

**‘Gender, Peace and Conflict in Pakistan: Knowledge, Best Practice and Research in Policy Making Processes’**,

**Round Table Discussion Organized by Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU)**

Let me start by thanking Prof. Dr. Samina Amin Qadir, Vice Chancellor of Fatima Jinnah Women University and her team for organizing this round table discussion and for providing me the opportunity to share with you my views on a very interesting theme of “Gender, Peace and Conflict in Pakistan: Knowledge, Best Practice and Research in Policy Making Process’.

I would also like to congratulate both the Fatima Jinnah Women University and the British Council for joining hands in launching the International Strategic Partnership to Strengthen National Training and Research Capabilities (INSPIRE).

Let me also share with you that I found the project started under this INSPIRE programme: “Facilitating Women Parliamentarians in Pakistan: Conflict, Peace & Security Issues” very interesting and unique.

There was never a more suitable time for focusing on the role of women in dealing with conflict, peace and security issues.

Changed dynamics of international peace and security has made it very clear that long term and sustainable peace and security cannot be achieved without involving the women folk of any society.

Times have passed when conflict and peace were considered exclusively men’s domain. In today’s world women could be an instigator of conflict as well as the catalyst for long term peace.

Today's round table discussion: "Gender, Peace and Conflict in Pakistan: Knowledge, Best Practice and Research in Policy Making Process" is very important especially considering the prevalent dynamics of international peace and security.

Whether we like it or not it's a fact that Pakistan has a very vital position on the international security map of the world. Peaceful conflict resolution in Pakistan is imperative for the long term international peace.

Traditionally we are used to retrospective policy making, but the present Government has inherited the vision and ideology of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto; and both of these great leaders were proactive in their thinking and actions.

It was Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who while addressing the nation in 1970 had said that " We consider the removal of inequalities, the achievement of a fair distribution of wealth, and the establishment of a welfare society as a proper function of the state"

And it was her daughter who in 2003 had remarked that " with civil society taking on a global character, local and international initiatives can be woven together to provide new opportunities for women's participation in decision making"

I am quoting the two great leaders to make my point that proactive thinking in decision making is vital for dealing with the issues of national and international concern; and to establish the fact that present government having inherited the vision of these leaders is adopting proactive approach in dealing with the most vital issue of conflict, security and peace.

It is because of this proactive thinking that present government had realized from the very first day that if we want to win this war on terror we would have to win the war against poverty. These two wars are intertwined, mutually inclusive and causing each other; and former can never be won without winning the latter.

Secondly, we also realized that without empowering women we cannot make serious progress on any front especially in building a peaceful, tolerant and developed society. As no society in the world has developed without empowering their women.

Women empowerment is also vital from the point of view of our topic of discussion today as women's role in peace and conflict cannot be over emphasized. As in the words of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto " women - far more than husbands and brothers – are cautious about committing the lives of their children to war. Women are the principal educators, not just of literacy but also of morality".

Proactive thinking is hard to achieve without having more than adequate knowledge about the issue, which could only be gained through research and education.

Research based policy making is a standard operating procedure in the developed world but unfortunately in our country the tradition of research in policy making isn't that strong.

But the present government has tried to change this tradition as we are focusing on research based informed decision making. I am speaking from my personal experience as the Chairperson of Benazir Income Support Programme, where our decision making is based on the research about the issues of concern.

To give you few examples of informed decision making based on proper research Ladies and Gentlemen, let me apprise you a little bit about BISP the largest social safety net of the country.

BISP was launched in 2008 as a means to provide financial assistance to the poorest of the poor adversely affected by the high inflation and the impact of the international economic crisis.

Women empowerment is an integral part of the design of the programme. All benefits to the deserving families are being provided through the woman of the family.

Our research showed that poor families are generally not very enthusiastic about issuance of CNIC for the women of their families. Let me share with you that due to efforts of BISP (as we made possession of CNIC a pre-requisite for eligibility under BISP) ratio of registration of women with NADRA, particularly in remote areas of the country has picked up tremendously.

Figures of last two years will illustrate my point. In 2009 for the first time in the history of Pakistan, female outnumbered men in CNIC registration. The figure was 3.45 million for male while that of female was 4.8 million. Similarly up to June 2010, 1.45 million female as compared to 1.3 million male have been registered with NADRA. It was the informed decision making based on research, which enabled BISP to achieve these results.

Secondly, we are conducting a Poverty Scorecard based Poverty Survey of the entire country. For the successful conduct of this huge exercise and to make it a worthy endeavor we again opted for research based decision making. First we conducted pilot survey of 16 districts, analyzed the results of that pilot phase, rectified the shortcomings and then started the national roll out of poverty survey.

I feel immense pleasure to share with you that survey of the entire country is going on and we have successfully completed almost 70% of the survey.

Successful completion of this survey in June 2011 will give us an unprecedented data base containing immensely valuable information about the socio-economic conditions of the each family living in entire country.

This data base would be a huge help and a vital instrument for future decision making regarding any sphere of development.

Whenever we have to start a new initiative we first launch a pilot in a district or two; analyze the results of that pilot and based on the information modify our plan and then launch a country wide initiative.

Based on this kind of decision making, BISP has in a short span of time, reached out to more than 3 million families across the country.

We also learnt from research that such social protection initiatives tend to instill dependency among the recipients on the state donations.

To cater for this problem BISP designed a graduation strategy to enable poor people to earn a dignified living instead of relying on cash grants.

Under BISP'S graduation strategy, the microfinance initiative of 'Waseela-E-Haq' aims to facilitate the income generation opportunities for women, by providing them micro loans and thus giving them a chance to escape the vicious cycle of poverty.

Our Vocational Training Program 'Waseela e Rozgar' envisages providing unskilled female workers or their nominees across Pakistan with the demand driven skill based training to enhance prospects of earning a dignified livelihood. All expenses including boarding, lodging and tuition fee will be borne by BISP.

Under 'Waseela e Sehat', bread earner of beneficiary families is provided life insurance of upto Rs 100,000.

I have given you this brief facts about BISP to share with you the experience of research based policy making. And to encourage you that you are not alone in this struggle for promoting informed policy making especially among the female parliamentarian.

However, its imperative that we both coordinate and synchronized our efforts in promoting the culture of research based informed decision making.

I believe that INSPIRE and similar efforts would go a long way in promoting our goal of gender equality and gender sensitization and for ensuring enhanced share for women in informed policy making.

In the end I once again thank Dr. Samina Amin Qadir for providing me the opportunity to share my views with you. And I wish you all the best in your endeavor for the promotion of women rights in our society.