

Address to the Women Parliamentarian Caucus **On 26th May, 2010**

Let me start by thanking honorable Speaker of the National Assembly and Chair of this Women Parliamentarian Caucus Dr. Fehmida Mirza and her team for organizing this meeting 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.

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”. And I am equally sure that you all very much remember the very first objective, we all set for the very existence of this Women Parliamentarian Caucus during the first meeting of our general assembly in November 2008, which was:

To attain a broad-based consensus among all women members of the Parliament on an agreed agenda for women development, empowerment and emancipation, enabling them to work beyond and above party lines for the uplift of the women of Pakistan.

I feel immense pride and satisfaction to share with you that we have not only honored the pledge made by our great leader but have also moved much ahead of developing a mere consensus among the women parliamentarians. 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 are true to our slogan:

Ilm, Roshni Sab Ko Kaam,

Roti Kapra Aur Makaan,

Maang Raha Hai Har Insaan

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 forsaken segments of our society; and unfortunately our women falls in all these categories.

BISP's endeavors are also in consonance with and targeted towards the achievement of two of the most important points of Millennium Development Goal (MDGs), which respectively relate 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 entrepreneurship especially in rural areas through micro finance. I am glad to say 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 alleviate the sufferings and to improve the status of our women folks. BISP benefits like quarterly cash transfers of Rs. 3000, 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 patriarchal society.

Our proposed packages of Health Insurance and Vocational Training, to be launched in near future, would also be targeted towards the welfare of our women. Even for Technical Training female beneficiary would nominate a next of kin (both male and female) for receiving the training. Under this programme, one member of each beneficiary family will be imparted

vocational/technical training free of cost thus becoming a source of respectable income generation for the family.

Similarly, Health Insurance 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 earning members of the family to a maximum limit of Rs.25000/ per family per year. This would particularly include mother and child health care thus ensuring the healthy sustenance of our mothers and children.

We are also 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 ordeal in general and of their women in particular BISP has launched an Emergency Relief Package under which benefits of Rs.12, 000 per family are being distributed to 318,126 verified IDPs from Swat and Malakand through Benazir Cards.

Similarly, we know that most of the unfortunate victims, of cowardly acts of terrorism like bomb explosions, are the males. This leaves their women and children in a state of extreme dejection, desperation and destitute. To assuage and share the grief and misery of such families we are also registering them as BISP beneficiary entitled to most of the benefits offered by BISP. Moreover, we have also paid a total of Rs.34 Million to 3729 earthquake affected families in Baluchistan under this Emergency Relief Package.

Apart from these tangible measures taken for the empowerment of women, we are also taking certain discreet steps which could be instrumental in changing the psychological mindset of our predominantly conventional and patriarchal 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 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. Even in the remotest and most conventional areas of FATA the rate of female registration has increased from few females to more than 25,000 females per year.

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 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.