

Call for strengthening women's role in conflict resolution

By Haneen Rafi

KARACHI: Despite the progress the discipline of women's rights has seen in the past few decades, the disparity between men and women in society still hasn't been eliminated. In a bid to depict the importance of women as global peace builders, Tehreek-i-Niswan and Peace Women Across the Globe organised a global conference at the Arts Council on Thursday.

'Karachi Women's Peace Table 2015' aimed to help women identify their strengths in both personal and professional capacity to further their role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peace negotiations, which is part of the resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council.

The conference opened with different speakers who were well-informed about the ground realities of the problems women face every day. From sexual harassment on the streets or at work, lack of educational opportunities, or a disadvantaged economic status in society, the list seems to be never ending.

Nuzhat Shireen spoke about a report on women and their weak economic standing that tends to have a domino effect on other aspects of their life. She elaborated that to make women more economically mobile, the government needs to assure them equal representation in the job market.

"There are so many women working in the informal sector today, more than eight hours every day. However, their work is not considered at all and they are not pro-

vided any opportunities for the work they put in," she said.

Naghma Iqtidar spoke about how women have been kept away from politics and as a result when we pick up history books it seems as if women did not exist at all. According to her, this is most prevalent in extremely patriarchal societies.

"The representation of women in politics should be taken up from the grass root level and they should be encouraged to take active interest in the political ongoings in the country."

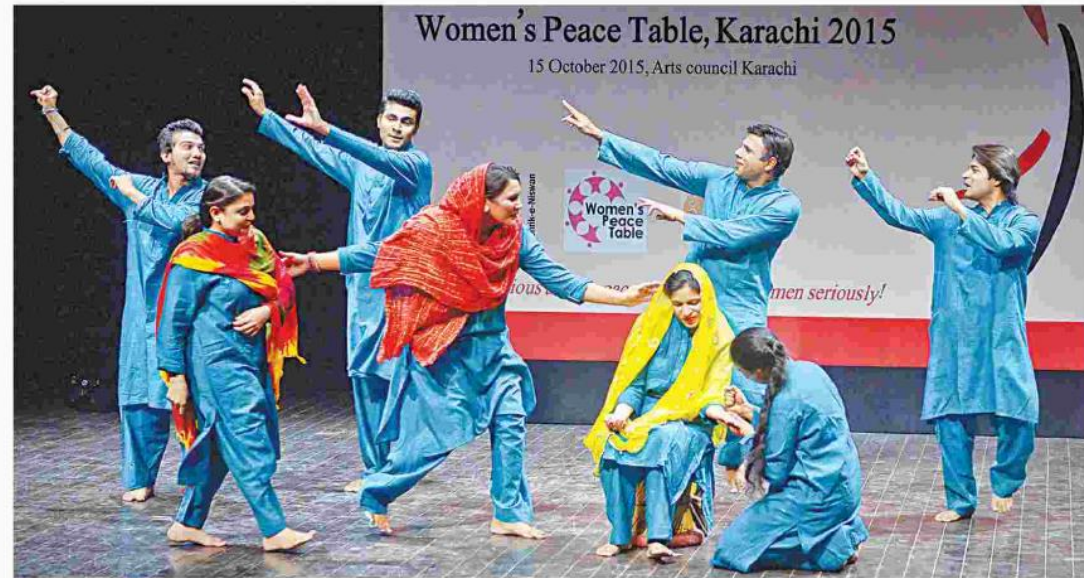
"If we want peace within our boundaries and outside, we need to include women in the political sphere," she said.

Space was also given to discuss the various forms of violence women are subjected to. To further this thread, several names active in the battle for gender equality were part of the conference that included Ansu Kohli, Humaira Bachal and Kainat Soomro.

Kainat Soomro, who was gang-raped when she was a teen, shared the battle she fought and also paid tribute to the men and women who have helped her along the way. Kainat was invited by Malala Yousafzai to attend the premier of *He Named Me Malala* in New York, and she also shared with the audience anecdotes about her visit.

Ms Bachal narrated her struggle against the belief rampant in certain segments of society that women should not be educated. Her belief is that "a powerful mother can very easily give birth to a peaceful society. And my mother is one such example."

The lack of participation and absence of



ONE of the performances during the Karachi Women's Peace Table 2015 conference, which was held at the Arts Council on Thursday.—White Star

women in the political and legal sphere were also issues touched upon by different speakers. The most important, many believed, was the need to revisit draconian laws negatively impacting women in the country, an example of which are the Qisas and Diyat ordinance and the Hudood

ordinance. From discussing local and international reports documenting women's rights, to poetry recitations and plays, the interest of the audience did not waver. The different forms of medium employed also helped dilute the message, thereby leaving a more potent impact.

Though the female perspective included at the conference was very pertinent, it would have benefited greatly had men actively involved in this fight be given space too. This was essential, considering that the audience comprised a large percentage of men.