Norwegian women have struggled long and hard for their rights

Women enjoy equal rights in Norway

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry, Deputy Speaker National Parliament of Norway, talks to Legislative Watch

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry, the Pakistan-born Deputy Speaker of the National Parliament of Norway, was in the country to receive the Siyara-e-Quaid-e-Azam conferred on him by the Government of Pakistan in recognition for his services. Taking advantage of his presence, the Aurat Foundation spoke to him about women’s rights in Norway, in particular their struggle for political and social rights, and measures taken to ensure their participation in the decision making process. The interview was conducted by Ms Nasreen Zehra, Ms Shumaila Tanveer and Ms Mumtaz from Aurat Foundation’s Lahore office on 29 March, 2011. Details of the interview are presented below.

Question: First of all, we welcome you to Pakistan, and then, for the interest of our readers, please tell us about your childhood, education and family background.

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Let me begin by thanking you for this meeting. I belong to a small village in Lahore and come from an average middle class background. My father was a teacher and my mother a housewife. I was born in the village. We were two brothers and one sister, but my elder brother, who was a lawyer in Lahore, died. My father was a very simple man, a fact of which I am both proud and consider my identity! I studied in the Model High School in Model Town, Lahore, until my Matriculation, and sat for the Intermediate examination, also from Lahore. After this, at the age of 20, I left Pakistan.

Question: Why didn’t you continue your studies after your Intermediate?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: I have a friend, and he and I were both very good students. Yesterday, when we visited our school we remembered that we used to have a teacher, Master Fazlur Rehman. He was a heavily built man and had a long beard. During the half hour recess, when children wanted to eat their snacks, run around and talk to each other, this teacher would make us pray, say our namaz. When we returned to class, he would bring a stick, and cane those who had been absent for the namaz! I am convinced that this man did not produce a single namazi, but he was responsible for ruining the future of countless pilots, engineers and architects of the country, because many of us did not return to class after the namaz recess when the chemistry and biology classes were usually held. We used to miss those classes everyday. So the school instead of motivating de-motivated us! This was one reason why I did not continue my studies.

Then, my father died in 1976. My elder brother had his own family to look after; and the responsibility for managing the household fell on me. So financial difficulties too proved to be an obstacle in continuing further studies. I did my Matriculation and Intermediate as an apprentice student. I was aware that I was intelligent and could study further, but at times circumstances do not permit you to move ahead. However, I had a strong ambition to make something of myself, and so I accepted every challenge that came my way.

Question: How did you decide to go to Norway?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: My mother was keen that I should go abroad. My paternal uncle (God bless him!) was living in Norway. My mother decided to marry me to his daughter, and so I joined my wife.

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NCSW, CSOs protest as Mukhtaran Mai ‘re-victimised’

ISLAMABAD: In an immediate reaction, National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), Aurat Foundation, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and several other human rights organisations and activists expressed shock, anger and disappointment over the Supreme Court judgement in Mukhtaran Mai’s case. Some of them discribed the decision of the Supreme Court as ‘re-victimisation’ of Mukhtaran Mai.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan on 21 March, 2011, dismissed the petitions in Mukhtaran Mai gang rape case. The apex court concluded the suo moto notice and has upheld the decision of Lahore High Court. SC maintained the punishment of main accused Abdul Khaliq and acquitted other 13 accused who were arrested for last six years on apex court orders.

A three-judge bench – comprising Justice Mian Shakirullah Jan, Justice Nasir-ul-Mulk and Justice Mian Saqib Nisar – rejected Mukhtaran Mai’s appeals against the acquittal of her torturers and for enhancement of their sentence, by a majority of two to one.

In his dissenting note, Justice Nasir-ul-Mulk partially accepted the appeals of Mukhtaran Mai to an extent, when he set aside the High Court’s verdict of acquitting the accused. The National Commission on the Status of Women and members of Insani Huqooq Ittehad, including Aurat Foundation, Rozan, Sunig, Bedari, Ethnomedia, Pattan, PODA, Mehergargh and SPO convened an emergency meeting to express deep shock and disappointment at the verdict given by the superior court in the Mukhtaran Mai gang rape case on 21 April 2011.

Although the judgment did prove that Mukhtaran was raped because one accused did get life imprisonment, while others were acquitted. We are surprised to see why only one accused was punished and others were acquitted on a charge of ‘gang rape’.

The Commission and members of civil society felt that this was the reflection of a biased and inefficient criminal justice system. This case has been a classic example of how the facts were distorted and documentation of the evidence was tampered with at all levels.

The group expressed concern at the long delays to dispense justice. The victim was raped in 2002 on the instructions of the local Panchayat. In 2005 the chief justice of the superior court took suo moto notice of the case. Despite the intervention it took more than nine years to come up with this decision, which is a source of concern for the women of Pakistan.
Interview with Mr Akhtar Chaudhry

Politics in Norway is not based on individuals

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: It was recognition of my services to the minorities in general, and recognition of the services of minorities to the country. It may be the recognition of my 20 years services. I felt that what I had done in those twenty years had been done well. Also, after the King, the Speaker comes next in seniority, so in this way I am fifth in line.

Question: What are the prominent achievements of this 20-year journey?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: It is difficult to identify any one thing. We don’t have politics based on individuals. We work collectively. We are in power for the last six years, and ours is a left of centre government. I guess our achievement is that we have barred the way for the centre right, and especially the extremist right parties from coming into power! We believe that we need to work hard for the development of our country, and for that it is necessary to empower women.

We have a Law of Equality that ensures equal rights for all - men, women, minorities, and different social groups. However, the right wing party is very strong, and if it comes to power it will repeal this law because they say it is not required. We think that would be a tragedy.

This society has struggled for 100 years, and these people are working to undo what we have achieved. It used to be difficult for all parents to find places for their children in the kindergartens. When we came to power, the budget for kindergartens used to be 14 billion Kroners. We spend 26 billion Kroners every year, so that every child has the right to be admitted in kindergarten. Now it is demanded that only children who were born or before 31st August can be admitted when they are one year old in the following year; but those born on or after 1st September can only be admitted the year after. We are trying to institute twice yearly admissions, so that children don’t have to wait more than six months to be admitted.

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Question: Did you have to face any discrimination in politics?

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: There is discrimination in Norway too - against languages, religion and ethnicity. And one can feel this. I too feel it. In fact, in the last ten years, these attitudes have become worse, and this is very painful, especially for Muslims. And we do our utmost to ensure that everyone in the country should be entitled to equal rights and be treated equally, but there is one particular party that has assumed a harsh intolerant terminology, and people are influenced by them. We are trying to get them to soften their rhetoric and moderate their point of view. We all have to live in the country. Our children will become judges, teachers, bus drivers and parliamentarians, so we want that the harshness should be toned down and our opponents should become more moderate. But our opponents too are using all their resources to propagate their ideology against ours.

Elections in Norway are not based on individuals.
Interview with Mr Akhtar Chaudhry

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: As I mentioned before, it was in 1911 that the first women entered parliament. Then, in the 70s there was a virtual revolution that made women very powerful. The first woman Prime Minister was elected in 1986, and she was a very strong Prime Minister. She stayed so long that, according to her, her grandson once asked her: ‘Grandmother, can a man become Prime Minister?’

Her Cabinet had 19 or 20 members, of whom nine were women, and this was then very new in the country and abroad. After this no Prime Minister has been able to even think of a government without women! It is only when you work at such a high level that change comes about.

In our Cabinet, at least one third women are ministers and hold the necessary authority. In the past four or five elected governments, the Ministry of Defence has always been headed by a woman. Also, the Speaker of the Parliament has been a woman.

When young people are elected to Parliament, it is their responsibility to talk on all issues, but people expect them to focus mainly on youth. Similarly, women, even though they have a point of view on all matters, they are expected to focus especially on women's issues. But this is changing. The Penal Code in Norway, made in 1905, is currently being amended, and the argument is that the Penal Code was made by and for men, and so it needs to be changed.

Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Norwegian women have struggled long and hard for their rights. The truth is that if you yourself are not going to demand them, no one will give you your rights - women, youth, industrial workers, peasants, senior citizens - all. Our women have struggled, and our men too have understood that unless you make the women strong, you will not progress. Hence you will find women and men together worked for these rights. Women have the same rights as men, but even so they have not yet reached the same level.

Question: What is the percentage of women's representation in Parliament?

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We have tried to address this issue too. If it is proved that the woman has been subjected to violence, the government ... would dispassionate and women and minorities their just rights and scatter the dark clouds of religious extremism, are displaying lack of sense. They perhaps believe that they will win more votes if they assassinate a bigger vote bank they will be able to implement their policies. I doubt that if you have come into power with the votes of these dark forces, you will be first of all doing what your policies! You will not be able to follow anything other than their agenda.

I was present in the President House when members of your Parliamentary Committee that finalized the 18th Amendment were given awards, and was sad to see that there was not a single woman among them. I asked about this and was told that there were no women members in the committee. Pakistan was a country of 180 million people in 2010, and there are no women in this important parliamentary committee! This would signify that no woman in the country is capable of contributing to the committee! But there are capable women! Those who sit in the committee did not have the sense to realize that strong and independent women must be included.

The communication between our two countries must be maintained. I have met the Speaker Dr. Fehmida Mirza, and I will go back and tell them that the highest position of the President of Pakistan, Punjab, I highlighted that issues concerning women and minorities, told them that we were concerned and emphasized that greater efforts needed to be made to urgently address the situation.

Question: You have described some best practices. Should these be shared with the Government?
Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: We speak about it in our conversations. Norwegian funding in Pakistan too is focused; 40 million dollars funding in the social sector, 8 million dollars in the government; that is why we route our funding through the United Nations and through NGOs and organizations.

Interview with Mr Akhtar Chaudhry

Norwegian assistance geared towards social development

We have a prettysmall army in Norway! Only 13 000 soldiers. But Pakistan always does things contrary to good sense. I was there with the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, the Chief Minister of Punjab and Members of the National and Punjab Assemblies had been present at his funeral, it would have sent a strong and resolute message to the nation. But the message they are now sending out is that you are so powerful that we are supporting you! I told the Governor of Punjab that you had built the walls around you, but if you think that makes you safe, it will not. You will only be strong if you, with 100 others, stand on the road and state firmly that such actions and attitudes are not acceptable in Pakistan. How many people will they kill?

About ten years ago, in Norway some extremist youths came out on the streets. They had only one plan: to kill a non-white person that day. They got hold of a 14-year-old boy and killed him. This was the first racist murder in our country. That same evening all the important forces - the Prime Minister, the Justice Minister, the Police Commissioner, the City Mayor and Provincial Ministers came out in protest. And three or four days later, at probably the General Assembly of the country where all important people were present, they gave the collective message that this country would not tolerate such actions and behaviour.

The world does not have a good impression about Pakistan. Everyone believes that Pakistani women are suffering and are facing immense difficulties. We are closely watching Pakistan, as is the whole world. This is a huge country with a population of 180 million. It is a nuclear power and has the fifth largest army in the world. But the behaviour of its people is worrying. This pains us, but Pakistan itself is suffering the greatest harm! The ex-President of Pakistan was assassinated; the Governor of the largest province has been assassinated, a Federal Minister has been assassinated. These are very dangerous forces. Pakistan must be first of all doing what its extremist behaviour. Its politicians and leaders must act with courage. But unfortunately this is not happening! And not only political intellectuals cannot do it. I think too many people in the country have done what they should be doing. Pakistan seems to be in a civil war, and whoever acts with boldness and courage will win!

I have spoken to several people here about this. Whether it was the Senate Chairman, Speaker of the National Assembly, Federal Ministers, Speaker of the Punjab Assembly or the Governor Punjab, I highlighted the issues concerning women and minorities, told them that we were concerned and emphasized that greater efforts needed to be made to urgently address the situation.

Question: What is your impression; do Pakistanis really love their country? Or do they just talk?
Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: They definitely love Pakistan very much, but many don’t know how to express it! People think it means that we should always be in the office at 8 am then you must be there at 8 am, not 0805 am! We are very careful and we seriously discussed whether the award should be accepted.

Question: Why do you think Pakistan is not making progress?
Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: I feel sad to think that wherever revolutions have taken place, it was because there was exploitation, injustice and inequality in that country. The upper classes were exploiting the lower classes because the country rose up against it and said: we cannot tolerate this any longer. But unfortunately, in Pakistan people say there is exploitation and injustice and corruptions, but they too seek to become beneficiaries of the system, and don’t oppose it!

Question: What is your message for the people of Pakistan?
Mr Akhtar Chaudhry: Whatever I am saying is against my mandate, against protocol! I am the Deputy Speaker of a foreign country, and I am sitting in your country. And there is a principle that you will not interfere in the internal affairs of another country. But I love this country, and while remaining within my limits I will stress that it is absolutely necessary to rid Pakistan of religious extremism, because this will be beneficial to everyone.

Those countries that have left religious extremism behind are the ones that are successful. All the Muslims combined could not have made this country. It was a secular man who did this. It is now necessary to call a halt to religious extremism, and to do that it is necessary to act with courage. The correct interpretation of Quran will help you to achieve this goal.

Our people have so much knowledge. You just have to read Allama Iqbal. In the last poem in Bale-Jhobeel the devil is addressing his advisors. Iqbal has spelt out all the ways in which the Muslims will be destroyed. The Muslims must read this from time to time.
One of the landmark features of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, passed by the Parliament in April 2010, was the strengthening of provincial autonomy through abolition of concurrent list of the Constitution. Devolution of power and resources to the provinces has been a long-standing demand of the smaller provinces and exponents of people-centred development in Pakistan. Under the 18th Amendment, 40 of the 47 subjects in the concurrent list are to be handed over to provinces before June 30, 2011, the deadline set in the package. Under the implementation package, the process of devolution of several federal ministries including the Ministry of Women’s Development, has either been completed or is near completion.

With regard to process of devolution and provincial autonomy, there is complete consensus within civil society organizations that maximum provincial autonomy should be ensured and all measures in accordance with the letter and spirit of the 18th Amendment must be undertaken and implemented in all sincerity. However, a number of women’s rights organizations have serious apprehensions that some critical issues are being overlooked by the decision-makers vis-à-vis the devolution of Ministry of Women’s Development (MoWD). These need to be elaborated here with the purpose of preserving the gains made by women’s rights movement in exercise of affirmative action measures under the 1973 Constitution over the decades. The establishment of the MoWD has been one of the outcomes of this struggle. The foremost concern is that which mechanism will ensure that women’s interests are cross cutting at the national level after the MoWD’s devolution; which agency, ministry or mechanism will be responsible for policy suggestions, national laws and national plans; what will be the focal point at the national level and where provincial plans and programmes are integrated for national programme and plan processes and; which mechanism will be responsible for ensuring the implementation of international norms, commitments, conventions and policies. The civil society organizations believe that this role should not be dispersed under different mechanisms, e.g. to EAD, Planning Commission, Cabinet Division etc. None of these mechanisms have a women-specific focus or internal mechanisms which would ensure uniformity, connectivity, ownership, continuity and cross-cutting nature of women’s interests that have been earned by them through a historic struggle, nationally and globally. Let us not lose one gain in order to win another.

EDITORIAL

ISLAMABAD: Women Members of the National Assembly accounted for almost half of the parliamentary agenda conducted during the third parliamentary year of the thirteenth National Assembly, according to parliamentary records and FAFEN’s direct observation of proceedings between March 11, 2010 and March 4, 2011.

Women constitute less than one-quarter (25%) of the National Assembly’s current 340 members - 77 female members occupying the reserved seats and 17 elected through popular vote. Despite their significant underrepresentation, women Members actively participated in the parliamentary business and remained more assertive and effective as compared to many of their male counterparts in the National Assembly that is headed by the country’s first woman Speaker.

The women parliamentarians put up 2,458 parliamentary interventions during the entire third parliamentary year. FAFEN defines a parliamentary intervention as each of the instances when a Member of the National Assembly either submits an agenda item on the Orders of the Day (Calling Attention Notices, Questions, Private Members’ Bills, etc.) or raises his/her concerns during a debate on the floor of the House (Points of Order, Supplementary Questions, Debate on Adjournment Motions, etc.).

Despite the fact that 18 women parliamentarians failed to participate in any form of parliamentary business during the entire year and 43 women parliamentarians came up with less than 10 parliamentary interventions, the remaining 34 female parliamentarians constituted more than half of the parliamentary business conducted during the year.

There were 10 female parliamentarians, who contributed more than 100 interventions each during the year. These 10 active parliamentarians can be credited for 60% of the participation registered by all female parliamentarians. In other words, these 10 women Members accounted for around one-quarter of the parliamentary activity in the National Assembly during the year. All the women parliamentarians conducting more than 100 parliamentary interventions have been elected on reserved seats except one Member of PML, all belong to PMLN.

Female parliamentarians with more than 100 interventions include Ms. Shireen Arshad Khan with 176 interventions, Ms. Marvi Memon (171), Ms. Nazhat Sadiq (164), Ms. Tahira Aurangzeb (161), Ms. Qudsia Arshad (155), Ms. Nisar Tanveer (154), Ms. Khalida Mansoor (131), Ms. Tasneem Siddiqui (130), Ms. Nighat Parveen Mir (120) and Ms. Shaheen Ashfaq (114). With the exception of Ms. Marvi Memon from the PML, all of these parliamentarians are affiliated with the PMLN. On average, each of these 10 parliamentarians put up 112 questions. More than one-third of the total questions (34%), which were tabled on the floor of the House were put up by these parliamentarians.

The women parliamentarians elected through popular vote contributed to only 8% of the interventions to the participation registered by all female parliamentarians. The popularly elected women made 22% of the parliamentary strength of female Members in the National Assembly. There were five popularly elected women parliamentarians who did not register any participation during the entire year, while another six parliamentarians made less than 10 interventions. There were five female parliamentarians--four from PPPP and one PMLN--elected through popular vote, who made more than 20 parliamentary interventions each during the third parliamentary year in the National Assembly. Among popularly elected women Members Dr. Azra Afsheen (PPP), Mrs. Fathima Tarar (PMLN) and Mrs. Shamshad Sattar Bachani (PPP) put up 54, 34, and 30 parliamentary interventions, respectively.

Agenda-wise, during the third parliamentary year, 136 Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) moved 130 Calling Attention Notices (CANS), of which 37 (29%) were women Members. In total, female MNAs collaborated with their male colleagues in submitting 108 CANS (82%). CAN is an important parliamentary business through which Members call attention of some ministry to an issue of urgent nature.

Female parliamentarians’ contribution to oversight of executive through putting questions was exemplar, as out of 3,339 questions raised in the Assembly during the third parliamentary year, more than half (1,685 or 51%) were put forward by female Members. On average 22 questions were submitted by each female MNA, almost four times more questions than their male counterparts.

In legislation, which is a core business of the National Assembly, female parliamentarians were quite active in bringing up Private Members’ Bills. Out of 34 Private Members’ Bills on the Orders of the Day, half (17, or 50%) were submitted by single female Members, including the only Private Members’ Bill passed by the Assembly during the third parliamentary year. More than one-fourth (28.9%) of the Members who took part in debate about the budget proposals were women, with a total of 33 female parliamentarians (44% of all female MNAs) taking an active role.

Women MNAs also sponsored 75 Resolutions (94.9% of Resolutions put forward) either independently or jointly with male or female Members, and more than half of all Resolutions (46, or 58%) were put forth by individual female Members. Resolutions are a crucial part of the parliamentary agenda, through which the House expresses its opinion on some issue.

Female MNAs also took part in other agenda items including Motions Under Rule 259 and discussion on Matters of Public Importance. Women MNAs were active in the submission of 55 (80.9%) Motions Under Rule 259, including 12 Motions (18%) jointly sponsored by male and female Members, eight Motions (12%) tabled by groups of female Members, and 35 (51%) Motions put forth by individual female Members.

Fourteen Matters of Public Importance were brought forward by 22 Members of the National Assembly, including 10 male Members (4% of 263 male Members) and 12 female Members (16% of 77 female Members). As many as 41 female Members (53.2% of all women MNAs) from six parliamentary parties participated in raising Points of Order during the third parliamentary year.

Women Members raised a total of 199 Points of Order during the year, including 23 POs related to non-inclusion of their submitted agenda items on Orders of the Day or seeking permission to take part in discussions on agenda items submitted by other Members.

(Courtesy to Free and Free Election Network - a network of 44 civil society organizations working to foster democratic accountabilities in Pakistan)
Citizens' Charter for rehabilitation of flood affectees

[In order to discuss and mark the common grounds between the government institutions, donors and civil society organizations, in the up-coming recovery and rehabilitation work for the affectees of August 2010 floods, the National Humanitarian Network - NHN (a network of civil society organizations) presented and discussed Citizens’ Charter of Demand at a Round Table titled ‘Reviewing Post-Flood Situation & Framing Way Forward on Citizens Charter of Demands’ on March 2, 2011, at the Islamabad Hotel. We are reproducing important demands from the charter for readers’ information.]

1. End Monopoly: We urge social movements and CSOs to join hands for the implementation of the article 38 of the Constitution of Pakistan which prohibits the monopoly of a few families over the means of productive resources and guarantees housing, employment, and social services to the people. We also urge the government to introduce comprehensive reform package that eliminate monopoly of feudal/tribal chiefs and cartels.

2. End Disparities: Civil society members note that existing social, gender and regional disparities have worsened due to the floods. They demand that the state revisit its exclusionary national policies that lie at the root of the existing social and economic gaps, the burden of which has been borne by the poor and the deprived of Pakistan.

3. Announce Rehabilitation Plan: The governments should make the rehabilitation plan public and invite broader consultation for rehabilitation.

4. Decentralise Relief/Rehabilitation: We note with concern that the over-centralized disaster management structures and dismantling of the local government bodies worsened the damage caused by floods. The state needs to restore these structures and decentralize disaster management to enable a quick state response to disasters.

5. Cancel Foreign Debt: We demand the immediate implementation of the Senate resolution on debt write-off. Rather than continuing with its unproductive spending, the state should introduce public austerity measures and control defence spending.

6. Disburse 2nd Tranche of the Watan Cards Now:

- The current administration regulating Watan Cards is inadequate. In many parts of the country, the ATM machines are not operating. The government should set up mobile ATMs for the Watan Cards.

7. Improve Farmers’ Package:

- There is substantial information gap with regards to the Farmers Package, its content and the mechanism concerning its distribution. Due to lack of information, farmers are unable to access the package. The state should address the issue of duplication of channels of distribution for the Farmers’ package as currently multiple government agencies are simultaneously implementing the Farmers Package.

8. Restoration of Infrastructure:

- The means of communication destroyed during the course of floods must be restored and their construction quality and design should incorporate risk reduction.

9. Restore Social Services Immediately:

- Schools and health units destroyed should be immediately reconstructed. The new reconstructed structures should be accessible to women. In this regard, mobile health units for areas with inadequate health facilities need to be initiated.

10. Rehabilitation of Women:

- State land should be distributed among flood affected, especially to women involved in farming. As a starting point, women should be given two acres to initiate small-scale agriculture activities on their own. Women should be given assistance with seeds, water, training and seed-funding to cultivate their land.

- Full compensation for livestock losses should be given to the women directly since women are primary caretakers of household animals.

- Women artisans (home based handicrafts workers) should be provided tools and compensation on urgent basis to resume livelihoods.

- The health needs of women and children should be prioritized and traditional birth attendants should be re-recruited to assist women.

- Gender Discriminations Complaint Cells should be established at District or Tehsil levels to allow women to register complaints of sexual harassment, gender discrimination and denial of services.

- Women should be included in decision-making processes at all levels in disaster mitigation efforts. Women shall be given representation in DDMAs, PDMAs and NDMA.

11. Protection of Children’s Rights:

- Children’s education should be resumed in all locations so that children can start normal life in order to lessen their trauma and stress. Since those who lost all their assets in the floods are in no position to continue the education of their children, the government should respond to the demands of the flood affectees to provide free education and stipend to the affectees’ children.

- The continuous displacement and sluggish pace of rehabilitation has exposed children to a number of vulnerabilities including physical and sexual abuse and child labour. The government shall set up Child Rights Complaint Cells at district level that should be linked to facilities offering protection to children.

12. Vocational Training:

- There should be specific focus on youth of affected areas. The Benazir Youth Support Programme should create special provision of educational, vocational, and social programmes directed specifically at youth.

13. Cancellation of Outstanding Debts of Haris:

- The damage caused to the cultivated land and the missed crops cycle resulting from floods have already pushed haris into the poverty spiral. The government, therefore, shall cancel all outstanding debts of the haris from the affected areas.

14. Social Security for Flood Affectees and Agriculture Workers:

- Flood affectees should be registered for social security without delay. Workers who have lost their livelihood during the course of floods must be immediately provided unemployment allowance. Furthermore, the state should initiate specific social security schemes directed at agriculture workers.

15. Land Reforms: To address poverty, the poor need assets to sustain their livelihood. The case of rural areas, are titles to land. The government must set up a commission to explore options for land reforms including the purchase of excess land holdings from landlords to distribute to the landless.

16. Pay Special Attention on Doubly Affected Areas: The areas such as Swat, Kohistan, Dir and Jaffarabad have already been affected by military operations; thus, the recent floods have aggravated their economic deprivation. These areas should be paid special attention for relief operations and rehabilitation.

17. Build on Existing Structures:

- Instead of creating new structures during emergencies, it is always better to work through existing social networks, as it is tested, effective and efficient. The government and donor agencies shall therefore, work with the local partners and re-build the existing structures.

18. Respect UN-Guiding Principles:

- All humanitarian interventions should incorporate UN-Guiding Principles, the Sphere Standards and the relevant articles of the Constitution of Pakistan.

19. Reinstall Local Councillors:

- Elected local councils provide the best structures to cope with any disaster. The NDMA Disaster Management Plan 2010 is also heavily dependent on elected local councillors. Therefore, we demand immediate reinstatement of the local councils.

20. Census:

- The forthcoming census should be inclusive, broad-based and represent the diversity in language, ethnicity, religious backgrounds, professional occupation and other aspects, that characterise Pakistan’s population. The flood affectees have demanded that the union councils should register the village level population.

21. Peace and Security:

- State shall make efforts to curb extremism and militancy that has crippled the social, economic and political progress of the country. Fast track action is needed to stop the recruitment drive by the extremists to lure children and youth into furthering their destructive causes.

22. Safeguard Minorities Rights:

- During the recent floods, there have been host of complaints regarding discriminatory treatment meted out to the minorities in the course of the relief phase. The post floods rehabilitation order must outline minorities’ rights as a priority agenda. In addition, the state should form adequate structures to monitor progress on addressing minorities’ issues and their access to state institutions be facilitated.

(From L to R) Karamat Ali, Samina Khan, Senator Jan Jamali, speaking as the chief guest at the round table, Naseer Memon, Sarwar Bari, Irfan Multi.
AF Staff Report

Gender Equity Program of Aurat Foundation supported by USAID, celebrated 100 years of International Women’s Day with the inaugural meeting of National Advisory Forum and launch of a documentary “Main Safar Main Hoon”. Both the events were held on 26 March, 2011, at a local hotel in Islamabad.

Members of the National Advisor Forum include Dr Nafisa Shah, Secretary General of Women’s Parliamentary Caucus; Ms Anis Haroon, Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women; Ms Samina Khalid Ghurki, Federal Minister Women’s Development, Ms Shahnaz Wazir Ali, member National Assembly, Ms Yasmeen Rehman, member National Assembly, Senator Nifar Bakhtiar, Ms Saadia Danish, Advisor to Chief Minister, Gilgit Baltistan, Ms Ghazala Gola, Provincial Minister on Women’s Development, Balochistan, Ms Sita Ayaz, Provincial Minister on Women’s Development, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ms Taqeer Fatimah Bhutto, Provincial Minister on Women’s Development, Sindh, Mr Kamran Michael, Provincial Minister on Women’s Development, Justice (Retd.) Majida Razvi, Mr Ehsan Sadiq, AIG Islamabad Police, Ms Samina Pirzada, renowned TV artist and women’s right activist and Dr Aily Khan, Professor Department of Economics, QAU.

Dr Nafisa Shah speaking at the event as Chief Guest; on stage (L-R), Simi Kamal, COP GEP, Sitara Ayaz, Provincial Minister on Women’s Development, KP, Ghazala Gola, Provincial Minister on Women’s Development, Balochistan, Dr Marilyn Wyatt and Anis Haroon, Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women.

Dr Nafisa Shah, while addressing the participants, expressed hope that Gender Equity Programme of Aurat Foundation would deliver effectively the much needed financial support for women’s rights. She expressed hope that the joint efforts of government and civil society organization would surely result in a gender sensitive and just society in Pakistan.

Dr. Marilyn Wyatt told the forum that the United States has made a long-term commitment to improving the lives of women in Pakistan and that all U.S. development strategies reflect the importance of women’s core roles in raising families, providing health care, running businesses, providing education and feeding children.

Ms Anis Haroon said women’s struggle over 100 years has resulted in some important gains nationally and globally, which women must preserve.

Ms Saadia Danish, in her address highlighted the problems of women in Gilgit Baltistan. Ms Ghazala Gola, stressed that women of Balochistan were not behind anyone; and they are determined to contribute to national struggle for equality and justice for all. Ms Taqeer Fatima Bhutto said that women in rural areas are so much caught in making bread and butter for their family that they are unaware of their basic rights. Ms Sita Ayaz said that people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are in a state of war, which is affecting women’s very basic human rights. Mr Kamran Michael appreciated Aurat Foundation for its composed struggle for women’s empowerment.

Mr Naem Mirza, Chief Operating Officer, Aurat Foundation, earlier welcomed and briefed the participants on the Gender Equity Program and introduced the National Advisory Forum (NAF) and its members. Ms Simi Kamal, Chief of Party, Gender Equity Program stated that NAF is an important national forum for consultation and brainstorming broader gender equity/equality strategies and it can provide direction to GEP, as well as to the government and other gender entities in the country.

A documentary “Main Safar Main Hoon” was also screened at the end of the event. The documentary focused on the 100 year journey of women all over the world, particularly highlighting the achievements and sacrifices of Pakistani women, starting from 1911 till 2011.

AF Staff Report

Aurat Foundation released the statistics on violence against women in Pakistan during 2010. The data was released in March 2011, at a press conference in Islamabad. According to the figures, there were 8000 incidents of violence against women in the country in 2010. Based on the reported cases in a majority of newspapers of Pakistan, no FIR was registered in a large number of incidents, reflecting the citizens’ lack of confidence in police.

Out of a total 8000 incidents, as many as 5492 cases of violence were reported from Punjab; 1652 from Sindh; 650 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; 79 from Baluchistan and 127 from Islamabad. The figures of Islamabad are alarming given the smaller population and high security maintained in the capital.

Of the total incidents, 2236 women were abducted; 1436 women were murdered and 557 were killed in the name of ‘honour’. 928 women were raped; 633 women committed suicide; 32 women were made victim of acid attacks and 38 women were target of stove burning. This is a grim reminder that evil social practices persist, such as the fact that several women were exchanged like cattle to settle disputes adjudicated by illegal jirgas, or hundreds were killed on the pretext of so-called ‘honour’.

There has been 13 % increase in the violence against women in 2009 over the preceding year in 2008. But the data analysis of 2010 reflects a decrease of 6% over the preceding year in 2009.

The decrease in figures is due to the fact that the recent natural catastrophe in the country not only damaged the main infrastructure of most of the flood affected districts but also led to the loss of valuable official, judicial and crime records. Moreover, as the media’s focus was also shifted in highlighting the relief activities throughout the country, the women related issues were less reported.

The collected data represents the reported incidence of violence against women from 113 Districts of Pakistan i.e. 36 districts of Punjab; 23 of Sindh; 26 of KPK; 28 of Baluchistan, Islamabad Capital Territory and federally and Provincialy Administered Areas.

The FIR status of the gathered data reveals that 3650 cases reported were registered while 1118 cases were not registered. The remaining 430 cases have no information about whether or not the cases been registered or not.

Following is the breakdown of the compiled 8000 cases reported in 2010 on regional basis:

- **2236 cases of abduction/kidnapping:** (1890 in Punjab; 246 in Sindh; 77 in KPK; 2 in Balochistan; 21 in Islamabad) ;
- **1436 cases of murder:** (758 in Punjab; 309 in Sindh; 328 in KPK; 15 in Balochistan; 27 in Islamabad);
- **928 cases of rape/gang-rape:** (741 in Punjab; 157 in Sindh; 5 in KPK; 6 in Balochistan; 19 in Islamabad);
- **633 cases of suicide:** (424 in Punjab; 164 in Sindh; 54 in KPK; 8 in Balochistan; 7 in Islamabad);
- **557 cases of 'honor' killing:** (233 in Punjab; 266 in Sindh; 22 in KPK; 36 in Balochistan; 0 in Islamabad);
- **486 cases of domestic violence:** (246 in Punjab; 136 in Sindh; 89 in KPK; 4 in Balochistan; 11 in Islamabad);
- **74 cases of sexual assault:** (39 in Punjab; 34 in Sindh; 0 in KPK; 0 in Balochistan; 1 in Islamabad);
- **38 cases of burning:** (33 in Punjab; 0 in Sindh; 3 in KPK; 1 in Balochistan; 1 in Islamabad);
- **32 cases of acid throwing:** (20 in Punjab; 3 in Sindh; 0 in KPK; 5 in Balochistan; 3 in Islamabad);
- **1579 cases of violence were of miscellaneous nature:** (vanni/swara, custodial violence, torture, trafficking, child marriages, incest, threat to violence, sexual harassment, attempted murder, Land Encroaching, harassment at workplace, suicide & rape) in the four provinces and in Islamabad.

Unfortunately, the number and percentage of the cases of abduction/kidnapping are 2236 with a very high proportion of 27.95%. Murder combined with ‘honor’ killings total to another ugly figure of 1193 constituting 14.9 % of total crimes against women, with 1436 murders of women (17.95%) and 557 ‘honor’ killing of women (6.96%).

8,000 incidents of violence against women during 2010
Women’s resolve on 12 Feb. & 8th March - we shall win

A view of the 8 March celebrations inside the premises of Karachi Provincial Assembly.

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani women and their supporters observed 12 February and 8 March in 2011 with renewed vigour and resolved to continue their struggle for equality, justice peace and democracy in all major cities of Pakistan. Members of civil society organizations, women's rights activists and peoples from different walks of life held a rally on 8th March, 2011, under the platform of Insani Haqooq Ittehad (IHI), from Clock Chowk, Kalsoom Plaza to Parade Chowk, in front of the Parliament House in Islamabad. Women’s Charter of Demand, read out by Rabeha Hadi from Aurat Foundation. The participants were carrying ‘Doves of Peace’, which were prepared by the school children and teachers of Khaldunya High School.

While commemorating the National Women’s Day, on 12th February, Aurat Foundation and OXFAM-GB, under ‘Raising Her Voice’ programme, jointly paid tribute to women leaders from grass-roots on 11 February, 2011 at Holiday Inn, Islamabad. Mukhtar Mai, an icon of struggle and courage in Pakistan and abroad, Dr Aman Mustafa and Haleema Bhutto were guests of honour. Women leaders Ms Riffat Khan, Qamar Bano, Razia Sultan, Razia Mudassar, Surya Manzoor, Atiya Batool and Ghazala Anjum, told their stories. Sarkar Abbass, Advocate Supreme Court and Feroza Zahra, Programme Manager, Raising Her Voice, Oxfam, also spoke at the event.


In another event, Insani Haqooq Ittehad organized a discussion on ‘Religious Extremism and its Impact on Women’, on February 12, 2011, at National Library Auditorium, Islamabad. Representatives of civil society organizations, women rights activists, student from universities and women from grassroots were among the participants. Bushra Gohar, Chairperson, Standing Committee on Women Development, in her address, said that religious extremism and Talibanization have roots in state systems and policies like education system and policies. Justice (R) Nasira Javid Iqbal said that although Pakistan ratified CEDAW in 1996, it has failed to remove discriminatory laws against women. Today women's rights in Pakistan are progressively deteriorating, Dr Fozia Bari, Rukhsheeda Naz, Director, Samina Khan, also spoke on the occasion. A recorded interview of famous poet Kishwar Naheed was also played for the participants. Alya Mirza, another women activist, also read her poem. Pictures of ‘12th February lathi charg 1983’ were also shown in a slide show.

In Lahore, the 100th International Women’s Day was celebrated by Aurat Foundation and HomeNet Pakistan jointly by organizing an event, including a panel discussion, on March 7, 2011, in the premises of Punjab Assembly. Women parliamentarians, representatives from civil society organizations, political and social activists and media participated in the event. Faiza Malik, MPA-PPP, presented a declaration on women’s rights issues. The panelists included Zakia Shahnawaz, Advisor to CM for Special Education, Social and Population Welfare, Mehnaz Rafi, renowned women’s rights activist, Arzma Zahid Bukhari, MPA-PPP, Arifa Khalid, MPA-PML (Q) and Arifa Khalid, MPA-PML (N).

In Karachi, around thirty Karachi-based organizations organized a grand rally from Karachi Press Club to Arts Council of Pakistan. Women members of Punjab Assembly and members of civil society lighting candles to celebrate International Women’s Day.

In Peshawar, Aurat Foundation, Peshawar office celebrated 8th March, in collaboration with other civil society organisations at Nishtar Hall by airing the Pashto music and Atan dance. Skits were presented on the theme of ‘Sexual Harassment’ and ‘HIV-AIDS’. Women also performed kite-flying on the occasion.

A view of the Islamabad rally on 8 March.

A view of the IHI event on 12 February at Islamabad.

A view of AF and OXFAM-GB event in Islamabad.

A view of the 100th International Women’s Day event held in Lahore.

Women members of Punjab Assembly and members of civil society lighting candles to celebrate International Women’s Day.

Women flying kites at Nishtar Park, Peshawar, to celebrate 100th International Women’s Day.