



ELEVATING THE ROLE OF PAKISTANI WOMEN IN MODERATING EXTREMISM

For more than a decade, Pakistan has been on the frontlines of the global fight against terrorism, bearing the brunt of violence inflicted by Al-Qaida and other extremist groups. According to the Pakistani government, terrorism has claimed approximately 35,000 civilian lives and cost the country up to \$100 billion in material and financial losses since 2001.¹ Rising radicalization continues to pose a serious security threat to the Pakistani state, its people, the broader region, and to the United States. Yet, national and international interventions to curb extremist violence have not sufficiently addressed the underlying causes of radicalization. Nor are there effective mechanisms in place to prevent and respond to extremism's exceedingly fatal outcomes, which are needed to break the cycle of violence.

Often targets of radical ideologies and terrorism, Pakistani women are keenly aware of extremism's damaging impacts. As prominent leaders in civil society, they best understand the needs of the Pakistani people and are well-placed to bridge social divides. Women frequently propose creative, non-violent solutions to prevent and resolve conflict, and rebuild communities following calamities. Despite their efforts to temper extremist voices and prevent violence, their role as peacebuilders remains largely unrecognized by national and international policymakers. Their lack of access to resources and relevant decision-making circles has subsequently resulted in the creation of policies that do not accurately address the needs or concerns of conflict-affected communities. The inclusion of these leaders in shaping policies related to security, counterterrorism, and development is therefore crucial to bringing about a more secure, peaceful Pakistan.

Recognizing their role as critical resources for stability, women leaders from across Pakistan formed Amn-o-Nisa, a diverse coalition dedicated to collectively moderating extremism, in 2011. Drawing on their extensive experiences, 12 Amn-o-Nisa delegates² drafted the following recommendations for advancing women's inclusion in US counterterrorism efforts and increasing US engagement with a key ally in Pakistan—women peacebuilders.

1. The US Ambassador should convene monthly meetings with US diplomatic, development, intelligence, and military communities, as well as with women leaders working to moderate extremism, including Amn-o-Nisa, to seek their insights into policies and practices to counter violence. The US Embassy should provide regular reports on the outcomes of these gatherings.
2. The Department of State and the US Agency for International Development should provide support to women's coalitions by funding their deradicalization efforts—including advocacy initiatives, community outreach programs, and capacity building projects—and providing protection mechanisms for women's rights defenders working in conflict affected areas.

¹ Asif Ali Zardari, "Talk To, Not At, Pakistan" (op-ed), *Washington Post*, October 2, 2011.

² From April 20 to 27, 2012 The Institute for Inclusive Security, with support from the US Embassy in Islamabad and in collaboration with Meridian International Center, hosted a delegation of 12 Amn-o-Nisa coalition members in Washington, DC for exchange and dialogue with US policymakers.



3. USAID and the State Department should fund and support initiatives that rehabilitate and build the livelihood skills of women survivors of extremist violence, especially women-heads of household. These initiatives should provide:
 - a. access to justice and legal counseling;
 - b. access to trauma care and psychosocial counseling;
 - c. opportunities for economic empowerment;
 - d. access to microcredit loans; and
 - e. support for families, including childcare, education, and healthcare.
4. USAID and the State Department should support and fund Pakistani civil society training initiatives, within each province and FATA, that build the capacity of media on gender-sensitive reporting in conflict situations. Additionally, USAID and State should fund women civil society organizations to train media on the impact of extremism and women's role in countering violence. All trainings should include at least 30% local-language media and at least 30% women.
5. The State Department and USAID should continue to allocate funds to Pakistani civil society organizations dedicated to reforming curricula and developing educational materials that promote tolerance, conflict transformation, interfaith dialogue, and respect for human rights, especially women's rights:
 - a. The US Department of State should ensure the implementation of curriculum reforms proposed by civil society through a targeted diplomacy effort with the Government of Pakistan;
 - b. USAID should fund the reconstruction of girls' schools in conflict-affected areas and provide incentives to women teachers and students; and
 - c. USAID should fund and support an initiative to build the capacity of all teachers on topics of conflict transformation and peacebuilding.
6. The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, USAID, and other relevant organizations should partner with the Ministry of Interior and women's civil society groups to prevent and respond to violent extremism by:
 - a. coordinating and conducting a needs assessment on the capacity of Pakistani law enforcement agencies to deal with extremist violence;
 - b. developing training materials for law enforcement officials that address the impact of extremist violence on women and how to engage with women society organizations in their efforts to counter violent extremism;
 - c. ensuring that 25% of law enforcement trainers and trainees are women;
 - d. supporting women civil society organizations, in partnership with the National Disaster Management Authority and the Provincial Disaster Management Authorities, in identifying, nominating, and training first responders in every district to react to incidents of extremist violence and terrorism, specifically addressing the needs of women and girls; and
 - e. developing gender-responsive, indigenous early warning and response systems.