



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO BOOST WOMEN'S POWER IN PAKISTANI POLITICAL PARTIES**

ISLAMABAD - More than 90 representatives of women's wings from five major political parties developed and endorsed a National Action Plan to strengthen their women's wings and boost their representation on party decision-making bodies.

The plan is the outcome of a two-day workshop with women from PPP, PML-N, PML-Q, ANP and MQM arranged by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to launch a new three-year program to strengthen women's participation in political parties. The participants included members of the Senate; National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies; and central, provincial and district level leaders of women's wings from Islamabad and all four provinces.

Recommendations for a plan were drafted in party groups and then presented to a plenary session for discussion. The plan was unanimously adopted by all participants in a show of hands after presentation of the final draft by an advisory committee made up of representatives from all five parties.

The National Action Plan sets out minimum standards for women's participation in political parties with two key objectives: to strengthen women's wings and to increase women's representation on party decision-making bodies.

To strengthen women's wings, the plan calls for the election of all women's wing positions with a limited term of office; autonomy of the women's wing to be enshrined in the party constitution with autonomy for women's wings to plan and organize their own activities, raise funds and decide how they will be spent; training for women's wing members; regular communication among different organizational levels of the women's wing and regular meetings between the provincial president and the district presidents; maintaining records of members, meetings and other activities; office bearers of the women's wing to receive the same recognition as their counterparts in other wings; and representation of women from minorities in the women's wing.

To meet the second objective to increase women's representation on party bodies, the plan calls for a specified quota for representation of women on the party's decision-making bodies at all

levels, including the policy and manifesto making bodies; consultation with the women's wing on the allocation of tickets for reserved and general seats and ticket allocations to be based on merit; a specified quota of tickets for women for winnable general seats; compulsory financial support for women candidates for general seats for the assemblies; abolition of fees for women to be represented on the party bodies; ensuring that women in the party are offered equal opportunities with men; making provincial presidents of the women's wing ex-officio members of the central decision-making bodies of the party; and regular meetings and communication between the women's wing and the main party.

"Your strength is your unity," noted the keynote speaker, Human Rights Commission Chairperson Asma Jahangir. She urged participants to "make alliances with other parties, as well as with civil society, to mainstream women's issues with other problems in society." She said, "Women are the first victims of any crisis in society, whether it is a financial crisis or the overall culture of violence. Therefore, women need to be united to be better able to face these challenges."

NDI Country Director Sheila Fruman credited the party activists for helping to create a new space for democracy to flourish in Pakistan in elections last February. Now, she said, parties must recognize that contribution and create more opportunities for women to play leadership roles as part of a winning strategy. She noted that in 2003 all five parties signed a Global Action Plan initiated by NDI to enhance women's political participation, and she lauded the women for developing a consensus National Action Plan as a way to implement the previous commitment of their party leaders. She reconfirmed NDI support to women's wings to implement the plan.

*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](http://www.ndi.org).*

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