

## **Pakistan NWFP: NGOs under threat**

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It should come as no surprise that clerics in Mansehra have asked NGOs to sack their female employees by July 30 or face being forcibly stopped from working in their area. It is no secret that right-wing elements in the country, particularly the religious ones, see NGOs as foreign-funded and inspired therefore un-Islamic in motivation. The lengths to which certain elements can go to discredit NGOs is what is worrisome.

Earlier this year, a woman NGO worker in the Kailash area was kidnapped in Peshawar and released only after she paid a ransom of one million rupees. She was still lucky compared to an NGO worker who last year, along with her teenage daughter, was killed in Dir, her crime being that she worked for a women's rights organisation. Dir was also the focus of much attention during elections when women were prevented from voting until the Supreme Court stepped in and ensured against forcible prevention. NGO workers were then beaten for encouraging women to exercise their right to vote. These incidents show the scale of threats and coercion NGO workers, especially women, face in carrying out their work, especially in the NWFP. This makes it imperative for the authorities to provide security to NGO personnel in Mansehra against threats of violence by bigoted elements.

It is unfortunate that while governments seem unwilling to undertake social work, those that do are often obstructed in every possible way. It is perhaps futile to argue with the clerics on the valuable service NGOs render in promoting health and education for the poor, for they are not open to reason. But they simply must be allowed to obstruct the good work the NGOs are doing for the betterment of the people.

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**P.S.**

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