

Declaration of Rights of Political Party Workers

Draft discussion paper.....for party workers

We admire the exemplary sacrifices and struggle by the workers of political parties in Pakistan who have different ideologies and approaches. They have voluntarily chosen a difficult and enduring course of politics which is full of challenges that can only be appreciated by the people who have been associated with practical politics.

Acknowledging the contribution of all political party workers for their historical services we, the workers, want to recognize the fact that no other institution other than the political parties whose workers have had to face so many arrests, harassment and torture. They have sacrificed their families and personal interests for politics and sometimes have also sacrificed their lives for their party's interests.

Workers have often been the direct target of clashes between different political parties on issues such as principles, interests and power. These disputes sometimes caused deep political animosity, with direct affects for political workers. We aspire to see this culture ended once and for all so that true political tolerance is created in our society.

A similar situation arises in relations between government and political parties. Political workers who belong to opposition parties are not only unable to conduct their work as employees of government organizations but are often targets of government torture and unfair practices which can result in a loss of earnings thus increasing problems for their families.

Ironically political workers who have made huge sacrifices for their party can also become a target when their own party attains government. The party leadership frequently promotes those people who have both money and some influence while ignoring long serving and loyal party workers.

It is unfortunate that a culture of tolerance regarding principled dissent on the policies and leadership within a political party is not allowed to develop in Pakistan. The result is that such loyal party workers are either suspended or expelled from party membership if they raise awkward but fair questions about a party's policy or leadership matter which is their right as a party member. Yet when leaders are promoted or receive the support of party workers, those leaders do not consider party workers important enough to involve in discussions about party policy or other major decisions, some of which are taken by leaders for personal interest thus ignoring their loyal workers.

Party workers are often punished for violating party rules while senior party leaders are rarely punished or expelled or suffer any consequences for their disloyal actions.

Political parties in Pakistan frequently ignore those loyal party workers and their families particularly when a party worker becomes incapacitated, ill or dies, the party often refuses to help his/her family thus leaving such families to face severe economic hardship

without any assistance. In view of this situation and given the lack of social infrastructure available from the State to help people we, the political workers, demand that:

1. The government and the leadership of political parties should, both verbally and by their actions, acknowledge the existence, active role and sacrifices of their political workers.
2. Each political party should maintain a directory to record the services of noted political workers since the inception of Pakistan.
3. The Constitution of Pakistan was passed in Islamabad. A memorial should be erected in the capital city with names of deserving political workers from different political parties engraved on it.
4. Political workers should have the right to voice dissent within the party and should not be a target of victimization by their own party because they ask questions. It is their democratic right to do so. All political party workers must be included in the party's decision-making process.
5. The democratic social contract between the State and its citizens demands that party workers should not be harassed by either government institutions or their representatives or other party workers.
6. A fair, transparent and accountable system must be put in place to enable people (no matter what their party affiliation) to obtain jobs in an equitable manner. Party affiliation should not have a bearing on one's ability to do the job.
7. Party workers should be treated with respect by both their party leaders and those in authority.
8. Party workers should not abuse their position should their party attain power.
9. The leadership of all political parties should encourage all parties to create a peaceful and democratic atmosphere between all workers of all political parties so that a strong political culture may be nurtured in the country. This is the leadership's responsibility to help ensure a strong democratic tradition.
10. All party workers should have the right to study, discuss, debate and question freely all party and political ideology without repercussions from any person or institution
11. The political party leadership should tolerate and encourage constructive criticism of party policy and the leadership. This is normal practice in all truly democratic parties. The party leadership should not term principled dissent within the party as disloyalty to the party. This attitude must be abolished.
12. To change his or her party is a basic, democratic and ideological right of the party worker. There should be no character assassination or consequences for such workers.
13. All party workers deserve to have their grievances heard by the party leadership. The party leadership has an obligation to listen to and respond positively to the party workers.
14. It is the responsibility of every political party to support their political workers in case of severe economic and/or other difficulties suffered by the party workers. A Political workers fund should be established for the welfare of political workers and their families by the political parties.

15. Political parties should conduct continuous political training for their workers. Political parties should consider establishing a training academy where party workers have the opportunity to study politics and receive proper political training. At the very least every political party should have a dedicated training officer whose responsibility is to organize and conduct training for party workers around the country.
16. All political parties should give special acknowledgement and reward to those party workers who have gone beyond the call of duty for their party on the party's founding day.
17. All laws in the country and rules should be immediately reviewed and reformed which curbs the work of political workers or interferes with their rights as citizens.
18. The Government of Pakistan should immediately ratify the International Covenant of Political and Citizen Rights and facilitate its immediate implementation. By doing so the government will help promote democracy and the democratic culture of the country.
19. Political parties should prepare a policy and change their party constitutions so that any party worker has a fair chance to attain leadership status in his/her party. All parties should take action to encourage and promote their workers as candidates in all elections. This has to include preferences when awarding party tickets, providing support for election activities etc.

This declaration has been put forward as a discussion document for all party workers and their parties to discuss and negotiate so that the rights of political party workers may be protected. It is the wish of the authors that a final document be presented to all parties leaders and that it would receive their active support and encouragement to become a part of every party's policy and best democratic practices.