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National Women's Day

# Struggle for equal rights will go on

NGOs set up stalls to raise awareness on gender-based violence

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ISLAMABAD

Three decades on, women movement for equal rights and an egalitarian society continues. Rights activists at a function marking National Women's Day re-affirmed their resolve to continue the struggle for their rights as equal citizens and for a peaceful, secular and just society.

The event was held at the Fatima Jinnah Park on Tuesday, to commemorate the occasion. A large number of women, activists, volunteers and students gathered to mark the February 12, 1983 incident, which is of historic significance in the calendar for women's struggle for rights in Pakistan.

"It is essential to mark this day. This memory will inspire the future," said Valerie-Khan Yousafzai, chairperson Acid Survivors Foundation.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) campaigning for women rights highlighted resilience of women in their speeches, and through skits. They had set up stalls to raise awareness on gender-based violence and displayed handicraft.

While activists spoke about their contributions, most of them were of the view that ongoing challenges in society

have added to the struggle for women rights with the passage of time.

Nasreen Azhar, founding member of Women's Action Forum (WAF), recalled the incident which took place in Lahore on this date in 1983 during the despotic rule of military dictator Ziaul Haq. This day re-kindles the memory of that afternoon when on a call given by the Women's Action Forum and the Punjab Women Lawyers Association, women gathered on the Mall to protest against the Law of Evidence and eulogised those who were baton-charged and injured.

The law sought to reduce the legal status of women by proposing that the evidence of two women should equal

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that of one man. The women had planned to march to the Lahore High Court to submit a petition against the law, but they were brutally attacked by the police. They were tear-gassed and beaten, and several were arrested and sent to jail. "The struggle for equal rights is ongoing and women today are still battling for it," she said.



**SUPPRESSED:** Girl students act the part of the average female, who is intimidated into submission even today. PHOTOS: MYRA IQBAL/EXPRESS

Other speakers expressed concern over the killing of people on the basis of ethnic and sectarian grounds. They urged the government to ensure the safety of people, equal participation of women in politics in the coming elections. They also urged effective steps to make sure that women are not deprived of their constitutional right to

vote. They mentioned the situation of violence against women, acts of terrorism and conflicts and their effects on women, children and other vulnerable groups.

We commemorate the day to recognise the role of women and give them the space they need to participate in all spheres of life, said Samina

Gul, a visitor.

Prominent among those who spoke included Naseer Memon, Professor Farkhanda Aurangzeb, Nighat Rizvi and Sheema Khan.

A musical demonstration on various aspects of violence was performed by activists to mark the day. The event was organised by WAF Islamabad chapter in collaboration with

Insani Huqooq Ittehad, a network of civil society organisations, EVAW/G alliance and Pakistan Reproductive Health Network.

Theatre performances were also part of the event highlighting different aspects of violence.

Women from various communities set up food and handicrafts stalls at the event.