

WWHL calls for recognition of Home-Based workers under ILO Convention-177

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LAHORE: Hundreds of women workers from different parts of Lahore suburbs took part in a rally, organized by Women Workers Help Line (WWHL), on the occasion of Labor Day on Monday, 1st of May 2006. The rally led by WWHL leaders, started from Press Club Lahore and after passing through MaCload Road, terminated at Reagal Chowk, where several other trade unions of Lahore were converged to celebrate the May Day. The participants of the rally were holding banners and play cards inscribed with slogans against WTO, IMF, WB and the state policies of privatization. The participants of the rally were chanting slogans in favor of their demands and against the anti labor policies of the Mushraff regime. Despite the hot weather women workers of all ages; young and old, even some of them along with their small kids, enthusiastically participated in rally.

The rally was followed by a seminar, also organized by WWHL on the topic of “Equal Work Equal Wages”, at Lahore Press Club.

Bushra Khaliq, WWHL, General Secretary, addressing the seminar said, May Day means not only to recall the unmatched struggle of the workers of Chicago but also to ponder upon the reasons of workers exploitation by the imperialist forces. She said the informal sector of Pakistan is growing rapidly where majority of the labor are poor women. This is most unfortunate that there is no record of these women workers who are contributing a lot in the economy of the country. The women workers labor in factories is being exploited as most of them do not have any appointment letters. They are not paid equal wages as compare to male workers despite the fact that ILO Convention 100 is duly ratified by the government of Pakistan. She demanded of the government to ensure the implementation of C-100 and also recognize the home-based workers by ratifying the ILO Convention 177. Criticizing male labor leaders’ domination in trade unions, she said building of a genuine workers movement in Pakistan is not possible without the meaningful participation of women workers in the trade unions.

Jehan Ara, a PTCL worker and WWHL member speaking on the occasion urges the participants to recall the supreme sacrifices laid down by the workers of Chicago. Today the workers all over the world and especially women are facing worst sort of exploitation. The concessions earned by the workers of Chicago hundred years ago, are now being withdrawn gradually by the states and factory owners. With the onslaught of globalization and rapid expansion of private sector, working conditions for the laborers are going from bad to worst. Workers are forced to work for longer hours without any incentive or benefits, she added.

Riffit Maqsood, A WWHL leader said women are not the weaker vessel. Today they are working shoulder to shoulder with their male colleagues in social movements, political parties and trade unions. They are fighting against the anti labor and exploitative policies of the government. But government policies are discriminatory as most of the women in formal sector or government offices are not been allowed to avail equal opportunities of employment and grow, she lamented

Nusrat Bano, a WWHL activist from Toba Tek Singh speaking on the occasion said “we are thankful

to WWHL for opening a literacy school for women workers in Toba. This school has not only provided local working women basic literacy but also help us explore new venues of employment". She said the level of socio-political and trade union awareness is also rising because of this WWHL initiative of education in Toba Tek Singh.

Munnaz Ayub, WWHL leader from Badami Bagh Unit speaking to the audience said domestic workers are facing multiple exploitation by the middlemen as well as state. They are not paid appropriate wages by the contractors on the one hand and the government also not ready to recognize them as workers. She demanded of the government to register all the domestic workers and cover them under the labor laws.

Razia Ansari, WWHL vice chairperson speaking on the occasion said, women workers in factories are facing harassment at work places by the supervises and owners. The working conditions in the factories are also bad and much below the standards set by ILO in its concept of decent work. She urged the government to help stop harassment at workplace and pressure factory owners implement proper working conditions.

Addressing the seminar, Chairperson Azra Shad said, women are facing lot of socio economic problems but they should not feel themselves weak, they must come forward and join the struggle for the cause of women workers. She demanded of the government to ratify the ILO Convention 177 to recognize the labor of millions of domestic workers.

At the end of the seminar the poet Baba Najmi and women activist Rukhsana Naz presented revolutionary poems.

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