

# Pakistan: March 8<sup>th</sup> International Women Day Statements

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## **PAKISTAN: Despite winning accolades, women continue to suffer discrimination**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission

This year's International Woman's Day theme is "Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality".

March 8, the International Women's Day, is observed every year to acknowledge women's struggle for the achievements of their rights and to reiterate their resolve to fight for their equal rights. Women throughout the world have struggled for their right to suffrage, right to education and right to choose.

Centuries after centuries women have been fighting to be recognised and acknowledged as equal, an egalitarian society where fairer sex is given equal opportunities to grow and flourish is an uphill task and requires empowering girls and women to stand up for themselves.

The state of women can only be improved on the basis of promotion of education, greater participation in politics and widespread awareness about social, economic and political issues. Professional and financial liberty can further improve the state of women. The state must play its active role in ensuring equality as envisaged in the constitution. The year 2016 has had an auspicious and inspiring start for women in Pakistan. The Punjab assembly unanimously passed the Protection of Women against Violence bill on February 25, while two Pakistani women were internationally recognised for their outstanding work: film maker Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy won her second Oscar for her documentary on honor killings, and Nergis Mavalvala was part of the team who detected gravitational waves, a critical scientific discovery of our time. The extraordinary journey of these extraordinary women began from a land that is marred by internal strife and conservatism, yet these brave women proved themselves by defying all odds and making their mark

Being the second most dangerous country in the world for women, it takes immense strength and courage to break through Pakistan's social barriers and glass ceiling. Pakistani women have fought a long battle to win the rights guaranteed under the Constitution, and yet they are still relegated to being second class citizens. Uneven socioeconomic development means that while there has been gradual improvement in the general status of urban women, the social and economic gender gap is increasing in rural areas. Many of Pakistan's cultural and religious practices pose a huge threat to women, particularly child and forced marriage, acid attacks, honor killing and denial of education.

The lack of education is a major hurdle faced by many girls; the female literacy rate is 48% as compared to 70% for males. Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai, who has inspired many girls and



others to fight for the right to female education, is antagonized by the country's orthodox and conservative clergy. Women who wish to empower themselves have always faced backlash, be it by studying, working or even choosing a spouse for themselves.

The movement for women empowerment can be traced back to before partition, when Ms. Fatima Jinnah fearlessly led thousands of women to stand up for their well-being. In 1949 the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) was founded by Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, wife of Pakistan's first prime minister, aiming to further the moral, social and economic standing of women across the country. Similarly, the Women's Action Forum (WAF) was established in September 1981, lobbying and advocating on behalf of women without the resources to do it themselves. The WAF publically opposed the unjust rulings passed under the Hudood ordinance during General Zia's era. The WAF has successfully enabled many women-friendly bills such as the Criminal Law Amendment Act (2004), the Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill, the Criminal Acid Act, the Protection of Women Act, the Status of Women Bill and regulations condemning honour killings and other vices faced by women.

There is no dearth of strong women who paved the way for their contemporaries to follow, women such as Parween Rehman, murdered by land mafia for fighting for the right to accommodation for the poor. Women who inspire others to scale new heights and carve a niche for themselves, like Pakistan's first women mountaineer, Samina Baig, who climbed Mount Everest. Despite clinching many firsts in the country's history, Pakistani women cannot escape the stigma of rebellion; Oscar winner Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy was criticized for maligning Pakistan in the international forum. It is unfortunate that such critics are unable to understand that highlighting the underbelly of a country is not equivalent to being a traitor.

Women's day is an occasion for women to look back on past struggles and accomplishments, to reaffirm striving for equality, and to look ahead to the untapped potential and opportunities that await future generations of women. At the same time, the day itself can hold little significance in a country where women suffer honour killing for exercising the right to choose their spouse. According to statistics from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 1000 cases of honour killing were reported in 2014, with many cases going unreported. The unimaginable atrocities meted out to these women are never prosecuted by the state. Violence against women perpetuates precisely due to the lack of action taken against perpetrators, and the denial of redress to victims. The attitudes of justice institution officials, most of whom are male, are also unfavourable to women who seek justice.

Though the country is witnessing a surge in legislation meant to uplift the social and economic state of women, mere promulgation of law is not enough. In a country where the literacy rate is dismal as per UNESCO's report titled "eAtlas of gender inequality in education" almost 16 million girls between the ages of 6 and 11 are currently out of school, expecting the status of women to be elevated just by promulgation of law is wishful thinking.

Until the Pakistani government and society takes up their responsibility to uplift the status of their mothers, daughters and sisters, 51% of Pakistan's population will continue to suffer from discrimination, violence and inequality. The state must play an active role to ensure that women are able to realize the rights enshrined in Pakistan's constitution, and to honour the remarkable women who have played their part in breaking barriers and living up to their potential.

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**Lets Pledge to Continue Struggle for Parity**



## ALL PAKISTAN TRADE UNION FEDERATION

14-N, Industrial Area, Gulberg II, Lahore, Pakistan

Solidarity Message

March 8<sup>th</sup> International Women Day

Lets Pledge to Continue Struggle for Parity

Dear sisters and Friends,,

Solidarity greetings from All Pakistan Trade Union Federation!

For All Pakistan Trade Union Federation March 8<sup>th</sup> is an important day to forge stronger links and unity between all those struggling for the liberation of women and resisting against gender inequality around the world. It is a day with a proud history for the women's movement - a history of internationalism, unity, solidarity and struggle.

March 8<sup>th</sup> remember us the struggle of women workers starts on 1857 for the betterment of working condition. At that time police brutally baton women workers to stop their voice, due to this brutally attacked by police several women workers sacrifice their life.

It was at the 1910 on the event of International Conference in Copenhagen that German Socialist leader Clara Zetkin first raised the idea of organizing an International Working Women's Day to mark the important victories of women workers in the United States and to provide a focus for women around the world to organize public actions to win the right to vote.

Friends, Pakistani women are also victims of violence, terrorism, gender discrimination, inequality, elimination of basic human rights. Despite the constant oppression against women, we all women's are fighting back.

To extend our deep solidarity with all sisters and friends struggling worldwide to end oppression and exploitation against women. We wish you get success and achievements in your struggle, which is ours struggle.

To celebrate victories and to raise our voice to end all kinds of discrimination, economic exploitation APTUF is going to organize a rally in Lahore.

To encourage and support the struggle of women in Pakistan, Kindly send us messages before March 8, 2016 at email address: [struggle0881 yahoo.com](mailto:struggle0881@yahoo.com)

Let us celebrate International Women's Day with a spirit of resistance and internationalism.

Rubina Jamil

Secretary General

All Pakistan Trade Union Federation

President

Pakistan Workers Confederation

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**Joint Statement of AWP federal leadership on eve of international day of women**



## **Press Release**

On the 106<sup>th</sup> International Woman's Day, we the central leadership of the Awami Workers Party commend the women of Pakistan for their courage, resolve, and struggle for gender equality.

As we commemorate Women's Day, we express our deep concern with the statements of religio-political parties, many of whom are openly opposing the right of women to be protected from violence—to live a life of dignity.

We understand that women face systemic oppression in Pakistan. This is exacerbated for women from the working classes, oppressed nations and religious minorities. With the growth of productive forces in the shape of capitalism, the living standards of women may have slightly improved but they still experience the worst forms of socio-economic and political inequalities, humiliations, violence and powerlessness, often driven by patriarchal backlash against any limited advances made by women.

This situation has its origin in our history and existing feudal and patriarchal structures, which are reinforced by the theocratic and neo-imperialist nature of the state.

We therefore welcome any legislative, political, economic and social measures taken for the advancement of women that highlight the woman question in society. We support the recently passed provincial legislation on domestic violence by the Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab assemblies. While the Protection of Women against Violence Act 2015 is insufficient (in that, for instance, it does not criminalize domestic violence), it is a necessary step forward towards a more just social order.

The AWP believes that supporters of this legislation – within and outside the state – must resist any attempts to dismiss or undermine it. We therefore strongly reject the regressive role of Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) and the Federal Shariat Court (FSC) in state affairs. We call upon the National Assembly and the Senate to immediately disband the theocratic and patriarchal CII and the FSC. Both institutions remain an obstacle to democracy, and the struggle for radical equality for all.

We strongly condemn the religio-political parties opposing the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act, 2015. They represent the epitome of feudal brutality and obscurantism that legitimizes a whole range of dreadful customs promoting women's oppression — the monster that the state has fed and fattened for decades at the cost of people's basic rights.

Awami Workers Party reaffirms its commitment to exposing, resisting and eliminating the inequities that color women's existence and all forms of patriarchal oppression. We stand for socialism, secularism, women's emancipation and human equality.

Abid Hassan Minto, President  
Fanoos Gujjar, Chairman  
Farooq Tariq, General Secretary  
Abida Chaudhry, Secretary Women

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## **Press release**

HRCP moot resolution calls for women's due representation in public life



Islamabad, 7 March: A conference organized by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) on women's representation, "Women in public life: breaking the barriers", in Islamabad on the eve of International Women's Day has called upon all branches of the states, to ensure due representation for women in positions of power in the public institutions and arena.

The conference was attended by prominent speakers from diverse backgrounds, including Asma Jahangir, Sarkar Abbas, Afrasiab Khattak, Fauzia Saeed, Farzana Bari and Bushra Gohar.

The conference concluded with the participants adopting the following resolution:

Recalling that the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973, prohibits any discrimination on the basis of sex;

Reiterating Pakistan's obligations under international treaties including CEDAW to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership roles;

Noting with concern the dismal proportion of women's representation, in positions of power and leadership in the legal profession, in governance and in parliament, which is among the lowest in the world;

Acknowledging that the representation of women in positions of power reflects institutional, structural and attitudinal barriers, which needs to be urgently addressed;

Affirming that the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's participation in public life is essential for the fulfillment of equality, social justice, human rights, and democracy; and

Admiring women's courage and tenacity to defy gender stereotypes and structural barriers to progress in their professional lives despite growing intolerance and insecurity in society.

Urge all branches of the State to:

- Establish gender balance in government bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, and in the judiciary, including, inter alia, setting specific targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through affirmative action, irrespective of their social, economic, ethnic or religious backgrounds.
- Put in place transparent criteria for appointment to decision-making positions and ensure that the selecting bodies have a gender-balanced composition.
- Develop mechanisms and training opportunities to facilitate and encourage women to participate in the legal profession, the electoral process, political activities and other key areas of public life.
- Provide gender-sensitive training for women and men to promote non-discriminatory working relationships and accommodate women's special needs, wherever required, for them to carry out their professional responsibilities.
- Ensure that there are adequate codes of conduct and disciplinary mechanisms to effectively prevent and provide redress against sexual intimidation and harassment.
- Monitor and evaluate progress in the representation of women through the regular collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative and qualitative data at all levels in various decision-



making positions in the public and private sectors.

- Provide a level-playing field to women by confronting gender stereotypes and taking steps to eliminate violence and discrimination against women that have barred them from important leadership roles.

Urges political parties to:

- Examine party structures and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women in the electoral process, including through amendments to the Political Parties Act, 2002, and the Representation of People's Act, 1976.
- Incorporate gender issues in their manifestos, taking measures to ensure that women are enabled to participate in the leadership of political parties.

Urges civil society organizations to:

- Continue their efforts to engage with all stakeholders to reduce discrimination, prejudices and structural barriers that prevent women from realizing their potential as equal citizens.

I.A.Rehman

Secretary-General

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)

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