



**OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL OMBUDSPERSON
FOR PROTECTION AGAINST HARASSMENT OF WOMEN
AT THE WORKPLACE, ISLAMABAD**

**FORM OF ORDER SHEET
Complaint No. FOH-ONL-H/0584/2025**

Ms. Sanam Junejo

V/S

Mr. Muhammad Rasheed Malik

Date of Institution: 05-09-2025

Name of Organization: Associated Press of Pakistan (APP)

FINAL ORDER

Date: 15/07/2026

Sr. No: 28

1. The present complaint bearing No. **FOH-ONL-H-0584/2025** was received via WhatsApp to this Forum on 22-09-2025. The Complainant namely; Ms. Sanam Junejo, Reporter/Sub-Editor, APP alleged that she had been facing persistent harassment at the workplace at the hands of Accused Mr. Muhammad Rasheed Malik, Acting Director, Associated Press of Pakistan. That the harassment began during the APP election campaign in the month of Ramadan last year, when she was contesting election for the post of Press Secretary from the APP Ramzan Adil Group. At that time, the Accused was associated with the pro management group APP Workers Etihad, who initiated a malicious campaign against her. That the Accused repeatedly made derogatory remarks about the Complainant in various WhatsApp groups, and with the support of management targeted not only her, but also other female colleagues of the organization. That despite her repeated requests and warnings to the Accused, he continued his attitude/conduct and eventually, crossed all limits by targeting the Complainant's community in a WhatsApp message with below the belt remarks.
2. That the Accused's conduct during the election campaign reflected a consistent pattern of harassment, as he had also targeted several female colleagues in a similar manner. That the Complainant formally approached APP Management and requested action against the Accused, but no action whatsoever, was taken. Subsequently, she submitted her complaint to the Parliamentary Secretary for Human Rights, Ms. Saba Sadiq MNA, who issued a letter dated 15-05-2025 to the Managing Director APP directing a formal inquiry against the Accused, but no compliance was made. That later on, the APP management itself ordered an inquiry and constituted a four members committee. The committee conducted hearings and submitted its report to

the Managing Director APP. However, instead of taking disciplinary action against the Accused, he was rewarded with the position of Director, which not only undermined the credibility of the inquiry, but further emboldened the Accused's misconduct.

- 3. In view of her charge against the Accused, the Complainant prayed to this Forum to take strict action against the Accused in accordance with the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, as well as the Rules and Regulations of APP, to ensure a safe and dignified work environment for all the employees.*
- 4. After registration and entertainment of the complaint before this Forum for hearing, the Accused side was issued notices for their appearance and reply. Mr. Malik Khizar Zaman, the representative of the Management, filed objection petition with regard to maintainability of the complaint on the ground that on the basis of the complaint of the Complainant to Federal Parliamentary Secretary Ms. Saba Sadiq, who asked the organization/management to conduct inquiry, an inquiry committee was constituted by the MD APP which found the allegations of the Complainant against the Accused unproved. The principal Accused Mr. Muhammad Rasheed Malik also furnished his written reply, wherein he denied all the allegations of harassment made by the Complainant against him. Instead, he took the stance that the complaint was malafide, as the Complainant wanted to rescue her colleagues involved in irregularities and corruption against whom inquiries were pending, in which he (Accused) was Inquiry Officer.*
- 5. It is relevant to note that at the 9th hearing before this Forum, vide order dated 20-11-2025, Dr. Asif Khawaja, Manager (Legal), appearing on behalf of the Management, submitted two office memoranda: one recording the view of the Competent Authority, (one pager) and another (5 pages) titled "Findings on the Complaint under the 2010 Act." On a bare perusal, these memoranda prima facie do not appear to be in consonance with the requirements of Sections 3 and 4 of the Act, 2010, which prescribe the manner in which a harassment complaint is to be inquired into and disposed of. Based on these viod ab initio proceedings, the instant matter was taken up as a complaint and proceeded accordingly.*
- 6. Both the parties produced their respective evidence in support of their conflicting versions. The Complainant recorded her statement as PW-1 with reference to her Affidavit in evidence Ex PW 1/1. She produced screen shots of WhatsApp group APP workers Ex PW 1/2, Ex PW 1/3, Ex PW ¼, Ex PW 1/5, Ex PW 1/6, Ex PW 1/7, Ex PW 1/8, Ex PW 1/9 and Ex PW 1/10 (details given in her examination in chief as PW-1). She also produced screen shots of WhatsApp conversation Mark-1. Ms. Shumaila Noreen appeared as Complainant's witness and recorded her statement as PW-2 with reference to her Affidavit as Ex PW 2/1. She produced screen shots of WhatsApp conversation with Mr. Asim Khichi Ex PW 2/2. Mr. Haq Nawaz Bhutto appeared as PW-3, with reference to his Affidavit Ex PW 3/1. Ms. Rukhsana Taj appeared as PW-4 with reference to her Affidavit Ex PW 4/1. Ms. Farhat Fatima recorded her statement*

as PW-5 with reference to her Affidavit Ex PW 5/1. All the above witnesses were cross examined by the Accused side.

7. On the other hand, Accused Mr. Muhammad Rasheed Malik recorded his statement as DW-1, with reference to his Affidavit Ex DW 1/1. He produced Mr. Muhammad Kashif Khan as DW-2 in connection with his Affidavit Ex DW 2/1. He also produced Mr. Hassan Raza Cheema, Mr. Muhammad Nadeem Iqbal Raja, Mr. Zaheer Uddin Babar, Mr. Muhammad Usman and Ms. Sehar Alam as DW-3 to DW-7 respectively with reference to their Affidavits Ex DW 3/1 to DW 7/1. These witnesses were also cross examined by the learned Counsel for the Complainant.
8. Having heard the learned Counsel for the parties and having carefully examined the pleadings, oral and documentary evidence, as well as the record produced before this Forum, the following questions arise for determination:

(i) Whether the conduct complained of falls within the ambit of "harassment" as defined under Section 2(h) of the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010;

(ii) What is the evidentiary value, if any, of the departmental inquiry conducted by the management of Associated Press of Pakistan;

(iii) Whether the impugned WhatsApp messages were authored and published by the Accused;

(iv) Whether those messages were directed towards, or sufficiently connected with, the Complainant;

(v) Whether the allegations stand proved on the basis of the evidence independently recorded before this Forum and, if so, what penalty, if any, is warranted under the Act.

9. Before advertng to the legal issues, it is appropriate to reproduce the principal communications upon which the complaint is founded. The record reflects that the Accused posted the expression "مافيا پور اندرون سندھ" **Mafia Pur Androon Sindh** in an APP WhatsApp group comprising employees of the organization. The Complainant contends that the expression was directed towards her and other employees belonging to Sindh and was intended to ridicule and stigmatize them on the basis of their ethnicity.
10. The record further shows that the Accused posted another lengthy message employing expressions such as "**khusray**," "**jhando mai**" and "**meesni**," together with a fictitious book title "**khusriyati chawlein, by musanifa mai jando khusri**," mock authorship and fabricated publishing details, repeatedly incorporating the expression "**Androon Sindh Mafia**." The term "**khusray**" appears repeatedly throughout the post (17 times) and is used as an instrument of ridicule and mockery. **The learned Counsel for the Complainant also argued that since she has not been able to bear any children, the Accused used that and associated her with the transgender community**
11. Another screenshot (Ex.PW-1/2) contains the statement: "**khusray bhi chawal hotay hain, aik baar chawal khusron ke ghar bacha paida hogaya, tou unhon ne**

choom choom kar maar diya." These communications constitute the primary documentary evidence relied upon by the Complainant.

12. At this stage, it becomes necessary to examine whether such conduct satisfies the statutory definition contained in Section 2(h) of the Act. Section 2(h), insofar as relevant to the present case, contemplates discrimination on the basis of gender which embodies a discriminatory or prejudicial mindset resulting in discriminatory behaviour against the complainant. Thus, the provision requires more than the mere use of offensive language. It must be determined whether the conduct complained of demonstrates a prejudicial mindset founded upon gender and whether such conduct was directed against, or had the effect of discriminating against, the complainant. The provision must therefore be applied by analysing its constituent elements rather than by proceeding solely on moral disapproval of objectionable language.
13. Applying the above test to the evidence on record, this Forum is satisfied that the repeated use of the expression "**khusray**" as a term of ridicule unmistakably reflects a prejudicial mindset based upon gender identity. The expression was not used descriptively, nor in reference to any legitimate issue under discussion. Rather, it was repeatedly employed as an abusive epithet to convey inferiority, contempt and ridicule.
14. Language of this nature derives its offensive character precisely because it treats transgender identity as something deserving of mockery. Such usage reinforces harmful stereotypes and reflects discriminatory attitudes towards a recognised gender identity. The repeated deployment of these expressions in communications exchanged amongst colleagues is incompatible with the dignity and inclusiveness expected in a professional workplace.
15. The repeated use of expressions associated with a protected gender identity as pejorative insults is legally significant, not because the language is merely offensive, but because such usage objectively manifests a discriminatory perception that persons associated with that identity are fit subjects of ridicule. The discriminatory character of the language lies in the stereotype it reinforces rather than in the vocabulary employed in isolation.
16. The question nevertheless remains whether the discriminatory conduct was directed against the Complainant within the meaning of Section 2(h). Having examined the evidence as a whole, this Forum is satisfied that although the derogatory expressions were ostensibly couched in general language, they formed part of a continuing series of communications exchanged during an ongoing dispute involving the Complainant. The messages were circulated in a common professional forum, were contextually linked with the workplace rivalry already established on the record, and were reasonably understood by the Complainant as referring to her and the group with which she was publicly associated.
17. In workplace harassment cases, direct naming of the complainant is not an indispensable requirement where the surrounding circumstances sufficiently establish that the impugned conduct was calculated to target or demean the complainant before

her colleagues. The cumulative effect of the evidence in the present case satisfies that requirement.

18. The Accused has argued that the impugned remarks, even if accepted, were directed towards ethnicity rather than gender and therefore do not fall within the scope of the Act. The submission is only partially correct. The expression **"Mafia poor Androon Sindh,"** viewed in isolation, primarily carries ethnic overtones. Standing alone, it would not necessarily constitute gender-based harassment within the meaning of Section 2(h). However, the present complaint cannot be decided by reading each communication in isolation. The impugned messages constitute a series of communications in which ethnic references were repeatedly interwoven with derogatory references to transgender persons and other abusive expressions. It is the cumulative effect of these communications, and not any isolated phrase, that requires consideration.
19. The statutory wrong, therefore, does not arise merely because ethnic references and gender-based insults appear together in the same communications. Rather, the liability arises because the Accused consciously employed gender-based expressions as instruments of ridicule against an identifiable workplace rival, thereby exhibiting the discriminatory mindset contemplated by Section 2(h). **Accordingly, while the ethnic remarks by themselves may fall outside the precise scope of Section 2(h), the repeated gender-insensitive expressions employed contemporaneously with those remarks disclose the discriminatory mindset contemplated by the statute especially when the Complainant has not been able to bear any child.**
20. The Accused has further contended that the complaint is actuated by mala fide on account of departmental inquiries allegedly conducted by the Accused against certain employees. Even assuming such departmental disputes existed, no independent evidence has been produced to establish that the present complaint is false or fabricated. A possible motive for instituting proceedings does not, by itself, negate otherwise credible evidence. Conversely, the existence of previous disputes cannot furnish a licence to employ derogatory and discriminatory language within the workplace. The evidence adduced by the Complainant stands independently supported by the admitted authorship of the impugned communications. Consequently, the plea of mala fide does not materially affect the credibility of the substantive evidence produced before this Forum.
21. It is appropriate, at this juncture, to record a compelling institutional dimension of this case. Where a woman's entry into a contested and visible role — here, a trade-union election within a public-sector organization — is met with an organised campaign of ridicule invoking her gender and her community, the harm inflicted travels well beyond the individual complainant. It sends an unmistakable signal to every woman in the organization that seeking visibility, leadership or contested office carries a personal cost that her male colleagues are never made to bear. This is especially consequential in the media sector, where editorial and decision-making positions remain overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of men, and where a woman aspiring to

any position of authority or public visibility is already the exception rather than the rule. Intimidation of this nature — humiliating a woman before her colleagues, invoking her gender or personal circumstances, and weaponising a stigmatised identity as a term of ridicule against her — operates as a deterrent to other women contemplating similar participation, whether in union activity, editorial decision-making, or public life more broadly. Left unchecked, such conduct entrenches the very imbalance in decision-making authority that the Act, and the constitutional guarantee of equality, are designed to remedy. It is for this reason that this Forum views the present conduct not merely as an interpersonal dispute between two colleagues, but as a matter bearing directly upon institutional culture and upon women's equal access to public and professional life.

22. For the reasons discussed above, I am satisfied that the Accused consciously employed expressions carrying discriminatory, sexually demeaning and gender-insensitive connotations in a professional communication forum accessible to his colleagues. The admitted use of such expressions was neither accidental nor isolated; rather, it formed part of a series of communications exchanged during an ongoing workplace dispute involving the Complainant. Their cumulative effect was to expose the Complainant to ridicule and create an atmosphere inconsistent with the dignity and mutual respect expected within a professional organization.
23. Proceedings under the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 are civil in nature and the allegations are therefore required to be established on the touchstone of the preponderance of probabilities rather than proof beyond reasonable doubt. Applying that standard, this Forum finds that the cumulative effect of the admitted authorship of the communications, the consistency of the complainant's testimony, the corroborative evidence produced through the prosecution witnesses, the surrounding circumstances of the workplace dispute, and the absence of any convincing alternative explanation collectively render the Complainant's version substantially more probable than that advanced by the defence. Accordingly, even though individual pieces of evidence, viewed in isolation, may admit of more than one interpretation, their cumulative evidentiary value unmistakably establishes the allegations on the balance of probabilities.
24. Therefore, the essential ingredients of Section 2(h) of the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 stand established. The conduct of the Accused embodies a discriminatory and prejudicial mindset based on gender, resulting in discriminatory behaviour against the Complainant and contributing to a hostile and offensive working environment.
25. This conclusion is founded solely upon the independent appreciation of the evidence recorded before this Forum. The admissions made by the Accused during cross-examination, the documentary evidence in the form of WhatsApp screenshots, the surrounding circumstances established through the testimony of the witnesses, and the absence of any plausible explanation for the repeated use of the impugned expressions collectively establish the allegations on the standard applicable to

proceedings under the Act. While certain defence witnesses attempted to portray the communications as political banter arising out of union elections, their testimony does not satisfactorily explain either the repeated use of derogatory expressions or the context in which they were published. Their evidence, therefore, does not displace the weight of the documentary record and the Accused's own admissions.

- 26. Before proceeding to appreciate the substantive evidence, it is necessary to address the reliance placed by both parties upon the departmental inquiry conducted by the management of APP. The record shows that, pursuant to a complaint submitted by the Complainant, the Managing Director, APP constituted a four-member inquiry committee to examine the allegations. The committee submitted its findings and made certain recommendations.*
- 27. Both parties have referred to those proceedings during the present complaint. While the Complainant relies upon the findings recorded therein, the Accused challenges both the legality of the inquiry and its conclusions. This Forum considers it necessary to first determine the legal status and evidentiary value of those proceedings before examining their relevance to the present complaint, if it was constituted in accordance with the Act, 2010.*
- 28. In addition, it is important to observe that the proceedings before this Forum are entirely independent of any departmental inquiry undertaken by the employer. The jurisdiction exercised by the Federal Ombudsperson is statutory in nature and is derived exclusively from the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010. Consequently, the findings of any departmental inquiry neither bind this Forum nor relieve it of its obligation to independently appreciate the evidence produced before it.*
- 29. The learned Counsel for the Accused has questioned the legality of the inquiry committee on the ground that it was not constituted in accordance with the mandatory requirements of the Act, 2010. It has been argued that the committee lacked statutory competence and that, consequently, its proceedings and findings are without lawful authority.*
- 30. This objection is not devoid of substance. The 2010 Act prescribes a specific statutory framework governing the constitution of inquiry committees. Compliance with such requirements is not a mere procedural formality but goes to the competence of the forum itself. Where a body derives its authority from statute, it must act strictly within the limits prescribed by that statute. Any deviation affecting its constitution or jurisdiction necessarily raises a question as to the legal validity of its proceedings. The Act stipulates that a three-member inquiry committee must be formed; hence, the current departmental inquiry suffers from illegality, **rendering those proceedings invalid as already captured in Para No.5 of the order.***
- 31. At the same time, however, this issue need not be finally determined for the purposes of the present complaint. Whether the departmental inquiry was legally constituted or otherwise, its report cannot by itself determine the rights of the parties before this Forum. For that reason, this complaint shall be decided solely on the basis of the*

pleadings, documentary evidence and oral testimony recorded before this Forum, without treating the departmental inquiry report as either conclusive proof of guilt or conclusive proof of innocence.

32. Having held that the departmental inquiry is neither binding upon nor determinative of the present proceedings, this Forum proceeds to independently examine the evidence adduced by the parties. The inquiry report, irrespective of its legality or otherwise, is therefore treated only as part of the factual background and not as substantive evidence upon which the liability of the Accused can be founded. Accordingly, the objections regarding the constitution of the inquiry committee, the plea of estoppel, and the alleged acquiescence of the Accused in the departmental proceedings do not require any definitive adjudication for deciding the present complaint, as the controversy before this Forum falls to be determined exclusively on the evidence recorded herein.

*33. Moving forward to the **third** issue at hand, the Complainant, while appearing as PW-1, reiterated on oath the contents of her complaint and produced the relevant screenshots as Exhibits PW-1/2 to PW-1/10. Her case is that the impugned remarks formed part of a continuous campaign of humiliation undertaken by the Accused during the APP election process and thereafter. According to her, although the messages were circulated in a group setting, they unmistakably targeted her because she was the only employee actively associated with the group repeatedly described by the Accused as “**Khusri**” “**Mafia poor Androon Sindh**.” She further stated that repeated references to transgender persons and derogatory expressions concerning ethnicity created an intimidating, humiliating and hostile working environment, not only for her but also for other employees. The learned Counsel for the Complainant also argued during the final arguments that since the Complainant has not been able to bear any children, the Accused used that and associated her with the transgender community.*

34. PW-2 Ms. Shumaila Noreen, PW-3 Haq Nawaz Bhutto, PW-4 Ms. Rukhsana Taj and PW-5 Ms. Farhat Fatima substantially corroborated the Complainant's version regarding the circulation of the impugned messages and their objectionable nature. Their testimony primarily establishes that the messages were in fact posted in the official WhatsApp group, were seen by several employees and generated resentment amongst members of the organization.

35. The defence, on the other hand, is two-fold. Firstly, the Accused denied that the impugned communications were directed against the Complainant. According to him, the messages were satirical observations made during union politics and were never intended to target any particular individual or gender. He maintained that the complaint is motivated by personal hostility arising from departmental matters and inquiries being conducted by him against certain employees. Secondly, the Accused asserted that the complaint lacks bona fides because the Complainant allegedly sought to pressurize the Accused into abandoning disciplinary proceedings against her

colleagues. It is also the Accused's case that no act constituting harassment within the meaning of Section 2(h) of the Act has been established.

36. DW-1 Muhammad Rasheed Malik, the Accused, reiterated the contents of his written reply. However, during cross-examination, he admitted having authored and posted the expressions "**khusray**," "**mai jando**," "**meesni**" and "**Mafia pur Androon Sindh**" in the WhatsApp group. Likewise, DW-2 through DW-7 also acknowledged during cross-examination that the impugned expressions had in fact been used by the Accused. Thus, the authorship of the impugned communications does not remain a disputed question.
37. The significance of these admissions must, however, be properly appreciated. The admissions establish the authorship and publication of the impugned communications. They do not, by themselves, conclusively establish the legal character of those communications or the existence of harassment, both of which remain questions requiring judicial determination upon the entirety of the evidence. Nevertheless, once authorship stands admitted, the evidentiary controversy concerning the authenticity of the screenshots is substantially diminished. The principal question before this Forum therefore shifts from proof of publication to the legal consequences flowing from the admitted communications.
38. Furthermore, the Accused has consistently maintained that the messages were not addressed to the Complainant personally but constituted general political commentary exchanged during union-related discussions. It is equally true that none of the impugned screenshots expressly mentions the Complainant by name. However, the absence of an express reference is not necessarily decisive. Harassment in the workplace may, depending upon the facts of a particular case, be conveyed through indirect references, innuendo, repeated allusions or contextual identification. The determination must therefore be made by examining the surrounding circumstances rather than by isolating individual words or expressions.
39. In the present case, the evidence establishes that the messages were exchanged in an official WhatsApp group comprising colleagues working in APP. The Complainant consistently deposed that the repeated use of the expression "**Mafia poor Androon Sindh**" was understood within the workplace to refer to the faction with which she was publicly associated during the APP elections. This version finds support from the surrounding circumstances brought on record, particularly the admitted existence of rival groups during the election campaign and the continuing hostility between the parties.
40. Although some defence witnesses denied that the remarks were specifically directed towards the Complainant, none was able to furnish any convincing explanation as to whom the repeated references were intended to signify. Nor did the Accused identify any alternative person or group against whom the expressions were allegedly directed. His defence remained confined to a bare denial without offering a plausible contextual explanation for repeatedly employing these expressions in discussions concerning the workplace and its employees. The defence remained unable to

produce any contemporaneous material demonstrating that the impugned expressions referred to any person or group other than the complainant and her associates. A bare denial, unsupported by a plausible contextual explanation, is insufficient to rebut the natural inference arising from the admitted circumstances surrounding the publication of the messages.

- 41. Equally significant is the language employed by the Accused. The repeated invocation of expressions such as "**mai jando**," "**khusri**," and "**meesni**" was admittedly not used in any descriptive or neutral sense. The words were repeatedly employed as pejorative expressions intended to ridicule, demean and insult. Their repeated usage in conjunction with sarcastic fictional narratives, fabricated authorship and mocking references leaves little room for doubt that they were deliberately employed as instruments of humiliation. No reasonable interpretation of these communications permits the conclusion that they constituted innocent humour or legitimate criticism. Viewed objectively, the tenor of the communications is plainly contemptuous and calculated to expose their subject to ridicule.*
- 42. The defence has emphasized that the impugned communications arose during a contested union election and therefore constitute political exchanges between rival groups. This submission cannot be accepted in absolute terms. Participation in workplace elections undoubtedly permits robust political debate, criticism and disagreement. However, the freedom to engage in such discourse does not extend to employing discriminatory language founded upon protected characteristics or to humiliating colleagues through gender-based ridicule in a professional workplace. The present findings therefore do not penalize legitimate political opinion or union activity. They are confined to the discriminatory manner in which the Accused chose to express that disagreement through language which, viewed objectively and contextually, falls within the statutory prohibition contained in Section 2(h).*
- 43. Before determining the appropriate penalty, this Forum considers it necessary to observe that the repeated use of the word "**khusray**" or similar expressions as a means of ridicule is deeply offensive and inconsistent with the constitutional values of dignity, equality and respect for every individual. Transgender persons constitute one of the most vulnerable segments of society and have historically suffered exclusion, prejudice and discrimination in employment as well as in public life. The casual use of terminology associated with their identity as a form of abuse not only demeans members of that community but also reinforces stereotypes that have long contributed to their marginalisation. Such language has no place in a professional workplace, particularly within a public sector institution entrusted with disseminating information to the public. Every workplace is under a legal and moral obligation to foster an environment in which employees are treated with dignity irrespective of their gender, ethnicity or social background. Employees occupying supervisory or senior positions bear an even greater responsibility to maintain standards of civility and professionalism in their official communications. Expressions which ridicule individuals or communities on the basis of protected characteristics undermine*

institutional discipline, erode mutual respect among colleagues and discourage an inclusive workplace culture. The observations made herein are not intended to elevate offensive language alone to the status of statutory harassment. Rather, they underscore that where such language, viewed in its proper context, manifests a discriminatory mindset and results in conduct prohibited by Section 2(h) of the Act, it necessarily attracts the consequences prescribed by law.

44. The present case also highlights a broader institutional concern. The media sector plays a vital role in shaping public discourse and democratic participation. Yet, women journalists frequently remain underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions, which continue to be predominantly occupied by men. In such an environment, gender-based intimidation, public ridicule or discriminatory conduct by senior colleagues may have consequences extending beyond the individual complainant. Such conduct is capable of discouraging women from participating freely in professional debate, seeking representative positions, expressing dissenting views or aspiring to leadership roles within media organisations. The object of the Act is not merely to punish individual misconduct but to ensure that workplaces remain environments in which women can participate with dignity, confidence and equal opportunity, free from intimidation or discriminatory treatment.

45. In determining the appropriate penalty, this Forum is guided by the principle of proportionality, which requires that the sanction imposed bear a reasonable relationship to the gravity of the misconduct established and the objectives sought to be achieved by the Act. The misconduct proved in the present case was neither accidental nor isolated. The impugned communications were repeatedly disseminated within a professional forum, originated from a senior officer of the organization, and had the tendency to undermine the dignity, confidence and inclusiveness that every employee is entitled to expect within the workplace. Balancing these considerations, I am of the view that the ends of justice would be adequately served by imposing a major penalty in terms of Section 4(4)(ii)(e) of the Act.

*46. In exercise of the powers conferred under **Section 4(4)(ii)(e) of the Act**, a fine of **Rs. 500,000/- (Rupees Five Hundred Thousand only)** is imposed upon the Accused. Out of the said amount, **Rs. 400,000/-** shall be paid to the Complainant as compensation for the impairment of her dignity, the humiliation suffered in the workplace, and the hostile work environment, while the remaining **Rs. 100,000/-** shall be deposited in the National Exchequer in accordance with law. The complaint stands disposed of in the above terms.*

FAUZIA VIQAR
FEDERAL OMBUDSPERSON

