March 2011, at a press conference in Islamabad. According to the figures, there were 8000 incidents of violence against women in the country in 2010. Based on the reported cases in a majority of newspapers of Pakistan, no FIR was registered in a large number of incidents, reflecting the citizens' lack of confidence in police.

Out of a total 8000 incidents, as many as 5492 cases of violence were reported from Punjab; 1652 from Sindh; 650 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 79 from Baluchistan and 127 from Islamabad. The figures of Islamabad are alarming given the smaller population and high security maintained in the capital.

Of the total incidents, 2236 women were abducted; 1436 women were murdered and 557 were killed in the name of 'honour'; 928 women were raped; 633 women committed suicide; 32 women were made victim of acid attacks and 38 women were target of stove burning. This is a grim reminder

that evil social practices persist, such as the fact that several women were exchanged like cattle to settle disputes adjudicated by illegal jirgas, or hundreds were killed on the pretext of so-called 'honour'.

There has been 13 % increase in the violence against women in 2009 over the preceding year in 2008. But the data analysis of 2010 reflects a decrease of 6% over the preceding year in 2009.

The decrease in figures is due to the fact that the recent natural catastrophe in the country not only damaged the main infrastructure of most of the flood affected districts but also led to the loss of valuable official, judicial and crime records. Moreover, as the media's focus was also shifted in highlighting the relief activities throughout the country, the women related issues were less reported.

The collected data represents the reported incidence of violence against women from 113 Districts of Pakistan i.e. 36 districts of Punjab; 23 of Sindh; 26 of KPK; 28 of Baluchistan, Islamabad Capital Territory and federally and Provincially Administered Areas.

The FIR status of the gathered data reveals that 3650 cases reported were registered while 1118 cases were not registered. The remaining 430 cases have no information about whether or not the cases been registered or not.

Following is the break down of the compiled 8000 cases reported in 2010 on regional basis:

- **2236 cases of abduction/kidnapping:** (1890 in Punjab; 246 in Sindh; 77 in KPK; 2 in Balochistan; 21 in Islamabad);
- **1436 cases of murder:** (758 in Punjab; 309 in Sindh; 328 in KPK; 15 in Balochistan; 27 in Islamabad);
- **928 cases of rape/gang-rape:** (741 in Punjab; 157 in Sindh; 5 in KPK; 6 in Balochistan; 19 in Islamabad);
- **633 cases of suicide:** (424 in Punjab; 164 in Sindh; 54 in KPK; 8 in Balochistan; 7 in Islamabad);
- **557 cases of 'honour' killing:** (233 in Punjab; 266 in Sindh; 22 in KPK; 36 in Balochistan; 0 in Islamabad);
- **486 cases of domestic violence:**

(246 in Punjab; 136 in Sindh; 89 in KPK; 4 in Balochistan; 11 in Islamabad);

- **74 cases of sexual assault:** (39 in Punjab; 34 in Sindh; 0 in KPK; 0 in Balochistan; 1 in Islamabad);
- **38 cases of burning:** (33 in Punjab; 0 in Sindh; 3 in KPK; 1 in Balochistan; 1 in Islamabad);
- **32 cases of acid throwing:** (20 in Punjab; 3 in Sindh; 0 in KPK; 5 in Balochistan; 3 in Islamabad);
- **1579 cases of violence were of miscellaneous nature:** (vanni/swara, custodial violence, torture, trafficking, child marriages, incest, threat to violence, sexual harassment, attempted murder, Land Encroaching, harassment at workplace, suicide & rape) in the four provinces and in Islamabad.

Unfortunately, the number and percentage of the cases of abduction/kidnapping are 2236 with a very high proportion of 27.95%. Murder combined with 'honour' killings total to another ugly figure of 1193, constituting 14.9% of total crimes against women, with 1436 murders of women (17.95%) and 557 'honour' killing of women (6.96%).

Women's resolve on 12 Feb. & 8th March - we shall win



A view of the 8 March celebrations inside the premises of Karachi Provincial Assembly.

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani women and their supporters observed 12 February and 8 March in 2011 with renewed vigour and resolved to continue their struggle for equality, justice peace and democracy in all major cities of Pakistan. Members of civil society organizations, women's rights activists and peoples from different walks of life held a rally on 8th March, 2011, under the platform of Insani Haqooq Ittehad (IHI), from Clock Chowk, Kalsoom Plaza to Parade Chowk, in front of the Parliament House in Islamabad. Women's Charter of Demand, read out by Rabeeha Hadi from Aurat Foundation. The participants were carrying 'Doves of Peace', which were prepared by the school children and teachers of Khaldunya High School.

While commemorating the National Women's Day, on 12th February, Aurat Foundation and OXFAM-GB, under 'Raising Her Voice' programme, jointly paid tribute to women leaders from grassroots on 11 February, 2011 at Holiday Inn, Islamabad. Mukhtaran Mai, an icon of struggle and courage in Pakistan and abroad, Dr Aman Mustafa and Haleema Bhutto were guests of honour. Women leaders Ms Riffat Khan, Qamar Bano, Razia Sultana, Razia Mudassar, Surya Manzoor, Attiya Batoool and Ghazala Anjum, told their stories. Sarkar Abbass, Advocate Supreme Court and Feroza Zahra, Programme Manager, Raising Her Voice, Oxfam, also spoke at the event.

National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) in collaboration with Aurat Foundation, Pothohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA) and Pakistan Television (PTV) jointly organized a public gathering on February 11, 2011, at the Pakistan National Council of Arts, Islamabad. Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Advisor to Prime Minister, presented the history of women's struggle for equal rights and status in Pakistan. Anis Haroon, Chairperson NCSW, gave a guiding presentation on the 'Way Forward - Where we do go now from here'. Earlier, Zahida Hina spoke on the socio-cultural aspect of religious extremism and its impact on women. Rehana Taufique and Shabnam Shakeel read their poetry on women's struggle. Renowned singer Fareeha Pervez sang famous poems.

In another event, Insani Haqooq Ittehad organized a discussion on 'Religious Extremism and its Impact on Women', on February 12, 2011, at National Library



A view of the Islamabad rally on 8 March.



Women members of Punjab Assembly and members of civil society lighting candles to celebrate International Women's Day.

Auditorium, Islamabad. Representatives of civil society organizations, women rights activists, student from universities and women from grassroots were among the participants. Bushra Goher, Chairperson, Standing Committee on Women Development, in her



Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Advisor to Prime Minister, speaking at the function (top picture); Anis Haroon, Nasreen Azhar presenting shield to Mukhtaran Mai, in an event organised by NCSW on 11 February in Islamabad.

address, said that religious extremism and Talibanization have roots in state systems and policies like education system and policies. Justice (R) Nasira Javaid Iqbal said that although Pakistan ratified CEDAW in 1996, it has failed to remove discriminatory laws against women. Today women's rights in Pakistan are progressively deteriorating. Dr Farzana Bari, Rukhshanda Naz, Director, Samina Khan, also spoke on the occasion. A recorded interview of famous poet Kishwar Naheed was also played for the participants. Alya Mirza, another women activist,



A view of the IHI event on 12 February at Islamabad.



Women flying kites at Nishtar Park, Peshawar, to celebrate 100th International Women's Day.

also read her poem. Pictures of '12th February lathi charge 1983' were also shown in a slide show.

In Lahore, the 100th International Women's Day was celebrated by Aurat Foundation and HomeNet Pakistan jointly by organizing an event, including a panel discussion, on March 7, 2011, in the premises of Punjab Assembly. Women parliamentarians, representatives from civil society organizations, political and social activists and media participated in the event. Faiza Malik, MPA-PPP presented a declaration on women's rights issues. The panelists included Zakia Shahnawaz, Advisor to CM for Special Education, Social and Population Welfare, Mehnaz Rafi, renowned women's rights activist, Azma Zahid Bukhari, MPA-PPP, Anma Ulfat, MPA-PML (Q) and Arifa Khalid, MPA-PML (N).

In Karachi, around thirty Karachi-based organizations organized a grand rally from Karachi Press Club to Arts Council of Pakistan. Members of citizen action committees (CACs), media, school teachers, nurses and lady health workers (LHWs) joined the celebrations in large numbers. In a separate event, Aurat Foundation, distributed shields to women legislators of Sindh Assembly in a seminar and cultural evening organized at the Sindh Assembly building on 14 March, 2011. The distinguished guests on the panel included Nisar A Khuhro, Speaker Sindh Assembly, Shehla Raza, Deputy Speaker, Sindh, Tauqeer Fatima Bhutto, Minister for Women's Development, Nargis N D Khan, Minister for Social Welfare, Anis Haroon, Chairperson, NCSW, Simi Kamal, Chief of Party, GEP of AF and Mahnaz Rahman, RD, AF Karachi. LWP regional coordinator Adv. Rubina Brohi presented special shield to the Speaker, Nisar A Khuhro, who in turn distributed shields to all the distinguished women parliamentarians and the women artists, as a gesture of appreciation for their continued struggle for women's empowerment. The award ceremony was followed by a cultural evening where renowned artists Shazia Khush and Sheema Kirmani performed.

In Peshawar, Aurat Foundation, Peshawar office celebrated 8th March, in collaboration with other civil society organisations at Nishtar Hall by airing the Pashto music and Atan dance. Skits were presented on the theme of 'Sexual Harassment' and 'HIV-AIDS'. Women also performed kite-flying on the occasion.



A view of AF and OXFAM-GB event in Islamabad.