



women's action forum **نحواتين محاذ عمل**

WOMEN'S ACTION FORUM, NATIONAL MEETING
KARACHI 11TH JANUARY, 2008

WAF LAHORE DISCUSSIONS/'POSITIONS' ON THE AGENDA

WAF Lahore discussed the political situation post the assassination of Benazir Bhutto; WAF's immediate and future concerns; its positions/strategies including the issue of the forthcoming elections; and the question of alliances. The meeting was attended by 18 members on the 9th of January 2008. The following is the substance of the discussions, analysis and 'positions' and reflect the consensus of Lahore WAF.

WAF Lahore added three additional items for the national meeting, 1) the forthcoming elections 2) the vulnerability of the Federation and 3) Baluchistan, FATA, WANA, Swat etc.

BENAZIR BHUTTO was a woman of stature and a most outstanding woman political leader in mainstream politics not only in Pakistan but globally. Her significance on the world scale was particularly of note since she was a leader of a country like Pakistan and had spent 28 years in the forefront of the democratic struggles. Her specific contribution was the articulation of the unity of the Federation and that she reached out to the poor, women and minorities and represented a secular world view. She was also the most vocal politician against extremism and against the militants.

Her assassination is a very serious blow to democracy and this is a moment that must give pause to her own party and all political parties to review themselves in terms of their policies, strategies, and internal workings. While WAF is against dynastic politics per se WAF Lahore takes the position that we must hold our concerns on this in the immediate future and while not going into an idolatry mode, must keep in focus that her death is a political issue with political ramifications. While the question of dynastic politics may be discussed in the national meeting WAF Lahore takes the position that at this point this should not detract us from the immediacy of the democratic processes in the country and that the contribution of Benazir and the PPP must not be lost sight of at this point.

WAF reiterated its strong indignation as to how the government particularly Musharraf responded and it feels that the lack of an appropriate response is an insult to the nation.

THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS in the light of national imperatives at this moment is a part of the democratization process. There is some confusion within the civil society movement as to how civil society is to perceive the elections. Prior to this enormous setback many of them took the position that the elections should be boycotted.

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However the need of the moment is for unity among us. Those wanting a democratic change should not take separate roads. Civil society should support the political process and the elections with reservations on whether these will be free, fair and transparent. WAF members should not only vote but encourage others to do the same. It should mobilize itself and others on the issue of free, fair and transparent elections. WAF Lahore decided that engaging with the elections are a part of engaging with the political process..

As far as ALLIANCES with other forces are concerned WAF takes the position that the distinction must be made on the basis of those who are pro or anti Musharaf. This must however be tempered by understanding those forces who have consistently been anti women (The MMA was discussed in this context).

WAF reiterates its stand-that:

1. Musharaf must step down. This is at this moment the primary contradiction and he the common enemy.
2. The judiciary of November 2nd, 07 must be reinstated and judges and lawyers under detention must be freed immediately. In this context it was decided that WAF should try and meet Munir Malik and work out with him and with the legal community and others a specific national programme for their release.
3. The media must be free and PEMRA must withdraw its recent restrictions on all media channels particularly GEO TV.
4. The UN Security Council should hold an inquiry on the assassination of Benazir. The UN Human Rights Council is powerless and of no international significance in terms of putting international pressure on the government of Pakistan, particularly the military.
5. WAF understands that the military is responsible for the militancy and the violence in the country from Zia onwards. The military has created this militancy and the politics of violence. WAF is against both at the very least because both their interests and their tactics hold the nation to ransom. Both create the law and order situation and both are responsible of creating the insecurity and vulnerability of all citizens of Pakistan.
6. While WAF does not support a federation that is brought and held together by force, it upholds the concept of federalism based on justice and equality. It strongly challenges those igniting and inciting sinister forms of ethnic articulations or the use of ethnicity to further they own hegemony. Punjab must take responsibility for the inequality between provinces and must be in the forefront of the struggle for justice and equality for all ethnicities, nationalities, etc. WAF must be part of this national project and process.