

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: H <hrod17@clintonemail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2011 9:45 PM
To: 'JilotyLC@state.gov'
Subject: Fw: Afghan Shelter Crisis

Pls print.

----- Original Message -----

From: Verveer, Melanne S <VerveerMS@state.gov>
To: H
Sent: Wed Feb 16 21:40:01 2011
Subject: Afghan Shelter Crisis

I thought you might be interested in this email from the Afghan Women's Network on what's happening there in Afghanistan on this front.

We are getting out a press statement thru Af-Pak because many on Hill and in press are asking about what we're doing. The post is fully engaged and Frank R meets with Karzai on Sunday.

[REDACTED] and runs one of the shelters told us that her shelter and at least a couple women are being targeted.

This was a subject of more discussion at the civil society mtg after you left.

B6

From: Ghori, Saba N
To: Verveer, Melanne S
Sent: Wed Feb 16 17:51:55 2011
Subject: Email to Rina with attached statement

Dear Rina,

Attached are documents I just received from AWN.

AWN asks that you NOT share it outside the closest State Dept circles since this is what they will deliver at their press conference tomorrow.

The women I am in touch with are terrified -- they send you this message:

"You should should inform State Department of the attacks on women by journalists tonight. MoWA turned off their phones and we ran around asking for help while the women at shelter were crying and yelling that they will be killed. It

is a crisis here and we really don't know what to do. If we survive tonight, we will deliver this statement at the press conference tomorrow. Please beg the State Department to make a loud statement for Afghan women's shelters."

The actual statement:

Press Release:

Afghan Women Call for the Repeal of Shelter Regulation

17 February, 2011

"If our government is serious about ending the misuse of women's rights, they have to stop the continuous sexual abuse of women in female prisons throughout Afghanistan. If we women had any confidence in the ability of the government to protect us I would have not come to this women's shelter but would have gone to them in the first place. Instead, I was made to sit in a police station for half an hour and was accused of every possible crime by the police after I escaped home."

- Halima[1], a 35 year old woman who escaped a husband who had sold her to three men after he lost a gambling game.

Let us recall the history of women's shelters in Afghanistan. Independent safe-houses were started because our government failed to meet the basic human needs of women, and whose ineffective management of emergency shelter led to repeated attempted suicides by women in Azadi Garden. It was then that women's organizations were invited by UN agencies to help remedy the situation. Women who had experience and had learned from the centuries-old Afghan tradition of giving safety to those in need opened safe homes with the intention of supporting their kind with a woman's sensitivity and care.

Since last eight years thousands of women have been given safe haven in these independent shelters. Many of them were in fact referred to these places by the government, including the Presidential Palace, which did not wish to disrupt its relationship with tribes and clans that might have been upset by the government giving refuge to their abused daughters.

These concerns persist even now. On many occasions government officials, pressured by influential people in society or political circles, have exposed the location of women seeking refuge or forced them to return to their families who then punish them for trying to escape. This is a betrayal of the women they should be trying to protect. And yet this week, in response to a baseless media report and an incomplete and untransparent political assessment, the decision has been taken to hand these shelters over to the government, which has proven itself incapable of managing them well or protecting the women who depend on them.

"We got a case on a Thursday afternoon of a woman who was terribly injured. We kept calling MOWA but got no response so had to call the senior deputy minister, her first response was 'we're off today, bring the case on Saturday' and I kept saying that she will die if we wait until then, but the deputy didn't even care. But with this Regulation, I would have to let the injured woman die till MOWA was back at work after two days"

- Executive Director of a women's shelter in Kabul.

The Afghan Women's Network believes that the first concern of any regulation, policy or law should be the protection of the citizen, not control over foreign resources or saving 'honor'.

AWN is equally concerned by the government's accusation of the misuse of funds in these shelters. In fact, the majority of shelters are being very well run, despite the fact that due to government interference many have been running on no external funding for the last one year.

We believe that it is corruption which should be combated, as this is our national shame: a problem which persists due to the government's failure to tackle it at the highest level. We believe in accountability and transparency for both government and non-government organizations alike, and that organizations of all kinds should take on only as much responsibility as any they can effectively absorb, manage, and lead. NGOs have been able to do this, and are dismayed by the incapacity of the Afghan government, which has spent a mere 40% of its allocated development budget according to official reports.

Following the incredible media report, and the Commission of investigation into the shelters, the government has come up with a draft Regulation that aims to control the access, protection and services of shelters to women at risk. However, we see the Regulation as it is currently devised as hampering the very basic principle of a shelter, which is providing safety to women.

Our concerns are as follows:

- The fundamental obstacle created by the Regulation is that it restricts the admission of women into shelters by creating parallel decision-making structures of high officials which are not accessible for the women who is in need of immediate support. The Regulation requires every case to be reviewed by a high level Council in order for a woman to gain admission to a shelter. This bureaucratic measure – which experience proves would be subject to corruptive influence by powerful members of society – will only result in imminent threats to any woman escaping violence and can result in the loss of her life. Knowing this to be the case, fewer women will seek help.

- The Regulation has come into effect without any consultation with the organizations running shelters, nor has it been developed by women's rights specialists who can understand the sensitivity of the matter in Afghanistan context. Considering the inability of women to access justice, victims of domestic abuse and rape can easily fall prey to state punishment practice show that courts in Afghanistan still does not differentiate between cases of rape and adultery.

- Our experiences of working with government agencies have shown that they are not in a position to utilize the allocated development budget due to lack of structures and management capabilities, therefore, they're not in a situation to manage the very complex nature of running shelters in Afghanistan. This should be a long term goal with a proper transition process.

Therefore,

We, civil society, the women organization's and women activists of Afghanistan, call on the government to seriously consider our concerns and start a process of consultation to revise the Regulation with best interest and safety of women at risk.

For more information please contact:

Afghan Women's Network: awn.kabul@gmail.com , 0093700286598

[1] Considering the personal safety of the woman, Halima is a chosen name.