



**RESHAPING SOLUTIONS FOR
ACCESSING JUSTICE IN PAKISTAN**

NEWSLETTER

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29th Edition



EDITORIAL SECTION: FROM THE DESK OF DR. SAMIA BABAR

THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY'S REMARKABLE VISION



DR. SAMIA BABAR,
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In a world where justice often seems reserved for those who can afford it, the Legal Aid Society (LAS) shines as a beacon of hope, driven by the dedication of young legal minds guided by the vision of their seniors. My encounter with this extraordinary organization was nothing short of transformative, opening my eyes to the profound impact they are making on countless lives. When my husband, Babar Ayaz, attended LAS meetings, I had little idea of the scale and scope of their work. It was only when I stepped in for him during his absences that I began to understand the magnitude of their mission. From that moment, I became immersed in their relentless efforts to address the concerns of the most vulnerable members of society. One of my first interactions with LAS was a visit to their call center, SLACC (Sindh Legal Advisory Call Center). Unlike typical call centers, this one was unique—staffed by compassionate lawyers who patiently listened to the queries and grievances of the public.

"CHANGE WILL NOT COME IF WE WAIT FOR SOME OTHER PERSON OR SOME OTHER TIME. WE ARE THE ONES WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR. WE ARE THE CHANGE THAT WE SEEK." —BARACK OBAMA

For those who called outside working hours, their concerns were diligently recorded, with follow-up calls made the next working day. This simple yet effective system ensures professional legal assistance is accessible to those who cannot afford private lawyers. Pro bono actions, where necessary, amplify their impact, offering a lifeline to justice for the less fortunate. The passion and commitment of LAS's team left me inspired. At a time when societal issues—child molestation, gender-based violence, honor killings, forced conversions—are splashed across headlines and social media feeds, many of us feel helpless and move on. But not LAS. They confront these challenges head-on, determined to make a difference. With national conferences, discussions, and partnerships, they have become a fighting force for justice, uniting like-minded individuals and organizations to tackle deeply ingrained societal issues. One recent initiative particularly resonated with me: their focus on women's property rights. In Pakistan, despite provisions under Islamic law, women face created hurdles in claiming their legal rights to matrimonial property, such as Haq Mehar, dowry, and jointly acquired assets. Traditional interpretations often undermine these rights, especially in divorce cases. LAS's efforts to challenge these norms and align them with both Islamic principles and modern human rights standards are commendable.

Involving provincial parliamentarians, Islamic scholars, and activists to explore actionable steps, from legislative reviews to public awareness campaigns ensures that action will be taken.

As a woman, I find solace in LAS's commitment to addressing issues that disproportionately affect women and children. The relentless cycle of violence, revenge, and exploitation targeting the most vulnerable is a grim reality. Yet, the presence of LAS on the frontlines, advocating for change and justice, offers hope.

In today's turbulent times, creating awareness is as critical as finding solutions. LAS does both, serving as a catalyst for societal transformation. Their collaborative approach, involving private companies and other stakeholders, ensures the sustainability of their mission. Knowing that such a dedicated organization exists gives me hope for a better future—one where justice is accessible to all, regardless of privilege or circumstance.

The Legal Aid Society stands as a testament to what collective action, vision, and compassion can achieve. They are not just resolving individual cases; they are changing the narrative of justice in Pakistan. For that, they deserve our admiration, support, and gratitude.

My best wishes and a promise to carry on my humble support in any way I can.

INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS AND RECOGNITIONS

PILNET GLOBAL AWARDS 2024

Every year, PILnet's Global Awards honor individuals and organizations for their remarkable dedication to advancing pro bono work and legal services for underserved communities worldwide.

We are delighted to announce that Barrister Haya Emaan Zahid, CEO of the Legal Aid Society (LAS), has been recognized at the prestigious PILNET 2024 Global Awards held in Bangkok, Thailand. She received the esteemed Global Pro Bono Publico Award, celebrating her exceptional contributions to strengthening public-private partnerships and advancing critical legal aid services for marginalized communities, particularly prisoners, through innovative legal empowerment initiatives across Pakistan.



Under Barrister Haya's visionary leadership, LAS has achieved remarkable milestones, working relentlessly to provide vital legal assistance to those who cannot afford representation. Through groundbreaking programs, LAS has empowered thousands of prisoners and vulnerable individuals, ensuring their access to justice and fair representation. This recognition is a testament to LAS's unwavering commitment to building a more equitable legal system for all.

SVRI FORUM 2024 IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) is the leading global organization focused on knowledge management around all aspects of violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC). Founded in 2003 as part of the World Health Organisation (WHO), the SVRI has become an independent non-governmental organization. This year's Forum was held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre in South Africa, bringing together an inspiring community of 1,502 delegates from 112 countries. United in their commitment to ending violence against women, violence against children, and other forms of violence driven by gender inequality, the participants collaborated to drive meaningful change. Over the course of five transformative days, delegates shared research, innovative practices, and collaborative solutions. LAS was well represented at the prestigious forum by Barrister Haya Emaan Zahid (CEO, LAS), and Advocate Maliha Zia Lari (Associate Director, LAS), who shared LAS' journey and contributions to improving response to Sexual and Gender-based Violence.



Using this Forum, Barrister Haya highlighted that with over 450,000 calls fielded through SLACC and its automated chatbot, LAS is leveraging its data to expand into digital chat support, aiming to be accessible online at all times for its community. Furthermore, LAS is working on developing predictive analysis tools to help users better understand the potential outcomes of their cases. She also shared insights on the urgent need for justice systems to address Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV), calling for legislation that inclusively recognizes the digital dimensions of violence.

VISIT BY ACUMEN

Since 2022, women in Pakistan have faced significant socio-economic, physical, and emotional challenges brought about by climate disasters. Compounding these struggles, many continue to endure sexual and domestic violence, with limited resources tailored to address their needs. In a pivotal development, Acumen, a global nonprofit impact investor, has announced a \$90 million commitment to climate finance for Pakistan at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. This commitment marks a crucial step toward bridging existing gaps and providing much-needed relief to affected communities.

LAS had the privilege to host Ms. Jacqueline Novogratz (CEO, Acumen) and discuss how LAS is committed to advocating for climate justice, aligning with COP's gender action plans to address the impact of climate change.



LAS emphasized the critical role of women in environmental stewardship by promoting gender-responsive climate advocacy through workshops, training, and outreach efforts across eight districts of Sindh. In response to the devastating 2022 floods in Sindh, which made accessing relief and vital services difficult, LAS undertook the following initiatives:



Reached **11,000+ community members** through awareness sessions to raise awareness about civil documentation and social protection scheme



Helped **900+ individuals** reclaim lost documents, and providing financial aid to 493 people



Engaged **250+ stakeholders** to strengthen disaster-response frameworks



Distributed **2,250 dignity kits** to women and girls in affected areas



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS TO ADVANCE JUSTICE INITIATIVES IN PAKISTAN

MOU WITH PATHFINDER INTERNATIONAL

On December 24, 2024, LAS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Pathfinder International, marking the beginning of a transformative partnership to address critical challenges in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), climate, and justice systems in Pakistan.

This collaboration aims to strengthen multi-sectoral efforts to address SGBV and advance legal reforms in Pakistan. Through collaboration with Pathfinder International, LAS aims to drive impactful reforms while addressing critical challenges such as climate resilience and fostering sustainable solutions for long-term impact.

Under this MoU, LAS and Pathfinder International will jointly operationalize Multi-Sectoral Coordination Committees, enhance advocacy and legal reforms, strengthen referral mechanisms, and build the capacity of government and non-governmental actors to address challenges in justice and health sectors. Both organizations have committed to mutual representation at forums, joint advocacy campaigns, and collaborative media engagements to maximize outreach and impact, serving as a testament to the shared vision of LAS and Pathfinder International to build a just and equitable society in Pakistan.



PARTNERING WITH THE DIRECTORATE OF LEGAL EDUCATION TO ENHANCE LEGAL EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

On December 27, 2024, LAS and the Directorate of Legal Education (DLE) of the Pakistan Bar Council formalized a partnership to enhance the standards of legal education nationwide. The collaboration was solidified through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed at the Committee Hall of the Pakistan Bar Council, located in the Supreme Court Building, Islamabad.

Led by Barrister Usama Malik (Director DLE), the DLE focuses on curriculum enhancement, teacher training, legal research, and the regulation of legal education institutions to ensure adherence to prescribed standards. This collaboration between LAS and DLE is set to introduce strategic initiatives, including curriculum development, specialized training programs for educators, and the promotion of legal research. By leveraging their combined expertise, both organizations aim to produce a cadre of legal professionals equipped to meet contemporary challenges and uphold the rule of law in Pakistan.

Barrister Usama Malik highlighted that partnering with LAS would enable the DLE to implement comprehensive reforms that will benefit both educators and students. While Barrister Haya Eman Zahid (CEO, LAS) expressed the commitment to bridging gaps in Pakistan's legal education system.

The signing ceremony was attended by key stakeholders from the legal fraternity including Haroon Rashid (Member and former Vice Chairman, Pakistan Bar Council), Mr. Gulzar Ahmad Secretary (PBC), and Mr. Saqib Faraz (Deputy Director, DLE).



WORKING TOGETHER WITH ISMAIL GLOBAL TO COMBAT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In a significant step towards enhancing access to justice for vulnerable communities, Ismail Global and LAS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on October 4, 2024, to provide free legal assistance to survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). This collaboration aims to enhance access to justice for vulnerable communities, including women, transgender persons, and persons with disabilities, and will focus on cases involving domestic violence, harassment, child marriage, and other human rights violations.

The MoU was officially signed at the LAS office by Hamid Ismail (CEO, Ismail Global), and Barrister Haya Zahid (CEO, LAS) in a ceremony attended by key representatives from both organizations, where Hamid Ismail expressed his commitment to addressing the issue of gender-based violence.



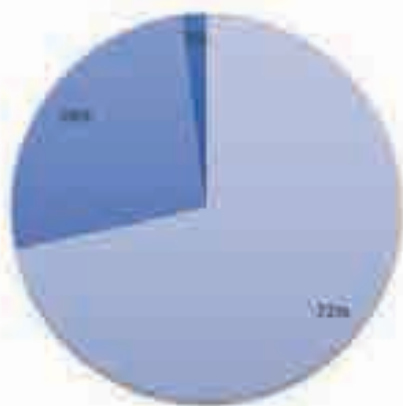
Under the agreement, Ismail Global will fund a team of lawyers, who will be stationed at LAS's offices, benefiting from the organization's established systems for case management, legal expertise, and advocacy. This partnership between Ismail Global and LAS not only reaffirms the commitment of both organizations to advancing human rights and gender equality but also serves as a powerful example of how a collaboration between the corporate and non-profit sectors can drive meaningful social change.



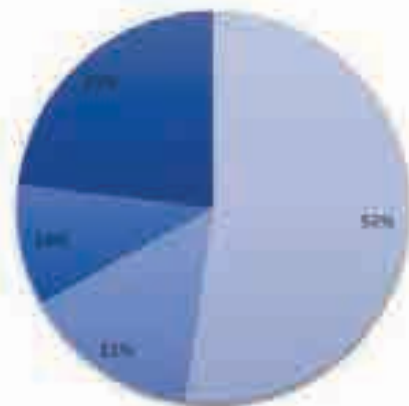
EMPOWERING CITIZENS AT THE FOREFRONT OF CRISES THROUGH ITS TOLL-FREE NUMBER 0800-70806 – A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF SINDH AND THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

The Sindh Legal Advisory Call Center (SLACC) is a flagship project of the Legal Aid Society (LAS) and the Government of Sindh (GoS). This is Pakistan's first and one-of-a-kind toll-free helpline, which through its Interactive Voice Recording (IVR) system has amassed an impressive record of 475,784 calls received to date from more than 600 cities across Pakistan. These queries are appropriately addressed by High Court enrolled Agent Lawyers, and callers are provided with conclusive guidance on each query. During the reporting quarter, SLACC registered 10,797 queries. The majority of calls originated from Sindh (82%), followed by Punjab (15%), Balochistan (1%), and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (1%).

Gender Bifurcation



Categories of Queries



Moreover, since the public launch of the NAZ Assist on October 1, 2024, more than 2,386 people have used the free-of-cost multi-lingual legal advisory chatbot. While over 150 users requested a callback by providing their contact details through the chatbot.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND MARKETING EFFORTS

After achieving positive results, SLACC continued its marketing efforts during the reporting quarter as part of its comprehensive Mar-Comms (Marketing-Communications) campaign. As SLACC's media campaign was successfully administered throughout the reporting quarter, an increased number of calls were received at SLACC's helpline 0800-70806.

COVERAGE BY URDUPOINT

On November 29, 2024, UrduPoint, one of Pakistan's largest digital media channels, visited the SLACC office for exclusive coverage. The feature highlighted SLACC's innovative and impactful work, showcasing various aspects of its operations, including the functionality of the NAZ Assist chatbot. The segment also included interviews with Ms. Rukhsana Parveen Khokhar (Senior Program Manager, SLACC) and several on-call lawyers, offering an inside look at the call center's operations.



GNN PLUS VISIT

Another digital channel, GNN+ visited the SLACC office on December 4, 2024, to showcase SLACC's operations and the provision of its free-of-cost legal remedies to people across Pakistan. The visit included insightful interviews with SLACC lawyers and how they go about performing their daily duties.



SLACC INFLUENCER CAMPAIGNS

SLACC partnered with renowned Sindhi influencers to amplify its outreach and build trust with its target audience in Sindh. Endorsement messages from Fazeelat Begum (145K+ YouTube followers), Sher Dil Gaho (93K+ YouTube followers), and Nadia Hussain Channa (174K Instagram followers) were produced and shared on the SLACC digital mainstreams to enhance engagement and visibility.



COLLABORATIONS

PARTNERING WITH THE SINDH INFORMATION DEPARTMENT

The SLACC team met Mr. Nadeem Memon (Information Secretary, Sindh) and briefed him on SLACC's recent work and achievements. The discussion focused on seeking assistance from the Information Ministry to spread the word about the public welfare project. Mr. Nadeem has agreed to support in promoting the SLACC's helpline number in TV programs managed by the Information Department, further expanding the reach of SLACC's services.



AWARENESS SESSIONS FOR RESCUE 1122 OFFICERS

SLACC conducted awareness sessions for over 140 Rescue 1122 field officers, offering insights into SLACC's referral system from October 9 to 11, 2024. These sessions equipped the officers with knowledge about SLACC's services, enabling them to effectively refer individuals in need of legal assistance to the call center. This outreach effort strengthens SLACC's network and improves accessibility to legal aid for communities served by Rescue 1122 in Sindh.



TRAININGS AT THE SINDH LEGAL ADVISORY CALL CENTER

TRAINING ON SHARED PARENTING FOR SLACC LAWYERS

SLACC held a virtual training session for its lawyers which was led by Advocate Fahad Ahmad Siddiqi (High Court lawyer), on October 16, 2024, focusing on child-centered principles under the Family Courts Act, 1964, and the Guardians and Wards Act, 1890.

The session covered ethical representation in family law to prioritize children's best interests, principles of natural justice for fairness, distinctions between guardianship and custody, and the legal framework of the Family Courts Act with remedies for family law cases. Incorporating insights from case laws, Quranic verses, and Hadiths, the session reinforced ethical shared parenting practices, equipping SLACC lawyers with a deeper understanding and practical tools to guide callers effectively



TRAINING ON EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, COMMUNICATION, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

SLACC organized a transformative training session, "Collaborate to Elevate," led by renowned trainer Ms. Muzna Ali (an experienced NLP Practitioner, Timeline Therapist, and Sales Coach) on September 25, 2024. The session covered critical areas for personal and professional growth, including managing workplace conflict, improving communication skills, addressing cognitive, emotional management, and techniques for enhancing team dynamics.

This training equipped SLACC lawyers with enhanced interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and practical strategies for conflict resolution and communication, empowering them to apply these skills both within their teams and when assisting callers with conflict-related issues.



TWO-DAY ADVOCACY TRAINING BY THE SINDH HIGH COURT BAR ASSOCIATION

Advocate Parveen Khurram, one of our talented lawyers at SLACC, was selected in a batch of 50 people amongst 15,000 High Court Registered Lawyers to take part in the Two-Day Advocacy Training Program organized by the Sindh High Court Bar Association. The training was held on December 2-3, 2024, and covered a crucial spectrum of topics such as skills for lawyers in civil trials, emerging legal issues, and technology in trials.



PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS SECURITY AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN PAKISTAN

COMMUNITY AWARENESS SESSIONS ON PERSONAL LAWS, FINANCIAL AND DIGITAL LITERACY THROUGH TRAINED PARALEGALS

LAS has trained paralegals to conduct awareness sessions for Religious Minority Communities (RMCs) across three districts of Sindh (Hyderabad, Sanghar, and Dadu) and Punjab (Multan, Khanewal, and Muzaffargarh).

These sessions are designed to equip participants with essential knowledge and skills in personal laws, financial literacy, and digital literacy. The objective of these sessions is to empower the RMCs by enhancing their understanding of their legal rights, helping them gain insight into how to become financially independent, and enabling them to navigate the digital world securely. By addressing these critical areas, the initiative aims to reduce the vulnerability of RMCs to exploitation and create pathways toward a more secure and informed future.



MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

AWAZ SABKI

LAS launched a mass media campaign titled "Awaz Sab Ki" (Voice of All). The campaign focused on raising awareness about the fundamental rights and personal laws relevant to minority communities. The campaign gained traction on social media including reaching over 2 million+ views. Another campaign, titled "Interfaith Harmony," was launched to spotlight the significant contributions of religious minorities throughout history, emphasizing their roles in education, economic progress, and the overall development of the country. The campaign aimed to raise awareness about the importance of unity, inclusivity, and the collective responsibility of all communities in fostering a prosperous nation.



CROSS-PROVINCIAL SMS CAMPAIGN

Aiming to raise awareness about issues like discrimination, child marriage, and violations of fundamental rights, LAS administered a comprehensive SMS campaign in Sindh and South Punjab. A total of 3,430,000 messages have been disseminated so far, aiming to continue till June 2025. This campaign has been designed to reach a broader audience and to promote understanding of key social issues, such as:

- Social Security Schemes.
- Microfinance Schemes.
- Minorities Quota for Government Jobs and Admissions.
- Discrimination in the Workplace due to Religion.
- Awareness on Religious Freedom.
- Child Marriage and Its Negative Effects.
- Protection of Religious Spaces.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS

COLLABORATING WITH NCHR & ROSHNI TO ACHIEVE COMMON GOALS

To further advance the rights of Religious Minority Communities (RMCs), LAS has signed agreements with the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and Roshni Welfare Organization (RWO).

NCHR will play a pivotal role in supporting the research aspects of the project, focusing on critical issues such as forced conversion, child marriage, and international practices on conversion. Additionally, NCHR will assist in organizing training sessions, workshops, and advocacy roundtables involving criminal justice sector actors, government officials, policymakers, and activists to foster discussions on these pressing issues.

On the other hand, RWO will focus on community-level engagement in Punjab, mobilizing and implementing interventions designed to protect the fundamental and legal rights of RMCs. These activities aim to empower minor girls and women by increasing their knowledge and autonomy in areas such as personal laws, fundamental rights, financial and digital literacy, consent, societal values, child marriage, and soft skills such as leadership, communication, and mediation.



Moreover, these interventions will contribute to the social empowerment, legal awareness, and reduction of economic vulnerabilities and political marginalization among RMCs. This collaboration marks a significant step forward in LAS's mission to empower and protect RMCs in Pakistan.

STRENGTHENING THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN

LAUNCH OF THE SINDH SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

LAS in collaboration with the Government of Sindh and UNFPA, marked a significant milestone in advancing justice and survivor-centric solutions. Over the past four years, the Sexual Violence Response Framework has introduced 80+ interventions, increasing conviction rates from 5% to 15% and establishing critical initiatives such as One Stop Protection Centers and Anti-Rape Crisis Cells.

A joint launch of the Sindh Sexual Violence Response Framework (SVRF) 2025–2029 roadmap took place on December 16, 2024, which featured interactive exhibits followed by a panel discussion on holistic with expert insights from Amir Faruqi (DIG Investigation), Ms. Shahla Qureshi (AIGP-Gender), Dr. Summaiya Tariq (Chief Police Surgeon), Ms. Aisha Mastoi (Science & Technology Section, Planning & Development Department), and Mr. Imdad Hussain Siddiqui (Director PDMA) on creating a robust support system for survivors and bridging existing gaps. With the launch of this roadmap, LAS reaffirms its commitment to systemic reforms, ensuring that justice is not a privilege but a fundamental right.



INAUGURATION OF THE ANTI-RAPE CRISIS CELL (ARCC) AT KHYBER MEDICAL COLLEGE, PESHAWAR

LAS, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government, and UNFPA jointly launched the Anti-Rape Crisis Cell (ARCC) on December 4, 2024, marking a significant step in addressing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). The ARCC provides comprehensive medico-legal, legal, and psychological support while fostering collaboration among law enforcement, healthcare, and judicial stakeholders.

In alignment with the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act of 2021, the initiative aims to reduce secondary victimization, improve conviction rates, and establish sustainable frameworks for SGBV prevention and response. The event brought together stakeholders from the judiciary, government, and medical sectors to operationalize a survivor-centered support system.



TRAINING OF TRAINERS ON INVESTIGATION AND TRIAL PREPARATION FOR VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (VAW) CASES

LAS, in collaboration with UN Women and Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), successfully conducted a four-day Training of Trainers on Critical Areas and Techniques of Investigation and Preparation for the Trial of Violence Against Women (VAW) cases in October 2024 at the Central Police Office, Karachi.

The primary objective of this training was to build the capacity of Sindh Police Trainers to deliver in-depth and specialized training on critical topics for the Special Sexual Offences Investigation Units (SSOIs) in Sindh. This initiative aimed to enhance their ability to support SSOIs through a dedicated course, supplementing the existing Sindh Police training programs.

The sessions featured gender sensitization by Dr. Asha Bedar (Clinical Psychologist), a legal review by Advocate Bahzad Akbar (Community lawyer, LAS), and medico-legal practices led by Dr. Summaiya Tariq (Chief Police Surgeon, JMPC). Hands-on exercises in crime scene investigation and evidence collection further equipped participants to address VAW cases with improved efficiency.

The training concluded with a formal ceremony, where Mr. Kapil Dev (Program Coordinator, UN Women) and Justice (R) Arshad Noor Khan (Judicial Member, SHRC) commended the initiative for advancing the skills and readiness of Sindh Police Trainers to address violence against women.



JOINT TRAINING OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM ACTORS IN ISLAMABAD

LAS conducted a comprehensive training program engaging 24 criminal justice actors to enhance their capacity to manage Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) cases in October 2024.

The intervention emphasized interagency collaboration, effective communication, and practical application of SGBV protocols, integrating the Anti-Rape Crisis Cell (ARCC) framework for a victim-centered and coordinated approach. Participants, including Medico-Legal Officers, Investigation Officers, prosecutors, and support staff, were equipped with tools to streamline case management and improve survivor-focused responses.



TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

LAS in partnership with the Government of Sindh's Multi-Sectoral Coordination Committee (MSCC) is spearheading transformative initiatives to address SGBV through five high-impact Technical Working Groups (TWG 1-5). In November and December 2024, LAS convened two pivotal meetings to strengthen SSOIUs, vital for efficient evidence collection, seamless interdepartmental coordination between police, prosecution, health departments, and the expedient and speedy delivery of justice to survivors.



Coordinated efforts outlined actionable plans for GBV data collection, timelines, and the Gender Parity Report, addressing critical gaps, standardizing practices, and enhancing GBV data systems.

ENGAGING MEN TO BECOME ALLIES – THROUGH THE HEFORSHE ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN

As a part of LAS' ongoing partnership with UN Women and the Sindh Human Rights Commission (SHRC), LAS collaborated with universities in Sukkur on the Global HeForShe campaign. The HeForShe campaign aims to create an inclusive environment for women and girls, emphasizing the integral role men play as allies in standing up against violence toward women and girls.



This campaign aims to transform gender roles in society in a way that contributes to several positive outcomes, such as the achievement of gender-balanced leadership, equal pay for women, and women's economic empowerment. Two awareness sessions were conducted at Sukkur IBA University and ABD Law College in November 2024. A total of 42 HeForShe advocates were recruited as a part of this campaign and will carry the legacy of this campaign forward through activism within their circles and communities.

MULTI-SECTORAL TRAINING OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM ACTORS IN PESHAWAR, KP

LAS engaged 48 Criminal Justice Actors through Multi-Sectoral Training in Peshawar during November 2024 to strengthen their capacity to handle Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) cases.



This training emphasized building a responsive and accountable system that prioritizes survivors' needs. Participants, including Medico-Legal Officers, Investigation Officers, prosecutors, and essential support staff, gained vital tools to foster cross-departmental collaboration, streamline case management, and ensure timely, survivor-centered responses. It also reinforced the implementation of Anti-Rape Crisis Cell (ARCC) protocols to deliver timely and coordinated services to survivors.

These focused efforts supported strengthening the justice system's ability to deliver comprehensive support, informed care, and timely justice for survivors of SGBV.

CONSULTATION ON STRENGTHENING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ANTI-RAPE (INVESTIGATION AND TRIAL) ACT, 2021, AND ESTABLISHING ANTI-RAPE CRISIS CELLS (ARCCS) IN BALOCHISTAN

LAS in collaboration with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Ministry of Law and Justice, and the Government of Balochistan organized a critical consultation on November 22nd, 2024, that aimed at advancing the implementation of the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021, and initiating the establishment of Anti-Rape Crisis Cells (ARCCs) in Balochistan. The event convened 25 participants, including government officials, legal professionals, health sector representatives, and other key stakeholders, to identify challenges and propose survivor-centric solutions for effective implementation.

The consultation focused on addressing barriers to implementing the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021 and developing operational frameworks for ARCCs, which are designed to provide comprehensive medical, psychological, and legal support to survivors of sexual violence.



CONSULTATION TO VALIDATE AND CONTEXTUALIZE ARCC GUIDELINES AND SOPS IN PUNJAB

LAS in collaboration with UNFPA, organized a one-day validation consultation in Lahore on November 12, 2024, to refine and contextualize the draft Anti-Rape Crisis Cell (ARCC) Guidelines for Punjab's healthcare settings.

The event gathered stakeholders from the Punjab Health, Prosecution, Police, Punjab Forensic Science Agency, and Social Welfare Department to ensure the guidelines are survivor-centric, practical, and aligned with provincial contexts. Led by Dr. Talha Naeem Cheema, the consultation included discussions on medicolegal, medical, legal, and psychosocial components, addressing best practices and implementation challenges.

The session concluded with remarks from Dr. Muhammad Hafiz Waseem (Additional Secretary, Specialized Healthcare & Medical Education Department), reaffirming the commitment to institutionalize the guidelines. These validated ARCC Guidelines will enhance Punjab's healthcare system's response to SGBV.



FOSTERING LEGAL EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AGAINST SGBV IN SINDH

LAS aims to provide essential multi-sectoral services to end Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), targeting economically vulnerable populations in Larkana, Dadu, and Matiari. To enhance the demand for these services at the community level, we are deploying volunteers 'Guardians of Justice' (VAWG/GBV Paralegals) to raise awareness about domestic and sexual violence and their available redressal mechanisms. These Paralegals will integrate into the existing Community Networks for Child Protection (CNCP) and will promote MFBN (Markaz Falah-e-Behbood e Niswan) centers, which will provide multi-sectoral services.

LAS aims to provide essential multi-sectoral services to end violence against women and girls (VAWG), targeting economically vulnerable populations in Larkana, Dadu, and Matiari.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THREE MARKAZ-E-FALAH-O-BEHBOOD-E-NISWAN CENTERS (MFBNS)

LAS in partnership with the Government of Sindh, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), and the Sindh Police, proudly inaugurated three centers for the Empowerment and Welfare of Women by the name of Markaz-e-Falah-o-Behbood-e-Niswan (MFBN) in Matiari, Larkana, and Dadu, marking a significant milestone in our fight against gender-based violence.

These community-based centers provide a safe space for women and girls affected by gender-based violence (GBV), offering multi-sectoral services such as legal aid, psychosocial support, and financial literacy training.



The inaugural event in Matiari commenced with a warm welcome to attendees, including government officials, civil society representatives, and community members. A powerful role-play by LAS-trained GBV paralegals illustrated real-life scenarios of domestic and gender-based violence, emphasizing the importance of support systems and legal recourse. The event brought together a panel discussion by key stakeholders, including Tariq Latif Khanzada (DSP), Dr. Pir Ghulam Hussain (District Health Officer, Matiari), Syeda Quratulain Shah (Senior Psychologist, and Deputy Director of the Women Development Department), Moderated by Ms. Durkhanay Ijaz (Senior Manager Gender Portfolio, LAS), which explored strategies for sustaining and expanding the impact of such centers.

Ms. Saadia Sabir (Program Manager, USIP) in her closing note stated, **"USIP is proud to partner with LAS for this initiative which is more than a response to a critical issue; it is a promise of safety, dignity, and opportunity for women and girls at risk of or facing gender-based physical, mental, and economic violence in Sindh. Every step we take in this journey has the potential to change a life."**

The event concluded with a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony and a tour of the center. The establishment of MFBNs exemplifies a groundbreaking effort to bridge the gap between legal frameworks and on-ground implementation, addressing systemic barriers to justice and support.

PARALEGAL TRAININGS

LAS conducted a series of paralegal training sessions across Matiari, Larkana, and Dadu on October 24-29, 2024. Seventy-five paralegals in total were trained in three districts by LAS. The training particularly focused on domestic violence, and gender sensitization, along with laws and acts implemented in Sindh. These paralegals will further conduct awareness sessions in their respective communities in the next quarter.



FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS

MOU WITH COMMUNITY CENTERS' OWNERS

After a thorough community mapping by LAS field officers at Matiari, Dadu, and Larkana, community centers were finalized in communities where centers are easily accessible for women and girls. One community center in each district was finalized where owners of community centers voluntarily agreed to give their place to establish MFBNs.

Legal Aid Society signed MOUs with owners of the respective community centers on November 1, 2024, and transferred keys to each other, officially declaring it as Markaz-e-Falah-o-Behbood-e-Niswan (MFBN).



PARTNERING WITH THE SINDH GOVERNMENT & SINDH POLICE

LAS formalized a collaboration with the Government of Sindh and Sindh Police, strengthening referral pathways and reinforcing community safety measures to address gender-based violence. The LAS team met Matiari Faisal Bashir Memon (SSP) on November 29, 2024, for the collaborations and sustainability of the MFBN centers.



SINDH PEOPLE'S HOUSING FOR FLOOD AFFECTEES (SPHF) CONFERENCE

It is our pleasure to inform that LAS Field Officers participated as panelists in a conference organized by Sindh People's Housing for Flood Affectees (SPHF) on November 29, 2024. The event was held as part of the global "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" campaign, where key discussions revolved around GBV, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), and Sexual Harassment (SH), emphasizing prevention and support in disaster-affected communities.

The field Officers from Hyderabad, Dadu, Larkana, and Shaheed Benazirabad were honored with shields for their valuable contributions as panelists and speakers at the conferences in their respective districts.



INFORMATION SESSION

An information-sharing session was conducted on December 03, 2024, in Village Jan Mohammad Solangi, UC Thalo, Tehsil K.N. Shah, with active participation from both women and men. The session focused on raising awareness about MFBN centers, project activities, LAS services, and issues related to S&GBV.

The community showed great interest and pledged their support for all project activities, emphasizing their commitment to addressing these critical issues collaboratively. This session marks a positive step towards building a stronger partnership with the community to ensure the success of LAS' interventions.



BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN LAW, POLICY, AND PRACTICE ON WOMEN'S RIGHT TO PROPERTY

CONFERENCE SYNOPSIS: ROUND-TABLE CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S MATRIMONIAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

In Pakistan, despite provisions under Islamic law, women face considerable challenges in securing their legal rights to matrimonial property. Traditional interpretations often restrict access to marital assets such as Haq Mahar, dowry, and other jointly acquired property, especially in divorce cases. However, modern Islamic jurisprudence in several Muslim-majority countries demonstrates that such rights can align with both Islamic principles and modern human rights standards.

Recognizing these challenges, LAS convened its second Round Table Conference (RTC) on women's matrimonial property rights in Karachi on November 4, 2024. This event followed up on the momentum built during the first RTC in Islamabad, which had successfully engaged national-level stakeholders. The Sindh RTC focused on addressing region-specific barriers, engaging provincial legislators, and fostering consensus on the importance of matrimonial property reforms.



The discussions during the RTC emphasized the critical need for legislative reforms to recognize and protect women's economic contributions within marriage and post-divorce. These contributions, often invisible or undervalued, are key to ensuring women's economic security and dignity.

Advocate Maliha Zia Lari (Associate Director, LAS) highlighted the absence of a legal framework that acknowledges women's unpaid labor and the pressing need for reforms to bridge this gap. Ms. Shaheena Sher Ali (Minister for Women Development, Sindh) also addressed the gathering, calling for societal and legal shifts. She stated, "The perception that women cannot manage property matters needs to change. We need to start thinking about the future of our girls and ensure that it is secured through legal provisions."

The conference explored social, cultural, and legal hurdles that limit women's access to property rights, with a particular focus on the undervaluation of women's unpaid contributions within marriage. The conference concluded with several actionable steps, including conducting detailed legislative reviews with provincial parliamentarians and organizing in-depth discussions with Islamic scholars and institutions to build consensus on religious alignment.

PARALEGAL REFRESHER TRAINING: STRENGTHENING ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

LAS conducted paralegal refresher training sessions in Karachi, Shaheed Benazirabad, and Larkana, engaging 78 participants, including 20 newly onboarded paralegals. The sessions reinforced knowledge on topics such as women's rights to property (movable, immovable, and matrimonial), inheritance for minority women, and strategies to overcome institutional barriers.

The interactive trainings emphasized practical skills through activities like role-playing on Nikahnama clauses, case studies on inheritance and property gifting, and mock awareness sessions using Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials. Participants were also introduced to mediation, Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR), online complaint filing, and a new IEC toolkit on social protection schemes like BISP programs and Pakistan Baitulmal initiatives.



The presence of key stakeholders at these sessions added great impact. Mr. Muhammad Rasheed Bhatti (Mayor, Shaheed Benazirabad) attended the session in Shaheed Benazirabad, highlighting the significance of creating awareness at the grassroots level. In Larkana, Mr. Waqar Ahmed Soomro (Deputy Director, Social Welfare Department) highlighted the essential role of social welfare programs in driving gender equity. In Karachi, Mr. Salman Abdullah Murad (Deputy Mayor, Karachi) attended the session.

These training sessions not only strengthened our paralegals' ability to advocate effectively but also reinforced their position as catalysts of change in their communities.

IMPROVING THE UNDERSTANDING OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS UNDER MUSLIM FAMILY LAWS

90% of Nikahnamas in Sindh leave critical clauses blank, these include:

- Clause 16: Property details in lieu of dower.
- Clause 18: Delegation of divorce rights to the wife.
- Clause 19: Limitations on the husband's right to divorce.

By failing to fill these clauses, brides are systematically excluded from protections enshrined in Islamic law.

A CELEBRATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN MARRIAGE: MELA ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN MARRIAGE

Karachi witnessed a vibrant fusion of culture, education, and advocacy at the Mela on Women's Rights in Marriage under Muslim Family Laws, hosted by the LAS in collaboration with the United Nations Democratic Endowment Fund (UNDEF), Tehrik-e-Niswan, and Bond Advertising on October 9, 2024. This groundbreaking event brought critical conversations about women's marital rights to life through interactive experiences, art, and thought-provoking dialogue.



The Mela was an immersive journey into understanding the significance of the Nikahnama, a cornerstone of marital rights in Islam. With a vibrant South Asian wedding-themed atmosphere, attendees explored a Mehendi Stall, a Theatre performance by Tehrik-e-Niswan that illustrated real-life scenarios where unfilled Nikahnama clauses led to hardships for women, alongside a Bridal Walk emphasizing the need for informed and equitable marriages.

The Mela brought together passionate voices from the Provincial Government of Sindh, including Ms. Shaheena Sher Ali (Minister, Women Development Department), Mr. Iqbal Detho (Chairperson, Sindh Human Rights Commission), Syed Khalid Hyder Shah, (Additional Chief Secretary, Local Government), who vowed to work together towards standardizing the process of Nikah registration, including the requirements for Nikahkhwans to become registrars.



The Mela also witnessed an insightful panel discussion featuring prominent voices, including Elhaam Shaikh (Podcaster & Writer, DAWN News), Annam Khan (Project Lead, Aahung), Advocate Basam Dahri (Litigation Manager, LAS), Syed Uzair Al Huda (Senior Nikah Registrar). The Mela shed light on key issues, emphasizing that a properly completed Nikahnama is not just a contract – it's a manifesto of marital rights. Whether through government initiatives, civil society advocacy, or individual efforts, it's time to ensure that every bride in Pakistan is empowered with the knowledge and tools to claim her rights.

EMPOWERING NIKAH KHWANS: BRIDGING KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE TO PROTECT WOMEN'S RIGHTS

To strengthen the practical application of legal knowledge and promote equitable marriages, LAS conducted resensitization sessions with Nikah Khwans who had previously participated in our training sessions earlier this year. These targeted sessions in Karachi, Shaheed Benazirabad, and Larkana emphasized the pivotal role of Nikah Khwans in safeguarding women's rights and addressed key areas such as:

- **Filling Crucial Clauses:** Reinforcing the necessity of completing critical sections in the Nikahnama, such as delegation of divorce rights, property details, and financial rights.
- **Legal Compliance and Responsibilities:** Revisiting legal obligations, including verifying the bride and groom's ages, obtaining informed consent, and properly documenting marriage details to prevent potential rights violations.

These sessions not only bridged the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation but also equipped Nikah Khwans with the tools and awareness to champion women's rights in their professional responsibilities. Through consistent reinforcement of these practices, LAS aims to foster a culture where informed and equitable marriages become the norm.



CAPACITY BUILDING OF LAWYERS ON STRATEGIC LITIGATION TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS

LAS conducted a comprehensive Strategic Litigation Training aimed at equipping both emerging and experienced legal professionals with the tools to advance women's rights under Muslim Family Laws. The training was attended by lawyers from prominent civil society organizations such as Aurat Foundation and Legal Rights Forum, along with final-year law students. It emphasized the transformative potential of strategic litigation in addressing systemic gender inequities and establishing critical legal precedents.



By targeting lawyers from diverse backgrounds, LAS sought to foster collaboration among practitioners with direct engagement in grassroots advocacy and systemic reform, ensuring that strategic litigation efforts are informed by on-ground realities. The inclusion of law students was equally significant, as it cultivates a new generation of legal professionals with the knowledge and commitment to uphold women's rights. This initiative bolstered the capacity of legal practitioners to represent marginalized women effectively and safeguard their rights through impactful and precedent-setting litigation.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS SESSIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NIKKAHNAMA

With its dedication to advancing gender equality and empowering women in our communities, LAS conducted Community Awareness Sessions in Karachi, Larkana, and Shaheed Benazirabad.

Over the past few months, these sessions have engaged 5,000 women from various localities, equipping them with essential knowledge and tools to advocate for their rights and well-being in marriage.

The Nikkahnama, a critical document in a Muslim marriage, outlines the rights and responsibilities of both spouses. However, many women remain unaware of the clauses and provisions that can safeguard their interests.

Through these sessions, we seek to close this knowledge gap by providing in-depth guidance on the legal and religious dimensions of the Nikkahnama, highlighting the importance of informed consent and mutual agreement.

These sessions are a safe space for married and soon-to-be-married women to share their experiences and have access to free legal aid for any issues that they might be currently facing.



EMPOWERING TEACHERS THROUGH AWARENESS SESSIONS

An awareness session was conducted with teachers at AMI School, focusing on educating participants about critical aspects of Muslim Family Laws. The topics in the session included the requirements of a Nikah, conditions of marriage, knowing your Nikahnama, financial rights of wives, dissolution of marriage, and registration of marriage.

Teachers were provided with informational material to further disseminate knowledge within their communities, promoting broader awareness of women's rights in marriage.



IMPROVING THE DEMAND SIDE OF ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

MEDIATION AWARENESS SESSION THROUGH ADR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

After the successful implementation of the ADR Experiential Learning Program with five law colleges in Sindh, LAS is now expanding it by working with the following universities:

- SZABIST in Karachi,
- International Islamic University in Islamabad,
- National University of Sciences and Technology in Islamabad,
- Bahria University in Islamabad, and
- Karakoram Law College in Gilgit.



LAS launched the intervention with two 2-hour introductory sessions, one held at NUST on November 20, 2024, and the other at IIUI on December 9, 2024. Aimed at 4th and 5th-year law students and faculty, the sessions focused on the principles of mediation, its benefits, and its integration into the current legal system.

Mr. Shahzar Ilahi (Program Delivery Specialist and Accredited Mediator LAS), conducted the awareness sessions, and outlined a roadmap for aspiring legal professionals, highlighting ways to leverage mediation to provide relief to clients, and expand career opportunities within this dynamic field. Whether aspiring to become mediators or mediation advocates, the session aimed to inspire participants to take the lead in shaping the future of dispute resolution. During the session, participants were guided through real-world cases and the mediation process, exploring how this approach transforms access to justice by promoting efficient, collaborative, and effective solutions for the parties involved.

With this session, the students and faculty gained valuable insight into Pakistan's ADR (laws, learned how mediation works in practice, and explored the crucial role mediators play in resolving disputes.

PARALEGAL ORIENTATION SESSION

LAS successfully conducted orientation sessions with its ADR paralegals across seven districts of Sindh, engaging 118 participants, including 46 women, 70 men, and 2 transgender individuals. These sessions introduced paralegals to LAS's ADR interventions and highlighted the enhanced role they will play in the community.

These paralegals will lead community clinics, with each paralegal conducting at least two clinics to promote ADR and empower local communities. Building on their remarkable contributions in previous projects, paralegals expressed enthusiasm and commitment to advancing ADR through this new initiative. This engagement underscores LAS's continued efforts to foster accessible and community-driven dispute-resolution mechanisms.



UNRELENTING EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE SUPPLY SYSTEM OF ADR IN ICT & SINDH

LAS AND MICADR'S MEDIATION ADVOCACY AND SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM

LAS in partnership with the Musaliha International Centre for Arbitration and Dispute Resolution (MICADR) and the Federal Judicial Academy (FJA), launched their first-ever Mediation Advocacy and Skills Training Program on November 20-21, 2024. This pioneering initiative was led by Mr. Shahzar Ilahi (Program Delivery Specialist and Accredited Mediator LAS) who provided participants with a comprehensive understanding of mediation principles and advocacy techniques.



The training emphasized on the mediation process, effective advocacy strategies, and the importance of guiding parties toward mediation in appropriate cases. Participants in the session were equipped with the skills to act as mediation advocates, ensuring positive outcomes for their clients. Over the two days, Mr. Ilahi explored recent advancements within Islamabad's mediation ecosystem and unveiled upcoming opportunities, including specialized training for mediators and advocates. These efforts aim to promote ADR as a means of efficiently resolving civil, family, and commercial disputes.

AWARENESS SESSION ON MEDIATION FOR COURT STAFF AT DISTRICT COURTS IN ISLAMABAD

LAS in collaboration with the ADR Committee of the Islamabad High Court, had earlier established the Islamabad High Court Court-Annexed Mediation Center (IHC-CAMC) within the premises of the Family Courts in Islamabad. This initiative aims to promote and facilitate mediation proceedings, fostering a culture of amicable dispute resolution.

LAS is committed to developing a robust mediation framework by training and sensitizing key stakeholders, including judges, lawyers, and court staff, to ensure the mediation ecosystem thrives and becomes a cornerstone of the judicial process.



A comprehensive training of two days was conducted for 46 Ahalmads (record keepers) from the District Courts, Islamabad, at the IHC-CAMC on December 20 and 21, 2024. The training was led by LAS' seasoned trainers: Ms. Furrah Kashif (Program Delivery Coordinator, Legal, and Accredited Mediator, LAS), Mr. Israr Ahmed (Program Coordinator and Accredited Mediator, LAS), and Ms. Sadia Tanveer (Coordinator and Mediation Advocate LAS).

The training focused on equipping court staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to support mediation proceedings effectively. Key topics included an introduction to the mediation process, its benefits, and the specific roles of court staff. Participants were also trained on how to maintain dedicated registers for mediation cases and ensure that case files include all necessary information to seamlessly integrate mediation into the court system.

JUSTICE RESTORED: STORIES OF RESILIENCE AND HOPE

RESCUING A MINOR FROM CHILD MARRIAGE & FORCED CONVERSION

A courageous step was taken to protect a 16-year-old Hindu minor girl from Hyderabad, who was a potential victim of child marriage and forced conversion. After going missing for a week, she was recovered from a district in Punjab and brought to safety.

The LAS team in Hyderabad played a pivotal role in this remarkable recovery. Their unwavering dedication and tireless follow-ups with the SHO of Hussainabad Police Station were instrumental in overcoming the complexities of interprovincial recovery.

Within just one week, the girl was located and placed in Darul Aman on November 15, 2024. Thanks to the relentless advocacy of Advocate Danial Sahito (Field Officer, LAS) the court ordered her return to her family on November 21, 2024, reuniting her with her loved ones and bringing immense joy to all.

This inspiring story highlights the power of legal advocacy, teamwork, and collaboration with law enforcement in protecting vulnerable individuals and ensuring that justice is served.

REBUILDING BONDS THROUGH MEDIATION: A SUCCESS STORY OF A MOTHER AND SON

Disputes within families can be emotionally taxing, especially when property and financial misunderstandings are involved. This was the case for Ms. Rida* and her son, Mr. Ali*, a constable at Police Madadgar 15 in Sukkur.

The conflict arose over a house purchased jointly by Ms. Rida and her late husband, which was later transferred to their sons, including Ali. Years later, Ms. Rida wished to sell the house and distribute the proceeds among her children. However, Ali opposed the sale and also refused to repay a loan he had borrowed from her, leading to tension between them.

A District Legal Aid Forum (DLAF) member referred the case to LAS mediator Advocate Afreen Kanwal. After explaining the mediation process and gaining consent from both parties, Afreen facilitated open communication and negotiation. Through mediation, they reached a mutually agreeable solution, avoiding a lengthy court battle.

Both Ms. Rida and Mr. Ali expressed gratitude for the mediation process, appreciating how it preserved their relationship and provided a dignified resolution. A District Legal Aid Forum (DLAF) member referred the case to LAS mediator Advocate Afreen Kanwal. After explaining the mediation process and gaining consent from both parties, Afreen facilitated open communication and negotiation. Through mediation, they reached a mutually agreeable solution, avoiding a lengthy court battle.

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