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PML-N LEADER CALLS FOR WOMEN'S QUOTA FOR GENERAL SEATS

ISLAMABAD – PML-N Vice President Senator Syed Zafar Ali Shah has called for quotas for tickets for general election for women in national/provincial elections in addition to seats already reserved for women.

Speaking at a workshop for the PML-N Women Wing, organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Senator Shah said that the party should allocate more tickets to women for general seats because it would help widen the scope of women's political participation. Claiming that women are better than men in reaching out to the masses he added that the party would benefit if they had more representation on constitutional institutions as well as the party's decision making bodies.

On the question of how women will bear the expenses of contesting general elections, Senator Shah confided that it is also difficult for men to bear the costs of election but the answer to financial constraints for the candidates lies in stronger parties that can finance campaigns for their candidates.

Talking about the current political situation, Senator Shah strongly urged the political forces of the country not to surrender their power to militant elements and emphasized that Sharia cannot be implemented at the point of a gun.

The two-day workshop was last in the series of five organized by NDI as part of its program to strengthen women's participation in political parties. Around 50 senior representatives of the PML-N women's wing from all four provinces and the federal capital, including MNAs, senators, provincial and district level executives, participated in the workshop.

Central President of the PML-N Women Wing Begum Ishrat Ashraf MNA urged the women to use the opportunity of the party reorganization to reach out to more women to join the party. She noted that the more women are organized, the more they get power and important positions.

Speaking of financial constraints, she said that fundraising should be the party's responsibility and asked for suggestions on how the women's wing could raise its own funds. Provincial

President PML-N Women Wing Punjab Senator Najma Hamid and President Federal Capital MNA Nuzhat Amir also spoke on the occasion.

Women from NWFP and Balochistan, including a young participant from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), reported that increasing militancy and the worsening law and order situation in both provinces have limited their ability to continue political work. However, they added, they are not deterred and continue organizing women and conducting political activities despite the risks and threats to their personal safety.

The participants developed detailed plans to strengthen their women's wing and to ensure more representation on their parties' decision making bodies. The plans are part of a National Action Plan developed in December last year by women from five political parties including PPP, PML-N, PML-Q, ANP, and MQM as a way to ensure women can play their due role in a democratic political environment. The National Action Plan sets out standards to strengthen women's wings and increase women's representation on all party decision making bodies.

NDI Country Director Sheila Fruman said that women have time and again demonstrated their ability and commitment to play an active political role as party members, election campaigners, polling agents and public representatives. She said with the new opportunities for democratic development in Pakistan, it was in the parties' own interest to encourage a greater role for women because they represent more than half of the voters.

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide by promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. More information is available at www.ndi.org.

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