

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Adoption of Joint Electorate System at all levels and protection of women's right to vote stressed**

Commission for Peace and Human Development has stressed on the adoption of Joint Electorate in electoral system at all levels and protection of women's right to vote all over the country.

Showing his concern on the lack of interest shown by the religious minorities in the by-election held on March 28, 2004 and hindering the women to exercise their right to vote in certain parts of the country, Waseem Anthony, the Executive Director of the Commission said that according to the local press Over 90% minority seats in Punjab could not be filled in during the local government by-polls due to non-filling of nomination papers. The minorities in Punjab have shown extreme apathy towards the local government by-elections as only 196 candidates have submitted their nomination papers against 1209 vacant seats in the province. This is only 16 percent of the total vacant seats reserved for the minorities. Out of this 18 have withdrawn their nominations and In actual only 95 minority candidates are contesting on 37 seats, while candidates on the 83 seats have been declared elected unopposed. The total contestants (95) are just 7.8 % of the notified 1209 vacant seats. In NWFP also 668 seats reserved for minorities remained vacant.

He appreciated that the National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) has submitted a draft of proposed amendments in the Local Government ordinance vis-à-vis the introduction of Joint Electorate System in the LB polls to prim minister Zafarullah khan Jamali and that the government is trying to make Pakistan a secular, moderate state. He urged President Pervez Musharaf and Prim Minister Zafarullah khan Jamali to take appropriate steps to make sure that the next LB polls are also held on the bases of Joint Electoral system.

He said that the local press also quoted that In Swabi, The jirga members of various union councils declared that the women would not be allowed to exercise their right to vote in the by-elections and as a result the women were barred to cast their vote on Sunday. It is learnt that in NWFP, about 1871 seats remained vacant despite the by-elections, as nobody has filed nomination papers for these seats. Out of these, 718 are women's reserved seats and 451 are seats reserved for women peasants and workers.

He was of the view that women and religious minorities are the two most marginalized and dis-empowered groups in the country and steps should be taken to protect their rights. He said that the electoral system should not be used by the rulers or the elite only to get legitimacy but to empower the people.

Waseem Anthony  
Executive Director

March 30, 2004