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End Child Marriages in Pakistan

2nd March, 2015

PRESS RELEASE

**Govt of Punjab is committed to curb the harmful practice of Child Marriage:
Advisor to the chief minister, Ms. Zakia Shahnawaz**

Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) and Democratic Commission for Human Development (DCHD) as part of their efforts to devise legal mechanisms to address the practice of child marriage through effective implementations of the constitutionally guaranteed right to education jointly **organized a consultative meeting on the subject here** at Hospitality Inn, Lahore. The meeting gathered around concerned departments of the government and senior representatives of the civil society organizations.

Renowned educationist and Director Programs ITA, Dr. Baela Raza Jamil while welcoming the participants shared her vision of ending child marriages in Pakistan through Multi-sectoral approaches. Participants agreed to address the issue of child marriage through a multi-sectoral approach combining health, rights, protection, education, skills/livelihoods and social protection, etc. Ms. Hinna Jillani, Advocate, referring to various lacunas in existing legal framework stressed that the best interest of the child should be the paramount consideration while making any efforts to reform and revise child related laws. She further suggested that the issue of child marriage is quite complex therefore multi sectoral approach is best way forward to make any campaign against this more effective. Mr. Hussain Naqi expressed his concern over the silence of the government of Punjab on this very important human rights issue and urged all the stakeholders to make an effective mechanism both at the policy and grass root level to curb the menace of child marriage

Ms. Fauzia Vaqar of the Punjab Commission on the status of women and Ms. Tanveer Jahan, Director, Democratic Commission for Human Development, moderated sessions on exploring the range of inter-sectoral collaboration for ending child marriages in Punjab and Sharing of ideas for effective interventions and preventive measures respectively

During the course of the meeting, representatives from various sectors exchanged ideas for effective interventions and preventive measures to end child marriages along with exploring the range of inter-sectoral collaboration to take this initiative forward. Participants of the meeting were unanimous that Child Marriages is the blatant violation of human rights and it not only violate the fundamental right to education but also left detrimental effects on the psycho emotional and physical health of the victim besides promoting They urged the provincial Governments to follow Sindh in enacting effective legal mechanism against child marriage. They were of the view that In addition to effective legislation, attention must be given to preventive strategies in order to minimize and to ultimately end the instances of child marriage. Participants agreed to form a technical group, which will address the issue of child marriage through adopting multi-sectoral approach combining health, rights, protection, education, skills/livelihoods and social protection.

Advisor to the chief minister, Ms. Zakia Shahnawaz, in her concluding remarks said that Government is fully aware of its responsibility vis a vis child marriage and assured the participants that the suggestion made by them will be seriously looked in to while making policy and law against child marriage in Punjab. However she emphasized that we need to highlight thorough media all cases of under-age marriages so that people got aware of it. New legislation on raising the age of marriage from 16 to 18 for girls without highlighting the detrimental effects will make no difference

The meeting was attended by Ms. Lubna Mansoor (Director, Regional Directorate of Human Rights); Mr. Sohail Akbar (Human Right Activist), Mr. Iiaqat Ali (Advocate), Mr. Ahmar (Lawyer), Ms. Nabeela Shaheen (Aurat Foundation); Syed Miqdad Mehdi (Save the Children); Dr. Narmeen Hameed; Dr. Roomi Aziz (Nur Center for Research & Policy); Mr. Mansoor Malik (DAWN News); and representatives of many other human rights organizations.

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