



women's action forum خواتین محاذ عمل

Date: 5 January 2008

### WAF Press Release

Women's Action Forum expressed its grief and mourned the loss of Benazir Bhutto in a requiem, eulogizing her towering presence and courage. Since then, we have reflected on what she symbolized for us personally and politically, and feel the need to articulate and document our reflections.

Benazir's death is a tremendous loss not just to PPP, but for the whole country. Her strength, commitment, and resilience in face of adversity made her indomitable in the political spectrum of the country. Her life motivated women and inspired poor people across Pakistan. While we disagreed with some of her particular positions, her pivotal place and critical contribution to the political landscape was a source of strength for us.

Her popularity reaffirmed our faith in our people – who rallied behind her defying a repressive establishment; challenging assumptions of unacceptability of women's leadership; flouted parochialism by supporting her across the nation; and were willing to sacrifice for the sake of democracy.

In brief, WAF Karachi affirms;

- The State in Pakistan is answerable for the death of Benazir Bhutto and is responsible for bringing the culprits to justice. The State faces an immense trust deficit among the people, and overcoming this is the duty of the State.
- The protracted rule of non-democratic forces and militarism in society has resulted in the spiraling of violent, militant actions in the political sphere.
- The immense tragedy of her death should not be used as a tool for dividing people, and we must be vigilant against those who try to exploit it for creating ethnic or religious fault lines.

The dignified manner in which PPP has dealt with this loss and the sensitivity with which a few major political forces have responded to it has given us a semblance of hope. While we understand the practicality that prompted the positioning of the current party leadership – and understand that Benazir Bhutto best epitomized pragmatic leadership – we also remember that for her pragmatism was a strategy. The vision and the promise of Benazir Bhutto were ideological – a tolerant and egalitarian Pakistan, defined by and vested in its people. In keeping with the visionary politics, we urge her party to move towards its realization by actualizing both, internal party and as well as country wide democracy, because democracy is both a process and an outcome.

WAF takes this opportunity to reiterate its demand for the removal of all anti-democratic changes to the 1973 Constitution made since October 1999;

For a national government to hold free and fair elections;

For freedom of the media and cancellation of the restrictive PEMRA ordinance.