

Pakistan's anti-women villains: Not just the Taliban

New Delhi, 6 April 2009: Will the recently released video footage of a teenaged girl being flogged by the Taliban in Swat make Pakistan's leadership sit up and take notice? Will it finally open their eyes and make them see the peril facing the society? Will the International community finally react to the deplorable state of women's rights, not just in Swat but the whole of Pakistan? These are just some of the questions raised by Suba Chandran in an Issue Brief, recently published by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi.

Chandran, in his brief, not only traces the plight and fears of women in Swat and the steady decline in their status and freedom but also mentions other startling cases of women's rights abuses in Pakistan, including the infamous case of Mukhtaran Mai, at the hands of tribal and feudal lords who have practiced and lived by a social code over and above the 'official' law of the land. Chandran's basic argument points a finger at state complicity and state failure on the issue. He highlights incidents of leaders condoning violence perpetuated against women in the name of tradition and culture and further adds, "In the current enthusiasm to blame whatever the Taliban does, one can forget that the State also needs to be blamed for this situation. It has completely abdicated its responsibility to protect women against the Taliban brand of justice or what is sanctioned by the feudal lords and Sardars in Sindh, Punjab and Balochistan."

Pakistan's civil society has made some feeble noises against such atrocities and the movement is steadily growing stronger. This, according to Chandran, is the silver lining around the proverbial dark cloud. But, these voices need tangible support from the west to ensue that Pakistan's people, especially its women, get the protection they deserve from the state, concludes Chandran.

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D Suba Chandran's complete Issue Brief – **Violence Against Women in Swat: Why Blame only Taliban?** - is available on the IPCS website www.ipcs.org.

For more on the Swat Valley see – **Swat: A Chronology since 2006** – Special Report by Urvashi J Kumar available on the website www.ipcs.org

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