

**Chairperson's Speech at One Day Seminar for**  
**Pakistan's Leaders of Tomorrow**  
**Theme: Women Empowerment**

**Distinguished participants,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen!**

- I would like to congratulate this forum of *Pakistan's Leaders of Tomorrow* for its initiative in convening this Conference. The topic is extremely vital in our efforts to build a stronger social foundation for inclusive and sustainable development of our nation.

## Ladies and Gentlemen!

- Pakistan's founder, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah in his address to the university students in 1944 had said;

*"No nation can rise to the heights of glory with half its population shackled. It is a crime against humanity that our women are confined within the four walls of their homes like prisoners; they should be side by side with men as their companions in all spheres of life."*

- It is impossible to separate women's rights from human rights, just as it is impossible to separate economic justice from political freedom. There is no human right more fundamental, and more universal, than equal rights for woman in the new century. Democracy is the first step toward humanity's freedom. But it is not an end in itself.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

- The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences.
- Today, no system can claim to be democratic and participatory if it fails to include and address the issues concerning its women. There can be no democracy if there's no equity-based social justice. It is thus that in this age of democratization, nations are increasingly creating space for their women. This also holds true for Pakistan where each time, the return of democracy brought concrete measures to women's empowerment.

- The first democratic government of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto saw the first-ever induction of women at the highest decision-making bodies-First woman Governor, first woman Senator, and first woman vice Chancellor. It was also at that time that the Constitution granted women not only equal rights but made special provisions for the protection of their long-neglected rights.
- The two terms of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto were literally a race against time when it comes to women. Her visionary leadership was able to leave behind a shining legacy of a Woman's Ministry, a Woman's Bank, a Woman's corps of health workers and the largest number of women cabinet ministers.

## Ladies and Gentlemen!

- My commitment and vision of women empowerment is inspired by the words of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. In a keynote address on the subject of Social Development and Women's Empowerment in New Delhi 2001, she said:

*“For me, the empowerment of women lies less in laws and more in economic independence. Dependent women, like dependent nations, are not free to take the decisions they may like to take. For them survival becomes the code with which to address their situation.”*

## **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

- The present Peoples Government has also taken a number of steps for Women Empowerment.
  - Today Women comprise 22.2 percent in the National Assembly and 17 percent in the Senate.
  - The Speaker of the National Assembly is a woman, so are important members of the Federal Cabinet.
  - A Women Parliamentary Caucus of 90 women parliamentarians with representation of all parties has been formed at the national level. It has been successfully lobbying for women rights and empowerment legislation.

- Government's commitment to a strong legislative cover to address women's issues is evident from the measures we have taken so far. These include
  - The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2010,
  - The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act 2010,
  - Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Act 2011
  - Protection against Harassment at Workplace Act 2010 which covers both public and private sectors.
  - Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act 2011
  
- For women to succeed, job opportunities and avenues of economic activities are needed. Respect for the fundamental rights for women will flow when women have the economic means to stand up for themselves. The women of our nation will not be free, until we determine to empower them. Empower them with words, with laws, with awareness, with economic opportunities and with role models.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

- Benazir Income Support Programme is committed to realize the dream of making Pakistan a welfare state. In line with the Shaheed BB's vision and the leadership of the President Mr Asif Ali Zardari, BISP was launched in 2008 with the objectives of meeting the UN's Millennium Development Goals. These include
  - Eradication of extreme poverty & hunger
  - Empowering Women
  - Youth empowerment and
  - Universal primary education by 2015

- Indeed BISP is the manifestation of the government's resolve to realize these MDGs by 2015. It has a multi-dimensional design for achieving multi pronged targets. With women empowerment as its centre-piece, strategies for achieving family empowerment, youth emancipation and poverty alleviation have been put in place.
- All benefits to the deserving families are being provided through the woman of the family. BISP is providing the woman of the eligible family cash transfer of Rs. 1,000/month. So far over 7 million beneficiaries have been identified by BISP - covering almost 22% of the total population of Pakistan.

- BISP is using technology based innovations for economically empowering the poorest of the poor women.
  - Modern payment mechanisms like Debit Card/Smart Card and Mobile Phone Banking have been adopted for disbursements of BISP benefits.
  - Millions of new bank accounts have been opened of the poor families for the first time in the history of the country; making them part of the financial mainstream of the country.
  - Thus the fruits of latest technology are being made accessible to these poorest segments of society.
  - Through first of its kind poverty scorecard census, invaluable socio-economic data of 27 million households has been collected. This will help in designing and implementing effective interventions in the field of

health, education, emergency relief and poverty alleviation.

- BISP has helped in giving these poor women their identity. In the four years since BISP's inception, around 20 million females have got their CNICs. Doubtlessly, BISP has a great deal to do with this increase in female registration.
- Further, even in geographically remote and culturally ultra conservative areas of the country like FATA, interior Sindh and Baluchistan the rate of female registration has increased considerably. BISP is helping the women folk of the country, particularly rural women in getting their identity and achieving self respect.
- BISP's graduation strategy is empowering the entire beneficiary family to lead a life of economic independence and self reliance. Following initiatives are part of this graduation strategy;

- Waseela e Haq: is a micro-finance initiative aimed at helping the women and the youth of the family to start some income generation activity.
- Waseela e Rozgar: is a free of cost skill development programme for capacity enhancement of the youth of the family to earn gainful self-employment. Aim is to help them become economically independent through acquiring demand-driven vocational skill and technical education.
- Waseela e Taleem: is a human capital development initiative under which more than 03 million children of beneficiary families will be educated; thus providing them a stepping stone to become the future leaders of Pakistan.

- Waseela e Sehet: covers the health and well being of the entire family and makes health services accessible to those living at the bottom of the social and economic pyramid.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

- At the end I would like to say that no government can bring about a revolution on its own if it is not backed by a strong and committed public opinion. It is high time that we, as a nation, realized that gender roles, inequities and power imbalances are not accepted results of biological differences; but are determined by the systems and cultures in which we live. This requires broad-based mobilization. We must, therefore forge a comprehensive alliance of political parties, civil society, media and of course the international partners.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

- As I conclude, I wish to leave you with the thought from Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

*“We must shape a world free from exploitation and maltreatment of women. A world in which women have opportunities to rise to the highest level in business, diplomacy, and other spheres of life. Where there are no battered women. Where honor and dignity are protected in peace, and in war. Where women have economic freedom and independence. Where women are equal partners in peace and development”.*

I thank you all.