

Statement on NCSW and Provincial Women Commissions

Women's Action Forum (WAF), Lahore while welcoming MoHR notification for the appointment of members of the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) considers the announcement as too little, too late. Without the Chairperson, who is the administrative and financial head and whose approval is required for all actions, the Commission cannot become operational and remains toothless. The Commission has been non-functional since 1 November 2019 when the previous Commission completed its 3-year term. Momentum and continuity have been lost; and provisions of the NCSW Act, 2012 which gives a time frame for the appointment of the Chairperson have been grossly violated.

WAF takes strong exception to the Government's indifferent attitude towards women's concerns and women's institutions including statutory bodies. The disregard for the law is appalling especially since the process of inviting nominations had been initiated months before the end of the previous Commission. In Punjab too, the Provincial Commission on the Status of Women is without the Chair and members for almost a year with no signs of filling the position or appointing members. The selection of the NCSW Chair has to be by a bi-partisan Parliamentary Committee from three candidates agreed upon by the Government and Leader of the Opposition. WAF fails to understand why it has taken so long to obtain consensus on the names.

WAF demands that the Government expedite the process of appointing the Chairperson NCSW and fulfill its responsibility and legal obligation at the earliest. In Punjab, the provincial Government after advertising the post seems to have gone to sleep. In Balochistan, having passed the law in 2018 the Commission has not yet been established. This delay in WAF's view reflects apathy of the rulers towards women and girls and encourages elements in society who do not believe in the legal identity of women and their rights under the law. WAF urges the federal and provincial governments to take immediate steps to set up the women's commissions and facilitate them to function as independent and autonomous bodies to promote and protect women's rights as guaranteed under the Constitution and in accordance with Pakistan's international commitments.

(21.06.2020)