

In addition to traditional banditry, discrimination of all forms characterises Pakistani society, although Pakistan does not have as rigid and pervasive a caste system as India. There are in fact few places in the world where women are worse off. Literacy among women is less than half of the (abysmally low) rate among men. However, urban upper-class women enjoy opportunities for education and professional work in some fields. They make up most of the membership of women's groups who promote women's rights and lobby the government. Discrimination against religious and other minorities also is rife, with abrogations of Islam being punishable under law.

The Prime Minister, in addition to the measures mentioned above, recently announced the end of the Speedy Trial Courts. Although the Anti-Terrorist courts will continue as before, the abolishment of the Speedy Courts will take away a facility used by past governments largely to harass political opponents. Recent notable victims of this process were the present Prime Minister and her husband following the PPP's dismissal in 1990.

The government has set up a number of advisory bodies related to women's development and other social issues. It also claims to be reviewing all legislation to remove clauses which discriminate against women and has progressed to the stage where a few female judges have been inducted into the high courts of Pakistan. The appointment of two women judges in the High Courts of the NWFP and Sindh have been widely applauded, but this will raise some thorny issues so long as the law of evidence remains in place. This law bars women from being witnesses in Hadood and Diyat cases, and considers evidence of two women as equal to one man in other situations. This issue will have to be addressed by the government.

A major breakthrough has been a recent Lahore High Court decision by a female judge (recently appointed) ensuring a muslim woman's unconditional right to "Khula" (ending her marriage). The Court must now accept a muslim woman's application for Khula without her having to establish grounds to end her marriage. Previously, unlike men who have an unconditional right to divorce without recourse to the law, women who applied for Khula had to enter a long and expensive procedure to establish grounds without necessarily ending her marriage.

CANADIAN POSITION

We are pleased with the developments that have taken place over the past year, in particular, the naming of women judges to the High Courts. As regards other legislative changes and measures, we look forward to their full implementation.

Canada continues to be extremely concerned over the situation and treatment of women as a result of the application of the Hadood Ordinances and discrimination against religious, ethnic, and other minorities as a result of Ordinance XX and various other laws. We are pleased with the urgent steps taken by the Bhutto Administration last year to establish women-only police stations so as to enable women police officers to deal more effectively with public safety concerns of women. However, we are disappointed by the fact that the number of women in the lower ranks of the Police has not been increased and that no women have been inducted into the officer ranks.