

# **“Promotion of Democracy, Peace and Human Rights through Combating Discrimination”**

Discrimination of every kind, form and nature is detrimental for the social, psychological and economic development of human kind. And its indeed true that combating discrimination could be instrumental for the promotion of democracy, peace and human rights in any society.

The very definition of Human rights as “those rights which are held by all human beings” is an evidence that human rights and discrimination are antithesis of each other.

Same is the case with democracy, which be definition is the end of discrimination as it's the indiscriminate expression of the will of the people without any consideration of cast, color, creed or religion.

The concept of human rights is a product of the enlightenment and education in the aftermath of World War-II and has spread around the world.

And you would agree with me that the major reason for the World War II was the tendency of a select group to discriminate against the others. So a durable peace is also not possible in presence of any form of discrimination.

The peoples of the world have in the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights' preamble reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women.

It is also said that Women rights are human rights because women comprise more than half the world's population.

Women are the primary caretakers for most of the world's children and elderly. Yet much of the work they do is not valued - not by economists, not by historians, and not by our popular culture; rather they are always discriminated against.

But the leadership of Pakistan People's Party from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Mohtarma benazir Bhutto Shaheed to the President Asif Ali Zardari 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.

The latest example of this is the passage of bill against the harassment of women. I am specifically mentioning the violence against women and harassment of women as it's the manifestation of the worst form of discrimination.

But only passage of bill is not sufficient, it is now responsibility of all of us to build an understanding and respect for rights in our community. Education about human rights is the centerpiece of our agenda.

Our decision to concentrate on violence and harassment of women in all areas of our work reflects our understanding that, if the human rights of 'everyone, everywhere, everyday' are to be truly respected, the levels of violence, harassment and discrimination in Pakistan will decline significantly.

Violence, and harassment are not only inconsistent with the right of everyone to be treated with respect and to live free from fear and violence; they impact indirectly on the internationally recognized rights to equality of opportunity, to health, to employment, to education, to housing and to family life.

Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights says "Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organisation and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality."

In recognition of this important message the other major step taken by the present government is the establishment of Benazir Income Support Programme.

BISP is the flagship initiative of the present government to empower women and eradicate poverty. As discrimination against women could best be dealt by empowering them socially, politically and economically.

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.

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

However, we are developing BISP in to a comprehensive social safety net by provision of Monthly Cash Grant, Vocational & Technical Training, Micro Finance for gainful self-employment and Health, Accident & Life Insurance.

BISP has, in a short span of time, reached out to more than 2.8 million families across the country and has disbursed around Rs. 70 billion among these deserving families. We are lucky to have the patronage and supervision of the President and continued encouragement and support of the Prime Minister.

BISP has gained enormous support and trust of international donors and financial agencies and that is because of the transparent nature of its operations.

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 bleaker future prospects. They were treated as an insignificant commodity which could be done away with any time on the whims of the males of their family. 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. I am glad to share with you that due to our initiatives more than 8 million women have got their identity in shape of their CNIC since the inception of BISP

Under the Programme only a female head of the household is entitled to receive the cash support. I am confident that this gender sensitive orientation of the programme will have an added impact on women empowerment and will prove instrumental in discouraging discrimination against women.

What we are envisaging 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 indignities of poverty and dependence on the male members of their family and thus suffer undue exploitation.

BISP is providing them this chance to help them get their rights; 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 a future to look forward to; and above all a life of independence and self esteem.

We strongly believe that by empowering women we will considerably reduce the chances of discrimination against them, thus indirectly strengthening peace and promoting democracy in the country.

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.