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Major Parties in Sindh Assembly Push for Stronger Parliament

Karachi: The major parties in the Sindh Assembly have agreed to work together to strengthen the role of parliamentary parties to ensure the supremacy of parliament.

More than 30 members of Sindh Assembly including parliamentary leaders of Pakistan Peoples Party, Muttahida Quami Movement and Pakistan Muslim League-F participated in a roundtable discussion on strengthening MPAs and Parliamentary Parties, arranged by the National Democratic Institute. Deputy Speaker Sindh Assembly Shehla Raza chaired the discussion.

The members during the discussions unanimously agreed on several recommendations to strengthen the parliamentary parties and enhance the role of individual MPAs. The key recommendations included acknowledgment of the role of parliamentary parties in the rules of procedure of the assembly; amendments to the rules of procedure to reflect the due role of parliamentary parties and the provision of resources to support the parliamentary parties. They agreed that resources for parliamentary parties should be at the disposal of the Speaker and should be allocated to each parliamentary party in proportion to their representation in the house.

It was agreed that a committee headed by Speaker Sindh Assembly and comprising the Deputy Speaker and all three parliamentary party leaders will form a committee to continue to work on finding ways to implement these recommendations.

Deputy Speaker Sindh Assembly Shehla Raza in her opening remarks said that the role of MPAs and parliamentary parties is an important component of a strong parliament. "Democracy will function effectively if parliament is playing its due role and every parliamentarian is part of it" she said.

PPP Parliamentary Leader, Senior Minister Pir Mazhar ul Haq was of the view that democratic institutions like parliament and parliamentary parties should be strong enough to protect democracy from any attacks from non democratic forces. He suggested that all parties irrespective of their party affiliations should work together to achieve the common objectives that make parliament function effectively and every MPA and parliamentary party should get the resources required to fulfill the mandate they have been given by the voters.

MQM Parliamentary Leader, Senior Minister Syed Sardar Ahmed said that concrete steps to strengthen parliamentary parties will make the parliament a supreme institution in real terms. He said that there should be a balance between the resources allocated to bureaucracy and to the parliamentarians because parliamentarians are the ones responsible for developing policies and the bureaucracy is required to execute them.

Opposition Leader in Sindh Assembly and PML-F parliamentary leader Jam Madad Ali said that if the role of parliamentary parties is recognized and supported with resources, it will create more space for the effective role of MPAs and better functioning of the parliament.

Canadian parliamentary expert Gerry Scott in his presentation highlighted the role of MPAs as part of their parliamentary party. "The parliamentary system is designed for parliamentary parties to play a key role and the assembly works best when each parliamentary party and its MPAs are able to work as strong and organized teams" he said. Mr. Scott said that members belonging to both treasury as well as opposition benches can use their parliamentary party to develop and promote their political program and to ensure better representation of their constituents.

NDI Country Director Sheila Fruman said that the challenge is to take steps to strengthen parliament so it can truly become the supreme institution it is meant to be in a fully developed democracy. "The risk of failing to strengthen parliament can erode the confidence of voters in democracy" she warned. She noted that parliamentary democracies around the world have developed standards which can guide a reform process to strengthen parliamentary parties. She said NDI will continue to support parliamentary leaders and assemblies to develop concrete steps to strengthen parliament.

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