



The remarkable journey of Aurat Foundation

In the landscape of women's rights advocacy in Pakistan, few organizations shine as brightly as Aurat Foundation. Established in 1986 as a national, non-profit, non-governmental organization under the Societies' Registration Act 1860, Aurat Foundation has dedicated over four decades to championing gender equality, democracy, and social justice. As Pakistan's largest NGO focused on women's rights, it has become a beacon of hope and progress, mobilizing civil society, influencing legislation, and empowering countless women across the nation. Aurat Foundation was born out of a pressing need to address systemic inequalities faced by women in Pakistan.

Founded amidst a backdrop of social and political challenges, the organization quickly established itself as a leader in fostering civil society networks and advocating for women's empowerment. Its mission is clear and unwavering: to create a just, democratic, and caring society where women and men are recognized as equals, with the inherent right to lead lives of self-respect and dignity. Over the years, this guiding principle has driven Aurat Foundation to build collaborations among citizens, amplify marginalized voices, and push for systemic change. From its headquarters in Islamabad and regional offices in Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta, the foundation operates with a grassroots approach, engaging communities at every level.

Its work spans awareness campaigns, policy advocacy, and capacity-building programs, all aimed at dismantling barriers to gender equality. Aurat Foundation's performance excels through its diverse and impactful programs. One flagship effort is the Legislative Watch initiative, which monitors women's issues in parliamentary proceedings and advocates for pro-women laws. This has been instrumental in shap-

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ing national policies on violence against women, property rights, and workplace harassment. The foundation also excels in training and capacity building. Programs like the National Training of Trainers (NTOT), conducted in collaboration with the Women Learning Partnership (WLP), equip activists with skills for advocacy and leadership. Recent events, such as the "Women as Architects of Peace, Power and Progress" workshop in Rawalpindi and "Industrial Work & Decision Making" sessions in Faisalabad, demonstrate its commitment to fostering women's roles in peacebuilding and economic decision-making. In times of crisis, Aurat Foundation's responsiveness stands out. During the devastating floods, it launched the Motherland Flood Relief Campaign, providing clean water, food, medicines, and shelter to women and children in need. This initiative not only addressed immediate humanitarian needs but also highlighted the foundation's agility in supporting vulnerable populations. Aurat Foundation engages media and civil society through publications, protests, and reports. Its E-Newsletter 'Aurat', Violence Against Women (VAW) reports, and NGO alternative reports on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) have been pivotal in raising awareness and critiquing global and national policies.

Aurat Foundation's track record of achievements is nothing short of extraordinary. It has been a key player in securing seven landmark legislations for women's rights, including the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, and amendments to provide financial and legal aid to incarcerated

women. These laws have transformed the legal landscape, offering protections against acid crimes, anti-women practices, and more. In political empowerment, the foundation led efforts to reserve 33% of seats for women in local, provincial, and federal elections, resulting in a surge of female participation. During the 2000-2001 elections, it trained over 70,000 women candidates, providing essential skills in campaigning and governance.

This has amplified women's voices in leadership, challenging entrenched norms and advancing gender parity. The foundation's advocacy for international commitments, such as CEDAW implementation, has urged the government to address violence against women and promote economic, social, and cultural rights. Notable recent successes include the Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act (2020) for child protection, the Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act (2020), and the Legal Aid and Justice Authority Act (2020), all of which enhance access to justice for women and marginalized groups. Aurat Foundation's role in forming women water networks and launching provincial women's parliamentary caucuses further exemplifies its impact. For instance, the Punjab Women's Parliamentary Caucus event in 2019 celebrated legislative progress and honored women MPs for their dedication. As Aurat Foundation enters its fifth decade, its performance remains a model of dedication and effectiveness. In a country where women face significant challenges—ranked 153rd in global gender equality—Aurat Foundation's work is more vital than ever. By continuing to advocate for rights, build capacities, and respond to crises, it paves the way for a more equitable Pakistan. Aurat Foundation's excellent performance is a testament to the power of persistent advocacy.