

25% Representation and
Legislation for Women in
the Parliament



WOMEN MEDIA
CENTER PAKISTAN

WMC

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CHQ

Gender Equality in Media

Seminar

25% Representation and Legislation for Women in the Parliament

**Marriott Hotel Karachi
28 February 2006**

Organized by:

Women Media Center—Pakistan

and

National Endowment for Democracy, USA

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Preface

There has been a significant increase in women representation in Pakistani legislative bodies and public representation. A significant number of seats have been allocated for women in the National Assembly, the four provincial assemblies and district, taluka, town and union council levels. Women can also contest and get elected on general seats. The issue of low women representation has been addressed in this way. There is still a question mark on whether this increased representation has been effective for the women empowerment in legislative bodies, decision making and governance or not.

In Pakistan it has never been considered important to examine the economic, personal, social and political needs of women. Islam has empowered women to take decisions about marriage but in the Pakistani feudal and tribal system, no one asks women of their choice at the time of their marriage. The marriage contract also gives women numerous rights but they remain denied of those rights.

In the Pakistani society, a woman has never been free, empowered, emancipated and socially, politically and economically liberated. The Islamic laws regarding inheritance are never followed and a woman, normally left deprived of her rightful share in the inheritance. It is common practice in feudal families not to get women married due to the fear that the inheritance would be divided. Mismatch marriages are arranged to protect inheritance and women are even wedded to mental, semi-mental, illiterate men. If an educated feudal marries a girl from his own family then it is also necessary for him to marry an educated girl to be able to move in social circles.

Hadood ordinance were introduced during General Zia's regime ignoring all other laws and norms of the country and society. Religion was also violated while making these laws. In this ordinance, rape is considered analogous to sex with consent and a woman victim of rape has to prove that she was raped. A blind woman of Rahim Yar Khan, a rape victim was accused of having sex with consent and she was openly lashed 80 times as punishment.

Women Media Center held a seminar on the topic of legislations for women and increased representation in the Parliament and Assemblies on 28th February 2006 in Karachi. Fundamental questions were raised and discussed regarding legislation for women. We hope that the report of this seminar would open the doors on these basic and vital questions in our society. We also hope that this report would provide assistance for the women representatives in the legislative bodies and most of all would provide food for thought to the women journalists.

Fauzia Shaheen

Executive Director

Women Media Centre - Pakistan

"Women are not given opportunity to speak on the floor of the house. If, the Speaker of the Assembly totally refuses to accept and acknowledge women then women cannot play any effective part in legislation process. Women do not have the assistance of legislative branch for preparing a bill and it takes months to prepare a bill".

Ms. Sherry Rehman
Member National Assembly



Fauzia Shaheen, Sherry Rehman and Nuzhat Shireen

First Session

The seminar organized by WMC in collaboration with National Endowment for Democracy, USA on the topic of “25% representation and legislation for women in the parliament”, began at ten in the morning. A total of 58 women participated in this seminar including Provincial Minister for Women Affairs, Dr. Saeeda Malik, Sindh Ombudsman, Yousuf Jamal, members of National Assembly, Sherry Rehman, Fauzia Wahab and Nabeel Gabol and member of the Sindh Assembly, Kalsoom Nizamani, Farhina Ambreen and Nuzhat Shireen of Aurat Foundation. Introduction of the participants and registration was conducted at the beginning of the seminar.

Introducing the topic the Executive Director of WMC, Ms. Fauzia Shaheen said that the Pakistani urban and rural women are faced with numerous problems. In the rural society, a woman performs household responsibilities while working in the fields as well. A woman is also responsible for feeding the animals. She does all these jobs without any compensation. Women of lower middle and middle class are also forced to live in miserable conditions.

So far the increased representation of women in legislative bodies has not been able to bring any changes, although, it seems that we are on the right track. There are still many hurdles in achieving women emancipation. Access to quality education can help us to achieve this goal. We are not trying to resolve issues rather raising those issues which need to be addressed and would be solved one day.

Sherry Rehman member National assembly comes from a highly educated family. Her father, Hassan Ali Abdul Rehman was the Vice Chancellor of Sindh University and her uncle, Mr. Justice Tufail Ali Abdul Rehman was the first Chief Justice of Sindh Balochistan High Court. Sherry Rehman is not only a politician but is a veteran journalist who has laid the foundation for several values in journalism.

Welcoming the increased number of women representation in legislative and decision-making bodies, Sherry Rehman said that the preparation of document for legislation is a very difficult and energy consuming task. She said, “In Pakistan it is very difficult for women to raise their issues. Women are not given opportunity to speak on the floor of the house. If, the Speaker of the Assembly totally refuses to accept and acknowledge women then women cannot play any effective part in legislation process.” According to her, she has presented the bill in the National Assembly to repeal Haddood Ordinance but this cannot go through without the help of this government, which claims to be enlightened and moderate. Affirmative Action for Women bill has also been presented for economic freedom of women. This bill demands at least 10% quota for women in employment opportunities and jobs security. She said that women do not have the assistance of legislative branch for preparing a bill and it takes months to prepare a bill.

She said that with the partnership of Aurat Foundation and the civil society, a bill was drafted against the “honour killing” but the government supported this bill only after amendments in the bill. This amendment deals with the money given to the relatives of the victim as compensation and pardoning the culprit. This means that the problem of karokari has not yet been solved. She said that the Haddood Ordinance and the law considering women witness as half do not go with the demands of 21st century and these should be repealed.

She said that she is head of the Central Policy Planning of her party and there

are many opportunities for women in her party. If, all other political parties also extend similar treatment to women, all hurdles in the way of women emancipation would be removed, she hoped.

The Project Director of Aurat Foundation, Nuzhat Shireen was the next speaker. She said that for the very first time, such a large number of women have been in the Parliament and they are working hard. She said that legislation is a complex process and women cannot amend and change laws immediately. She said that women were always raising their voice and if only one woman is in the Parliament, she would raise voice for her rights. She said that the environment in the country is against women but the civil society organizations are helping the women parliamentarians. She said that Aurat Foundation is assessing the proceedings of National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies since 1998. We look out for the problems faced by the women and we have seen that there is less space for women. We have also observed that the bills regarding women are not taken up in the agenda. She thinks that women can achieve their goal with the help of education and resources. "Our women attend the Sessions regularly and take part in the discussion even then they face criticism from men folk", she concluded.

"The environment in the country is against women but the civil society organizations are helping the women parliamentarians".

Ms. Nuzhat Shireen
Project Director, Aurat Foundation



(From L to R) Sindh Ombudsman Khan Yousuf Jamal, Nabil Gabol, MNA Fauzia Wahab, Minister for women Development Saeeda Malik, MPA Farheena Ambreen (Muttaheda), Kulsoom Nizamani (MMA) and Fauzia Shaheen.

Second Session

The speakers for the second session were the members of Parliament, Provincial Assembly and the minister for Women Affairs. The first speaker was Kalsoom Nizamani, MPA from Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). In her speech, she said that in the MMA, women are given equal status and the men members of the parliament fully cooperate with the women members and they also acknowledge that women are playing far more active role than their male counterpart. She said that she is the only woman MPA of MMA in Sindh Assembly and enjoys full support of her party. She said that in Islam, a man is responsible for providing to the family. She said that it is not important for women to be economically liberated. Islam has very expressively said that a father is responsible for daughter and husband is responsible for wife. "I am against putting all responsibility on the women shoulders rather I want that men should help women in raising children and in other household jobs" she said.

She said that a lot is being said against Haddood Ordinance and Karokari. She thinks that Pakistani laws are flawless but there are problems in their implementation. She said that the law against Karokari has been passed but Karokari could not be eliminated in Pakistani society.

The next speaker was the former Deputy Speaker of Sindh Assembly and currently an MNA, Mr. Nabeel Gabol. He said that he is a tribal leader and is of the view that all the defects in the society are because of lack of education. He said that if the leader of a tribe, the leader of a political party or head of a family is illiterate then the nation couldn't be raised properly. He claimed that he has eliminated Karokari in his tribe and if someone kills in the name of honor, his tribe suggests punishment for that person. He said that women in villages are forced to live like animals and society has never allowed women to take part in decision-making process. He said that he has introduced a system in his tribes that whenever there is a problem, a woman is also called to decide on the issue. He said that in the previous elections, it was made compulsory for a candidate to be a graduate to contest the elections. Several known politicians who were not graduates asked their wives to contest the elections so that they could continue the control of their constituencies. These were the people who always kept their wives and other family women behind walls but were forced to bring them out to take part in politics. There are twelve women members in the assembly who were sent to the assemblies by their male counterparts, he said.

Member National Assembly and the Chief Coordinator of Human Rights Committee, Pakistan Peoples Party, Ms. Fauzia Wahab, in her speech said that the women social workers should reach young women so that we can promote educated women in politics and bring about changes in our political landscape. She said that intelligent and educated are normally kept away from the Parliament because of difficulties faced by the women in parliamentary politics. The people who are directly elected have the pressure of their constituents thus they do not have time for taking part in legislation process. We need to send quality people to the Parliament. She said that it is a normal trend that educated women shy away from politics. In our society, educated men do not enter in politics as well. It is impossible to achieve dynamic culture and strong economy without politics thus; we need to make our politics vibrant. She said that political institutions play a very vital role to change a developing country into a developed country.

Farhina Ambreen, MPA said that exploitation of women begins at home as we prefer to educate our boys and not girls. We advise our girls to put up with all kind of excesses but remain loyal to the family of her husbands'. Boys are never told to take care of their wives. She said that only the increased number of women parliamentarians is not enough for meaningful legislation. The women resolutions are taken up in the agenda but to get it through women need the help of men members. This is the reason the increase of numbers should be on key positions in the assemblies and government jobs. Women are good timekeepers and as far as encouragement for women in the political parties is concerned, in MQM women are treated equally. She said that there are two women in the Rabita Committee of the party and the Deputy Nazim of Karachi is also a woman.

Provincial Minister for Women Affairs, Dr. Saeeda Malik addressing the seminar raised several important issues. She said that there is no cross party network of women in this age of powerful media and men are taking advantage of this situation. This is a men-controlled society and women feel themselves unsafe in rural and urban areas. There are still several hurdles for women to enter in politics because there are still prejudices against women within the political parties. The women can only be emancipated when there is democracy in the country and women are treated equally and are enabled to express their views. Men control women in political parties and several women in the assemblies wait for the instructions from men for guidance. "I achieved this position after 35 years of political struggle. I have done as much as I could for the welfare for women. I have been successful to pass resolutions against domestic violence with the help of the opposition and friends," she said. She informed the participants that women would soon hear the good news that the Haddood Ordinance has been repealed. She said that it is not enough to make a law but the difficult stage is its implementation. Public help is needed for implementation of laws. She said that no development is possible without education. "Education teaches a mother to stand up for the equal rights for her son and daughter and only then the father, who want more rights for the son, surrenders" she said.

"As long as, a woman is not strengthened economically, she would not be able to participate in political process effectively. We have taken practical measures in this regard. We have started a project by the name of "Sales and Display Center" through which the goods made by rural women are brought to the market and sold in the weekly bazaars. We have also established a governing body, which through District Resource Committee selects few goods from different districts. We display these goods in the Expo centers, introducing them in the international market. We have encouraged and promoted the direct relations between producer and buyer. In the history of Pakistan, we have established the very first daycare center for children. We also started a training program for women to look after children especially girls. This is a three months course and students are given stipend of Rs. 1000 per month and hostel facilities are also provided to the students.

In the end of the seminar, Sindh Ombudsman, Mr. Yousuf Jamal was invited to speak to the participants. He has served as a civil servant for a long time and has been federal and provincial secretary in different ministries. In his address, he said that it is necessary that the women parliamentarians spend time in their constituencies and to raise constituents' voice in the assemblies. He said that our political parties

should hold open forums to solve peoples' problems. He said that he has done several work for women during his service. Recently, he has opened a new office in Larkana and appointed a woman in that office. He said that soon three Regional Offices of Ombudsman will be opened in interior Sindh and he would like to appoint women on key positions in those offices. He said that he is a great supporter of women empowerment. He said that the issues of child labor, street children and trade of children are related with the welfare of women.

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Dr. Saeeda Malik
Sindh Provincial Minister for Women Development



Participants of the seminar.

Recommend

A question answer session was held after the speeches. Many issues were raised which are being included in these recommendations. Following are the recommendations:

- Women members of National and Provincial Assemblies should work for and participate in workshops, seminars, conferences, conventions and other activities regarding women issues irrespective of their political affiliations. They should also prepare recommendations for legislation on these issues.
- Members of Parliament should raise effective voices against Haddood Ordinance because it is against women. The police and other state apparatus are blackmailing women using this law.
- The marriage of women with Holy Quran should be regarded as a punishable crime and whoever is involved should be arrested.
- Trading of women should be termed as crime and strong punishments should be given to the culprits of such crime.
- Any incident of Karokari should be termed as murder by intent and complaint should be filed by the state and there should be no provision of pardoning the culprits in such cases because usually a brother, a husband, a father or a son kills the women and afterwards an FIR is registered. During the court proceedings, the culprit is let free.
- Education up to Matric should be made compulsory for women.
- A law should be passed for compensation to rural and urban women for their household work.
- Separate police stations should be established at every level and women should not be kept in men police stations. The lock-up for women should be separate to the lock-up for men.

Conclusion:

The WMC by holding a seminar has addressed the issue of legislation on women issues. The seminar provided an opportunity to members of parliament and provincial assemblies, senior women journalists and girl students of information technology departments of different universities to meet one another and discuss different aspects of women issues. They deliberated on different legislations and had an opportunity to discuss them in detail and present their own point of view.

"So far the increased representation of women in legislative bodies has not been able to bring any changes although it seems that we are on the right track. There are still many hurdles in achieving women emancipation. Access to quality education can help us to achieve this goal".

Ms. Fauzia Shaheen
Project Director, WMC

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Women Media Centre of Pakistan

Introduction

Women Media Center-Pakistan

Women Media Center (WMC) is a nonprofit organization working to provide research and training facilities to the women in media.

It is an exceptional organization with respect to its ideology and working. It realizes the feeble nature of Pakistani democratic structure and limited women representation in the media. WMC is working to promote creativeness in ideas amongst women so that their recommendations can become a part of policies of the country.

WMC is currently working on several projects which if implemented can enable women journalist to work in a professional environment so that not only democracy could be strengthened but also focus could be directed towards other critical social issues.

WMC has begun working in the largest Pakistani city Karachi. We wish to reach not only other parts of Pakistan but also to extend our efforts to South Asia.

National Endowment for Democracy, USA

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.

KARACHI



Sherry Rehman addressing a seminar, 'Legislation in the Parliament for Women', held by the Women Media Centre in collaboration with National Endowment for Democracy.

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Seminar calls for change in mindset in society

By Sherry Rehman
 The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) has organized a seminar on '75% Representation in the Parliament for Women' at the Marriott Hotel, Karachi, on Saturday, March 4, 2006. The seminar was held in collaboration with the Women Media Centre of Pakistan. The seminar was attended by a number of women and men from various fields. The seminar was held in a well-attended session. The seminar was held in a well-attended session. The seminar was held in a well-attended session.



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Sherry Rehman addressing a seminar, '75% Representation in the Parliament for Women', held by the Women Media Centre in collaboration with National Endowment for Democracy.

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Daily Awam Karachi



Women MPs' unity urged to change feudal mindset

Women Members of Parliament (MPs) are urged to work together to change the feudal mindset in society. The Women Media Centre of Pakistan, in collaboration with the National Endowment for Democracy, USA, has organized a seminar on '75% Representation in the Parliament for Women' at the Marriott Hotel, Karachi, on Saturday, March 4, 2006. The seminar was held in a well-attended session. The seminar was held in a well-attended session. The seminar was held in a well-attended session.

