

PRESENTATION: PAKISTAN

ABBASI NUSRAT BANO,

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, PAKISTAN

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Dear friends and delegates,

I am thankful for AHRC for inviting me to represent legislators of Sindh, Pakistan. We first proposed separate land from India. The people of Sindh have been a vanguard for democracy, rule of law and human rights. The dream of democracy is not fulfilled.

I am from the Functional Pakistan Muslim League (PML-F), and my party stands for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and torture and ill-treatment. I have been a member of the Sindh provincial assembly for the past four and a half years. We have introduced several legislations, bills, motions and urgent motions for the protection of rights of children, honour killing victims and women (for instance, we have put in place a 33% reservation for women to hold positions in government). I recently submitted a resolution on honour killings and sexual harassment in workplaces and women's entitlements to land. I also participated in a roundtable conference in Karachi organised by Hamdard University and the AHRC, and have suggested possible changes in legislation at these meetings.

Torture is an endemic problem in Pakistan. Most reported cases of torture and ill-treatment in law enforcement agencies are said to occur in the pre-trial period. Torture is perceived as the easiest and fastest way to achieve certain goals (extracting information and confessions). Today, because only two female parliamentarians will deliver presentations on behalf of their countries, I wish to highlight specifically problems faced by women. Pakistani women face the worse form of physical and psychological abuse from officials, particularly at police stations. Women are not safe even in asylums and safe houses. Although numerically more cases of torture reported involve men, women are particularly vulnerable and most of their cases go unheard. It is therefore difficult to establish a statistic to represent this sector of society. From January to November 2010, 1998 cases of torture were reported. The real number is almost certainly higher than that. In 1973, the Pakistan Constitution and Criminal Procedure Code criminalised torture. In 2010, our country ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention against Torture (CAT). However, there were no practical efforts to sensitize law enforcement officials to such violence. Child abuse, bribery, corruption and extraordinary or martial laws have disrupted the people's conception of "normality". Torture is an instrument of terror and fear, especially for more progressive forces in society who constantly challenge the status quo.

PML-Functional affirms that we will support any initiative for the eradication of torture in custody, whether under police or other law enforcement agencies. I want to remind you that according to the 18th Amendment of the Constitution, provincial governments also have the power of legislation. I announce here that I will move a Bill in Assembly against all forms of torture and ill-treatment, and commit here that we will also work on the rehabilitation of victims. Inshallah ("God willing"), Sindh will be the first province with legislation against torture. Thank you very much.

Honourable Abbasi Nusrat Bano, Member of Parliament, Pakistan