

Talking about women's rights

By Gloria Caleb

PAKISTAN WOMEN LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION (PAWLA)

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PAWLA is a non-governmental organization devoted to protecting legal interests & promoting empowerment of Pakistani women by means of collaborating with legal bodies, the government, churches & NGOs.

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Site developed in collaboration with Sustainable Development Network Programme, Pakistan

WOMEN'S rights in this country have long been a far cry. Specially the rural woman, who is not only unaware of her rights, but is exploited in the name of honour. Although the conditions of women in urban areas are better than those of rural women, yet age-old traditions and social restraints have hindered their independence.

To this end, a number of organizations have come up during the past few years to help women fight for their rights, out of which some have maintained a strong Web presence. "Ensuring women are no longer victims of violence...Providing counselling and support to women and their children through difficult life transitions...Safeguarding women's future by creating awareness of their legal rights..."

That's exactly what the PAWLA web site states and what the organization believes in.

The PAWLA site, www.pawla.sdn.pk.org/ provides surfers with a brief overview of the organization. It also mentions the organization's history, mission statement and objectives.

Its site provides a brief history of the organization and a list of APWA activities and events. The layout and design is good, however, one sad bit about the site is that most of the links are redundant. Had the links worked the site would have been plethora of information.

Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation (APISF), www.brain.net.pk/~apisf/main.html is an organization committed to women's empowerment and believes that this is only possible through their participation in governance at all levels. Its site too provides a detailed outline of what the organization stands for and how they plan to fulfil their goals. Besides this, details on the programmes that have been designed to build an environment to empower women and make them part of the democratic process are also present.

However, since the site is still under construction, some of the details are not available.

Women's movements are no longer empty slogans and chants, that's all that comes to mind while you surf the Simorgh Women's Resource and Publication Centre web site www.spinifexpress.com.

China, Fiji, India, Hong Kong, Nepal, Malaysia and more. However, it is a pity to see that no provision for ordering these publications online is available.

Behbud, xiber.com/behbud/ is an organization that works for the elevation of the status of women. With its headquarters in Rawalpindi, it boasts of branches in most cities of the country such as Karachi, Lahore, Quetta, Peshawar, Multan, Gujranwala, Jhang and D.G Khan. Their site offers information on the health care and educational centres run by Behbud in various colonies in Karachi. Besides this, information on the various vocational centres that come under the banner of Behbud are also available on this web site. National Commission on the Status of Women, www.ncsw.gov.pk/ strives to promote gender equality and empower women thus providing them with an environment in which they realize their full potential and are equal partners with men to create and maintain social order in collaboration with civil society and the government. The site offers information on the background and history of the organization and an outline on how they propose to achieve their goals.

Information on the NCWS ordinance is also provided on this site. This ordinance was proposed to provide for the setting up of the NCWS. Besides this, you will find archives that boast of a number of legal documents that would be of help to women in various situations. News updates and the organization's annual report are other noteworthy features on this site. The annual report gives us an outline of the organization's endeavours during the past fiscal year. A list of links to various other organizations that work for the uplift of the status of women are also provided here: A complaint form through which you can mail your grievances to the organization in just a click away. This is a very good feature and must be adopted by most other organizations that strive to alleviate women's problems.

Taking a look at the sites

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Besides this, the site also provides insight on how they plan to fulfil their objectives and how they plan to help women free themselves from the clutches of unjust societal norms. FAQ's that would help women understand their rights and their privileges have also been provided on this site.

The organization's contact information for various sub-centres that provide legal aid within the city and a number of interesting case studies are also available on this web site. Don't forget to checkout the calendar of events, with a list of objectives for every programme that the organization conducts. This calendar will provide surfers with a fair idea of what the organization is actually involved with and how it plans to redress the problems of women.

The All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA), www.un.org.pk/unic/apwa.htm works diligently towards the uplift of the status of women, by making them aware of their rights and providing opportunities to make them self-sufficient.

[com.au/fasiapub/pakistan/sim.htm](http://www.com.au/fasiapub/pakistan/sim.htm). The organization is actively involved in research on women's issues and has strong links with other national and international women's groups.

The site boasts of a superb list of publications that address issues of gender and class as well as some important documentary films based on women's lives and struggles in Pakistan. This site is truly an asset that boasts of superb feminist literature.

Simorgh also conducts seminars, conferences, income generation projects and gender awareness workshops to help women make a place for themselves in a society that is obsessed with gender bias, details of which are provided on this site. Diaries and postcards are also available which would prove to be excellent feminine gifts. A list of publishing houses involved with women's publications is also found on this web site.

Here one can also find links to publishing houses in various Asian countries, including Bangladesh,

that strive to give women their rightful place in society, it was heartening to see that these organizations were making their presence felt not only in the real world but in cyberspace as well. However, it was sad to see that a major organization that works so diligently against the violation of the dignity of women was not present.

Yes, the WAR site was not available. While talking to an official at WAR it was revealed that the organization was revamping the site, which is scheduled to be launched by mid-August.

Well, while surfing these sites one thing that does come to mind is that, awareness of this sort is available only to the educated woman who has access to the latest technology. The rural woman who is most in need of awareness, still remains at a loss. But then, this is just the beginning.... Hopefully in time these NGOs will take appropriate measures to educate the masses of uneducated, rural women that they strive to help, and invent new ways to enlighten them. ■