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## Press Release

**FAFEN Urges Public Consultations on Electoral Reforms**

Islamabad, November 22, 2014: The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) has urged the Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reforms to open its doors to broad-based public consultations to ensure that electoral reforms are meaningful, realistic and reflective of popular aspirations.

FAFEN says the committee’s formation is a step in the right direction but the way its business is being conducted is neither drawing public confidence nor ownership, which are prerequisites for any reforms effort to be successful. The solicitation of recommendations from interested individuals and organizations through public adverts is insufficient unless the committee engages with serious proponents for an in-depth assessment of their proposals.

FAFEN believes elections act as lynchpin in a democracy and any changes to the electoral system require public discourse and debate for a broader public ownership. Unless diverse social and political groups share at least a minimum common reforms agenda, any future changes in the laws will be subject to public questioning and censure, having implications on the legitimacy of elections as well as its results.

Currently, the committee is only providing an opportunity to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to deliberate at length on its proposals. However, the ECP, which faces a crisis of credibility after allegations of irregularities in the General Elections 2013 raised by all political parties, is presenting a myopic view on electoral reforms, which will not yield an election system that is transparent, accountable, efficient and responsive as required by the Constitution of Pakistan as well as by a polity that is increasingly becoming aware of its electoral rights and responsibilities.

The Network strongly recommends to the parliamentary committee to follow the spirit in which it was constituted by the National Assembly Speaker on the request of the Prime Minister. Along with making public more than 1,200 proposals which the committee has received from various interested individuals and groups in the interest of transparency and to encourage public debate, it must also reach out to political parties outside the parliament, citizens, bar councils, professional and trade associations, civil society, election observation groups and media to actively solicit their proposals and discuss their views.

In line with the 18th Constitutional Amendment which requires an intense engagement of provinces and its assemblies in any reforms process, FAFEN says consultations with provinces will not only improve public confidence in the reforms process but also enhance their ownership among people and the federating units.