

Cut in military spending sought: Pre-budget seminar

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Reproduced below is the Daily Dawn Coverage of WWHL pre-budget dialogue “People Charter of Demand on Budget 2008” under ELBAG campaign, organized on Friday at Lahore Press Club.

LAHORE, May 23: The Women Workers Helpline has presented people’s charter of budgetary demands calling for cut in military and non-productive expenditures for making additional resources available for the social sector development.

The charter was presented after formulating it through a series of community level consultations across the country under the international level knowledge-based mobilization “Economic Literacy and Budget Accountability for Governance” at a pre-budget seminar by the Helpline at the Press Club here on Friday.

Helpline secretary-general Bushra Khaliq said the military budget should not only discuss in parliament but its details should also be made public because it involved major portion of spending. She said the budget making process required to be made more transparent and participatory by involving members of parliament in its preparation and approval.

The social sector budget, she said, should focus on marginal sections, including women, minorities, children and elderly people.

Mega projects should be initiated through proper procedural framework with parliament having the authority to approve or reject them after discussion. She said the minimum wage should be raised to Rs12,000 in view of unprecedented inflation. She said the charter required the government to accept the responsibility for education. The budgetary allocation for education should be doubled and increased to 10 per cent of the GDP for meeting the millennium development goals by 2015.

She said the allocation for health should also be raised from 0.57 per cent to two per cent of the GDP and funds should be allocated for reducing the maternal mortality rate to 200 per live births by 2011 as envisaged by the National, Maternal and Child Health Programme. She said medical screening facilities and trained staff should be made available at all basic health units at tehsil, town and taluka level.

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) representative Mahboob Khan said the government should not only discontinue privatization but also give substantial relief to the salaried class and wage-earners in the budget. He urged the government to stop repayment of foreign loans in cases where it had paid back the principal amount or more. All new loans should be accepted after a thorough debate in parliament. Talat Rubab called for a clear gender-friendly policy and institutional framework for public spending.

She said provinces should be given financial autonomy and wages should be linked to rate of inflation. The local population should be consulted before starting mega development projects in any

area. Rights of the people should not be compromised for foreign investment, she said. — Reporter

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