

Challenges of Ombudsmanship Workshop organized by the Forum of Pakistan Ombudsman.

The Forum of Pakistan Ombudsman organized a two day Workshop on the Challenges of Ombudsmanship at Islamabad from 25th Sept 2013 to 26th Sept 2013. All the 12 Ombudsman offices of Pakistan were represented. The Workshop comprised six working sessions spread over two days. On the first day, in the first session, Registration of Participants was followed by the Inaugural address of the President, Forum of Pakistan Ombudsman, Mr Abdur Rauf Chaudhry who is also the Federal Tax Ombudsman and the Keynote address by Mr Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi, Commissioner for children in the Federal Ombudsman Secretariat. In the second and third sessions, four resource persons made 30 minute presentations each, moderated by a separate Chairperson for each session. A 30 minute Question and Answer session followed the presentations by the two resource persons of each session in which Workshop participant's and members of the audience participated. The Chairperson recorded his / her observations after the Q & A session. On the second day, 6 resource persons made presentations in two working sessions followed by a Q & A session. After the Chairperson's remarks the President, Federation of Pakistan Ombudsman recorded his observations and wound up the proceedings. Finally, Certificates were awarded to the participants.

During the proceedings, the Workshop participants were advised by the Advisor (Projects) FTO Sectt., Mr Ahmad Owais Pirzada that the Forum had deputed a senior officer of the Federal Tax Ombudsman office to compile a report on the activities during the two days that the Workshop sessions lasted. They were told that the report would be made public within a month. True to his word, a special report on the Challenges to Ombudsmanship Workshop was released on 30.10.2013.

The report is spread over 66 pages and is organized into four chapters. The first chapter contains the Inaugural Address and the Keynote Address. Chapter-II has the presentations by the resource persons. Chapter-III contains an analysis of the major issues of relevance for the Ombudsman. Based on the presentations and the discussions during the workshop sessions, the recommendations of the

Forum are placed in Chapter-IV. Also placed in this chapter, are landmark decisions of the superior judiciary as they relate to the office of the Ombudsman especially the Ombudsperson's jurisdiction, that is the areas that he may take up for investigation.

In the Foreword, the President of the Forum gives a very broad overview of the Workshop sessions and explained that the Workshop had made it possible to:

".....to better project the Ombudsman institution and improve the peoples understanding of this important office and to overcome a deep seated conservative mindset that makes it difficult for many people, especially women and children, to come forth with their problems and grievances."

In the Inaugural address the President of the Forum emphasised that in a dynamic, fast changing environment " **... in order to remain relevant the Ombudsman must deliver.**" That however would not be easy especially as fiscal constraints mandate that workload is regulated and complaint's taken up for investigation after careful screening to ensure that only those get to see the light of day that are best placed to have optimum impact. He also emphasised that it was imperative that the Ombudsman adopt a proactive approach and use **own motion initiatives** to redress grievances. He explained that the evolution of the office of the Ombudsman had now reached a stage where the 21st century Ombudsman was qualitatively quite different from his classical 19th century predecessor and was forced to address problems related to a much more complex work environment. Human rights issues, especially those involving women and children added a completely new dimension to the Ombudsman's responsibilities.

In the Keynote address, Mr Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi dilated on the need to ensure that the rights of a large child population are addressed adequately as this was seen as an area of great concern in the second half of the 21st century. He also opined that the regular court system had come under great stress and strain due to a much increased workload and a less formal system, such as the Ombudsman's office was better placed to deliver redress in many areas.

The presentations by the resource persons cover about 20 odd pages of the report and are a central feature of the workshop proceedings. Each presentation took approximately 30 minutes in which the speaker went through power point slides explaining various facets of his presentation. Almost all the resource persons were seasoned bureaucrats with many years of work to their credit. The first presentation by Mr Yaseen Tahir, senior Advisor in the Federal Tax Ombudsman secretariat, Islamabad, illustrates well the combination of experience and professional understanding of the resource persons. The interactive nature of the presentations enabled participants to have a free and candid exchange of views and the session chairperson ensured that the discussion did not stray into irrelevant areas.

An analysis section (Chapter-III of the report) is a useful feature of the special report. It starts with a recap of the evolution of the Ombudsman institution in Pakistan beginning in 1983 with the establishment of the office of the Wafaqi Mohtasib or Federal Ombudsman, probably the first country in Asia to embrace the modern Ombudsman institution cast on the Swedish model. It goes on to examine the Forum of Pakistan Ombudsman, set up in 2011. An examination of fiscal imperatives in the Ombudsman context follows. Human rights issues and their increasing significance so far as they relate to children's rights and the protection of women from workplace harassment are also put under the scanner. Empowerment of the Ombudsman in Pakistan to enhance his outreach and ensure implementation of his recommendations is taken up next and is an important feature of the evolution of the Ombudsman's office in Pakistan. Training of Ombudsman staff, political interference in the work done by the Ombudsman, projection of the Ombudsman through the print and electronic media and the impact of judicial activism on workplace harassment of women is also looked into. Finally, in Chapter-IV, recommendations have been made by the Forum for implementation by all participating members.

This Report succinctly documents the two days proceedings which is a major event organized by the Forum of Pakistan Ombudsman. It is now a valuable

reference source on the issues identified by the participants that are likely to arise as they implement their respective charter's.