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Pakistan/International Women's Day

We Say No to Religious Fundamentalism, Privatization and Feudalism: They Collude Together to Kill, Exploit and Oppress Women

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Awami Workers' Party Message on 104th International Woman's Day - 8 March 2014.

First of all, we condemn the co-option of the womanemancipation question by neo-liberal economic and politicalforces through the ahistorical and de-contextualized 'celebration' of Women's Day as another opportunity to further the neo-liberal development agenda. We want to remind the masses and women in Pakistan that the UN and the NGOs have got nothing to do with the ideological origin of international women's day. The 8 March International Women's Day came from Clara Zetkin, a socialist, at the Socialist Second International (and not from the 'advocates of human rights') in order to celebrate the movements of women garment workers in the US in 1857 and then in 1908 for their rights as workers. The Second International (1889–1916), was an organization of socialist and labour parties formed in Paris on July 14, 1889. Among the Second International's famous actions were its (1889) declaration of May 1 as International Workers' Day and its (1910) declaration of March 8 as International Women's Day. It also initiated the international campaign for the 8-hour working day.

While many of our demands relate to the state and its economic policies, we also see a need to combat the deep-rooted patriarchy that is embedded in our (and many other) societies. We understand that the patriarchal elite, along with the capitalist/economic elite, both of which happen to be predominantly male; both these forms of privilege are unacceptable, oppressive, and create a system in which a life of dignity is a 'luxury', available only to those who agree to trample upon the lives and opportunities of their working brothers and sisters.

The Awami Workers Party celebrated the 104th International Woman's Day by holding its Women Convention on 2 March 2014 to prepare the Party's position and statement of intent on the woman question, which has already been announced on 2 March 2014. We remain committed to mobilize the entire Party to struggle for equality, development and emancipation of women. The AWP believes that the oppression of women is a political, social, legal and economic question of the first priority.

We celebrate the struggles of and by women, and salute the women from working classes who are constantly at war with the exploitative system and struggling for social justice, gender equality, development and emancipation.

We are deeply concerned about the rise of religious fundamentalism is Pakistan which is affecting the basic right of women such as: right to life, education, health care, and employment. It has also reinforced the pre-existing patriarchal violence against women.

The religious fundamentalist-friendly government of PMLN is endangering the lives and rights of women, reinforcing patriarchal institutions and cultural values, by negotiating with the terrorists and accepting their demand to further define the state ideology as a theocratic state. This engagement with fanatics will certainly obliterate whatever little rights are guaranteed to women by the law and the constitution.

We cannot allow fundamentalist political parties and military establishment, their subsidiary terrorist organizations to define and drive the country on the pretext of security and stability in Pakistan, as it is detrimental to women emancipation in Pakistan. We reaffirm our commitment to the struggle for separating religion from the state and politics

The new liberal agenda of Muslim League (PMLN) government has resulted into policies of privatization and withdrawal of subsidies, which have hit women the most as women are the last ones to receive benefits and the first

one to loose rights and resources. We reject the sale of public properties, public services, essential infrastructure such as energy, health, education, and transport such as railway and Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). We also reject the PMLN government's recent no-extension policy for federal government employees, which will certainly hit white-collar workers, mainly women in PIA, schools, hospitals and other offices. We demand for re-nationalization of electricity distribution system and reinstatement of subsidy for power sector to improve daily lives of millions of women and working conditions of home-based workers.

We have seen the worst forms of labour exploitation and oppression of women in areas, which are under direct feudalistic control. In addition to worst forms of labour exploitation, we have witnessed feudal/tribal jirga/pachayat endorsing sexual violence against women, forced marriages, child-marriage, gifting women for dispute settlement. To abolish feudalism, the AWP has moved the Supreme Court to implement the land reforms introduced by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto through Martial Law Regulation 115 of 1972 and the Land Reforms Act, 1977. The plea also urges the court to nullify the 1990 judgment of the appellate bench of the Federal Shariat Court declaring land reforms un-Islamic. We condemn the feudal of Punjab who have colluded across political party and become a legal party against this constitutional petition, main PMLN and PTI. We call upon provincial governments, mainly Sindh and Baluchistan governments to express legal solidarity with AWP and support the constitutional petition for land reforms, as this is detrimental for social and gender justice in Pakistan.

With respect to women's basic needs, we demand for drastic reduction in military budget and considerable increase in the budget to ensure free public education and health services. We further demand removal of all anti-women systems and policy perspectives from health and education services through modernizing and secularizing health and education services in Pakistan.

Finally, we understand that it is the system of elite rule, which is the root cause of the multiple burdens that oppresses and exploits women, as workers, as unemployed housewives, as the urban and rural poor, as students, as professionals, as poor farmers and fisherfolk. This system uses patriarchal and conservative ideologies and violence to maintain the status quo. We reject this system because it defends an economic system based on the supremacy of "private profits" over "people's needs".

To significantly reduce and ultimately eradicate the multiple-burdens of exploitation and oppression faced by women, we reaffirm our struggle for socialism. We believe that this can be achieved.

We call upon all the progressive organizations and movements in Pakistan to form solidarity with AWP in supporting the struggle for women emancipation and oppressed.

Farooq Tariq

General Secretary

Awami Workers Party