

**STATEMENT IN COMMEMORATION OF PAKISTANI WOMEN'S DAY**  
**12<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2005, ISLAMABAD**

At the call of Khawateen Mahaz-e-Amal (Women's Action Forum), the Joint Action Committee for Citizens' Rights (JAC) and the Citizens' Action Group Against "Honour" Killings (CAGAHK) joins in observing Pakistani Women's Day, in commemoration of the infamous police brutality and illegal action against a group of unarmed women activists peacefully exercising their basic human right to demonstrate against the proposed Qanoon-e-Shahadat (Law of Evidence) outside the Lahore High Court, at the height of General Zia-ul-Haq's martial law regime on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1983.

WAF, JAC, CAGAHK, Mubariza and other progressive groups of gender, human rights and peace activists note, with gravest concern, the continuing denial of, and the serious deterioration in women's rights in particular, and basic human rights and civil liberties in Pakistan in general. The rise in cases of violence against women, especially rape and so-called "honour" killings is alarming. We strongly condemn the Government's response to the horrific case of the rape of a woman doctor in Sui, Balochistan: (i) its attempt to cover up the involvement of her male colleagues – doctors belonging to the military establishment; and (ii) its inaction regarding a local jirga's declaring her a "kari" and thus under a serious threat of falling victim to "honour" killing – are particularly reprehensible.

The Women's Action Forum and other progressive groups and sections of Pakistani society take strong exception to the retrogressive provisions and the omissions in the law relating to "honour" killings and violence against women, as passed by the National Assembly in October 2004, by the Senate in December 2004, and enacted by the Chief of Army Staff and President of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf in January 2005. We urgently call for an amendment to this law, incorporating our longstanding demands as follows:

- Compoundability: the law fails to remove the provision for compoundability through compromise and waiver of Qisas, thus laying the door open to "muafinamas" and "raazinamas", as the perpetrators are most often also the guardians, heirs and close relatives of the victims. We demand that compoundability and waiver of Qisas or ta'azir be deleted from the law.
- Role of the State as "Wali": we demand that the State must assume the role of "Wali" in cases of "honour" killings and "honour" crimes; and that the State must assume full responsibility for the registration, investigation and prosecution of all "honour" killings and "honour" crimes.
- We demand that the law must lay down a strong provision for punishment for the use of the pretext of "sudden and grave provocation" by perpetrators of "honour" killings and crimes, and forbid the permissibility of this pretext by gender-biased sections of the police and judiciary.

WAF joins civil society groups in strongly condemning the federal Government's proposal to decrease the number of Union Council seats from 21 to 13 for the forthcoming Local Government elections. Such a regressive move will result in a corresponding decrease of reserved seats for women, although the much-touted 33% quota will be retained. Women's representation will come down to 18,066 from the current figure of 36,132 women councillors. We demand that this proposed cut be abolished and the original number of seats be retained. Likewise, the number of reserved seats for non-Muslim Pakistanis, peasants and labour categories will also be decreased substantially and we demand that the original number be retained.

We strongly reiterate our longstanding demands for the immediate repeal of all discriminatory and retrogressive legislation, e.g. Hudood Ordinances (especially the Zina Ordinance), Qanoon-e-Shahadat, Qisas and Diyat provisions, Blasphemy law, Shariah Act, and others which militate against our struggle for the achievement of gender equality, social justice, human rights, and, above all, peace. We call upon all progressive and committed individuals and groups to join us in our ongoing struggle.

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