

# Quota for women on general election seats stressed

**Our correspondent**  
Islamabad

Speakers reiterated the demand of quota for women on general election seats and urged political leadership to finance election campaigns for women who are interested in contesting the forthcoming polls.

They were speaking at a consultation on 'Suggestions for Women's Empowerment for Election Manifestoes of Political Parties,' organised by Aurat Foundation in collaboration with Parliamentarians Commission for Human Rights (PCHR). The event was chaired by Chairperson National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights Riaz Fatyana. Chaudhry Shafique from the Parliamentarians Commission for Human Rights (PCHR) coordinated the event.

The main objective of the consultation was to have a dialogue with political party representatives for incorporation of the handbook titled 'Suggestions on Women's Empower-

ment for Election Manifestoes of Political Parties,' launched by Aurat Foundation and co-authored by development practitioners and rights activists Naeed Aziz and Tahira Abdullah.

Speakers were of the opinion that change in social mindset is vital for effective political participation of women. They demanded increase in budgetary allocation for education and suggested changes in curriculum for violence free society.

Riaz Fatyana emphasised for more than 10 per cent quota for women in employment. Though women are more educated and well aware of their rights in urban areas, he pointed out that on reserve seats, lesser women join from urban areas as compared to rural areas. He said that in the next meeting, National Assembly on Human Rights would have consultation with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on political participation of women.

Senator Mir Hasil Khan Bizenjo from National Party agreed that the manifestos of

political parties need a lot of additions and improvements. He said that there cannot be true democracy without secular state but regretted that not a single party manifesto mentioned the word 'secularism' due to wrong translation of the word. He said that 'secularism' in Urdu is translated as 'la-deenyiat' (atheism), rather it is the separation of state and religion.

Ms Anisa Zeb Tahirkheli, from Qaumi Watan Party, Balochistan, said that her party is against any type of discrimination against women and believes in enhancing women's participation in politics and governance.

Mehnaz Rafi from Pakistan Tahrik-e-Insaf said most of the political parties ignore the issues of women's rights at the most crucial times. For example, all the political parties gave cold response to the popular demand of repealing of Hudood Ordinances.

Malaika Raza from Pakistan Tahrik-e-Insaf (PTI)'s Manifesto Committee said that her

party has ensured at least 20 per cent participation of women at all the party level or committees and hence they are very active in shaping PTI's manifestos and other policies.

Farah Aqil, Senator from ANP, while talking about the women's presence in political parties, agreed that although the situation is not very good in her own party, leaders of her party believe in bringing more women in the parties and in the parliaments.

MNA Khushbakht Shujaat of MQM said that one of the major reason behind discrimination against women is the 'neem-mulaet' as whenever there is a talk of women's rights, religious leaders brings in the religion to oppose women's right to property, politics, economic empowerment etc. She emphasised the need to focus more on positive things of women's rights instead of just highlighting women's pain and deprivation, discrimination and violence against women.

Senator Nuzhat Sadiq from

PML-Q said that there is a need to collect more data on situations of women in health, education, economic, employment and all other sectors.

General Secretary of Awami Tahrik, Sindh, Anwar Soomro said there would be no change in the status of women unless women from grassroots come into politics.

Senator from PML-N Enwar Baig emphasised that political parties and governments in Pakistan shall collectively increase the budget in education and health sector and also increase women's education and opportunities in employment.

Earlier, Chief Operating Officer Aurat Foundation Naeem Mirza said usually gender is considered a social construction but women and human rights activists at Aurat Foundation have learned that it is actually a 'political construction.' He also said that the manifestos suggestions for women's empowerment, prepared by Aurat Foundation, after a process of wider consultation.