

**SPEECH BY THE
PRIME MINISTER
ON
MOHTARMA FATIMA JINNAH
AWARDS, 2010**

Federal Ministers,

Ministers of State,

Senators, Members of the National Assembly

Excellencies!

Distinguished Guests!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

My participation in today's programme is a matter of immense pleasure and privilege for me. All of us have gathered here to commend and eulogize the services of the distinguished women as a mark of our tribute to them for their contributions to the diverse fields of national life. Let me first of all take this opportunity to congratulate them on receiving prestigious Fatima Jinnah Awards for their outstanding performance in different fields. These awards are conferred on women in recognition of their contributions to the empowerment of women and promotion of their cause.

I am pleased to note that the women who received the Awards today come from a cross-section of professions, regions and society. It shows that our women are moving up the ladder of professional progress and growth by making a difference through their dedication, hard work and commitment. Gone are the days when women used to be considered unequal and lacked representation at the national level. Today's Pakistan represents the realization of dreams of our founding fathers about the equality of women's rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The conferment of the Fatima Jinnah Awards on 21 (twenty one) outstanding women of Pakistan is also meant to honour the sacrifices, services and contributions of Mohtrama Fatima Jinnah during the movement for independence and later on her single-handed challenge to restore democratic order. The naming of the Awards after her name is the expression of our national gratitude

to her. The life of Mohtrama Fatima Jinnah is a classic example of selfless service, sacrifice and commitment.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

After the establishment of Pakistan, when the people's democratic right to elect their representatives was trampled upon, Mohtrama Fatima Jinnah emerged as a strong defender and symbol of democracy and representative rule. She put up heroic fight at the age of 71 for the restoration of democracy, direct polls and parliamentary system. She symbolized the democratic aspirations of people. Our nation acclaimed her by conferring the title of "Madar-e-Millat, or "Mother of the Nation" for her role in the Freedom Movement and restoration of democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It makes me proud to say that history of Pakistan People's Party is synonymous with the struggle for women emancipation and empowerment in the country.

We are committed to work for the economic, political, legal and social rights of women. PPP is the only party, which has the singular distinction of being led by a woman, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, who was twice elected as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. It was during her tenure as Prime Minister in 1988 that Women Development Division was upgraded to the level of a full-fledged Ministry.

Recognizing that women become the victims of violence and need proper protection and help, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto established Women's Police Stations for their protection. The present democratic government remains wedded to the development and empowerment of women. We have undertaken a mix of legislative, political, economic and administrative policy reforms for this purpose.

The enactment of Sexual Harassment against Women at Workplace and its application across all the government ministries and departments would encourage our womenfolk to join the public sector and become equal partners in national development. The increase of women quota from 5% to 10% for recruitment to the federal services is yet another milestone, which would pave the way for participation of women in the government sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

National Commission on the Status of Women is already in place tasked with important functions such as:

- Examining policies, programmes and measures taken by the government to assess its implementation;
- Making recommendations, reviewing laws, rules and regulations affecting the status and rights of women;

Distinguished audience,

Women empowerment would remain a pipedream as long as their economic well being is not ensured. The target recipients of Benazir Income Support Program are rural women and the launch of 'Waseela-e-Haq' scheme is meant to enable them to stand on their feet. The democratic government has also initiated a number of projects such as District Resource Centres, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Centres for Women and Women Burns Centres across the country including AJK.

During the process of formulation of laws, my government remains extensively engaged with civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, women parliamentarians, human rights activists and National Commission on Status of Women to eliminate abuse of women in all its forms in accordance with our adherence to Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I often say that women and minorities are my core constituencies and my government is committed to do everything possible for their uplift and development. I have a firm faith in the ability and potential of our women to outshine in life.

You are aware that our country is confronted with multiple challenges including terrorism and extremism being the most lethal of them all. We cannot allow a handful of bigoted minority to impose their agenda on the peaceful majority. In her interview with a foreign writer, Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah said:

"We are not a state run by priests or a hierarchy. We are a state organized according to Islamic principles... they are very fine principles for organizing a state." I urge you all including women to play your due role in spreading hope and optimism among the people. I am confident that women can inculcate the values of tolerance, moderation, harmony and respect for diversity both at the level of community and within their respective families.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the end, I would congratulate the Ministry of Women Development on holding this event in a befitting manner and ensuring representation of women from all the four provinces, FATA, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. I would recommend to the Ministry to hold this event annually on the birthday of Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah on July 30 so that we could honour our distinguished women who achieve excellence in life.

I again congratulate the awardees and hope you will be more motivated and inspired to continue your good work.

Pakistan Pains abad!