

# Pakistan: Press conference of the Awami Workers Party

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## Awami Workers Party

PRESS CONFERENCE,

LAHORE PRESS CLUB

Lahore, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2017 - The Awami Workers Party (AWP) has reiterated its support to the fledgling parliamentary democratic system in the country, and warned that it will resist any and all extra-constitutional steps that prevent the elected government from completing its tenure.

The AWP has also said that it will continue to resist the establishment's agenda of full-fledged militarization of the state, and said that the establishment has no mandate to interfere in civilian affairs, whether foreign policy, the mainstream of FATA, or the economy.

The AWP has also criticized mainstream parties who have remained silent or complicit in the face of this growing encroachment of the establishment upon civilian affairs and has called upon all progressive forces to come together and build a genuinely democratic alternative to the present system in which all forms of oppression and exploitation are eliminated.

Addressing a press conference at the Lahore Press Club, AWP president Fanoos Gujjar, general secretary Akhtar Hussain, spokesperson Farooq Tariq and vice president Abida Chaudhry said that throughout Pakistan's history, leftist forces have struggled for fundamental transformation of state and society so that all of the country's people are guaranteed basic rights irrespective of class, creed, caste, gender or religious affiliation, and so that Pakistan establishes a non-aligned foreign policy to resist all forms of imperialism and establish friendly relations with all its neighbours.

However, the establishment and its allied mainstream parties consistently criminalized the left, facilitated extremist militant groups and thwarted the democratic process. As a result, right-wing terrorism today haunts Pakistani society, the country stands isolated from its neighbours, and the political system is beset by a complete crisis of legitimacy.

The current stand-off between the PML-N and establishment confirms that the 70-year old contradiction is now becoming untenable, but neither the PML-N, PTI nor any other mainstream party are willing or able to decisively challenge the establishment or detach itself from the rule of global capital and the destructive wars of imperialist forces.

The AWP leaders pointed out that all around the world, the global capitalist system is in crisis and elitist, megalomaniacal and reactionary political forces are on the rise. The global financial crisis which erupted in 2007 continues to intensify but the genuine alternative programme of progressive and leftist forces is completely overshadowed by right-wing populist rhetoric.

In Pakistan too, long-established internal contradictions are being exacerbated by regional and global developments, and here too right-wing populists like the PTI claiming to be a genuine

alternative are only taking the desperate masses towards further crisis.

The AWP openly advocates certain structural reforms that distinguish it from all right-wing populist forces who claim to be challenging the system. Amongst these, land and agrarian reforms are primary, which includes reinstating the parliamentary legislations of 1972 and 1977 which established ceilings on landholdings; but also bringing to a halt the practice of allotting public land to state personnel, particularly military officers.

Other policies include regulation of the activities of all multinational corporations, and particularly the protection of the rights of labour and the environment; and reversal of the policy of privatization of public services. In fact AWP is committed to ensuring the quality provision of health, education, housing and other basic services to all Pakistanis irrespective of their means.

Despite the civilian government's complete lack of concern with such matters, and its failings on numerous other matters of great significance, the AWP believes that it retains a mandate to fulfil its term in office. However, the AWP believes that it is no longer necessary for the establishment to enforce martial law to defend its interests; progressives who are resisting the militarization of the state are being subjected to all forms of repression, and it is therefore necessary for all progressives to join hands against both the establishment's dictates as well as the anti-people impulses of the ruling parties.

The AWP leaders highlighted numerous struggles of working people in different parts of the country which reflect the rise of right-wing bigotry, the repressive measures of the establishment and the continued unwillingness of mainstream political parties to build a mass movement against the political-economic system.

Most prominent amongst them are the ongoing victimization of peasant farmers on the Okara military farms, the forced disappearances of activists in Sindh, as well as the continuing reduction of space for dissent against 'development' projects all over the country.

The AWP leaders in particular noted that the desperate plight of the people of Balochistan and FATA which continue to be subject to the horror of military operations and the establishment's policy of 'strategic depth'. The AWP leaders condemned the fact that the ruling classes continue to benefit from their control over FATA, Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK but that the most basic constitutional rights are still denied to the people of these regions.

In fact political problems never have a military solution - this is true as much for the phenomenon of right-wing religious militancy as it is for the ethnic insurgency in Balochistan.

Here again mainstream political parties have been found wanting - they have supported the so-called National Action Plan, military courts, and all other such initiatives but have made no attempt to address the propagation of extremist ideas in textbooks and in the media, or bring the cause of long suppressed regions like Balochistan, FATA and GB into the political and intellectual mainstream.

Finally the AWP leadership warned that there is no 'quick-fix' to Pakistan's myriad problems. Prior to the present stand-off between the PML-N government and the establishment, a perception had been created that CPEC will magically address all of Pakistan's problems.

The AWP leaders warned that Pakistan's people have suffered for almost seven decades due to the state's pandering to US imperialism, and that no external alignment can itself ensure resolution of long-standing structural crises in Pakistan. In fact, only a non-aligned foreign policy privileging friendly relations with all neighboring countries, particularly Afghanistan and India, can guarantee

peace and prosperity for Pakistan's long-suffering working people, oppressed nationalities, women and religious minorities.

*Press conference addressed by Akhtar Hussain, Fanoos Gujjar, Farooq Tariq and Abida Choudry*

