

Media Update-2

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UN Women PRESS RELEASE

Women now have legal protection in asserting their property rights, Ombudsperson

PESHAWAR: The Ombudsperson for Protection against harassment of women at workplace jointly with UN Women launched a stakeholder's guide for "KP Women's Property Rights Act, 2019". The purpose of the Act is to build an effective and efficient redress mechanism to protect and secure women's property ownership rights. "Women's rights are human rights." Women have the right to equality in the enjoyment of all their rights, including the right to access, use, inherit, control, and own land. To achieve gender equality, KP shall fulfil their obligation to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Upholding the agenda of women rights, UN Women provided technical assistance in the development of the stakeholders guide to help women claim their property rights.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan gives due respect to the women in society and guarantee their right of ownership. However, the rights of ownership of women in inheritance are violated usually by their family members by means of coercion, fraud, fabrication, forgery and cheating etc. The event was participated by Bar Councils, lawyers, Social Welfare Department, Revenue Department, civil society, UN Agencies and officials from District Administration.

The KP Women Property Rights Act, 2019, has given, vast powers to the ombudsperson's office established under the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010 and also extended its jurisdiction across KP, including merged tribal districts. Under this legislation, the respective office is equipped to handle cases of women who have been deprived of their ownership rights to inherited movable and immovable properties. The Ombudsperson had also been given the authority to enforce its decisions

through the state institutions including District Administration, Police and Revenue Department and all authorities are expected to obey its orders.

Ms. Rukhshanda Naz, shared that *lengthy court procedures further complex the situations in accessing the property rights in the country and specifically in the province. The property right was also perceived to be an important issue in the fight to eliminate discrimination against women. “Although, the ombudsperson's office is situated at the provincial capital however, women from far-flung Areas such as Mansehra, South Waziristan, Bajaur are also accessing the Ombudsperson office for getting their property rights. Addressing this need, it is planned to introduce the same system at the regional level in the coming two years which will increase women access to property rights.”*

The event was graced by **Mr. Zulfiqar Ali Shah**, Secretary Social Welfare, Special Education & Women Empowerment Department as the chief guest. He stated that the “The Provincial Government has put in place the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act to ensure that women's rights to property ownership and possession are guarded and that such rights are not violated through harassment, persuasion, force, or fraud, among other things.”

“Women are denied of their inheritance rights and less women in the province have the possession of the owned lands. The fear of male family members, poor financial conditions, and prolonged legal procedures, delayed proceedings discourage women from approaching the court for claiming their property rights”, said Zainab Qaisar Khan, Head of Sub Office UN Women Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. She further added that Section 7 of the Women's Property Rights Act allows a woman to file a complaint with the Ombudsperson even if legal proceedings regarding ownership or possession of any property claimed to be hers are pending in the court of law. She also emphasized that women should be made aware of their ownership rights and redress mechanisms, enabling them to seek their legal rights.
