

## **Draft notes from the 6<sup>th</sup> “Discussion Meeting on the Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan”**

Hosted by UNIFEM, Wednesday July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004

*Please see attached sheet for the list of participants.*

### **1. Background**

Violence against women is not an issue which women have been facing during the 23 years of war, but it has been the issue in the history of Afghanistan. Therefore, UNIFEM has taken the initiative to invite the people from different Governmental and Civil Society organs to find out the causes of violence against women and solutions for these problems so that violence against women is ended in Afghanistan. In the previous meetings the research on VAW by different Organizations was discussed as well as some of the problems faced by women in the justice system and solutions were suggested. To continue the discussion on the other fields in which women face violence, the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting was held moderated by Carolyn McCool the Acting Director of UNIFEM in Afghanistan. There were three items on the agenda; VAW and Education, Update on Research Coordination, How to begin to think of the Solutions?;

### **2. Research Coordination Group Report**

The report was presented by Dr.Suraya, the Technical Deputy Minister of Women’s Affairs. The some more comments were added by Amina Afzali from AIHRC. The Research Coordination Group held two meetings: one in the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in presence of NGOs, and the second was held at the office of AIHRC with the participation of the donors (EC, University of Calgary, Rights and Democracy, Canadian Embassy), MoWA, AIHRC and the NGOs doing the research. This group aims to facilitate and coordinate the process of research. EC is having an Executive Committee. The Research Coordination Group requested that the members of the group should be the members of the Exe.Com not observers. This was accepted by the European Commission and now the group is having the role of assessor in the Executive Committee.

The contact person for the research coordination group is Momena Yari of AIHRC. Her contact is: [myari8@hotmail.com](mailto:myari8@hotmail.com) , Mob: 079- 34 14 56

Any NGO doing research can contact her.

### **3. Education and VAW**

#### ***Presentation By representative of Ministry of Education:***

A presentation was given by the representative of Ministry of Education on the Education System in Afghanistan, the problems and the work which has been done by (MoE) so far to solve the problems. She mentioned that there is no place for any kind of violence in the policy of MoE. She gave the information on the number of the female schools, students and teachers in Kabul and all over Afghanistan.

#### ***Issues***

Following are the issues which were raised as a result of the discussions in the meeting:

#### ***Violence in school, beating of students and insulting them***

Violence in school starts from the time a girl is admitted to school till she graduates, even during the university life. There are different types of violence against girls as in classroom: they are beaten, they are asked to stand outside if they are late, they don’t have the courage and permission to enter the office and discuss their problems with a teacher or head of school. Also students have to face the violent acts of the male teacher; even female teachers are targets of

violence by the male teachers. There have been the cases of rape of female teachers by male ones. Violence is not carried out only by teachers but it starts from the level of cleaner and guard of the school, to the high position holders of the Ministry of Education. They are committing violence in different ways.

#### *Violence based on gender in schools*

A case was mentioned of a female head of a school who was fired for no official reason. The reason could be that she is a woman and can't defend herself. This worries her and these worries will lead her to the psycho-social diseases which itself is violence against that woman.

#### *Violence by family in education field*

The Ministry of Education is facing too many cases of students after 9<sup>th</sup> class whose families don't want them to continue their education for different reasons as she is married to this family and they don't want her study or her brother has come from this place so he doesn't want his sister to study, although the girls themselves are not ready to leave school. Sometimes the girl's in-laws or her husband don't let her continue her studies. There have been 50 cases registered in the Legal Department of MoWA of women who have not been allowed to study any more by their families or husbands. There are also some cases of women were teachers before the Taliban, but now their husbands don't let them go to school. This is a violation of women's education and working rights which is equal as men in the constitution.

#### *Disliked customs*

One of the reasons that women have been suffering of for centuries is the customs. It has been the block on the way of development of women. In almost all the areas of Afghanistan, people still think that it is a shame to let their daughters go to school or study more than that. The ones, who let their daughters study, do not let them study more than the sixth grade.

#### *Lack of coordination among the faculties and ministries to introduce the qualified women*

When women graduate from faculties with higher marks than male students and apply for jobs, men with lower marks are given the higher posts. This can be called as the weak point of the faculties that they don't coordinate with Ministries to provide job on the basis of qualification, not gender. This lack of coordination results in violation of the human and working rights of the women. (Comment: This can be one of the tasks of working group for VAW and Education to help the faculties and ministries establish coordination among each other.)

#### *Lack of female nurses in the clinical department of schools*

There is a department for first aid services in all schools. The problem is that there are fewer female nurses in these departments. In one of the schools two male nurses were hired for that department and after sometime it was discovered that the department is used for illegal purposes as the male nurses had relations with the girls and spent time with them in that department.

#### *Violence in the content of the curricula*

The content of curricula has violence in it, e.g. there is a sentence that "Farida is helping her mother in house chores." On the other hand there is a sentence that, "Ahmad went to school". This shows that women are for house work and the men are to go out and study.

#### *Educational Television doesn't include VAW programs*

There is a program on Educational Television that includes the celebration of different occasions in the school while it has to include the other aspects as well, such as violence in schools. The Program needs to be developed.

### *Fewer opportunities for girls to have scholarships*

As usual in other affairs, scholarships are also given to boys, not girls. The reason is only gender. If the women are talented also, preference is given to boys. This can create mental tension to girls which can be called violence.

### ***Present Programs/ Actions Taken:***

#### *Correction of the curricula and topics about rights in it*

With the help of AIHRC, the Ministry of Education had been able to correct the curricula which were violent. They have also been able to add the topics about rights as human rights, rights of women etc. in the curricula.

AIHRC and the Ministry of Higher Education have been able to make the subject of “Human Rights” as a course of study in most of the faculties.

#### *Peace & Violence and life’s manners subject*

Ministry of Education has started teaching of a new subject in two schools of the city, Habibia and Maryam High School, as an experiment. This course includes topics about all kinds of violence and the solutions to them. If the result is good they will add it to the course of other schools as well. There is another subject which is planned to be taught at schools and that is “Life’s Manners”. This includes topics about rights also. Soon it will be taught at schools.

#### *Monitoring Committee / Programs of reading the students psycho-socially*

To find out the reasons why students leave the schools, whether it is the problem of the family or school or the way, a Monitoring Committee has been formed at the Ministry of Education. This committee also monitors the violence atmosphere within the schools and the cases of the teachers as well as the students.

#### *Workshops for teachers*

To change the mentality of the school teachers and their reaction towards the students, there have been many workshops and they continue. These workshops will help the teachers develop in the way they deal with the students and not to deal with them in a violent way.

### ***Suggested Solutions:***

#### *Using the media*

The Ministry of Education should use the media such as Educational Radio Television and newspapers to do advocacy for the families to let their daughters and maybe wives study.

#### *Workshops and training*

There should be workshops and training for families to make them aware of the rights of women and other family members. This will help them know the education rights of women so they will not prevent girls from going to school.

#### *Providing financial support to families*

Another reason for giving preference to boys is that they say they are not financially able to send their daughters to school. “We can’t afford the cost of the stationery she needs and other things.” Therefore, it was suggested that a program should start to support the families financially so that they let their daughters study.

### **4. Next Meeting:**

Participants wanted to have MORE time to discuss VAW. The next meeting will be for two and a half hours. The next meeting will be on:

***Wednesday June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2004, 1:30 - 4pm in the UNDP conference room.***

The VAW and Education session will continue at the next meeting in order to specify more issues of women in education and find solutions for them. As suggested at the meeting, UNIFEM will invite someone from Educational Radio Television and the Ministry of Higher Education.

**5. Proposed Agenda:**

1. Continuation of discussion on VAW and Education
2. Solutions for the specified issues
3. Next steps: committee for VAW and Justice as well as VAW and Education

Other noted agenda topics identified for future meetings:

- VAW and Health
- Social Protection Service for women.

*Notes prepared by Maryam Shamal, Programme Assistant, UNIFEM, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004*