

**Speech by
the Prime Minister
on National Convention
of Women Parliamentarians
(25th May 2010)**

**Madam Speaker,
Honorable Members,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to address the national convention on the role of women parliamentarians in peace, security and reconciliation.

I congratulate Madam Speaker for bringing together women Members of the National Assembly, the Senate, the four provincial assemblies, Legislative Assembly of Gilgit Baltistan, and Azad Jammu Kashmir to review, discuss and plan the role of women parliamentarians in peace-building and reconciliation.

I would also like to extend a special welcome to the esteemed members of the parliaments from the SAARC region including Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh and India.

Indeed the role of women parliamentarians from the SAARC countries in making peace and promoting reconciliation through dialogue within the region holds a great promise to improve the lot of one fifth of world population. Tension in the region is not helping any country rather diverting precious resources to non-developmental sectors.

Therefore, every effort to promote peace and reconciliation is laudable.

Many countries including our own have shown that when women become a central part of the political decision making process, there is a greater chance for positive social change and sustainable peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

While discussing the role of women parliamentarians for peace and reconciliation, I will strongly urge them to recall the legacy of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

She always wanted to be remembered mainly for what she did for the women, and how her efforts made a difference in the lives of the common person —whether it is in population control, exposing domestic violence, or giving women access and opportunities to become economically independent.

It is with this vision that we are taking on the battle for peace, stability and prosperity of Pakistan and its people against the forces that want conflict and mayhem.

I am heartened by the fact that women parliamentarians have also decided to be part of this struggle, which we will, Insha Allah, win.

Our great leader Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto had aptly said that the people of Pakistan want change—change from a climate of threat to one of stability and prosperity.

And we cannot achieve this aim without the participation of women.

The convention marks a watershed in the parliamentary history of Pakistan. The presence of the high percentage of women legislators in our Assemblies today is a proof that we are translating Mohtarma's dream into reality.

Women parliamentarians' outstanding performance in the legislative business signifies their assertiveness as capable legislators and their keen interest in addressing matters of national and international importance.

Indeed, the legislative business cannot be validated without the participation and consent of women parliamentarians.

Their role is critical to establish true democratic procedures.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Pakistan is in the midst of fight against extremism.

The people and the armed forces are valiantly rendering sacrifices to save the country from the clutches of forces that want to move the country backward, not forward.

Pakistan's leadership is fully alert to the dangers terror poses to Pakistan and its people, which as you are discussing at this important event, have an extra and sometimes unique impact on women, girls and on family life. Women are among the most vulnerable victims of conflict and violence, and they are often the last to speak about their ordeal.

You - in this audience -- are among the most important voices for these women in Pakistan and the region, and as lawmakers, you are critical to ensure that the right laws - and the strong oversight of these laws - to protect the most vulnerable.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

The majority of our parliamentarians have shown their commitment to gender equality in all spheres of life and they are addressing critical issues

and problems faced by women in Pakistan. The government believes in women empowerment to ensure equal rights through economic, social, legal and political measures.

The Pakistan People's Party is especially proud that Dr. Fehmida Mirza is the only woman Speaker of a House of Parliament in the Muslim World.

It is under her able leadership that an active Women Caucus with representation of all parties is working in the parliament, and which is also the driving force behind this historic convention.

With the active participation of women parliamentarians, the government is amending discriminatory laws.

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2009 has been enacted, whereas the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Bill, 2010 has also been enforced.

These laws would serve as deterrent to the issue of harassment at workplace and provide opportunity to young women to join private and public sector without any fear.

A draft Domestic Violence Bill, 2009 is also in the process of enactment. Meanwhile, the numbers of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Centers for Women are being increased to provide immediate relief to the victims of violence.

Legislation to enable women to own property and assets is also being formulated.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

The struggle for improving the lot of the women in Pakistan is continuing and in this endeavor I look forward to cooperation from the women parliamentarians.

By working across party lines, women parliamentarians can become catalyst for change that will ultimately not just benefit the women of Pakistan, but their children, fathers, husbands and brothers.

I will be keenly following the deliberations at this important convention, and I am confident that under the leadership of Madam Speaker, women parliamentarians will come up with concrete measures for peace and prosperity of Pakistan as well as the whole region.

Thank you,

Pakistan Paindabad!