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Gender equality through SDG5 stressed

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Islamabad

A one-day national consultation on 'Achieving Gender Equality through the implementation of SDG5' was held on Wednesday.

The convention was being held under the project 'Jazba - Democracy and Empowered Women', being implemented by Aurat Foundation (AF) and South Asia Partnership-Pakistan (SAP-PK) with the support of Global Affairs Canada (GAC). The guests and participants of the event included community leaders, media personnel, academia, civil society representatives, and parliamentarians of national assemblies and all four provinces of Pakistan including Gilgit-Baltistan.

Syed Amjad Ali Zaidi, speaker of the Gilgit-Baltistan assembly and convener, SDG Taskforce GB, said that GB they are going to start a first-ever cadet college for girls. This will further help in empowering the women of the region. He said that buses and other public transport are free for women and he further added that vocational training centres are spending a large amount on training and equipping the women and girls of the region with technical skills.

Rahila Durrani, the former speaker of the Balochistan assembly, said that we are lacking implementation of the laws due to our poor po-

litical and reading culture.

She said that she broke the barrier and became Pakistan's first-ever female speaker of the Balochistan assembly. She further said that women have to stand together and be free of all political ties. She said that her political counterparts should consider women members as chairpersons of the provincial standing committees since their work is better.

At the end of her brief comments, she said that we need to improve our understanding of legislative processes such as legislation drafting and writing since several members of the assembly are not knowledgeable about these topics.

Mangla Sharma, member provincial assembly of Sindh, spoke about the legislative weaknesses in Pakistan and said that the women are not trained in legislative matters and a majority of the first-time members do not understand and have poor capacity in this regard. She said that Sindh has passed pro-women legislation in recent times such as anti-dowry act, acid-throwing law and domestic violence prevention act. She further added that such laws are a positive sign from the Sindh assembly and that it is doing good work on women's rights.

Furthermore, she said that the Sindh women caucus should improve its work in Sindh and said that as a suggestion they also need to

draft bills and laws in the local language for better understanding of the masses.

Sabrina Javed, member provincial assembly Punjab, said that when we talk about gender, people instantly assume that we are only talking about women whereas it also includes men and transgenders, PWDs as well.

She said that woman is still seen as a burden in rural areas. Citing an example, she said that in the recent floods several families conducted the 'Nikkah' of their minor girls and sent them away to their new families in order to get rid of an additional member's burden from their family.

She said that it is shocking that Punjab province still does not have a women's caucus in Punjab assembly. In the end, she said that female members should remain united and be together regardless of political party affiliation.

Uzma Kardar, member provincial assembly Punjab, said that she remained the head of gender mainstreaming committees for three years in Punjab. Highlighting some of her work, she said that during her tenure she with the help of the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) formed an integrated system in order to be a good aware of the work done by other departments on gender mainstreaming.

She said that they held female cyclethons in the city to increase awareness regarding

female issues. Ms. Kardar said that we already have a very low female labour force participation in Pakistan and we need to accelerate the work on an emergency basis.

Madiha Nisar, member provincial assembly KP and chairperson of standing committee on higher education, archives and libraries department, said that in the recent past several pro-women laws and bills such as the acid and bum crime act, Hindu and Kailash marriage act, have been brought to the fore and all of these are a good sign of progress.

She said that a domestic violence against women act has been passed after a struggle of 22 years. She further added that these are all baby steps towards progress and work is currently being done to further empower the provincial Dar-ul-Amans of KP and establish them in more neglected areas.

Zeenat Shahwani, member provincial assembly of Balochistan, said that Balochi women have shown tremendous courage in recent times. She cited the example of a female MPA of Balochistan who was not allowed to sit in the assembly session as she was with her infant child and was asked to leave the assembly premises. After hue and cry on the media, Balochistan assembly now has a child day care centre on its premises.

Naem Mirza, executive

director Aurat Foundation, spoke about the significance of pro-women legislative agenda in Pakistan. In his brief remarks, he thanked all the participants of the consultation and said that in the modern era even in corporate feminism women have become the heads of organisations such as the international monetary fund (IMF) and the central intelligence agency (CIA).

He further said that the first procession for women's rights in Pakistan was taken out by Begum Jehan Ara Shah Nawaz who was also the member of Pakistan's first constituent assembly. Also, the first inheritance law for women came in 1948 in Pakistan and this a 600-700 year struggle of women for their rights.

Citing the example of women in Europe during the First World War, he said that around 300 women were incarcerated in the Holloway prison due to their protests for their voting rights.

Naem said that the reserved seats for women are not charity seats. This is due to a whole process and is according to the constitution of Pakistan article 25(3).

Furthermore, he said that despite the passing of the domestic violence law in the provinces the national assembly is not passing it as a law and has sent it to the council of Islamic Ideology (CII) for its consent.