



Saute-e-Niswan

The Voice of Women

National Commission on the Status of Women

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EDITORIAL

This newsletter marks the conclusion of the three year tenure, from March 2009 to March 2012, of the 4th National Commission on the Status of Women. Much has happened during these three years and there have been many ups and downs along the way, but on the whole, I think we can look back with some satisfaction at what has been achieved. From the time that the Commission assumed office, and indeed from the time that the present government came to power, the country was beset by political turmoil and uncertainty. But throughout this period the Government remained committed to women's rights and several steps were taken to ameliorate the lot of women. With the recognition that women constitute the poorest of the poor, the Benazir Income Support Program, which provides a monthly stipend and micro credit to poor women, education and health support for their families and life insurance for the main earning member of the household, was initiated, and land was distributed to peasant women.

The Parliament led by the Pakistan Peoples Party, and with the Women's Parliamentary Caucus in the forefront, proved itself to be the most women-friendly parliament in the history of the country. No less than six bills to address violence against women and protect their rights were passed between 2010 and 2012, the last being the National Commission on the Status of Women Act 2012 giving financial and administrative autonomy to the Commission. As soon as the outgoing Commission was notified the issue of autonomy was taken up by us and, despite constant

hurdles and challenges, was vigorously pursued until the Bill granting autonomy was finally passed in January 2012. Activists in the women's movement had struggled long and hard for this independence because it was felt that only an autonomous women's commission could adequately meet its role as an effective monitoring body. It is gratifying that this long sought after goal was achieved during our tenure.



During the three years that the Commission held office numerous activities were initiated, notable among them being the establishment of a Resource Centre, the drafting and submission of several laws and action oriented research studies. The problems of women victims of natural disasters were addressed, cases of women victims of violence were taken up and constant interaction with

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government, parliamentarians and civil society was maintained. Perhaps most important of all, four committees were formed to streamline activities in different areas of work. These were the Executive Committee, the Law Committee, the Research Committee and the Implementation Watch Committee. Experts from outside the Commission were co-opted onto the three last mentioned committees.

But much work still remains to be done. For example, after devolution, coordination with provincial systems will need to be strengthened, and now that NCSW has also been given the responsibility to

function as a court of enquiry, decisions will have to be made and procedures established on how best to make this effective. The worry now is that almost three months after our tenure has ended the new Commission has not been appointed. This unnecessary interval has served to slow down the momentum that was built by three years of sustained hard work. It needs to be emphasized that the NCSW serves the women of the entire country and endeavors to attain their rights in accordance with international commitments. Its appointment should not fall victim to political differences or bureaucratic maneuverings.

NCSW GAINS AUTONOMY

The NCSW autonomy bill was passed unanimously by the National Assembly on January 19, 2012. The Bill was tabled by Advisor to the Prime Minister, Mr. Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, while amendments were moved jointly by both treasury and opposition benches, represented by Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Ms Nafeesa Shah and Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) leader Mr. Zahid Hamid. On this historic occasion the Chairperson NCSW Ms Anis Haroon, members and staff thanked all stakeholders, the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, parliamentarians, supporters and well wishers who worked for the passage of the Bill. The Commission especially acknowledged and paid tribute to women parliamentarians under the dynamic leadership of the Honorable Speaker, Dr. Fahmida Mirza, for steering the Bill with determination and persistence through many difficulties and obstacles, and successfully enacting this long awaited legislation. The Commission also thanked all political parties for their support.

The passage of the NCSW Bill was welcomed by civil society as a milestone and a significant addition to the country's growing body of pro-women legislation achieved with the

support of the Government after a long and arduous journey by the



women's movement and human rights activists.

After two weeks, the Bill was unanimously approved by the Senate and signed by President Mr. Asif Ali Zardari in the presence of women parliamentarians, Ms Anis Haroon and other members of the NCSW on Women's International Day, 8th March 2012. After the brief signing ceremony at the Presidency, the President made a short speech reminding participants that working for the rights of women had always been an important part of the history of the struggle of the Pakistan Peoples Party, and reiterated the resolve of the PPP to continue working for the cause of women. He said that it was a matter of great pleasure and satisfaction for him to note that following in the footsteps of

Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtrama Benazir Bhutto, the present Government has achieved many important milestones to empower the women of the country.

The fundamental functions of the Commission will be to examine policies, programmes and other measures initiated by the government for women's uplift and gender equality. It will assess implementation and make suitable recommendations considered necessary to the authorities concerned. The Commission will also review all laws, rules and regulations affecting the status and rights of women, and suggest repeal, amendment or new legislation in order to achieve gender equality before the law in accordance with the country's Constitution and obligations under international covenants. The Commission, with the prior permission of the provincial government concerned, has been authorized to inspect any jail, sub-jail or other place where women are kept in custody.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE QUARTER

COMMEMORATION OF NATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

It was on February 12, 1983, with Section 144 in place, when the Forum and Women's Action Forum women, public demonstration on and Lahore High Court against the martial law that sought to reduce the value of the evidence given by a woman to half that of a man.



on a call given by Women's Action Forum the Punjab Lawyers Association defying the ban on demonstrations, collected the Lahore Mall and marched to the Court to protest the Law of Evidence to reduce the evidence given by half that of a man.

The protest was the first public demonstration by any group against the martial law. The protest also marked the first time in the history of Pakistan that police used tear gas and batons on women, injuring many and arresting nearly 50. This event shocked the nation, galvanized the women's movement and served to catapult women's rights on to the national agenda.



The 12th of February is commemorated each year as National Women's Day by women's rights and human rights activists, but since 2010 it has also been celebrated by the Government. The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) in collaboration with the Human Rights Ministry organised an event at the National Insurance Company Auditorium in Islamabad on Friday 11th February 2012.



The gathering was attended by parliamentarians, government functionaries, prominent human rights and women's rights activists and members of civil society. Speaking on the occasion, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Human Rights, Mr. Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, highlighted the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and reminded participants that Pakistan was one of the first coun-



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The chief guest, Goodwill Ambassador for Women's Empowerment Ms Fiza Gillani spoke about Benazir Bhutto's vision for women's empowerment, and said that it had served as the inspiration for parliament to enact pro-women legislation. A short documentary was screened showcasing the key roles of women in the country and the events of the 12th February 1983.

NCSW Chairperson Ms Anis Haroon distributed bouquets as a token of appreciation to women parliamentarians who had been in the forefront of the struggle to enact six women's rights bills in as many months. Amongst the recipients were: PPP

MNA and Special Adviser to the Prime Minister for the Social Sector Ms Shehnaz Wazir Ali, ANP MNA Ms Bushra Gohar, MQM MNA Ms Kishwar Zehra, and PML-Q Senator Ms Nilofar Bakhtiar. To finish on a lively note, musician Mr. Arieb Azhar came on stage to perform a few

songs, including Habib Jalib's poem which the poet had written for the historic 12th February protest.



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE QUARTER

LAUNCHING OF ANNUAL REPORTS OF NFCSW

NCSW's report for 2010-2012 was launched at a local hotel in Islama-

National Commission on the Status of Women Act 2012. She paid tribute to the

National Commission and we expect the same support from CSOs in future to promote and protect gender equality and women's empowerment. Working independently, the Commission will continue to play its role as a bridge between government and civil society, she said.



Participants at the launch called upon the government to constitute the new National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) without any further delay so that there should be no gap between the expiry of the present members' term and the appointment of the new members.

Ms. Anis Haroon invited NCSW member from Balochistan Justice (Retd.) Kailash Nath Kohli to formally launch NCSW's Annual Report. In his brief remarks Justice Kohli suggested that the Commission should be made part of the Constitution of the country so that no government could change its status. Justice Kohli stressed that implementa-

bad. The function was largely attended by women rights activists, civil society representatives and officials of donor agencies. Ms. Tahira Noor formally welcomed the audience and invited Ms Nasreen Azhar to present a brief account of challenges faced and achievements made during the three year journey by the outgoing commission.

She said that the past three years have been extremely challenging for the commission as it assumed office at a time when images of a woman being flogged in Swat were being shown on TV channels all over the world. These images horrified the world in general and the women of Pakistan, in particular. Ms Azhar appreciated the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) in the National Assembly for their continuous pro-active role in the Parliament and the Senate, which recently approved landmark pro-women legislation, including the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010, the Acid Crimes Prevention Act 2011, the Anti-Women Practices Act, 2011, the Women in Distress and Detention Fund Act 2011, and of course, the

media and said that prompt reporting helped many women victims of violence to get justice in the last few years. She said the media had raised public awareness about women's rights and the violence being inflicted on them, and this had given courage to many women to



speaking up and make their voices heard. Speaking at the occasion, NCSW Chairperson Ms. Anis Haroon said it was a great achievement for the women's movement and rights activists that an independent and autonomous women's commission exists in the country today. However, financial constraints remain the main hurdle. She said civil society organizations have always supported the

tion of laws was not possible unless there was adequate awareness about the laws at grassroots level. The Chairperson Provincial Commission on the Status of Women KPK, Ms Zubaida Khatoun also spoke on the occasion.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE QUARTER

LAUNCHING OF RESEARCH STUDIES AND TRIBUTE WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) launched four re- search studies and later paid tribute to women parliamentarians for their efforts for women’s empowerment in Pakistan at a function



organized jointly with Aurat Foundation in Islamabad.. The research studies were carried out with the support of the Gender Equity Programme (GEP). The ceremony was attended by a multitude of people from different walks of life.

NCSW Chairperson Anis Haroon said that NCSW was authorized to make recommendations to amend, abolish or repeal such laws, policies and identify customary practices which undermine the fundamental rights and status of women and minorities in Pakistan. She spoke about the role of NCSW, especially after the introduction of 18th Amendment to the Constitution. GEP representative



Ms Simi Kamal said that GEP was a USAID supported programme of Aurat Foundation which focused on eliminating gender-based violence, improving access of women to justice, empowerment at home, the workplace and public spaces, as well as building capacities of institutions for women’s empowerment. GEP works with critical Pakistani government organisations on a cooperative basis in support

of gender policies. Simi Kamal also gave an overview of NCSW’s research

findings with audience.



programme which is being financed by the Gender Equity Programme. The four re-



search studies were then presented by their authors who shared the key

The studies included:

- i. “Appraisal of Capacities of Women Development Departments (WDDs) at Provincial Level,” by Dr Riffat Haque
- ii. “Shelters/Crisis Centers & Gender Crime Cell,” by Ms Afia Zia
- iii. “Assessment of Disaster Management Institutions and Development of a Gender Responsive Preparedness Plan,” by Mr Sohail Manzoor



iv. “Reporting, Investigation, Safety and Security of Victims from the Police Perspective,” by ALPH Consultants. Following the launch of the research reports NCSW hosted a program to acknowledge the contribution of women parliamentarians from across the country. Ms Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, whose documentary film about women victims of acid crimes won an Oscar was also presented with a bouquet.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE QUARTER

NCSW DELEGATION ATTENDS THE 56TH SESSION OF THE CSW HELD IN NEW YORK

Two members of NCSW attended the CSW meeting held in New York as part of the Pakistan Delegation. The priority theme was: *The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges*. The topics were:

- Economic Empowerment of Rural Women
- The role of Gender-responsive Governance and Institutions for the Empowerment of Rural women

The Pakistan delegation was led by Ms. Fiza Batool Gilani, Goodwill Ambassador on Women's Empowerment. Other members were: Begum Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for the Social Sector, Ms. Sitara Ayaz, Provincial Minister for Women's Development Khyber Pukhtunkhuwa, Ms. Khawar Mumtaz, NCSW member from Lahore, Ms. Bushra Ali Zulfarnain, NCSW member from Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Mr. Saeed Ahmed Alvi, Secretary Ministry of Human Rights, and Ms. Rehana Hashmi, Ministry of Human Rights.

Successful experiences of Gender Responsive Budgeting were discussed in financing for gender equality and empowerment of women. Pakistan shared the initiatives taken

by the Government of Pakistan regarding pro-women legislation. The Country Report was presented by Ms Fiza Gilani, while the Pakistan Mission to the UN arranged bilateral meetings of the delegates with delegates from India, China, UK, Canada, Turkey and Norway. A meeting with Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UNWOMEN, was also organised by the Pak Mission at the UN Building.

The Pakistan delegation focused on the following issues during meetings and plenary sessions:-

- Economic empowerment of rural women
- The role of gender-responsive governance and institutions for the empowerment of rural women
- National experiences in implementing the agreed conclusions on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women
- Progress in financing for gender equality from the perspective of international organizations and multilateral development partners
- Engaging young women and men, girls and boys, to advance gender equality
- Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls

HEARING OF NCSW'S PETITION AGAINST JIRGA/PANCHAYAT SYSTEM IN THE SUPREME COURT

The Supreme Court commenced regular hearing of the petition moved by the National Commission on the Status of Women seeking implementation of the judgment given by the Sindh High Court declaring *jirgas* to be illegal, as the *Jirga* system, which violates the fundamental rights of citizens, and is responsible for perpetrating much violence against women, is still widely prevalent in the country. Responding to the petition filed by NCSW Chairperson Ms Anis Haroon and other members, a two-member bench headed by Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry and Justice Tariq Parvez, issued notices to Attorney General Maulvi Anwarul Haq and other respondents, including Secretary Law Ministry, Secretary Interior Ministry and Chief Secretaries of the four provinces and Gilgit-Baltistan. A similar petition filed by Samar Minallah against *swara*, a custom in which girls and women are given as compensation to settle disputes through *Jirgas*, was clubbed together with the NCSW petition.

Ms. Anis Haroon informed the court that 87 *jirgas* had been held in Sindh in the last year alone, in which 26 girls and women had been given for settling disputes. She regretted that ironically, district administrations

were not interested in taking action against those involved in violating the fundamental rights of women.

The petition cites a Haripur *jirga* decision of June 7, 2011, when a middle-aged woman was ruthlessly dragged out of her home by the *jirga* team and forced to parade naked on the street as punishment for a crime allegedly committed by her sons.

The Chairperson requested the bench to give a strong verdict in this regard, upon which the Chief Justice said that the court had already given strong judgments and instructions to appropriate authorities to clamp down on such practices. Ms. Haroon requested that all such actions taken, proceedings conducted and orders passed by any *jirga*, *panchayat* or similar bodies should be declared null and void by the bench and appropriate action be directed against all the culprits who had participated, aided and abetted in such illegal activities.

Riffat Inaam, the legal expert in NCSW, and another petitioner, stated that *jirgas* contravened Articles 4, 8, 9, 10, 10 (a), 14, 25, 34 and 37 of the Constitution of Pakistan, which guarantee legal protection, right to enjoy life, liberty and justice to the citizens of Pakistan. "Such illegal practices are being carried out in various parts of the country with utmost impunity, violating the state laws and fundamental rights of its citizens," the petition says.

FOUR DRAFT BILLS FINALIZED AND SUBMITTED TO MINISTRY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The drafts of four Bills were submitted to Mr. Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Human Rights, to be submitted as Government Bills for approval by Parliament. Before finalizing the draft bills concerning religious minorities the Law Committee of NCSW had engaged in exhaustive consultations with representatives of the Hindu and Christian communities. Consequently, a number of amendments were incorporated in the existing laws and revised laws were drafted.

The drafts bills were:

- **Hindu Marriage Act 2011-** There is no legislation on the personal laws of the Hindu community in Pakistan. The bill drafted by NCSW was introduced in the National Assembly.
- **Hindu Marriages Registration Bill-** There exists no registration mechanism for Hindu marriages. This draft seeks to overcome that difficulty by prescribing a registration mechanism. It also proposes a penalty if its provisions are violated, and includes a registration form or "Shaadi Parat".
- **Christian Marriage (Amendment) Bill** - There exists a Marriage Act of 1872 but it is out of date and does not meet the needs of today. In the proposed draft, several changes have been suggested, for example, registration responsibility will lie with the state, and solemnization of the marriage with the church. It is proposed that discriminatory clauses against women should be deleted.
- **Christian Divorce (Amendment) Bill** - Under the present applicable law of 1862, only adultery is accepted as grounds for divorce, but in the proposed draft, other grounds too have been provided for. Furthermore, the court has been asked to decide a divorce petition within a time span of six months.
- **Domestic Violence (criminal law amendment) bill 2012.** This introduces effective clauses in the Pakistan Penal Code to check acts of domestic violence. It spells out almost all the forms of abuse which are common in our society in order to eliminate any ambiguity. It also proposes punishment for the offence.

PRESIDENT URGED TO EXTEND PRO-WOMEN LEGISLATION TO FATA

The Commission wrote to President Mr. Asif Ali Zardari urging him to extend the scope of recently passed women friendly legislation to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), in accordance with his powers under Article 247 of the Constitution. He has further been requested to extend the scope of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 and Family Court Act 1964 to FATA.

CONSULTATIVE MEETING FOR GENDER-JUST MEDIA ALLIANCE

The National Commission on the Status of Women and Uks Research Centre organized a civil society consultation for forming an alliance of organisations engaged in issues related to Gender Equality and media to come together on a platform to promote and ensure gender responsiveness within media houses and the journalistic endeavors. The Alliance for Gender-Just Media aims to respond to the 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project's (GMMP's) findings on the perpetuation of gender biased media, gender stereotyping and women's significant underrepresentation in the Pakistan's news media. The Alliance aimed to support collaboration and coordination amongst the like-minded media- civil society organization and persons that would/could probe, promote and push for gender-responsive media practice and content analytically and with evidence. The Alliance will encourage and support the adoption and implementation of comprehensive media house policies and practices from a gender equality per-

spective in news content.

Ms. Anis Haroon welcomed the participants and presented an overview of objectives and the need of 'gender-just media' in the wake of harrowing reports about violence against women behind forming such an alliance. She said "Our focus is not to point out anyone in particular and the issue is not only women but our households, our children and the society as a whole." She said she was heartbroken over the death of Fakhra who lost her life allegedly because of a person who was son of a renowned politician. "That person was not feeling ashamed of what he did. Fakhra underwent 38 operations and was shown by the electronic media all burnt. It is need of the hour to formulate a code of ethics for the media when it comes to showing such footages," she said

The director of Uks Research Centre in her presentation said that with 15

years of experience in creating a gender-responsive media her organisation had been highlighting the fact that the media continued to reinforce sexual objectification, commoditisation, gender stereotyping, negative social practices and violence against women.

She added: "In most of the dramas, negative role of women is being shown. Electronic media should show more responsibility. Besides, advertisements are affecting the lifestyle of the community." Dr Salman Asif said there was a need for a national alliance to connect the dots. The meeting discussed the terms of reference and rationale of the alliance and its contours. Tahira Abdullah said in the race for ratings the media had left the reality and facts far behind and there was a need to define the issues clearly. Dr Rakshinda Parveen said only five per cent staff in the media houses consisted of females and even they were facing so many problems, adding we should raise voice for them.

CIVIL SOCIETY CONSULTATION FOR A WOMEN'S MANIFESTO

The general elections are due to be held a year hence and political parties are in the process of putting together their manifestos. In order to ensure that women's concerns should be adequately addressed the NCSW organized a consultation with civil society representatives to invite ideas for a Women's Manifesto that would then be sent to the key political parties to be incorporated in their party programs. Ms. Tahira Noor, Manager Communications in NCSW, presented key findings from the gender based critique of party manifestos

made by Ms Naheed Aziz for Aurat Foundation. The manifestos of six political parties - PPP, ANP, MQM, PML-N, PTI, JUI-F - were reviewed. Civil society representatives and women activists attending the consultation were of the opinion that except for PPP, ANP and MQM, all other manifestos were not pro women. The MQM was found to be the only party that was explicitly against using religion in policies and programs.

After incorporating suggestions and ideas from participants the Women's Manifesto was drafted by NCSW

and forwarded to the office of the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for the Social Sector Ms Shahnaz Wazir Ali for further action. The Commission also sent a copy to the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) on their special request.

Representatives of NGO's including Aurat Foundation, PODA, ROZAN and WORD, NCSW members Ms Anis Haroon, Ms Nasreen Azhar and Ms Raashda Anwer, ex-Chairperson NCSW Justice @ Majida Razvi and activist Ms Tahira Abdullah attended the consultation.

DELEGATION FROM NEPAL VISITS NCSW

A delegation from Nepal lead by Dr. Trilochan Uprety Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers (OPMCM) visited the office of NCSW Islamabad for experience sharing regarding best practices and policies adopted to mitigate gender based violence. The delegation comprised Kesab Prasad Bastola, Under Secretary-OPMCM, Jhaindra Prasad Guragain, Section Officer-OPMCM, Kirti Thapa, Policy Officer OPMCM, Indira Phuyal, Monitoring and Reporting Officer, OPMCM, Diana Fernandez, Program Officer of The Asia Foundation Nepal and two representatives from The Asia Foundation office in Pakistan.

The objective of this meeting, which was organized by The Asia Foundation, was to get an orienta-

tion about the regional best practices on policy advocacy for mitigating gender based violence. The Nepali Prime Minister had declared 2010 as the 'Year against Gender Based Violence' and developed a National Plan of Action for adoption. This political initiative will open up channels for increased cooperation and knowledge sharing among key stakeholders, such as government, NGOs, and other non-state actors who work against GBV within Nepal as well as with regional countries. To take advantage of positive developments and regional best practices, they visited Pakistan and met different NGO's and state institutions.

The delegation was briefed by Ms Tahira Noor about the history and background of NCSW, its mandate and achievements in terms of policy,

advocacy, research and legislation made during the last one decade. Ms.Riffat Butt provided explanations on the bills reviewed, drafted, proposed and forwarded by NCSW on different issues concerning women and religious minorities. NCSW members Ms.Nasreen Azhar and Ms.Raashda Anwer also responded to the queries made by the members of delegation.

The delegation appreciated the achievements of NCSW despite several administrative, financial and bureaucratic obstacles. They expressed particular interest in the recently enacted National Commission on the Status of Women Act that has given autonomy to the Commission and asked for a copy so that it could be shared with the Women's Commission in Nepal.

SLAPPING OF POLLING STAFF BY WOMAN MPA DURING BYE-ELECTIONS IN SINDH

The Commission expressed its deep shock and concern regarding the incidence of violence inflicted upon a presiding officer by a woman MPA in Tando Muhammad Khan during a bye-election. The Commission termed it a shameful act against human dignity committed by a woman candidate, and said in fact the act amounted to a

slap on the face of humanity. The Commission urged the Chief Election Commissioner to take stern action against the woman MPA and said that she should be disqualified from holding public office owing to her undignified and unruly behavior towards a female colleague. She should

be made to apology publicly so that people know that such behavior will not be tolerated. It recommended that a code of conduct should be drawn up and made compulsory for all those aspiring to hold public office.

PRESS STATEMENTS:

NCSW GRANTED AUTONOMY

- Appreciating the unanimous approval by the National Assembly of the National Commission on the Status Women Bill that grants full financial and administrative autonomy to the Commission, the National Commission on the Status of Women and its members felicitated and thanked all parliamentarians, particularly the women legislators, friends and well wishers. It especially acknowledged the personal efforts, contributions and interest of Ms Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Dr. Atiya Inyatullah, Mr. Mustafa Nawaz Khokar and Mr Raza Rabbani, who at different times and occasions provided valuable input and support.
- The statement said that that without an independent and autonomous women's commission, the dream to achieve gender equality could not be realized. The new dispensation will enable the commission to work with greater facility and strengthen its hands to fulfill its mandate more effectively for the welfare and rights of the women of Pakistan.

STOPPING WOMEN FROM VOTING IN MARDAN

- The National Commission on the Status of Women expressed dismay and strongly protested that women voters were not allowed to exercise their franchise in Mardan and Mianwali at a number of polling stations during the by elections held recently. It said that the move by two political parties to stop women from exercising their right to vote would further exacerbate the diminishing socio economic status of women. According to the press release, "The action violates Article 34 of the Pakistan Constitution (1973) that says 'steps shall be taken to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of national life'. Unfortunately, such incidences are occurring time and again. The NCSW has been reminding the Election Commission of Pakistan to declare any election in which women are not allowed to participate null and void, and to take action against political parties that indulge in such lawless agreements and practices. It is regrettable that nothing tangible has been done so far and women continue to suffer at the hands of patriarchal forces."
- The NCSW demanded that the provincial government must hold an inquiry into this violation, and emphasized that election results that did not reflect the voice of half of the population could not be considered democratic or authentic.

TRAGIC DEATH OF ACID VICTIM FAKHRA YOUNUS

NCSW was extremely perturbed at the tragic death of acid burn victim Ms. Fakhra Yunous who committed suicide after enduring thirteen years of pain and agony and constant mental torture for not being able to get justice and the culprits convicted. Fakhra Yunous was married to a rich and influential landlord but her life was virtually destroyed when she was attacked and acid was thrown on her. Her husband was accused, but he was exonerated by the court. Fakhra fought a battle in the

courts for twelve years, but could not win because the criminal justice system in the country is patriarchal and women victims of violence are often denied justice. The NCSW strongly demanded that her case to be reopened and an investigation reinitiated so that the culprits could be exposed, tried and punished as per the new amendment of 'hurt' in the PPC that deals with acid attacks. NCSW also demanded that each

province should pass the Acid and Burn Crime Bill 2012, a comprehensive legal mechanism that addresses the challenges around the phenomenon of acid violence, which has been drafted after a participatory process with key stakeholders and experts.

WE ARE ON THE WEB:
www.ncsw.gov.pk



**NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE
STATUS OF WOMEN**

H. No. 39, Street 56, F/6-4, Islamabad

Phone: 92-51-9224875
Fax: 92-51-9224875
E-mail: info@ncsw.gov.pk

Editorial Team:

- Mrs. Nasreen Azhar,
Member NCSW
- Mrs. Tahira Noor,
Manager Media & Communication
- Mr. M. Khalid Imran,
IT Expert