



Free and Fair Election Network

Second Year of the 13th National Assembly

Women MNAs Outperform Male Counterparts in National Assembly

March 7, 2010

ISLAMABAD: Women members have been more active, assertive and effective voices of citizens than their male counterparts in the National Assembly that is set to complete its Second Parliamentary Year this month, says a Performance Analysis of Women Members of the National Assembly released by the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) to mark International Women's Day.

In a country where political potentialities of women are underestimated and under-documented, the role of Women Parliamentarians sets a benchmark for their male counterparts to follow, as they accounted for more than half of the parliamentary business conducted during the second parliamentary year, despite the fact that women members represent only 22 percent of the total number of parliamentarians.

Besides being headed by a woman Speaker, the National Assembly includes 76 women members, 16 elected on general seats and 60 on reserved seats. While not all women Parliamentarians have been equally active, 50 of them (66 percent of the 76 female members) have contributed almost 50 percent of the agenda of the Lower House in terms of their numbers of formal interventions – Questions, Calling Attention Notices, Private Member's Bills, Resolutions, Adjournment Motions, Points of Order, and Matters of Public Importance. These members have proven to work effectively in collaboration with male members of their parties as well as members belonging to other parties by jointly tabling Calling Attention Notices, Resolutions, Private Member's Bills, and other parliamentary business.

The Performance Analysis of Women Parliamentarians is prepared by FAFEN's Parliament Watch Project (PWP), which aims to collect and publish information about the job performance of Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) and Members of the Provincial Assemblies (MPAs) by observation of these directly elected representatives' actions in the legislatures. The unique aspect of FAFEN's Parliament Watch methodology is direct observation of parliamentary proceedings. FAFEN deploys trained observers to the National Assembly in order to monitor the institution's performance using a detailed, standardized checklist and reporting forms covering all types of parliamentary business. The information gathered is measured against the neutral and objective framework of the normal rules of parliamentary procedure.

The FAFEN report analyses participation of women in various types of parliamentary business that are admissible under the Lower House's Rules of Business. The participation is assessed on the basis of directly observable interventions in the House. There may be more submissions that female members have submitted to the National Assembly Secretariat, but were not presented in the House.

The observation of proceedings of the National Assembly demonstrates greater interest and active participation of women members, on average, as compared to



Free and Fair Election Network

their male counterparts. This conclusion is substantiated by the vital statistics of parliamentary business conducted during the second year of the National Assembly.

Of a total of 3,314 Questions, women members submitted 1,826 Questions as compared to 1,488 submitted by their male counterparts. Most Questions tabled by female members (835) were “starred,” requiring an oral answer. Women members from PMLN asked 1,127 Questions, leading the National Assembly in fulfilling the appropriate legislative function of executive oversight. PPP women members asked 500 Questions, PML 199, ANP 46 and MQM women members asked 18 Questions. Statistically, women members accounted for almost 60 percent of parliamentary business related to executive oversight in the National Assembly.

A total of 67 Private Member’s Bills were on the Orders of the Day for all sittings during the year. Of these, 49 were laid before the House. Of all introduced Bills, female representatives introduced 43 Bills either independently or jointly with other female or male members, while their male counterparts introduced only 6 Private Member’s Bills. Nineteen of the Private Member’s Bills were single member female bills, 14 were sponsored by multiple female members and 10 were jointly sponsored by male and female members. Only four single male member bills were introduced while two were sponsored by more than one male member.

Of a total of 49 Resolutions on various issues, women members sponsored 23 as compared to 13 by male members. Women members tabled 22 Motions under Rule 259 as compared to 12 by male members. Only 16 resolutions were, however, tabled in the House, of which eight were not on the Orders of the Day.

According to the Order of the Day, a total of 124 MNAs moved 147 Calling Attention Notices (CANs), of which 38 were women members. Of 147 such notices, 18 were sponsored by groups of male members, while 7 were put forward by groups of female members. The remaining 122 notices were jointly moved by groups of male and female members. Sixteen female Members from PPPP raised CANs, 12 from PMLN, 8 from PML and one each from ANP and MQM.

As many as 26 CANs raised by Women Members were directed to Cabinet Division, 19 to Finance Division, 12 to Ministry of Health, 10 to Ministry of Interior. The rest concerned with areas as diverse as water and power, defense, culture, food and agriculture, communications, education and petroleum and natural resources.

Parliamentary interventions of women were focused on a broad array of issues relating to “high” and “low” politics, evidencing their focus on diverse matters of national importance and their desire to address them in democratic ways. Women members have contributed to debates and discussions on issues of domestic and international relevance to Pakistan.

However, there have been instances during the parliamentary year where participation of women members appeared to be lacking. For example, the female members did not raise any implications about people in general and women in particular when the NWFP government finalized a peace deal with the Taliban, who had a proven track record of curbing women’s freedoms.



Free and Fair Election Network

Women members from Punjab were most active followed by their counterparts from Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan. Women members belonging to opposition parties, especially PMLN and PML, were particularly active as compared to their counterparts belonging to ANP, MMA and MQM. These members belonging to opposition parties have been more active in terms of their participation than their male counterparts in their respective parties.

Women members on reserved seats appear to be more active than women members elected on general seats. Many women on general seats were elected in constituencies that have been traditionally retained by male members of their families, who could not qualify for election due the graduation condition that had not yet been struck down by the Supreme Court at the time of February 2008 general election.

About FAFEN: FAFEN is a network of 30 civil society organizations working to foster democratic accountabilities in Pakistan. It is governed by Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability.