

**Draft notes from the “3rd Consultation Meeting on the Elimination of
Violence Against Women in Afghanistan”**

Hosted by UNIFEM, Wednesday May 26, 2004

Please see attached sheet for the list of participants.

Purpose – This was the third consultation meeting aimed to promote dialogue on issues related to violence against women in Afghanistan. The meeting was moderated by Carolyn McCool, A/Programme Director, UNIFEM Afghanistan. There were two items on the agenda; research coordination and justice. The latter was not covered by this meeting and will be discussed at the next meeting on June 09, 2004.

RESEARCH COORDINATION

The following organizations made a brief presentation on their plans to conduct research on violence against women;

1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Institute for Gender Research, University of Calgary

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with the University of Calgary is conducting violence against women research project. There are 5 countries included in the research project; Canada, Australia, Thailand, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. They have trained researchers and pleased to announce that this research will be coordinated by AWN.

2. European Commission

The European Commission outlined its tentative commitment to support a new Domestic Violence project. Approximately 800,000 Euros will go towards a domestic violence survey; 2.8million for supporting “awareness raising activities” and legal, medical and psycho-social support, aid to victims; 400,000 Euro to support the burn unit of the Herat hospital. The EC representative said they are expecting the ‘green light’ on this project soon.

3. Afghan Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)

The AIHRC has completed an *Analysis of Women’s Crimes Committed by Women*. They also published a book titled “*Why Self immolation?*” which examined the causes of self immolation and documents the findings of a two-day seminar in Herat last year. This publication is available in Dari.

4. NOVIB/OXFAM

NOVIB/OXFAM is in the process of conducting a ‘mapping exercise’ to find out what organizations are working on gender based violence issues what approaches they are using, whether the approaches used are adequate to address the issue etc. This is part of a new Oxfam International to Violence Against Women Global Campaign. They have found that some organizations are already working directly in the area (such as *Amcour’s (an NGO)* programme against trafficking, *Medica Modial* research on child marriage and suicide, *IOM* programme and research on trafficking, *Rawzana (a women’s NGO)* programme to raise awareness among religious leaders etc). They have also found some International NGOs operating in Afghanistan are unwilling to address these issues because it is too sensitive or because they claim Afghan women are too afraid to participate.

5. Kabul University

The University of Kabul (with possible support from UNIFEM) is planning to conduct research on “customary law and women”. The purpose of this research is to better understand how the practice of customary law affects women. The research will be led by two senior with the support

of 10 student and lecturers. The research will be conducted in 5 provinces including Kunduz, Herat, Paktia and Kabul.

6. Women's and Children's Legal Research Foundation

Women's and Children's Legal Research Foundation was established in early 2003 to promote women's and children's rights through evidence, research and capacity building. The Foundation published preliminary research on "Bad" (exchange for settlement of disputes) in November 2003. This research is being expanded to cover 15 different provinces and will be published in November of this year. More than 300 'victims' have been interviewed and 12 researchers trained. The Foundation plans to hold a conference on Customary Law to disseminate information on practices which violate women's and children's rights and to establish a network of women across the country who will campaign on these issues. The idea is to raise awareness about violence against women and customary laws across the country and to examine both positive and negative aspects of cultural practices. The Foundation now intends to collaborate with Kabul University after hearing about its study.

7. Amnesty International (AI)

Amnesty is interested in contributing to research and capacity building on violence against women and has developed some preliminary ideas which Helen Brereton from UNIFEM shared on behalf of AI. They are particularly interested in bringing a human rights framework to VAW, expose incidences, and demand more action at the international, national and local levels. AI has outlined some very tentative plans for consideration by the group;

- Research through sample cases in the context of violence in the family and will consider taking a narrow focus area such as forced marriage and exchange of girls to settle feuds.
- Capacity Building Workshops early next year – partnering with others (including AIHRC) to promote understanding of VAW and women's rights. This workshop should build on supporting methodology available for monitoring human rights.
- Later this year AI will be launching a report on VAW and militarization.

It was emphasized to the meeting that these are AI tentative ideas and they want to collaborate with others as much as possible.

Discussion Points

Comment from the Moderator: There is a diversity of projects proposed or actively pursued right now. However we are operating under a number of different definitions of violence against women. This could cause problems later if we do not use common language. This group is well positioned to bring those involved together to explore further. Collaboration is necessary to ensure we are all talking the same language and to avoid conflicting results which would be damaging for Afghanistan. This needs to be Afghan led and directed. The moderator asked the group (1) What do you think of what we've heard today and; (2) Do you see a role for another meeting for 'practitioners' – or is this meeting sufficient. Do we need more coordination efforts? If so, how? Comments included;

- Are these workshops and the research we've heard about today actually going to do something for women in reality? How can we coordinate these meetings and research? How can we find the resources? Small violations can become big and end up being a tradition. Before conducting research why shouldn't work with the schools and the Ministry of

Education? We need a curriculum on this. *The moderator commented that we need to develop a multi-institution and multi-donor financed programme to address violence against women.*

- There should be a department in the Ministry of Interior dealing with human rights, the law and women's rights. Twenty police officers should receive training in the subject and if this works the training can be expanded to other provinces.
- The AIHRC believes research is necessary first step and would like to discuss further how to coordinate research efforts.
- Violence against women is not only the result of decades of war, it has been going on for centuries. It is a disease that has infected families, traditions, history and our society. The two decades of war have made it worse. Only a small number of people know their rights and know what to do if their rights are violated. Most violations are because of traditions and the absence of a formal legal tradition. It has become a part of life and people think it is part of our religion. This is a very serious issue and can only be solved by all parts of society – government, civil society and religious leaders etc. It requires a short term response and long term planning. The main issue is the political assignment of women. Women remain largely absent from decision making forums and this is a violation in itself. Women need to work together to stop this and this can be started through the election process – which is an unique opportunity to get more women into politics and into decision making positions.
- Prostitution is emerging as an issue and a speaker asked what is being done about this new trend. The AIHRC responded by saying they have the mandate to monitor and research but do not have the authority to take action. It was agreed that more research is needed on this issue and the commission urges others to provide reports of cases to them. Unless there are facts and numbers it is hard to influence policy. According to the new criminal procedures law it is a duty of the police to investigate these cases. The MoI needs more training on this issue. We all have a responsibility – individual human rights advocates also have a responsibility to keep raising these issues.

NEXT MEETING

Wednesday June 09, 2004, 2-4pm in the UNDP conference room.

Proposed Agenda:

1. Follow-up on next steps on research coordination (30 minutes)
2. Legal and Justice Issues and violence against women.