



WISE members propose national launch of Jihad Against Violence at first regional meet in Pakistan



In a unique show of unity and common purpose, NGO leaders, religious scholars, and educators convened in Islamabad March 14, 2010 for WISE's first Pakistan regional meeting. The one-day event was designed to establish collaboration between members of the WISE network on the ground and to formulate a cohesive WISE project to further women's rights in Pakistan. Twenty-eight women and men, a vast majority women, from Islamabad, Lahore and Peshawar gathered for the meeting that was successful in sparking conversation between these various role players within Pakistani society that often operate only within their respective networks. In particular, religious groups and NGO representatives typically refrain from collaborating with one another, each group perceiving the other has having opposing perspectives.

Participants were more at ease with each other after a morning spent in leadership and team-building training with Wali Zahid, CEO of Skill City, a training and coaching firm that specializes in addressing leadership and management issues, taking into account Asian cultures. Safer Ullah Khan of Bedari, a women's rights NGO in Pakistan, later offered a presentation on the group's partnership with WISE in advocating against domestic violence in the northern Jhelum District - a project under WISE's Jihad Against Violence campaign. The participants finally ended the day with a brainstorming session where participants agreed that addressing violence was a major priority in Pakistan and an awareness campaign should be organized to tackle the issue. Attendees proposed ideas for cooperation, for example women working at madrassas offered to share their curriculum with the media and NGOs; scholars at the International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI) offered to provide booklets that address women's issues within an Islamic framework; and Maulana Azad, Imam at the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, spoke about his madrassa's activities. Participants individually outlined project ideas as well as resources they could offer. Based on these recommendations, an action plan will be developed by the WISE network in Pakistan.

"An excellent workshop in helping me recognize my inner self. Very informative & highly interactive."

--Syeda Rafia Mazhar, Assistant Research Associate, Uks Research, Resource & Publication Center on Women & Media

"We are looking forward to continue this interaction along with the other activities such as elimination of violence against women and girls."

--Saleem Malik, Executive Director, Bedari

"... Your efforts to take along diverse groups are commendable..."

--Samina Bashir, Assistant Professor, International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI)

Journalist Ishrat Hyatt, who was in attendance at the regional meeting, wrote an in depth article about the event in *The News International* newspaper, "Equal status for women under Shariah demanded." Please visit: http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=229813

To see more photos from the Pakistan regional meeting and other WISE activities in Pakistan, please visit: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/33568201@N07/sets/72157623546629499/>