

# PRESS RELEASE



## NATIONAL DIALOGUE FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSENSUS, DEMANDS FAFEN

**ISLAMABAD, January 19, 2018:** All democratic forces must initiate a grand national dialogue to reverse the dangerous trends of negativism, polarization and obscurantism. These trends are hindering the democratic developments and allowing rigid forces to reign social and political discourse and spheres in the country, says a declaration issued by the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), here on Friday.

Approved by the General Council of FAFEN comprising more than 50 civil society organizations from across Pakistan, the declaration has urged the political parties, media, civil society organizations and public and state institutions to make prompt and conscious efforts to reverse the deepening polarization that has created fragile fault lines within the society at a time when the country is facing serious internal and external challenges amid terrorism and changing geo-politics in the region. This will only be possible through a national dialogue to achieve a more updated social and political contract and consensus that is able to respond to the kind of challenges that the country is facing.

It has become imperative for all political and social actors to put aside their petty political disagreements and respond to the larger challenges ranging from poverty, unequal distribution of wealth and resources, erosion of human rights and civil liberties, rise of extremism, social conflicts and tensions among organs and institutions of the state. There is also a need to put an end to increasing social and political exclusion of women and minorities.

“Rising political polarization has severely undermined the state institutions, the constitution, the parliament, the judiciary, the National Action Plan and above all democratic and humane values. Everything seems subservient to party politics. The media appears to be spreading more confusion and chaos rather than reason and stability. It has become difficult to differentiate between the fact and the fiction”, says the declaration.

While the state institutions must only act within the constitutionally defined limits and trichotomy of powers must be preserved, FAFEN says that there is a dire need for systematically analyzing, identifying and isolating elements which are responsible for spreading, reinforcing and strengthening undemocratic trends and values in the country. At the same time, strengthening social forces striving for positive social change based on constitutionalism, rule of law, protection of rights and civil and political liberties and values of democracy is needed. “Let the Parliament be supreme, let the judiciary act independently, let the state institutions be insulated from political interference and let the law deal with public and elected officials transgressing their powers and those who are involved in corruption,” says FAFEN in the declaration.

FAFEN has expressed its serious concern over the shrinking space for civil society, media and social and political rights advocates in the country, which is systematically being eroded by the government through regressive legislation and regulations and by obscurantist forces appear to be acting in the garb of protection of state institutions. The space is being allowed to occupy by forces of extremism perpetuating violence. The country needs to build on recent achievements such as the mushrooming of all forms of media, the presence of political and civil society, an assertive judiciary and continuity of elected assemblies.

FAFEN has also expressed its concern over the quality of future elections amid severe polarization that has even tainted the otherwise neutral state institutions. The excessive dragging of military and judiciary in the political discourse and disagreements by all political actors does not augur well for the credibility of future elections. The Election Commission of Pakistan is the custodian of the integrity of elections and must assert its constitutional powers reinforced under Elections Act, 2017 to ensure that the General Elections in 2018 are fully transparent, credible and fair to ensure political stability and reinforce public confidence in democracy and its values.

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