

Press Release

## Women's protection bill a farce

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LAHORE: The latest compromise made by the government with respect to amendments in the Hudood laws is nothing more than a joke.

HRCP expresses its acute disappointment that the rights of women have been dealt with in so cavalier a fashion.

The so-called Women's Protection Bill is a farcical attempt at making Hudood Ordinances palatable. In the first place, the implications of the ordinances go far beyond discrimination and persecution of women on the plea of morality. For instance, the law prescribes punishments which are inhuman and allows for evidence of male Muslim witnesses for application of Hadd punishments. However, women accused under Tazir punishment of Zina (adultery) are its main victims. There are ample examples of victims of rape being imprisoned under accusations of zina.

The Women's Protection Bill has addressed none of these concerns. In addition the government has agreed to replace Section 3 of the draft by subjecting the interpretation of the Ordinance according to the injunctions of Islam. Such open-ended jurisdiction granted to an already cowed down judiciary will result in authentication of the most conservative form of religious interpretation. It will also be detrimental to the rights of non-Muslim citizens, who may not subscribe to Islamic principles. The addition of Section 3, could also undo the meaningful amendment made in the law in 1996 (The Abolition of the Punishment of whipping Act, 1996), which abolished mandatory public whippings for the crimes of Zina and Zina-bil-jabr (rape).

HRCP has also noted that the two amendments introduced earlier by the clerics within the ruling party had stiffened conditions for complaint of Qazf. By keeping hadd punishment of

zina-bil-jabr in the Ordinance, while moving the Tazir punishment to the PPC, the authors of the draft have created a confusion in deciding jurisdiction of the appellate court. This will only benefit those accused of zina-bil-jabr.

HRCP reiterates its demand that the Hudood laws be repealed, and that the government refrains from using the issue of women's rights to further its own interests, rather than making any real effort to better the plight of the women in country.

Asma Jahangir, Chairperson

Iqbal Haider, Secretary-General