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Special funds suggested for women candidates in elections

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD, Oct 3: Political parties should allocate special funds from the party budget to women candidates in any election, and media should also be trained to spread awareness about gender equality and democracy. Moreover, election results of constituencies where women were barred from voting in the May 11 elections should be declared null and void.

These were the key points of the report 'Gender Election Monitoring Mission Report Pakistan 2013' launched by the international non government organisation (NGO) Gender Concerns International (GCI) at a local hotel on Thursday.

In the report, the GCI observed the general elections

from a gender perspective in collaboration with the Aurat Foundation. Almost 120 females observed the results from 555 polling stations across the country.

The report suggested that political parties should follow the rule of 33 per cent allocation for women at all levels of decision making, and proposed intra-party elections to ensure democratic values. Furthermore, action should be taken against party personnel who prevented women from voting, the report said.

Similarly, the report also gave its recommendations to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

It suggested a balance of women and men at all levels of decision making within the ECP, and the appointment of a gender officer who

improved women's participation in the commission.

It also suggested workshops for the polling staff to apprise them of the importance of women participation in the electoral process and suggested re-polling in areas where women voter turnout was less than 10 per cent.

In the report, the NGO recommended a survey just before elections to register women voters and ensure their participation in the election process.

The observers suggested the training of more women observers to document all aspects of gender participation and to ensure secure access to polling stations in all areas of the country.

Chairperson National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) Ms Khawar

Mumtaz said the commission would request the ECP to provide gender based data of rejected votes in the next elections. This would help identify which section (men or women) needed training for polling votes correctly.

Additional Director General ECP Raja Iftikhar assured participants of the commission's commitment to the electoral processes and said the ECP had ensured women staff for women polling stations.

Similarly, Director GCI Sabra Bano emphasised the need of a collaborative effort by all stakeholders.

"I am sure if the process continues, things will be streamlined as the polling percentage of women was much higher in 2013 elections compared to the 2008 elections," she said.