

**Draft notes from the “Second Consultation Meeting on the Elimination of
Violence Against Women in Afghanistan”**

Hosted by UNIFEM, Wednesday May 12, 2004

Please see attached sheet for the list of participants.

Purpose – This was the second consultation meeting aimed to promote a dialogue on issues related to violence against women in Afghanistan. There was no fixed agenda for the meeting. The vast majority of the speakers were Afghan. The meeting was moderated by Carolyn McCool, A/Programme Director, UNIFEM Afghanistan.

Main discussion points and comments-

Violence against women has become part of our culture and to stop this we need a long term solution and it will be hard work. There is a need for research to better understand the situation and get more insight into cultural practices. It's the culture of Afghanistan that is the root cause of the problem. One speaker said that customs and customary laws are to blame for the widespread violence against women. The Holy Koran says that 'if you cannot do justice to one wife you cannot take another' – yet many men ignore this and marry several women. There should be a cultural revolution to change this.

New forms of violence against women are emerging in Afghanistan, such as discrimination against women in the workplace. People do not like to see women in positions above them. Women are always at a disadvantage because they are excluded. For example, the female staff of the Departments of Women's Affairs in the provinces are systematically excluded. People in the provinces do not see them as government workers because they are women and so they are ignored.

Afghanistan is not alone; there is violence against women in every country in the world. It's a universal issue. All colleagues around the table, whether Afghan or foreign, male or female, are dealing with a common issue. There should be no sense of embarrassment as every country is the same. It's been only quite recently in more economically developed countries women have claimed their equal rights.

We should not always blame the government; we need to struggle with change the culture to bring good things to women. People need to take personal responsibility for their lives and actions. Men need to be trained too – to adhere to the Afghan saying 'if you insult a wife, you insult a man also'.

We must not forget women with disabilities who often deal with violence every day. It was asked if the Ministry for Martyrs and the Disabled are doing anything to address this issue.

On justice –

All the laws of this country have been made by men with little or no participation of women. Some of the laws are not in favour of women's rights and there are gaps, for example, discrimination is a growing form of violence for women in the government and for those seeking employment. The speaker asked the international community to give more opportunities for women to participate in law making. There is a need for technical support and funding from international donors, but what's most important is giving opportunities for women and women's organizations and to build their capacity.

The Family Courts are not properly dealing with cases of violence against women. There is a culture that blames the women for crimes committed against them. The Family Court should be represented at the next meeting.

On research –

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in collaboration with the University of Calgary is conducting a violence against women research project. There are 5 countries included in the research project; Canada, Australia, Thailand, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. The research consists of two phases. The first is to study the policy environment – including the work of government, justice institutions, police, medical staff, NGO's etc. Phase two will collect data to explore the health impact of violence against women. This research will inform recommendations for policy change in the health sector (although other angles may be added) and for lobbying. The MoFA is still putting together its research team and asked all interested Afghans preferably with research experience to work on the project.

It was noted by several speakers that research efforts need to be better coordinated. The MoFA representative, for example, was not aware of the European Commission (EC) plans to conduct research on domestic violence (see minutes of April 29 meeting). Poor coordination could lead to different studies reporting different results and this could seriously undermine the cause. Basic coordination is also needed to avoid overlap and unnecessary duplication of resources.

There are not enough Afghan women and men with research skills. Internationally supported studies often do not invest in meaningful capacity building. Foreign researchers fly in for short period of time; conduct their research and don't conduct train the trainer courses. Often these research reports are never translated into Dari and Pashtu. There is an urgent need to give research skills to Afghan women. We need to expand the pool of qualified women in Afghanistan.

The moderator asked if anyone was aware of other research activities related to violence against women;

- The AIHRC has conducted several studies and monitors cases of violence against women in their regional offices;
- There are some smaller Afghan NGO's that have collected data and this research should be counted;
- Afghan Women's Lawyers and Professionals Association (AWLPA) and other professional associations have collected data through their legal rights awareness course in the provinces. AWLPA found that violence against women emerged as a major issue;
- NOVIB/OXFAM recently started a mapping exercise to find out what organizations are working on gender based violence issues;
- Amnesty International is planning to conduct some research later in the year. UNIFEM will contact Amnesty for more information and present to the next meeting and;
- UNIFEM is intending to support the University of Kabul to conduct research on the gender impact of customary laws. It will touch on violence issues.

Anyone conducting research should contact the Prosecutors Office and other institutions because they have important information.

It was agreed that each of these organizations makes a brief 5-minute presentation about their research activities as a means to share information and to begin a dialogue on research coordination.

The moderator identified several main themes that have emerged from this meeting.

- Well coordinated research - investing in capacity building for Afghan researchers;
- A judicial, legal and policy response and institutional reform (*top down*);
- An empowerment response with meaningful investments in human capacity and personal responsibility (*bottom-up/grassroots*) and;
- Media and awareness raising.

NEXT MEETING:

Wednesday May 26 at 2pm in the UNDP conference room

Proposed Agenda

1. Research coordination – each relevant organization to make a 5 minute (or less) presentation on their research plans i.e. EC, Amnesty International, Human Rights and Democracy, Novib, MFA and Kabul University (UNIFEM to invite).

2. Legal and Justice Issues – the Family Court and other justice players will be invited to attend. Marzia Basel from UNIFEM to invite.

Note – UNIFEM offered to maintain the email distribution list and will circulate news, information and updates. Please contact Marzia Basel from UNIFEM marzia.basel@undp.org.

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR WOMEN
ATTENDANCE SHEET OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN AFGHANISTAN DISCUSSION
DATE: MAY 12TH 2004

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