

JUL 17, 2013

Gulalai Ismail's Remarks at the 2013 Democracy Award

Thank you so much. I want to thank the National Endowment for Democracy, who always believed in our power, and in the power of young women to strengthen democracy. We started working with the National Endowment for Democracy two years ago, and it was one of their few partnerships with young people. We were very honored that they started working with us on strengthening democracy through increasing the political participation of young women. I want to thank all of the young women of Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, who always stood by me, who always risked their lives so that they can stand by the political rights of young women in Pakistan.

Young women in Pakistan are taking their roles as active citizens, as voters, as politicians, and as critics of the political processes. They have been contributing to the political processes in many different ways. And today I want to dedicate this award to all those young women who have always spoken for the empowerment of young women, for change, and for sustaining democracy in Pakistan. I believe that democracy, and sustaining democracy, is a slow process. We have to be patient about it. For example, in Pakistan many people said that we have a failing democracy, but I believe that it is a strengthening democracy. It is an evolving democracy.

We are the decision makers. We are decision makers in our country. We have the power to make

decisions.

The young people of Pakistan are coming forward and making politicians accountable. In the previous elections, the young people of Pakistan proved that they have a very crucial and important role in shaping democracy and in shaping the future of their country. I believe that young women are not victims. We are not just daughters; we are not just the public. We are the decision makers. We are decision makers in our country. We have the power to make decisions. We are being women. We are not being anything less than anyone. We are not less intellectual. We are not less articulate. We can shape our country. We can make the decisions of our country. And we want all of you to believe in our power.

And for today, I don't know if it was planned or if it's just a coincidence that all the awardees are young women, but it has strengthened my belief that women all around the world, not just in Pakistan, are playing key roles in strengthening democracy and in strengthening political processes in the world.

I agree that freedom does not come for free. And we young women are ready to stand by democracy. We can give our life, we can give our blood, we can give our intellect, our time, and our resources, so that democracy and peace can be sustained in the world. Thank you so much.