

### **Women and the workplace**

A private organisation working in the sphere of labour for women has, after an audit of gender at workplaces in Pakistan noted that women are often subject to discrimination and that laws to detect them are not fully adhered to. At a presentation in Islamabad, the organisation has noted that while there are discrepancies in salaries for women as well as skewed provision of rights, more subtle discrimination hurts them just as much. It has been found that, while maternity leave is usually granted to women, other forms of action against them are commonplace. Girls and women applying for jobs are frequently asked if they intend to get married or have children. Obviously, these are personal issues which should not arise during job interviews. Men are not often [or even ever] asked the same questions.

Experts from the organisation have also said that there is very poor representation of women on labour inspection teams and in the labour department, which is also biased against female workers. Essentially, we all know that not only in Pakistan but also in other nations including many developed countries women receive unfair treatment at work. This is a matter which ties in to the status of women in society and how they have fared within it. Scandinavian nations have perhaps been more successful in moving towards an elimination of discrimination. These are the models Pakistan would need to strive towards but we also know it will take a very long time to achieve success. We are currently living in a society where the harassment of women is still common in almost every workplace, where transport to work is a problem for female employees and where basic rights are barely recognised. Labour inspectors frequently ignore these conditions while there is of course very limited childcare available to women at their workplaces, whether in offices or factories. Change then will take time but it is a process that needs to begin as quickly as possible, first of all by implementing the laws that do exist.

Editorial