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## **Women From Different Political Parties Join Forces To Strengthen Women's Political Participation**

Islamabad: Women representatives from five major political parties agreed to work together to strengthen their women's wings and institutionalize positions for women in their parties' decision making bodies.

Participating on an advisory committee to enhance women's participation in political parties convened by the National Democratic Institute, senior leaders from women's wings, including Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) and Members of the Provincial Assemblies (MPAs), pledged that they will work together to develop a National Action Plan for minimum standards to strengthen and institutionalize women's role in political parties.

Members of the advisory committee include from the Pakistan Peoples Party MNA Shagufta Jumani, provincial president of Sindh Women's Wing and minister of state for religious affairs, and MPA Azma Zahid Bukhari, General Secretary Women's Wing Punjab; from Pakistan Muslim League-N MNA Nuzhat Amir Sadiq, president of Women's Wing Islamabad, and MNA Anusha Rahman Khan, central vice president of the Lawyers Wing; from Pakistan Muslim League-Q MNA Nosheen Saeed Khan and Senator Rehana Yahya Baloch; from the Awami National Party MNA Jamila Gillani, central joint secretary, and MPA Shagufta Malik, provincial vice president; and from the Muttahida Qaumi Movement Asma Sherwani, member of the Central Women's Council, and MNA Shagufta Sadiq, member of the Women's Central Council.

Advisory committee members were optimistic about the fact that Pakistan's transition to democratic rule has offered women opportunities in government and in their parties, yet they shared concerns that women still face obstacles to full participation and advancement in their parties. Some of the barriers they identified include lack of institutionalized representation of women on parties' policy-making bodies, of the parties, lack of transparent mechanisms for merit-based nomination of women for general and reserved seats, incomplete structures of women's wings at different levels, lack of autonomy and resources for women's wings to conduct activities, and lack of training and political education for women.

Citing some of their achievements to strengthen their parties, such as membership recruitment, voter registration campaigns to sign up female party supporters, work on election campaigns, organization of public rallies, and advocacy for policies to protect women from domestic and other violence, they agreed that now is the right time to join hands to advocate for measures that will ensure women are fully represented within their parties.

They agreed to work within their own parties and together with women from other parties to develop a National Action Plan that will include minimum standards for women's participation in political

parties and strategies to implement them. The plan will be developed at a national workshop to be arranged by NDI with the assistance of the advisory committee. Women's wing representatives from different parties from all over the country will participate in the workshop.

NDI Country Director Sheila Fruman, in her remarks at the meeting, acknowledged the many positive changes that political parties have made to enhance women's participation adding that it is in their interest to continue to support women activists at all levels of the party because more than half the voting population are women. She stated that NDI will continue to support women's efforts to remove the barriers they face in contributing to the democratic development of Pakistan.

NDI is a non-profit non-partisan NGO working to strengthen and expand democracy by providing practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions.

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