

WAF Press release
International Women's Day - 8th March 2008

On 8th March women all over the world celebrate International Women's Day and commemorate the struggles of women to realize their full human rights. On this day Women's Action Forum pays tribute to all those past and present women in Pakistan who have struggled for equal rights, peace, justice and dignity. Among these have been political leaders and workers, women working in factories and fields, human/women's rights activists, students and scores of others who have contributed in innumerable ways to take forward the struggle for equal rights.

This year 8th of March falls at a very critical juncture in the country's life which is beset with judicial, political and economic crises combined with deep insecurity due to frequent terrorist acts. Women's Action Forum takes this opportunity to salute the people of Pakistan for their deep commitment to democracy and their rejection of military rule and religious extremism. WAF particularly lauds the wholehearted participation of women in the electoral process to exercise their constitutional right and condemns all those who forcibly prevented women's participation in different parts of the country.

WAF strongly endorses the people's categorical verdict that General Musharraf must resign and the judiciary be restored to the pre-November 3, 2007 position. At the same time the results have given a clear mandate to the supremacy of the Parliament. WAF believes that the onus is now on the political parties particularly, PPP, PML (N) and ANP, to rise to the expectations of the people for the good of the country and its future by making a coalition government and sharing power as well as responsibilities. WAF demands that all the political parties rejected by the people, especially PML (Q) and MMA must not be accommodated in government and further that the military and reactionary forces not be allowed to hold the country to ransom.

Since 1981 WAF has struggled not only for women's rights but has been in the forefront of all progressive and democratic movements and has categorically stood against military intervention and Islamic fundamentalism. It challenged General Zia ul Haq's martial law and his 'Islamization' of Pakistan; it warned against the rise of the Taliban in 1996 on the grounds that this would have a fall out on Pakistan; it rejected the military take over of General Musharraf in 1999 and took a strong stand against the US invasion of Afghanistan on the grounds that this would not only be detrimental for Afghanistan but also for Pakistan. Unfortunately Pakistan now is paying the price for these interventions and policies.

WAF continues to uphold the spirit and the core principles of the original 1973 Constitution. It strongly believes that Constitutional promises of equal citizenship regardless of ethnicities, languages, religions, geographical locations and gender, and the promise of equal opportunities, aspirations, and economic, social and political rights can only be guaranteed through a secular state. It therefore

calls upon the new parliament to reclaim and re-establish the supremacy of Parliament, the rule of law and strengthen all institutions including the judiciary and a free media. This will not only ensure the democracy takes root in Pakistan but will ensure a direction that would enable equal rights of all its citizens.

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