**High incidence of violations observed in PK-08 Peshawar by-poll**

ISLAMABAD, May 12, 2016: Impressive number of people turned out to vote in PK-08 Peshawar-VIII by-election on Thursday held amid stringent security arrangements.

Deviation from polling schemes, suspicious voting patterns at some polling stations and illegal canvassing around polling stations were some key highlights of election that followed an active campaigning period.

Although heavy security was present both inside and outside the polling stations, campaigning and canvassing by political parties was witnessed around more than one third of the observed polling stations.

With high levels of interest and stakes of voters and political parties in Peshawar by-election, average number of violations per polling station remained relatively high. At 48 polling stations from where FAFEN could receive data on Election Day, five violations of laws, rules and codes of conduct were reported, on average. This average is slightly higher than the one witnessed in last by-election held in NA-267 Jhal Magsi-cum-Kachhi where 4.7 violations per polling station were recorded.

FAFEN observers were not allowed to enter polling premises by security forces at four polling stations despite the fact that they carried accreditation cards issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Security forces deployed on election duty, in the absence of appropriate training, have been observed to be implementing election laws according to their own interpretation. FAFEN has been witnessing bar on its observers from observing the voting processes for the last three by-elections.

At 11 polling stations in PK-08, voters of certain census block codes were not entertained at polling stations mentioned in polling schemes. Such deviations from polling schemes can potentially deprive voters from exercising their right to vote. Also, FAFEN observers documented suspicious voting patterns at five polling stations where the speed of polling was higher than the maximum possible 45 votes per hour per booth.

Pre-voting process at observed polling stations was smooth except at four polling stations where party agents objected to opening procedures.

Election camps were reported to be established within the 400 yards of 17 polling stations while candidates and supporters were seen providing transport to the voters at 14 of the observed 48 polling stations. Campaign material was observed to be displayed on the walls of 11 polling stations while promotional material was present inside three polling stations. FAFEN observers witnessed voters holding vote vouchers at significant number of 57 polling booths.

FAFEN observers also documented the availability of critical election material with the election staff. The election staff did not have adequate number of statement of the count forms (Form XIV) at 10 polling stations and ballot account form (form XV) at 13 polling stations. The election staff is required to carry these forms in adequate quantity to provide copies to polling agents of all the candidates for the sake of transparency.

Security staff at 36 observed polling stations told FAFEN observers that they were not given any training prior to their deployment, indicating at the need for defined ECP training protocols for security officials.

Polling conditions at 10 female polling booths were compromised by the presence of male staff serving women voters.

Voting processes were relatively better managed. However, FAFEN observers reported that irrelevant voters were seen to be accompanying the voter behind voting screen at nine polling stations while polling officials went with voters behind secrecy screen at two polling stations.

Presiding Officers at seven polling stations out of the 48 observed told observers that they did not receive any election trainings from ECP while Presiding Officers at 21 polling stations had never performed any election duty prior to this by-election. Presiding Officers at 34 polling stations told observers that ECP’s internal monitors had not visited their polling stations yet.

FAFEN deployed a total of 24 observers – 14 male and 10 female to observe all 98 polling stations set up by ECP. However FAFEN’s preliminary report contains information from the 48 observed polling stations (14 male, 16 female, 18 combined) data acquired telephonically on the Election Day. The observers were mobilized to observe the opening, closing and counting process of the election.

The by-election was necessitated after the death of Arbab Akbar Hayat of PML-N. Mr. Hayat was declared returned after he secured 13,528 votes in General Elections 2013 with Asif Iqbal Daudzai of JUI-F becoming runner up with 10,458 votes.

A total number of 17 candidates contested the by-election with eight representing parties and remaining vying as independent candidates. All major parties, including PML-N, PTI, PPPP, JUI-F and ANP had fielded their candidates.

ECP managed by-election through DRO and RO from its own cadre of officers. The election campaign was concluded peacefully with leading leaders of PML-N and PTI taking part in the election rallies for the campaign of their contesting candidates. Many candidates blamed PML-N and PTI for announcing and promising development work in the constituency.

The number of voters in PK-08 has registered an overall increase of 8.7% as compared to General Elections 2013. For the by-election of PK-08 the number of registered voters were 133,467 – 78,494 male and 54,973 female – compared to 122,782 – 71,524 male and 51,258 female – registered voters in GE-2013 while same number of 98 polling stations (35 male, 30 female and 33 combined) were set up by ECP. As per Provincial Election Commissioner (PEC) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, approximately 50% of the total polling stations were declared as sensitive.