

PRESS RELEASE

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Proposed National Commission for Human Rights Should Not Become a Parking Lot for Retired Bureaucrats, PCHR

Islamabad. The proposed National Commission for Human Rights should not become a parking lot for retired bureaucrats. This was demanded during the consultation organized by Parliamentarians Commission for Human Rights, Pakistan, held at its secretariat. The consultation was attended by parliamentarians, foreign diplomats and representatives of civil society organizations. Chairman PCHR Mr. Riaz Fatyana MNA chaired the meeting and Minister of State for Interior Dr. Shehzad Waseem participated in the meeting as a Chief Guest. The Consultation objectively reviewed and analyzed its provisions on criteria of famous Paris Principle which provides globally accepted standard for establishing NHR's.. Consultation focused on mandate, composition, functions, powers and funding of the proposed Commission. Mr. Riaz Fatyana Chairman PCHR in his opening remarks termed the introduction of National human rights act in Assembly as an historic moment and a step in the right direction to improve situation of human rights in the country.

Dr. Shahzad Waseem, Minister for State for Interior assured the resolve of the government for protection of human rights. Mr. Abdul Mujeeb Pirzada, MNA from Pakistan People Party and Member of National Assembly Standing Committee on Law, Justice and Human Rights viewed that this should be discussed in detail at all forums and urged the civil society to come up with concrete suggestions to further improve this draft. Maulana Rehmatullah, MNA, Member PCHR also called it a step in right direction and suggested some amendments in proposed bill.

Civil Society organization had a consensus opinion that Commission shall be independent and autonomous and it should have adequate administrative powers to be able to address human rights violations. As regards, appointment of retired judges and bureaucrats, it was unanimous opinion of all concerned that Commission should have total autonomy to hire professional and competent staff to run its affairs. Consultation reached on the conclusion that establishment of separate human rights courts was futile and rather Commission should strive for raising awareness about the human rights to judiciary. Civil Society Organizations expressed concerns about the definition of Human Rights and its erroneous linkage with the signed and ratified instruments. Regarding composition of Commission, it was recommended that Commission should have significant equal representation of women, no retired judges and bureaucrats, equal representation from opposition and treasury benches of parliament and prescribing criteria for appointment of members of Commission. They expressed serious reservations about discriminatory age limits for members and mandating Commission to engage itself in education and execution of human rights activities.

Chief Guest Senator Dr. Shehzad Waseem, Minister of State for Interior maintained that the establishment of this Commission will speed up the redressal of human rights grievances as the Commission has been charged with the power to intervene any proceeding involving any allegation of violation of human rights pending before a court with the approval of such court. Chairman Mr. Riaz Fatyana lauded this initiative which empowers the Commission to suggest legislative measures for making new laws on human rights and suggesting recommendations for amending the existing laws so as to curb human rights violations in the society.

Chief Coordinator PCHR Mr. Shafique Chaudhry briefed the participants about the role of PCHR in the establishment of National Commission for Human Rights. He said that Executive Director PCHR Ms. Kashmala Tariq MNA has already submitted a concept paper to President of Pakistan Pervaiz Mushrraf on the proposed bill for the establishment of National Commission.

The participants focused their discussion on the functioning and formation of NCHR and underlined the need for its absolute independence keeping in view the ongoing situation of human rights in the country. They opined that the Commission should be absolutely free and independent of all political as well as bureaucratic pressures in respect to its working, and that it should be made responsible before the Parliament instead of the Ministry of Law. Otherwise, it is likely that the proposed Commission will be no more except the puppet.

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