

Shahla Zia Passes Away

ISLAMABAD, 10 March 2005

Shahla Zia, one of the pioneers of the women's rights movement in Pakistan and co-founder of the Aurat Foundation, passed away in Islamabad Thursday morning, after a brief illness. She was buried in Islamabad on Thursday evening. Her funeral was attended by a large number of mourners, including family members, friends, representatives of NGOs, the government and political parties.

The late Shahla Zia was the daughter of the renowned educationist, Dr. Satnam Mahmood and Nawabzada Mahmood Ali Khan, the distinguished freedom fighter. In her own right, she has left behind a rich legacy.

As soon as the news of her demise spread, her home was swamped with a large number of prominent representatives from all walks of life, including women and men legislators and the government.

Shahla Zia was a founding partner of the AGHS women's law firm and legal aid centre in 1980. She was a pioneering activist of the Women's Action Forum and was one of those jailed for protesting against the Law of Evidence at the Lahore High Court in 1983. She was at the forefront of the struggle against all the discriminatory laws against women and non-Muslim Pakistanis. She was the most knowledgeable authority on Hudood Ordinances and other laws pertaining to rights of women and non-Muslim Pakistanis.

Her immense contribution to law reform and research on women's legal, political and development issues will form a shining chapter in the history of the women's movement in Pakistan. She was one the main authors of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Women (1997) and an author and co-editor of the National Report for the Women's Conference in Beijing (1995). She conceptualized the chapter on Women's Development for the Ninth Five-Year Plan for the Planning Commission.

She had the courage of her convictions to resign from the Government's various Committees and the Beijing Core Group when the Fifteenth Constitutional Amendment was introduced in Parliament in 1998.

Shahla will always be remembered for her immense courage in taking up challenges as an activist. She was a source of strength for family, friends, women political workers and civil society activists at large. One of her most enduring qualities was her humility and her reluctance to take centre stage or the limelight for any of her several landmark achievements. Shahla was a national asset and her loss is a national loss.