



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **UN Inter Agency Group on Gender Equality, UN Women and UNESCO in collaboration with Islamabad College for Girls F-6/2 celebrates International Women's Day**

Friday March 8, Islamabad: UN Inter Agency Group on Gender Equality, UN Women and UNESCO in collaboration with Islamabad College for Girls F-6/2 celebrated International Women's Day with a youth dialogue around the theme 'Promise is a promise: take action to end violence against women'. The event was hosted by the Principal of ICG Professor Shaista Pirzada, and attended by the UN Resident Coordinator, representatives of UNESCO, ILO, and UN Women, teachers and students of the Islamabad College for Girls, and students of other universities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

In his opening remarks, the UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Timo Pakkala, applauded the ongoing efforts and resolve of the Government of Pakistan particularly with the series of legislation to protect women and girls from violence. However, he noted that gender based violence remains pervasive. Future opportunities for development hinge on how these challenges are addressed and progress will depend on attitudinal changes and effective implementation of the new laws. He reiterated the United Nations' commitment to continue to work with the Government and CSOs, particularly in the context of devolution, to develop more context specific solutions for the people of Pakistan.

Ms. Abia Akram, Chairperson, National Forum of Women with Disabilities, reminded the audience that people with disabilities make up approximately 10 – 15% of the population. For women in particular, they face 3 main barriers – access, as most are confined in their homes; attitudinal problems; and policy and legislation barriers. She urged the distinguished guests to make a solid commitment for the rights of women with disabilities, to engage with grassroots women and to include women with disabilities as a cross cutting theme in development planning, focused on social rehabilitation and inclusion leading to a dignified life.

According to Francesco d'Ovidio, Country Director of ILO, many improvements have been made in employing women in the formal sectors, but the labour participation rate remains low. In the informal economy, women make up 70% of the workforce and do not have access to decent wages, decent working conditions, and benefits such as maternity leave. Women are an important factor of the economy. He emphasized the need to focus on policy, particularly for home based workers and domestic workers, and the need to make men aware of women's rights leading to improvements in access to employment opportunities. While women's participation in trade unions is increasing, he encouraged greater participation as a means to make their voices heard.

Lena Lindberg, Country Director-OIC UN Women Pakistan, emphasized the global outrage at the level of violence around the world, saying that violence against women is stoneage behavior.

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Following on the successful Million Signatures Campaign last year, UN Women has launched a social media advocacy campaign, Tashadud-na-Manzur (Violence is Unacceptable), to reach 1 million youth to raise awareness on the issues. She encouraged the students to participate in the campaign and to follow actions of the EVAW Alliance with Men Engage. In Pakistan, 5-7 million children, mostly girls, never get to school, and that, she said, is structural violence. She quoted UN Women's Executive Director who said that 'Change is possible and change is happening', and challenged the students to think of ways that they could make change happen.

Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata, Representative of UNESCO Islamabad, highlighted girl's education as a powerful tool to end violence against women. Education is key for women to defend their lives, to say no to violence. Violence against women is one of the most deadly and widespread violations of women's rights across the world. In light of Article 25 A of the Constitution of Pakistan on Rights to Free and Compulsory Education for all children age 5 to 16 years, she stated that now girls must be given full access to schooling and literacy as a constitutional right. She told the audience that this year, International Women's Day has a special meaning for UNESCO, because of the incident with Malala, which reminds us of what must be done. As Malala had stood up, giving a very positive image of girls in Pakistan, she called on the students of the Islamabad College for Girls to become the model of empowerment for girls all across the country.

Professor Shaista Pirzada, Principal of Islamabad College for Girls, stated that education is not about earning a Degree, it is about achieving a positive change. She referred to education as a catalytic agent fostering the power of thinking in an individual. She said it was the duty of all of us to teach girls to dream and make those dreams come true while living within the parameters of religious and cultural norms. Professor Pirzada called for more awareness campaigns of women's rights, formal vocation education leading to empowerment, enforcement of legislations, incentives for the corporate sector for engaging women in nation building activities, and changes to the curriculum to encourage self respect and self esteem.

Speakers on the occasion also included students from the Islamabad College for Girls, and Bahria University, Quaid-i-Azam University and Fatima Jinnah University. The students highlighted various causal factors of violence against women and girls such as traditional gender roles, patriarchy, and attitudes that would always place women in subordinate positions. The students spoke of the positive role that women can play in the economic and social growth of the country but also pointed out the many obstacles in the way. The role of education in ending violence against women was stressed, but it was also maintained that attitudinal change needed to begin in the home.

The students of the Islamabad College for Girls concluded the event with a skit illustrating the effects of oppression on a girl child and how education can lead to her empowerment.

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