

Press Release

Fourth conference of left-wing and progressive parties: “Building Comradeship between Progressive Women from Afghanistan and Pakistan”

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Pak-Afghan left conference

LAHORE: The progressive groups of Pakistan and Afghanistan have urged collective and effective strategy to ensure women rights and empowerment in the deepening grip of religious extremist and fundamentalist forces in both countries.

The progressive groups on both sides, discussed this in a three-day joint conference “Building Comradeship between Progressive Women from Afghanistan and Pakistan,” concluded at a local hotel in Lahore, on Wednesday. The participants from different left-wing and progressive parties from Pakistan and Afghanistan, including Awami Workers party and Solidarity Party Afghanistan, attended the conference. This is fourth conference of its series of joint cooperation between progressive forces of Afghanistan and Pakistan in the past few years. Three days discussions on the subject highlighted oppressing situation of women in different shapes and under different circumstances in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Representatives of different labour groups, left wing political parties from Kabul and different parts of Pakistan attended the conference.

The participants observed that women and both countries are facing similar challenges in getting their fundamental rights including health, education, freedom of expression and rights of marriages of choice, inheritance and being independent in their views.

Highlighting the situation of growing religious fundamentalism in Pakistan, Farooq Tariq, secretary general AWP, said that the religious fundamentalism is becoming a global trend, particularly, in South Asia. He said religious extremism is rising in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh in different shapes. He said because of particular interpretation and connotations of religion, the rights of women are suppressed by the mullahs and clerics adding to suffering of women in these societies. He said the groups like their parties believe in equality of men and women in term of rights, social justice and representation of women in a direct political process. Without getting involved women in direct political process, no democracy and no society can progress, he said. He said religions should be separated from state for a progressive society and development.

Hafeez Raas, representative of Solidarity Party Afghanistan, said that the women rights are even more suppressed in Afghanistan as compared to Pakistan. He said they are suppressed by religious fundamentalist groups, warlords and tribes. He rejected the claims of American and western media that recently held general elections of Afghanistan were independent and fair. There was no participation of real democratic forces in these elections, he said, he maintained that out of 61 political parties in Afghanistan there are only a few those are really democratic and they are

working at limited level. He said through strict legislation they are stopping the ways of such democratic parties so that they could not become part of mainstream. He said Solidarity party believes in equality of men and women and a secular state. He said there is need to evolve a joint strategy by the progressive forces of both countries to counter the fears and threats after the withdrawal of Americana and NATO forces from the region when these religious and fundamentalist groups would try to takeover and further suppress the rights, especially of women.

The conference also agreed on making alliance at local and regional level to enhance the partnership of such groups for strategy to counter religious extremism and broaden the network of such progressive forces for a collective voice against fundamentalism and imperialism.

The conference, on concluding session, agreed upon to evolve a joint strategy with Pakistan and Afghanistan's left wing and progressive groups, especially AWP and SPA, to have more cooperation and interaction in future for practical measure to fight religious extremism on both sides. They also discussed to have actions, protests, petitions, on both sides at same times on common issues like violence against women, gang rapes, women participation in political process and social justice etc. they discussed to have common links and interactions through joint newsletters, websites and social media interactions to aware masses, enhance interaction, and become practically united to give awareness against religious extremism.

Joint Declaration Awami Workers Party and Solidarty Party of Afghanistan

after three days of conference held at Hotel Pak Heritage Lahore on theme of

"Building Comradeship Between Progressive Women from Afghanistan and Pakistan"

The progressive groups of Pakistan and Afghanistan, including the Awami Workers Party and the Solidarity Party of Afghanistan met for three days to discuss and debate the challenges of religious fundamentalism and its effect on the women of both countries. We believe that

- 1.** Religious fundamentalism is abhorrent and must be curbed. This is only possible through a two pronged strategy involving state intervention as well as active social reform. By state intervention, we mean upholding the law and treating militants as criminals, to be held accountable for their crimes in courts of law. We believe that military intervention alone is not the way out of this and peace talks will not lead us anywhere.
- 2.** Women of both countries face similar issues including a lack of healthcare, education, access to proper justice, economic opportunities, freedom of expression and the right to marry out of choice, the right to inheritance and being independent in their views. We will continue to struggle for these rights in both countries. We seek justice for the women who have been victimised by religious fundamentalists and oppressive state institutions.
- 3.** We will expose religious fundamentalism for the blight it is upon this region. We will not be silenced and will highlight the fundamentalists' injustices on every platform, including the media, blogs, regular meetings and conferences, etc.
- 4.** The people of Afghanistan demand a tribunal to try war criminals and answer for the atrocities

committed against women and progressive groups in Afghanistan

5. We must unite in our aims, exhort each other at every step and work together to achieve these goals together

6. Religious institutions have been allowed to become breeding grounds for religious fundamentalism. Madrassahs must be subsumed within the public education system. They must be regulated and the education imparted there must be brought to par with other public schools. Their teachers must be employed by the government and trained so as to provide them job and social securities. The state must realise that it is playing with fire in trying to blur the lines between religion and the state. The state must learn from Afghanistan's and its own experience in the matter

7. South Asia has undergone a wave of religious fundamentalism and the women and minorities have suffered the most from this wave. The women of this region must be united in their goals vis-a-vis rights, social justice and representation in direct political process. There can be no progress without empowering women in leadership roles

8. We must continue holding such conferences and develop linkages with progressive groups of both countries as well as Kashmir. Social media and skype conferences are a cost effective alternative to holding regular cross border meetings. They also allow for regular exchange of ideas, experiences and possibilities of collaborations

9. Both parties have agreed to have joint action collaborations on many issues pertaining to religious fundamentalism and women's rights in both countries. Oppression in one country will be met with joint action by both Afghanistan and Pakistan

Farooq Tariq,
general secretary
Awami Workers Party

Hafiz Rasikh, Selay Ghaffar
Solidarity Party of Afghanistan

The three days conference was organised with assistance of Left Party of Sweden and all the arrangements for the conference was made by Labour Education Foundation.
