



خواتین محاذِ عمل

WOMEN'S ACTION FORUM
103 BASEMENT RAJA CENTRE
MAIN MARKET GULBERG LAHORE.

NEWSLETTER
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E D I T O R I A L

The violation of fundamental human rights of women in the past decade is unprecedented in our country. Since the past seven years Women's Action Forum has fought against discriminatory laws and policies and has desperately attempted to save the legal and social status of women in Pakistan.

We have seen how our rights have been eroded by legislations such as the Haddood Ordinances and the law of Evidence. Even more unfortunate is the fact that these reprehensible laws of the Martial Law era have received validation through the 8th Amendment in the Constitution. They are also indemnified against challenge in a court of law.

The provisions of the 1973 Constitution promising equality of status and protecting women against discrimination have become meaningless. In a recent judgement the Lahore high Court has held that the Constitution does not bar gender discrimination in the provision of opportunities for education.

Even women's rights in family law are threatened by the Shariat Bill and the Ninth Amendment. Laws which could be affected by these bills are the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, Dissolution of Muslim Marriages.

Act, Child Marriage Restraint Act and the Guardians and Wards Act. The small advantage that women had gained through this reformatory legislation may also be lost

Most disappointing is the role of our women in the parliament. They have been totally ineffective in protecting the rights and interests of women, and have shown themselves unworthy of our confidence. Their role has raised serious doubts as to the propriety of the present procedure for filling the reserved seats for women. Representative character of such members must be ensured. We can only hope to achieve our objectives under conditions that promise a strong, truly representative legislature and an independent judiciary.

Although we still have a long and hard struggle ahead of us, we have no cause to feel discouraged. We have been successful in bringing vital issues to the public view. Isolated efforts by women has been consolidated into a women's movement. Let us give strength to this movement, and look ahead to the future with hope and expectation!

W A F N E W S

The most positive step taken by WAF in the past

year was the merger of the two groups in Lahore. The Merger Committee nominated by the two General Bodies deserve our appreciation for settling the differences amicably.

Lahore WAF has finally acquired an office. We need volunteers for manning the office. Any contributions by way of furniture, desk accessories cabinets, shelves etc. are welcome. If any member can arrange for installation of a telephone it would be of great help. Please visit the office and give your suggestions on running it efficiently.

A new Chapter of WAF was opened in Abbottabad this April. Its a small group but they are hopeful of involving more women.

WAF National Convention was held on the 21-22 November, 1986. The Convention approved a WAF Charter of Demands. WAF has also decided to bring out a National publication in September, 1987.

WAF Lahore is being officially represented at the Women's Congress in Moscow to be held in June this year. Shahtaj Qizalbash, Rehana Taufiq and Mehnaz Rafi will attend the Congress.

N E W S U P D A T E

The Shariat Bill and the Ninth Amendment are still hanging over our heads like the sword of Democles. The Ninth Amendment was passed by the Senate, but since the National Assembly did not debate it within the stipulated period it will

have to be represented. Both the Bills are at present under review by different sub-committees of the Parliament.

The first sentence of stoning to death under the Zina Ordinance was awarded to Gul Nissa of Attock District. According to information received the sentence has not been executed. The case will be retried as Gul Nissa has retracted the confession upon which her sentence was based.

MEDICAL COLLEGES CASE:
Policy of the Punjab Government was challenged in the Lahore High Court on the ground that it was discriminatory to women and denied them the equal opportunity of acquiring professional education. The decision was in favour of girl students and the policy was declared as a contravention of Article 25 of the Constitution which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex alone. The Government appealed against this order. Judgement of a Double Bench of the High Court overruled the earlier judgement and has held that discrimination on the basis of sex in admission to educational institutions is not disallowed by the Constitution. A similar case is pending adjudication in the Sind High Court.

One positive outcome of the case is that the numerous petitions filed by girl students acted as a pressure on the Government and the policy was revised to accommodate nearly 170 girls. Nevertheless hundreds of girls remain

affected. The High Court decision has a serious impact on the status of women. We need to give urgent attention to this new development.

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WAF CALLS UPON THE GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN TO TAKE A POSITIVE STEP - SIGN THE UN CONVENTION FOR ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN !!!

W O M E N T H E W O R L D
O V E R

[This will be a regular feature of the Newsletter. It will contain information of interest on the rights and status of women in other countries and regions. Contributions on this topic will be welcome]

K U W A I T.

The only Gulf Country with an elected National Assembly still denies women their right to vote and be elected. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs of Kuwait has issued a 'fatwa' against the enfranchisement of women or their being elected. The 'fatwa' was opposed by many people and caused a sharp debate. This is an important challenge to Kuwaiti women who remain determined to win their political rights.

I R A Q.

Some Facts:

Location: Middle East

Language: Arabic

Religions: Muslims 95%

Christians 5%

Social rights of women:

1. Rights of a divorced wife - A wife may continue to live in the joint matrimonial home without the husband after divorce, provided that the wife did

not herself file for the divorce.

2. The legal age of marriage for both sexes is 18 years.

3. Polygamy - No man can take a second wife unless by court consent.

3. Iraqi law recognises both husband and the wife as head of the family.

4. Inherited property cannot be sold by the heirs of a deceased during the life time of his widow if she is in occupation, unless she agrees to the sale. Such agreement must be made before a court.

B A H R A I N.

Bahraini women have the highest rate of labour force participation among all the gulf states. The State employs the equal pay policy. Women in the public sector are guaranteed equal pay for equal work.

J O R D A N.

A draft Labour Law in Jordan seeks to give equality to women in employment opportunities, wages promotion and training.

Salient features:

-Employers are prohibited from sacking women for marriage or maternity reasons.

-A working nursing mother is allowed one hourly breast feeding break per day.

-A woman is guaranteed her job back should she choose to take unpaid leave to raise her children, for a period not exceeding one year.

-This law is applicable to any establishment operating in the national economy and is not restricted in application to establishments employing above a certain

number of people.

W O M E N A N D C R I M E

Some facts:

The total population of the females in all prisons of the country in the year

1978 : 553

1984 : 942

Increase : 70%

Increase in the female population in prisons is attributed to the vast number of women charged in Zina cases since 1979.

One argument used in favour of the Hadood laws is that the severity of punishment will help decrease crimes.

Facts speak for themselves!

Total number of cases registered under Hadood in

1983 : 1682

1984 : 1843

Increase 9.5%

Of the total women inmates in different central and district prisons of the Punjab, including the Multan Women's Jail (the only regular special prison for female inmates),

65% are between 15 to 30 years

85% are illiterate

67% are married

78% are rural women

WAF STATEMENT OF DEMANDS

Repeal of all laws which deny women equality before the law and equal protection of the law.

Reforms in Personal Status Laws to bring them in conformity with the existing socioeconomic realities, and proper implementation of the laws.

Withdrawal of all proposed legislations seeking to give Shariat Courts jurisdiction over Muslim Per-

sonal Law.

Repeal of the 8th Amend-

HEALTH EDUCATION EMPLOYMENT
THE PRIMARY NEED OF EVERY
PAKISTANI!!

ment in the Constitution.

Pakistan should sign the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.

In budgeting national expenditure priority must be given to developmental activity instead of defense and non-development expenditure.

Funds allocated to primary health care must be at least 6% of the GNP.

Allocation for education must be increased from 2.4% to at least 6%

GIRLS SHOULD HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION AS BOYS AT ALL LEVELS.

WAF seeks removal of sexist bias in employment in media projection, and in all other fields of economic activity and image/attitude building.

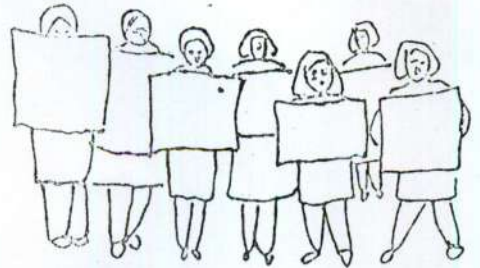
Inquiry should be conducted into the conditions prevailing in homes for destitute women. Safety of their life and dignity must be ensured. Women NGOs must be involved in their management. Finances must be allocated for more shelters.

The law enforcing machinery must be made effective to combat the increase in incidents of sexual abuse and exploitation of women. Strict supervision of the higher authorities of the police is necessary for guarding against such abuse by

police personnel.

Women candidates contesting elections through the reserved seats must be elected through an adult franchise of the female electorate.

Women convicts must be housed in their home districts.



WAF PRESS RELEASES

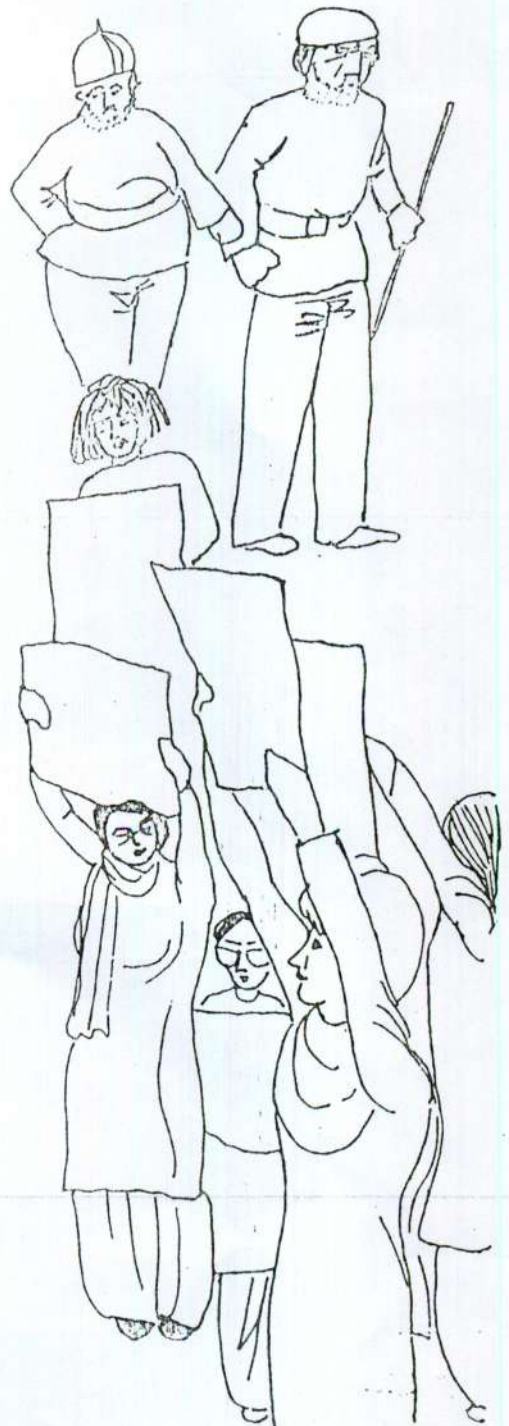
Through various press statements WAF has condemned the enforcement of inhuman and degrading punishments meted out under the Hadood Ordinances. WAF has particularly shown its concern over the sentence of stoning to death awarded by the Sessions Court of Attock to Mst. Gul Nissa.

WAF has also condemned violence committed by the law enforcing agencies. Concern has been expressed over incidents of custodial rape of women in police stations and prisons.

WAF has issued many press statements on the Shariat Bill and the Ninth Amendment. The forum considers both the legislations retrogressive and can be used to the detriment of the basic interests of women in Pakistan.

WAF has condemned the discriminatory policy of admission to medical colleges and has demanded that admissions be purely on merit.

WAF has condoled the sad demise of Mian Mahmud Ali Kasuri, a champion of civil liberties and a staunch supporter of women's rights.



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