



Joint Cross Country Feminist Statement in Support of Dr. Arfana Mallah

The feminist movement stands united to collectively resist patriarchal forces, and guard our struggles for women's emancipation in Pakistan.

Pakistan, 12 June: We, as feminists from all over Pakistan, jointly condemn the false accusations of blasphemy leveled at Dr. Arfana Mallah, an eminent academic and feminist organizer, by the JUI. We strongly oppose the weaponization of blasphemy and sedition charges that are repeatedly used as an instrument to silence dissenting voices in this country. We believe that this attack on Dr. Arfana Mallah is a dangerous development, and targets not only Dr. Mallah and her personhood but also the women's movement in Pakistan. We see it as continuation of the coordinated attack and collusion by patriarchal forces within and outside the state, corporate and state media, and religious-political forces against all critical intelligentsia, student movements and people's resistance movements across the country. We also believe that this is a collective attack on the critical voices within academia.

We declare that we stand together to collectively resist all those – within and outside the state – who attempt to attack or undermine our struggle for women's emancipation in Pakistan.

We reject the state backing of the religious right that seeks to uphold patriarchal structures in Pakistan, and subject's women to state violence and exploitation on a daily basis. We also stand against the draconian colonial era laws, laws made by Zia's military regime and the ruling elite, and the laws made under the pretext of the War on Terror, which are continuously relied on to silence dissenting voices in Pakistan. It is high time that all laws that are continuously used as a coercive means to crush innocent voices be repealed. Pakistan needs democratic legislation that advances democratic values, social justice, equality and freedom of expression. It is high time that all laws that are continuously used as a coercive means to crush innocent voices be repealed.

We demand that the government take immediate legal action against relevant JUI people for endangering the life of Dr. Mallah. We also condemn the threats to academic freedom that exist in Pakistan and are exacerbated by a religious discourse in order to stifle critical thought, and demand the immediate release of academics who have been imprisoned over false charges.

Dr. Arfana Mallah is a respected academic and feminist activist, and has spent her whole life fighting not only for women's rights but also the cause of social justice for all. We believe that the current attempts to falsely accuse her are life-threatening. Therefore, we call upon all the progressive forces of Pakistan to express solidarity with Dr. Arfana Mallah, unequivocally.

The religious right-wing has been continuously attacking feminists across Pakistan, and it tried its utmost best to stop the international women's day marches from taking place earlier this year. Nevertheless, we fought back, even though feminists in Islamabad were attacked with stones and bricks on the day of the march. We will continue to fight back through peaceful means and struggle for abolishing all interlocking forms of patriarchal and state oppression, national and class oppression, along with religious bigotry.

We affirm our commitment to women's emancipation and collectively exposing, resisting and eliminating the inequities that color women's existence and defeat all forms of patriarchal oppression and violence.

Issued Collectively By:

- Women Action Forum (Hyderabad, Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, Quetta and Peshawar chapters)
- Women Democratic Front (Sindh, Islamabad, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab units)
- Sindhiyani Tehreek
- Sindhi Aurat Tanzeem
- Aurat Haq (Karachi)
- Hum Aurtein (Lahore)
- The Feminist Collective
- Girls at Dhabas
- Feminist Fridays
- Aurat Azadi March-Sukkur, Aurat Azadi March-Islamabad, Aurat Azadi March-Quetta, Aurat Azadi March-Peshawar
- Aurat March-Karachi, Aurat March-Lahore, Aurat March-Multan