

**Address on International Women Day**  
**At Jinnah Convention Center**  
**March 8<sup>th</sup> , 2012**

Honorable Prime Minister

Speaker National Assembly

Ministers and Parliamentarians

Distinguished Guests

Ladies & Gentlemen

Assalm-o-Allakum

Let me start by thanking honorable Prime Minister, the Advisor to Prime Minister for Human Rights and his team for organizing this very important convention and for providing me the opportunity to share with you the role played by Benazir Income Support Programme for the empowerment of women in our society.

As you all know International Women's Day (IWD) is celebrated in different regions of the world to show respect, appreciation and gratitude towards women and to celebrate women's economic, political and social achievements.

Women are almost 70% percent of the world's poor, and unfortunately two-thirds of the world's women do not have the opportunity or the social approval to learn to read and write. Situation in Pakistan is unfortunately even worse.

In Pakistan we celebrate International Women's Day every year to honor our women's ongoing struggle for their due social, political and economic rights, despite facing many cultural restrictions.

I am sure you all would remember the promise made by our great leader Mohtarma Shaheed Benazir Bhutto while drafting the manifesto of our party when she said that “we promise to give high priority to empowerment of women and ensure their equal rights”.

I feel immense pride and satisfaction to share with you that we have not only honored the pledge made by our great leader. Since the time of these pledges, we have done a great deal of work for the development, empowerment and emancipation of our women. And the platform employed for this purpose is none other than Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP).

We at BISP are trying our best to ensure provision of food, shelter, clothing and opportunities to work, to the most under-privileged, most neglected and most marginalized segments of our society; and unfortunately our women falls in all these categories.

BISP’s efforts are targeted towards the achievement of two of the most important points of Millennium Development Goal (MDGs), which rrelate to eradication of poverty and promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.

BISP has set its objectives as Poverty Reduction through Women Empowerment.

According to United Nation’s document on MDGs the most vital actions for empowerment of women is to scale up actions and increase financial resources for measures targeted towards women empowerment; and to support women earning opportunities especially in rural areas through micro finance.

Ladies & Gentlemen

I am glad to share with you that BISP is very much doing the same things for the welfare and betterment of our women.

Woman is the centerpiece of BISP focus. We at BISP are working to reduce the sufferings and to improve the status of our women folks.

BISP benefits like monthly cash transfers of Rs. 1000, and long term interest free financial assistance of Rs.300,000 under Waseela-e-Haq, are either given directly to or through females of the family.

Under Waseela-e-Haq programme, soft loans are given to the female beneficiaries to start their own business enabling them & their family to move out of the vicious poverty trap.

Only women member of the family can be recipient of and sole proprietor of the business under Waseela-e-Haq programme. In other words she will be the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of her business. However, she can authorize any member of her family to run the business on her behalf. Thus elevating her status in the conventional household of a male dominated society.

Our initiative of Vocational Training, is also targeted towards the welfare of our women. Under this programme, one member of each beneficiary family is being imparted vocational/technical training free of cost thus becoming a source of respectable income generation for the family.

Even for Technical Training female beneficiary nominates a next of kin (both male and female) for receiving the training.

Besides these, We are also providing life insurance for the bread earner of these under privileged families to safe guard them against any financial shock in case of unfortunate death of their bread earner.

Similarly, we are about to launch the Health Insurance programme from 22<sup>nd</sup> of this month. Under this programme coverage of Rs.25,000 per family would be provided through female of the family. Health Insurance will cover full hospitalization, pregnancy, daycare treatment, diagnostic tests and accident compensation for members of the family  
This would particularly include mother and child health care thus ensuring the healthy sustenance of our mothers and children.

We are confident that through these initiatives we are facilitating and creating employment opportunities not only for women but also for millions of youth of our nation who are waiting for decent employment opportunities.

We all know how badly the ongoing war on terror has affected our economy; marginalized and under privileged sections of society being most vulnerable to any economic shock have suffered the most both in physical as well as material terms.

Realizing their problems in general and of their women in particular, BISP has launched an Emergency Relief Package under which civilian bomb blast victims are provided all the benefits of BISP.

Considering the importance of education for the human capital development BISP is designing an initiative to increase education of the women by providing additional resources for the primary education of the children of the beneficiaries under

Waseela-e Taleem.

Honorable Prime Minister

Apart from these tangible measures taken for the empowerment of women, we are also taking certain careful steps which could be instrumental in changing the psychological mindset of our predominantly conventional society.

The newly introduced Benazir Smart Card is one of these steps. Women of these marginalized sections of society would hold their destiny in their hands in the shape of this card as all the above benefits would be transferred and implemented through this Smart Card.

This card would be a key to empowerment for the underprivileged women of our society even living in remotest areas of the country.

Moreover, indirectly we are also working for giving the women of our nation their identity. Without a proper identity card they were a non-existing entity with no present and even limited future prospects.

By making the CNIC holder ship as a prerequisite for being the beneficiary of BISP we have forced the males of their families to give women their identity. As a result, the rate of female registration under NADRA has picked up considerable pace.

Even in remote areas like FATA, G-B & areas of interior Sindh and Balochistan, female are registering themselves under NADRA.

Ladies & Gentlemen

I am glad to share with you that due to our initiatives more than 10 million women have got their identity in shape of their CNIC since the inception of BISP. Even in the remotest and most conventional areas of FATA the rate of female registration has increased many folds. BISP has introduced new technology like mobile phone banking and Benazir Cards and has made the women well conversant with new technology that was previously considered to be the only prerogative of the rich or those who can afford. But BISP has introduced these gadgets to the poorest of the poor sections of society and especially to the poor women.

What we are hoping through these initiatives is that women would no longer have to depend on male members of the family for their subsistence, their identity and their existence.

These initiatives of BISP would give women not only a sense of ownership but would also improve their social status and be a step towards women emancipation

BISP is committed to providing maximum opportunities to the women of this country to be the masters of their own destiny.

They will no longer have to suffer the disgrace of poverty and dependence on the male members of their family and thus suffer undue exploitation.

Apart from BISP, the leadership of Pakistan People's Party have always displayed a strong commitment for promotion of equal rights for all including women and a firm resolve to fight against all forms of discrimination against women.

The latest example of this is the passage of bill against domestic violence and harassment of women. I am specifically mentioning the violence against women and harassment of

women at workplace as it's the manifestation of the worst form of discrimination against women.

Our Government, since 2008, has passed as much as 9 bills for empowerment of women in Pakistan.

Every woman of Pakistan has the right to a decent livelihood, adequate housing, education for her children, access to health facilities, respect in the society and above all a life of independence and self esteem.

We at BISP are putting our best foot forward for attainment of these long cherished ideals of empowered, dignified and emancipated women, so very close to the heart of our great leader Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the end I would like to thank the President who is the chief patron of BISP and the Prime Minister who is executive patron of the programme for their confidence, trust and endless support, which has enabled us to achieve so much in just three years.

I would also like to thank all our colleagues, and partners from government, civil society, media, academia and donors for supporting and helping us in achieving our mission of women empowerment.

With this much confidence and support it would not have been possible for us to do so much for our sisters.

I wish and pray for our women to succeed in all their goals and efforts and to become respectable and productive citizen of Pakistan.

God bless you all. Thank you very much!