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Women

Pakistan: after 8 March, solidarity with the organizers of the Aurat Azadi Marches and Aurat Marches

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The Awami Workers Party extends its solidarity with the organizers of the Aurat [Women]Azadi [Freedom] Marches and Aurat Marches in various cities of the country against the vicious attacks on them from various quarters after the women's day marches. [1] [2] [3]

AWP condemns in particular the attacks on the march organizers by rightwing politicians in parliament and the provincial assemblies of Punjab and Sindh from the MMA, PTI, and other parties. [4]

The attacks by political and media elites, such as Abida Bibi, Amir Liaquat, Orya Maqbool Jan, Maulana Kamaluddin and others, represent a particularly alarming situation whereby citizens are being actively endangered and threatened by their public representatives for demanding their rights.

The attacks on the organizers of the women's marches are evidence of the fact that deeply-entrenched patriarchal forces feel threatened by the growing strength and diversity of the women's movement in Pakistan.

As women become increasingly organized against systemic gender-based injustices and inequities, they are being told, in an age-old patriarchal tradition, that they must remain silent about their pain or express it within certain bounds.

We feel it is particularly shameful that public representatives responsible for protecting the interests of the public are demanding action against ordinary citizens who have merely exercised their constitutional right to assemble and protest; we will resist such attacks on political freedoms at every step.

Instead of targeting peaceful organizers, action should be taken against those who have illegally threatened and harassed women organizers since the marches.

We understand that the slogan of 'protecting culture' has long been cynically used as a tool to subjugate women and silence their demands for justice and liberation. Both the state and rightwing have long used the idea of a threat to our culture, religion and values to keep patriarchal hierarchies intact.

The backlash to the marches from the political right has exposed this nexus that seeks to keep women in a subordinate social and political position in our society.

AWP and its sister organizations will resist all attempts to target organizers of the women's marches and called for concerted grassroots organization to resist any attempts at intimidation and silencing of ordinary non-violent political workers and activists.

We also understand that the response to the women's day marches is evidence of the extent of their success. Despite the accusations about the movement's 'elitism', the marches were incredibly diverse in their class and ethnic composition, including enthusiastic participation from domestic workers, katchi abadi residents, eviction affectees, transgendered women and peasant women.

Despite claims about the 'frivolousness' of some placards, the movement's demands and objectives are

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comprehensive, concrete and relate to fundamental economic, social and political imbalances, related to both women and men, that need to be addressed.

While the inevitable imperfections and inequalities remain, they are a normal part of the process of building movements, organizations and coalitions for equality and justice.

The allegations are a distraction; it is in fact the increasing scale and diversity of these mobilizations that is worrying a longstanding patriarchal order, which is now trying to silence women's dissent through its ideological and political vanguard in the state.

Now more than ever, we must assert the legitimacy of the right of women to freely express their grievances and demand restitution. Now, more than ever, we must resist the attempts to push women back from spaces that have been gained through decades of struggle.

AWP stands with the women's movement and reasserts its call for a concerted and organized struggle to establish a society free of class, gender, ethnic and religious hierarchies and injustices.

[1] <https://www.facebook.com/events/press-club-islamabad/aurat-azadi-march-islamabad/379454929515940/>.

[2] <https://www.dawn.com/news/1468636>.

[3] https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/7xnqzd/how-pakistani-women-are-using-iwd-to-push-for-peace-with-india.

[4] <https://peoplesdispatch.org/2019/03/19/progressive-sections-stand-in-solidarity-with-aurat-azadi-march-in-pakistan/>.