

**LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT  
ACTIVITIES AND  
WOMEN  
JOURNALISTS**

**wmc**

Women Media Centre

Pakistan

November 30, 2005  
Karachi



National Endowment for Democracy  
Washington D.C., U.S.A.

**wmc**



**WMC**

**Women Media Centre  
Pakistan**



**National Endowment for Democracy  
Washington DC, United States of America**

**SEMINAR  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
ACTIVITIES AND WOMEN  
JOURNALISTS**

**Regent Plaza Hotel, Karachi  
November 30, 2005**

Hosted by

**WMC**

**Women Media Centre  
Pakistan**

In co-operation with



**National Endowment for Democracy  
Washington DC, United States of America**

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## Acknowledgement

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## Preface

The media often help us count the missing Pakistani women on the political judicial, administrative and socio-economic scene, but rarely focus on missing women on the media landscape. The very absence of women journalists in corridors of powers and decision-making tables in the media industry paves the way for cosmetic representation of women on fashion and household pages. We feel that such coverage cannot surrogate for substantive feminine voice in the media.

This situation helps create the culture of silence and limit. This marginalization of women in Parliament by virtue of ordinance offers over, however, its potential has not been expelled.

In South Asia in general and Pakistan in particular, the women participation and representation in the field of mass communication is marginal. They are usually assigned soft-beats like culture, fashion, showbiz and city seminars. Unlike their male colleagues, deliberately discourage to report and writing issues like politics, defense, economic, finance etc.

Women in the news portrays as victims more than double the rate of men. In fact, all media practice gender biased. 83 per cent of experts quoted by World News Organization are male and 19 per cent of women in the news who are portrayed as victims. This phenomenon is more prominent in South Asia.

This resulted that vernacular press has never had any women in leading position. The elitist English press has a few examples.

This very sorrow state of affairs reveals that women voices enjoy very little say in popular vernacular press. There is no mechanism that involves and courageous women participation in challenging beats like democracy, current affairs, conflict resolution, good governance, and electoral process.

The objectives of the establishment of Women Media Centre of Pakistan aimed at creating favorable environment for elimination of the gender inequality. The Media Centre has done something significant in this regard. The Centre in collaboration

with National Endowment for Democracy, Washington D.C., USA organized a seminar on the "Local Government Activities and Women Journalists". We are publishing the report of the said seminar to add to the ongoing endeavors of the Centre is to create a conducive environment to increase the representation of women journalists in mass media.

**Fauzia Shaheen**  
Executive Director  
Women Media Centre - Pakistan

## Seminar Program

### Session I:

The opening session, titled "Advantages and Disadvantages of the Electoral System" conducted by Ms. Fauzia Shaheen, Executive Director of WMC.

Ms. Nasreen Jalil, Naib Nazim of City District Government Karachi, Tariq Hassan, former Naib Nazim, Mr. Muslim Pervaiz, former presiding officer of the City Council, members of the City Council Ms. Shamim Mumtaz Wasi, Ms. Yasmin Butt, Ms. Musfirah Jamal and Ms. Sarwat Arif, represented the City Government. Mr. Mahmood Sham, group editor of Jang group of newspapers, Mr. Nazir Leghari, editor daily Awam, Mr. Mohammad Khan Solangi, deputy editor of Awami Awaz, Ms. Humaira Athar (daily Express), Ms. Sofia Yazdani (daily Nawa-i-Waqt), Ms. Ghazala Fasih (Nawa-i-Waqt), Ms. Farhat Anis (The News), Ms. Gul Nasreen (Daily News), and Saba Noorullah (The News) represented local media.

In her welcome address, Ms. Fauzia Shaheen observed that in past, women representation in local bodies institutions had not been more than a ceremonial activity. However, President General Pervez Musharaff has given an effective representation to women in the District Government system. The one-third women representation has brought about a visible change in the incumbent local bodies

system.

"Though, the dark period is over, however we have not so far adequately exploited this remarkable women representation in the local bodies institutions. The political parties awarded party tickets to their



Naib City Nazima Nasreen Jalil addressing the seminar, Shamim Mumtaz Wasi and Fauzia Shaheen are also seen.

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Though, the dark period is over, however we have not so far adequately exploited this remarkable women representation in the local bodies institutions. The political parties awarded party tickets to their relatives instead of the committed and politically strong women workers on reserved seats. 99

of the committed and politically strong women workers on reserved seats".

This seminar is the part of our ongoing struggle aimed at creating an environment whereby the women can actually assert themselves. I am sure this seminar will create a much-needed coordination between the women councilors and the women journalists so that they could jointly work for elimination of gender bias.

Addressing the seminar, a member of the City Council, Ms. Shamim Wasi Mumtaz said that although, women had been given 33 per cent representation in the local bodies governments, however, nobody knew exactly about the purpose of that representation." We did not know how to perform our responsibilities", Ms. Shamim said enumerating another flaw in the system that no honorarium had been earmarked for women councilors.

"I had been the president of the women councilors' front in the City Government, and we had continuously been demanding of the government to induct women councilors in decision making. Despite all the barricades and non-conducive environment, some women councilors have done tremendous work in their respective constituencies. A woman councilor in Larkana, who although was illiterate, had got approved and undertaken various development projects to the tune of Rs. 10 million in her constituency. We are ashamed that we couldn't follow that example in a city like Karachi".

She was of the view that women have been inducted in the political process; however, they have not been given the required authority, which is a must in this regard. The authorities concerned did not pay attention towards our requests during last four years vis-à-vis allocation of development funds. She requested the electronic media to cooperate with the women councilors so that they can serve the people, especially the women population, without any hurdle.

Ms. Nasreen Jalil, the newly elected Naib Nazim of Karachi City District Government, possesses a long political experience. She had been a member of the Upper House in late 90s. She has also served as the deputy convener of the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), a major coalition partner in Sindh and the Center.

Addressing the seminar, Nasreen Jalil said that currently, there are 59 women councilors in the City Council, and it is an honor for her to be elected as the City Naib Nazim. Tracing the history of women's presence in the local bodies system, Nasreen Jalil said that after the creation of Pakistan, only one seat had been allocated for women in the first local government act. However, the successive governments had kept increasing the numbers of reserved seats, and in 1979, 10 per cent seats had been earmarked

for women in the local bodies system.

Now, the women representation is 33 per cent, which, I think, has strengthened the overall political process in the country. However, she observed, without giving powers in financial and education sectors, the dream of women empowerment could not be materialized.

The media can play a vital role in making the women understand these flaws and the way to tackle them, she further said, women must acquaint themselves about the latest developments in the field of technology.

Underlining the importance of women journalists, the City Naib Nazim thought that they can play an effective role in bringing the women equal to men in the society. Coordination among all sections of the society is an essential requisite for the formation of a sophisticated and positive environment.

She informed that following the allocation of 33 per cent women seats in local bodies governments, Pakistan had reached at 58th number in the Gender Empowerment Index as compared to its past position of 100 out of total 102 countries.

### Session III:

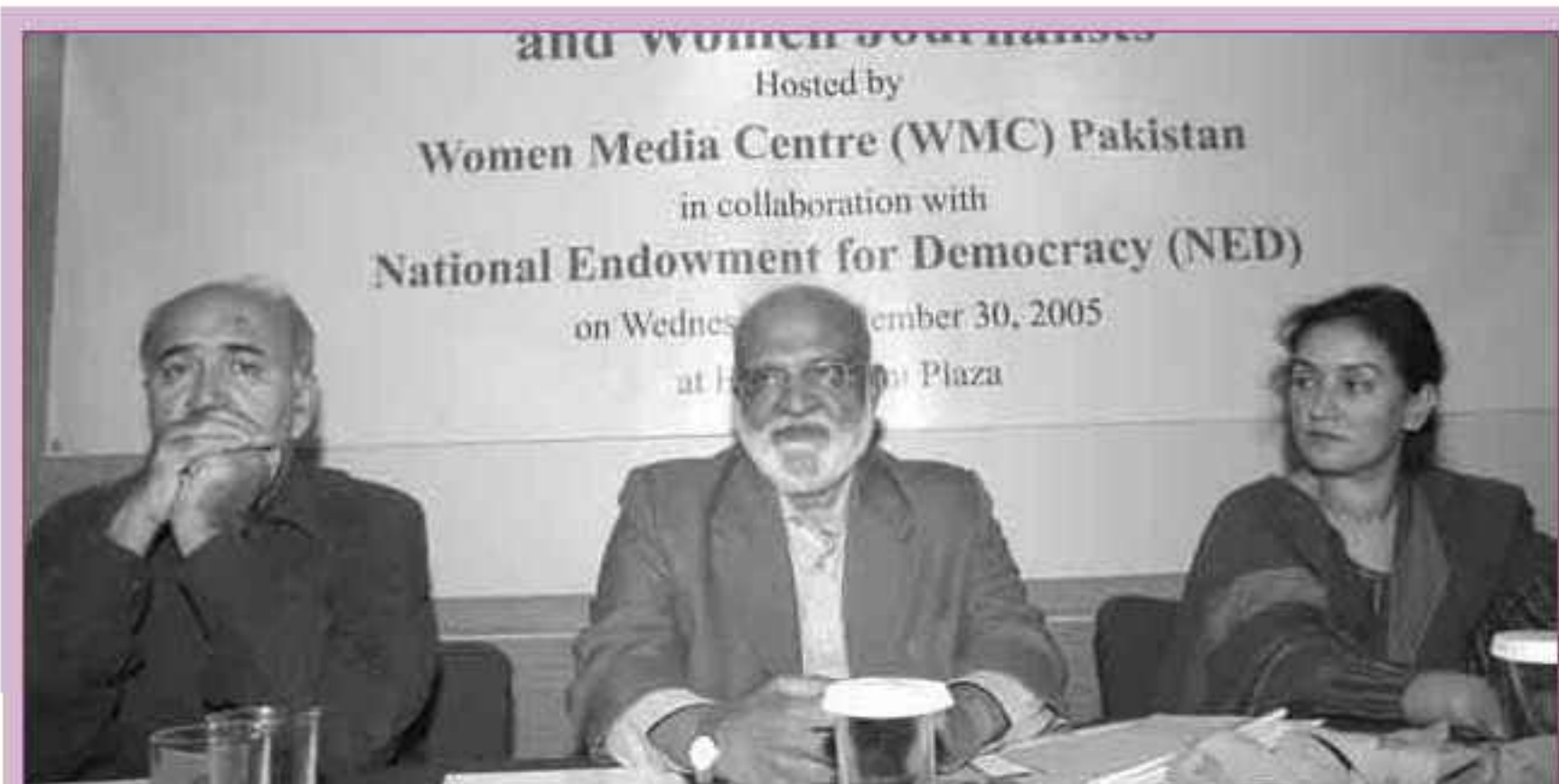
The topic of the session was "Women's Participation in the City Council Proceedings". Ms. Huma Baqai, associated with the International Relation Department of the



Former City Naib Nazim Tariq Hassan, Khursheed Haider of Daily Dawn, Musfirah Jamal, City Councilor, Humaira Athar of daily Express and Huma Baqai are sitting on stage.

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Until 1949, the women's representation in political process was merely 1.4 per cent. Later, it rose to 19.9 per cent. We appreciate the incumbent government's revolutionary step to allocate 33 per cent seats for women in the district government system.

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Women had been given 33 per cent representation in the local bodies governments, however, nobody knew exactly about the purpose of that representation.  
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Mahmood Sham, group editor of Jang Group of newspaper, Nazir Leghari of daily Awam and Fauzia Shaheen.

University of Karachi, was the moderator of the second session. Eulogizing the activities of the Women Media Center, Ms. Baqai said it is playing its due role in the struggle for a close coordination between media and the members of local governments.

She observed that media could not be kept away from the legislation process at any level. It is generally observed that the problems or issues highlighted by the media, become the part of the legislation and the policymaking. A close contact can be established between the media and the parliamentarians.

"Though, I would not dub Pakistan as graveyard of institutions, however I must say that our institutions are weak. Until 1949, the women's representation in political process was merely 1.4 per cent. Later, it rose to 19.9 per cent. We appreciate the incumbent government's revolutionary step to allocate 33 per cent seats for women in the district government system, which has promoted the country's image. Though, Pakistan till less behind countries like Nepal and Bhutan in Women Development Index, especially with regard to women maternal health and girls education, however, Pakistan has left even several developed countries behind in Gender Empowerment Index".

She observed that women councilors vigorously participate in the city council discussions, and the standard of their arguments is not bad, especially because the view comes from the grass root level.

Ms. Khursheed Haider works for English daily Dawn, and edits its weekly magazines "Images" and "Review". Participating in the discussion, she spoke about the lack of coordination

between the councilors and journalists.

Ms. Khursheed was of the opinion that women cannot come forward in the society no matter to which extent they are empowered because women are considered inferior in our society. "We have to introduce reforms from city council to the parliament for elimination of this gender bias.

"I have been a part of media since long, but the situation is not satisfactory here too. Women have to face different kind of difficulties in all working fields. Women have to remain tight-lipped at their respective working places. Therefore, I can easily figure out those women councilors have to face difficulties in playing their role in the city council. We have to root our various social ills, which have been obstructing the women to play their due role in formation of a healthy society. Women have to work under a constant harassment at working places. They can be silent very easily; therefore it is not big deal to gag their voice in City Council or any other institution."

"I being a part of a powerful media, feel myself weak. Now one does not has to be genius to figure out the environment for women in other institutions. We, the journalists, are struggling for others, while our own conditions are dark and pathetic. Women are forced to work more than men do but are paid lesser. We have to change the whole system to actually empower the women."

Mr. Tariq Hassan, the first former Naib Nazim of the City District Government Karachi, commenced with heaping praise on President General Pervez Musharaff for his revolutionary steps regarding women empowerment, which, according to Mr Hassan, should have been taken by the woman prime minister.

He said that for the first time in the history of Pakistan, women have been given 33 per cent representation in district governments, and 25 per cent representation in the parliament. Some women have also been elected as Nazim, Naib Nazim, and Councilor through direct election. Now, the situation is weird that on the one hand, they are getting their full share, and on the other hand, they are demanding for concessions.

"I gave full chance to the women councilors during my four-year stint to speak. At any topic, if two or three men councilors were given the mike to speak, a woman councilor had also been given the same time to speak. If men councilors had been appointed as chairpersons of different committees, a woman councilor had essentially been appointed as the chairperson of fourth committee. I had given due representation to women councilors as per their numbers in the city council.

Women are outnumbered on electronic media. They must come out of their cover, and help their colleagues representing the public.

We, the journalists, are struggling for others, while our own conditions are dark and pathetic. Women are forced to work more than men do but are paid lesser.

As far as the coverage is concerned, during last four years, not even a single woman journalist had come to me to ask about the problems faced by women councilors. Women should get themselves united. Women are outnumbered on electronic media. They must come out of their cover, and help their colleagues representing the public.

A large scope awaits women in all walks of life, including the District Governments, which was never before. Women should come forward with a positive approach. I request the women journalists to come forward and get the media free from the possession of men. Women journalists should form their team. I had appointed a female public relations officer during my time, however, no woman journalist had every contacted her. I suggest that there should a countrywide platform to get women belonging to all walks of life united.

Ms. Musfirah Jamal belongs to Al-Khidmat group in the City Council. Sharing her experience, Ms. Musfirah said she belongs to Jammat-e-Islami, and since she joined JI, she experienced a revolution in her life. Since then, she has never witnessed an environment where she can be harassed or disturbed.

She said when she entered the arena of public representation as a woman councilor, she found everything deteriorated. We had to face the bureaucracy. The District Government system introduced by General Musharraf lacked vision. Thousands of women were left languishing on the roundabouts. Scores of workshops and training programs had been organized in five-star hotels to coax the women, but I must say that it was not more than a mirage.

Dar-ul-Aman have been converted into Dar-ul-Azab (place of torment). Women are not protected in our society. We already have a strong base of a close society, but we instead of underpinning it, are engaged in destroying it.

changed. If the present ruling party in the City Government destroys the development projects undertaken by the former City Government, then the conditions will be deteriorated further.

Ms. Humaira Athar, one of very few senior women journalists, has been working in this field for 30 years. During her career, she has not merely covered typical women related topics, but has also explored her interest in political, social economic and others subjects.

Addressing the seminar, Ms. Humaira thought that women are not being given due credit and importance in line with their capabilities and achievements. I personally think that the media and the bureaucracy must patronize and encourage women. Similarly, women should also show their presence wherever they

work, including the city council. They should voice for public problems. I believe that there is an ideological gulf between women and men councilors. It seems if men councilors lack tolerance. They are not even ready to pay attention towards the suggestions made by women councilors during the city council sessions. Women councilors often complain that if being members of City Council's Monitoring Committees, they visit a school or a hospital, the male staff there does not cooperate with them.

Despite all these barricades, and social restrictions, our women councilors are doing a tremendous job, but this excellent job is not being recognized by the society. Women councilors must keep in touch with the media and the media should also encourage them by covering their activities.

Women councilors should also know how to prepare daily press releases containing details of their routine activities, and send them to the journalists at their offices.

Women councilors must prioritize their development activities; they should know how to get funds approved for them. I would like to repeat here that women councilors must raise their

voice in the City Council irrespective of the fact how much importance will be given to them. They should aim at being heard and seen.

### Session III:

Women councilors being members or chairperson of different subject committees of the City Government are also playing an important role. The third session of the seminar was fixed to deliberate over the role of women councilors in improving the performance of different civic organizations.

Mr. Nazir Leghari, editor of daily Awam, was the moderator of the third session. Speaking on the occasion, Mr Leghari said that in order to improve the efficiency of the civic organizations, it is essential that the public representatives, who are answerable to the people, monitor them. The members of the Monitoring Committees can keep

“Women councilors played an effective role in preparation of successive budgets during last four years.”



Muslim Pervaiz, former presiding officer of the City Government, Mohammad Khan Solangi of Awami Awaz and Yasin Butt.

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Participants attending the seminar on Local Government Activities and Women Journalists.

vigil on the performance and efficiency of the civic bodies falling under the City Government. This also helps create a democratic atmosphere within the ranks of bureaucracy. Moreover, if a woman is the chairperson of a Monitoring Committee, I believe its performance will be much better. In my personal opinion, the Monitoring Committees dealing with health, education social welfare and sports should be chaired by women councilors.

Mr. Muslim Pervaiz had been the presiding officer of the first City Council. He presided over a number of city council session during his four-year stint. He belongs to Al-Khidmat group of Jammata-e-Islami.

Sharing his views, Mr. Muslim Pervaiz said that finances play the most important role in running a government. If a good budget is presented, then the governments are also bound to work in line with it. Women councilors played an effective role in preparation of successive budgets during last four years. Our City Councils had approved various development projects including Women University, women sports complex, women library, and women hostel. All these projects were aimed at the women welfare.

The former City Council had held frequent discussions over issues relating to women. We had adopted resolutions against Karo Kari, Basant, Valentine Day and other issues. The council had also held discussions and prepared recommendations on various local and international issues in order to attract the attention of the provincial and the federal government. The women councilors had vehemently participated in those discussions.

We had set up three monitoring committees for education

sector, which presented detailed reports on that in the council. Women councilors had helped a lot in legislation. Whenever, we had had a quorum problem, women councilors saved the quorum. Another good thing about women councilors is that they had always come with full preparation to discuss any subject. They had contributed equally in struggle for the rights of downtrodden people. Our women councilors had represented us outside the city too. I agree with the suggestion that various monitoring committees of the council should be chaired by women councilors, as it will yield lucrative results.

Ms. Yasmeen Butt belongs to PPP-backed Awam Dost group in the City Council. She complained that women are not given due representation in the Monitoring Committees. We are passing through the initial stage of the new local bodies system that is why we have been facing various problems. We had not been given equal opportunities to explain our point of view on different issues in City Council sessions. Women councilors did not have powers, even proper offices.

In line with the City Council, the media too does not give us proper coverage. We want that equal coverage should be given to women in print and electronic media.

Mr. Mohammed Khan Solangi is the deputy editor of a Sindhi daily Awami Awaz. In his speech, he presented the background of the District Governments. He maintained that our

society is passing through the initial experiences of the district government system.

It is ironic that when popular democratic political parties come into power, the powerful state machinery prevents them from holding local bodies' polls. The women representation in the City Government's different committees is weak. I will say that not only women but also men are obstructed from monitoring the performance of different civic agencies. I suggest here that women councilors, doctors, teachers and

“Women are acceptable in magazine department, but they have not so far been provided opportunities to show their talent in hard-core journalism is still not considered there forte. This should be changed.”

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others set up a center in order to channelize their activities in different walks of life. I am sure it will improve their performance.

### Session IV:

The session on “How to Improve Reporting and Coverage of Women Activities?” was chaired by Mr Mahmood Sham of Jang Group of Newspapers. Mr. Sham is one of the senior most journalist in Pakistan. He has been working in this profession for last 50 years. Dwelling upon the subject, Mr. Sham said that Union Councils, Town, and District Governments are the basic institutions of democracy. If councilors and nazims perform their duties efficiently, then the foundation of democracy will automatically be strengthened. If we have a civic problem, we should contact our councilor. This will increase coordination between the public and their representative. If the problem is not resolved at this level, then we may contact at other levels.

However, women representation in different fields, the longstanding problems being faced by them are yet to be resolved. There is no improvement in working conditions for them too. It is true that women representation in provincial and national assemblies, and senate have also been increased, but the overall atmosphere for them has not changed much. Women representation in journalism is very limited. Women are acceptable in magazine department, but they have not so far been provided opportunities to show their talent in hard-core journalism is still not considered there forte. This should be changed.

I have written various times that in a society where we live, general people do not get their due rights. If general people get their rights, the women will automatically get the same. My personal opinion is that there is no difference between male and female journalists. Women are working with men side by side. Earlier, women were restricted to magazines only, but now they are working in newspapers and TV channel. Since 1960, there had been no female journalist in Pakistan. Mussarat Jabeen was the first woman journalist who started her career from Punjab. Then appeared Akhbar-e-Jahan, whose staff consisted of women in majority. In 60s, Saadia Afzal, Rana Farooqi, and Sultana Mehar had entered the journalism field.

Women journalists have a problem that they avoid translation. Secondly, they keep away from research. There are a few newspapers where proper research departments are operating.

The practical problem of women journalists is that they cannot stay away from their homes after sunset. Night news desk is the most important department of a newspaper. Because of the above-mentioned problem, women usually avoid joining the reporting side. From social

point of view, a few families permit their women to work. Sometimes, the neighbors also raise different kind of objections against working women.

However, women have found their place in TV channels. I think, the atmosphere in newspapers too will also be improved, and women will get equal opportunities there to work.

## Recommendations

The recommendations came out from groups are as below:

- Women councilors and journalists should have a concrete coordination.
- There should be a communication map to be followed between the women councilors and women journalist.
- Women councilors should highlight their activities through media.
- All local government activities should be published irrespectively.
- Different seminars be held for women councilors and journalists with practical dimensions.
- Such seminars and workshops be organized regularly which can help women journalists and councilors devise working strategies for them.
- Women councilors should also remain in touch with their male colleagues and learn from their experiences.
- Women councilors should invite female journalists to their respective constituencies to apprise them about local problems.
- Media should cooperate with women councilors in respect of the coverage of their activities and problems faced by their respective constituencies.
- A public relations center should be set up in order to strengthen coordination between women councilors and women journalists.

“Women journalists have a problem that they avoid translation. Secondly, they keep away from research. There are a few newspapers where proper research departments are operating.”

## Conclusion:

During this seminar organized by Women Media Centre of Pakistan, women councilors and journalists for the first time had a chance to interact freely. It was also the first time in Karachi when female journalists and students of the mass communication department, University of Karachi gathered at one place. Women councilors and women journalists had an opportunity to deliberate over different social and political issues and devise ways to overcome them. Although, it was the first seminar of its kind, it is a positive beginning in this regard. We believe the activities of the center will provide new dimensions to think and act on different issues.

## About WMC

The Women Media Center (WMC) is a non-profit organization and its core function is to carry out research, training and education of media women. The WMC is a unique body in its conception and functions. Diverse factors contributed to establish such body primarily due to feeble democratic structure in Pakistan and insignificant number of women in mainstream media. Another objective of the WMC is to promote new and creative ways of thinking among the Pakistani women so that their valuable suggestions may be included in the country polices.

The WMC is currently involved in organizing projects, which will promote women journalists to work in an enabling professional environment with major media organizations and work for strengthening democracy and other vital societal issues.

The Women Media Centre's mission is four-dimensional: Firstly, we aim to provide professional environment to women journalist. Secondly, we want to raise awareness of democratic and civic issues from the perspective of Pakistani women journalist.

Thirdly, we endeavor to increase women's participation in the mainstream media through training, research and education. In addition, final mission of WMC is to address the entry barriers confronted by women journalist and maintain liaison with media industry to facilitate against women journalist.

## About



The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is a private, nonprofit organization created in 1983 to strengthen democratic institutions around the world through nongovernmental efforts. The Endowment is governed by an independent, nonpartisan board of directors. With its annual congressional appropriation, it makes hundreds of grants each year to support prodemocracy groups in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union.

The Endowment is guided by the belief that freedom is a universal human aspiration that can be realized through the development of democratic institutions, procedures, and values. Democracy cannot be achieved through a single election and need not be based upon the model of the United States or any other particular country. Rather, it evolves according to the needs and traditions of diverse political cultures.

**Daily QAUMI AKHBAR Karachi**  
 ایڈیٹر الیاس شاہ  
**قومی اخبار**  
 روزنامہ  
 جلد نمبر 18 نمبر 18 مئی 1998ء

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**DAILY EXPRESS**  
 روزنامہ

**THE DAILY JANG KARACHI**  
**جنگ**  
 روزنامہ  
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**YPUSLT**  
 The female equation in governance

**Women enjoy 33% representation in CDGK**  
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**Daily Khabrain**  
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 نمبر 14

**THE NEWS**  
 Friday, December 2, 2005

**The Nation**  
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 خواتین کو مالیاتی اختیارات بھی حاصل ہونے چاہئیں، بسرن پبلش

**عوام**  
 روزنامہ  
**Daily Awam Karachi**

MOM Nasreen Jali addressing a seminar on 'Local Government Activities and Women Journalists', organized by Women Media Centre in collaboration with National Endowment for Democracy at a local hotel here on Wednesday - Staff photo.

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