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Civil society demands effective legislation to stop domestic violence

Staff Report

ISLAMABAD: Effective legislation to prevent domestic violence and sexual offences against women was strongly demanded by thousands of women, men and youth at an event organized by AAWAZ program run by four major civil society organizations namely Aurat Foundation, SAP-PK, SPO and SUNGI Development Foundation, to mark the International Women's Day here on Sunday.

The event included a panel discussion, resistance poetry, mime and musical program. The panellists included Ms Rubina Khalid, member of Senate of Pakistan, Ms Meraj Khan, MPA from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly, Ms Nusrat Sehr Abbassi, member Sindh Assembly, Ms Tehseen Fawad, MPA from Punjab Assembly, Mr Naeem Mirza, COO Aurat Foundation, and Ms Asma Shirazi, renowned media person. Ms Feroza Zahra, Manager AAWAZ Programme, Aurat Foundation and Ms Anbreen Ajayb, Gender Specialist from SPO, moderated the event.

Senator Runina Khalid while addressing the conference said that unless an effective strategy for implementation is devised and put in practice, even the most effective legislation do not deliver e.g. although there is now an anti-rape law, but when it comes to registering FIR at the police stations and proving evidence, the law becomes un-effective.

Meraj Khan, MPA from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly, said that immediate legislation to ensure women's rights, ending

violence against women and effective measures for implementation is must to achieve gender equality and justice in society, In response to a question, she said that they are struggling hard to bring a legislation against domestic violence against women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Nusrat Sehr Abbassi, member Sindh Assembly, in her address, said that International Women's Day is our own day and we shall celebrate it with applause and happy faces. She said we need to be aware of our rights and the laws and policies which are already there to defend our rights.

Tehseen Fawad, MPA from Punjab Assembly, also emphasized the need for gender-based legislation and effective measures for their implementation. She gave commitments that she and her colleagues in the Punjab assembly would enhance their struggle for the passage of the law against domestic violence from the Punjab Assembly.

Asma Shirazi, the renowned media person, in her talk emphasized that there is a need to replace and change the terminologies, which are discriminatory towards women such as 'sinf-e-nazuk', 'mardana-war' etc. She said that a lot of men forward the so-called notion that women are women's enemy, and that parents usually say their sons that boys do not weep, girls weep. She said that we must get rid of these terms and concepts from media, syllabus and daily lives. She suggested that a chapter shall be include in school syllabus on Malala's struggle for girls' education.

Naeem Mirza, COO, Aurat Foundation, said that men earn claim that they earn and

bring money, but the fact is that this money is converted into care economy where women do rest of the whole labour from making bread, curry, making and pressing clothes, rearing children, a whole set of labour, hard work is done by women. He further said and appealed to men that they must stop starring at women which has been now declared a crime as sexual harassment.

Haris Khalique and Aliya Mirza, renowned poets and human rights activists recited their resistance poems. Later, a mime depicting women's struggle was presented by Ms Huma Naz Group and resistance songs were sung by 'GAO, SUNO BADO Campaign' lead by Ali Aftab Saeed Group.

The celebrations concluded with the adoption of a Charter of Demands on women's rights which the participants passed unanimously. The charter of demand urged the federal government and the governments of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces should legislate against domestic violence and declare it crime in law. The charter further demanded that in order to stop child marriages and forced marriages effective legislation and strategy must be ensured; for immediate solution of local issues and development works, the local government must be restored immediately, representation of women, farmers, labourers and minorities must be ensured and political parties must include their women party workers in decision making and provide required resources for enhancing their political consciousness and leadership qualities.