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### **LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND: End Violence against Women and Girls**

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**Asad Ejaz Butt<sup>1</sup> and Tabeer Riaz<sup>2</sup>**

**"We the Peoples of the United Nations, determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small..."**

*—United Nations Charter*

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is celebrated on 25<sup>th</sup> of November each year around the globe. The international UNiTE campaign will mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence from 25 November till the Human Rights Day, 10 December. This campaign is to entice action to end violence against women and girls under the encompassing theme, "LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND: End Violence against Women and Girls" that manifests the transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Violence against women and girls is a serious human rights violation and one of the most extreme and intolerable forms of gender discrimination. According to a new report on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, based on data collected from 87 countries from 2005 to 2016, 19 percent of women between the age of 15 and 49 years have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the year leading to the survey. In extreme cases, these violent incidents can lead to death. In 2012, almost half of the women who were victims of the intentional physical violence were killed by their intimate partners.

The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations assembly. The Convention defines discrimination against women as *"...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."* By accepting this convention, the states execute themselves to commence the measures to all forms of discrimination against women and girls. The convention promotes

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equal rights for men and women and ensures providing them with equal opportunities in both political and public life.

States must formulate their legal systems in a way to abolish all the discriminatory laws against women and establish public institutions for the protection of women against discrimination. The states that have endorsed the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice.

Gender inequality persists worldwide and to combat inequality against women and girls will require robust efforts. By achieving gender equality, will put an end to conflicts and violence against women. Lack of resources and funds is the big root cause for not being able to prevent and end violence against women. In this regard, the European Union and the United Nations have launched the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls this year with focus on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). This initiative brings center of efforts to achieve gender equality and women empowerment in context with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That incorporates Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

As regards Pakistan, women are subject to violence on a regular basis. The Gender Gap Index 2015 ranked Pakistan second from the last among 145 countries in terms of the prevalence of gender-based disparities. The Index measures national gender gaps in earnings, politics, education and health, and published annually by the Geneva-based World Economic Forum. In 2011, Pakistan was ranked as the third most dangerous country in the world for women (Trust Law 2011). Deep insights of facts and figures portray a poor image of the country. From 2008 till 2015, 33% increase has been observed in cases of violence against women and percentage share of provinces shows that 41% of the total cases are reported in Sindh followed by 39% in Punjab (Hadi & Ullah, 2015).

A report by Human Rights Commission of Pakistan 2014, identifies forms of domestic violence faced by women like acid attacks, amputation, beating, injured, murder bids, set on fire, shaving and other with the highest statistics for torturing the women among these all. The proportions of victims who receive proper medical care are 52% while remaining 48% remain being neglected from any kind of medical services and the attackers of the victims are mostly the family members with the highest percentile of husband of 51.56 followed by father and brother that is 13.95% and 7.97% respectively. Despite being this growing number of domestic violence cases,

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there has been a drastic fall of 78.5% in the number of convictions from 2012-2015 as per reported by Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, 2016.

Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2012 has been passed unanimously by the Senate in February 2012. The act criminalized domestic violence against any vulnerable person including women and children and mainstreamed the offence by bringing it into the public domain. This act also recognized the fundamental rights of all individuals' dignity of person.

The Government needs to put this act into practice and ensure equal rights for women without any discrimination. Adequate actions to end violence against women and girls need to be taken. If Pakistan has to become a country that provides equal rights and non-discriminatory rights to women and discourage all forms and manifestations of violence against them, then it has to:

- Increase prosecution for violence against women to create safer environment for them.
- Improve medical facilities to control maternal mortality rate.
- Create economic opportunities for women through both small and large scale programmes with the commitment of women development and extensive outreach.
- Give women equal voting rights and power of national decision making.
- Formulate and implement laws on women protection.
- Enhance the women role in media without objectifying them.
- Adopt non-discriminatory recruitment policies that provide equal opportunities to men and women.