



Medica Afghanistan (MA)

has an excellent reputation for providing legal support and legal counseling services, psycho-social services, and literacy classes to women faced with violence. This Newsletter describes our recent work under three thematic titles: Services, Advocacy and Awards.

MEDICA AFGHANISTAN'S INITIATIVES TO PROTECT AND PROMOTE WOMEN'S RIGHTS

A review of three months' activities

1. Services

Legal services to our clients:

Legal services to Medica Afghanistan clients:

During the mentioned period 431 women and girls received legal and social services such as legal advice, legal awareness and legal representation in civil and criminal cases, mediation and social work services by our experienced lawyers and social workers in Kabul, Herat and Mazar. The legal aid services

provided to women and girls are detailed as below:

22 clients received reduction in their punishments, 8 clients released through investigation phase and 19 clients released from subsequent courts. In 39 victim cases MA lawyers succeeded to collaborate with prosecutors and have their indictments based on the EVAW Law provisions.

97 couples reached an agreement through mediation, 400 women were offered professional advice on their legal predicaments, 380 legal awareness sessions were conducted for our clients on women's basic rights and 100

clients safely reintegrated with their families and were followed up.

Direct statements of our clients:

- A client who made her case official after receiving legal awareness by MA: *"I was not aware of my rights and it took me quite a long time to raise my voice and now that I know my rights, I am not going to be silent about it"*.
- *I truly value your support and kindness to women, your holistic support is helping me to lead a successful life in the future.*



MA mediation center- Herat

Fawzia is 44 years old, she was forced by her parents to marry Mahmood. Now they have 2 children.

Since beginning of married life her husband physically abused her. Not only that he never provided alimony to her he sold out the house tools to buy drugs for himself. Her mother in law also had conflict with her and tried to take her marriage portion that was 200-meter land. Marriage portion (Haq mahr) is a woman's right according to Islam, which must be paid by husband soon after marriage. Fawzia refused to give up her right. She was therefore thrown out of home. She went to her parents' home for support. A friend of her father referred her to EVAW (Elimination of Violence Against

Women) unit and the unit referred her case to MA.

At first MA lawyers provided her awareness about women's rights. Afterwards, based on client's request MA mediator started mediation. MA mediator called client's husband and mother in-law and a monitor from their relatives and informed them about women rights especially about rights to alimony, and employment. After 7 sessions of mediation the parties reached an agreement and the client mother-in-law made a commitment to not interfere in Fawzia's life. Her husband made a promise to not abuse Fawzia and to stop using drugs. He was introduced to hospital for addiction treated. He was hospitalized there for one month, now his situation is improving and has stopped drugs. His behavior with the family has changed now.

Fawzia was also referred to MA psychosocial department for treatment, as she was suffering from depression. MA counselor worked on client's inner and social resources and did relaxing exercises that resulted in her improved psychosocial health after few weeks. She was also introduced to women's tailoring center for employment. She is working there and through her salary she is bearing her and her children's expenses. Moreover her husband is searching for job.

Fawzia is very happy from services MA provided her. She feels empowered and offers well-being advice to her friends in the center. Recently she referred one of her friends to us who is her co-worker in tailoring center.



Medica Afghanistan Mediation center-Herat

Psychosocial services to help traumatized women:

According to the recently released World Health Organization (WHO) preventing suicide report, 1000,000 people die by suicide across the world each year. Maybe it is not an exact estimation because many cases are not registered for different reasons, such as the stigma associated with suicide, lack of reliable death recording procedures and religious or legal sanctions against suicide in some countries.

Suicide Prevention Day is celebrated on 10th of September each year by Ministry of Public Health with the technical and financial support of International and national stakeholders. This year the suicide prevention day was celebrated with the theme of **“Preventing Suicide: Reaching Out and Saving Lives.”**

Medica Afghanistan as usual offered technical support for celebration of this day by contributing to the draft of suicide strategy, translation of brochures and presenting a story of a psychosocial client.

This client who did self-immolation as result of domestic violence presented her horrific story by her own words, she said:

“Five years ago, when I was studying at 10th grade, I was married off. Soon after marriage my husband stopped me from going to school. I was teaching at a school and giving the salary to my husband. After few months of my marriage, my husband’s behavior changed and he started blaming me for whatever happened at home. He was violent. He would beat me, left me with my injuries. My husband used to encourage me to commit self-immolation. One day, I tried to burn myself in front of my husband. Even though my husband was not eager to take me to hospital, yet he had to. After the incident, my husband was arrested by police and I was hospitalized. I have been under treatment for nine months and I have gone through five operations. Medica Afghanistan provided me counseling on bed. When my case started officially, at first the lawyer gave me information about my rights, and then took the case to prosecutor’s office. The prosecutor’s office investigated the facts together with my lawyer. When it was time for the case to go to family court, MA lawyer followed up the case during the court session. I am thankful from MA to help me to continue my life again.”

Mental health is an important issue, but sadly often neglected

The Ministry of Public Health in close cooperation with NGOs celebrated the World Mental Health Day –on 10th October 2015 with theme of "Dignity in Mental Health".

This year we will celebrate it in more effective way to give general awareness about psychosocial and mental health problems in Afghanistan. Many activities such as media campaign, interview reportage and gatherings are undergoing at the central and provincial

level. Our colleagues in Mazar and Herat are also involved in this campaign. The attached declaration is drafted by MOPH that was signed between governmental and non-governmental organizations on Saturday in the mental health hospital to reflect our commitment toward mental health in Afghanistan.

Days like this can help to raise awareness.

Advocacy

Medica Afghanistan representative took part ACBAR SO meeting on drafting civil society position paper, (some CS members prepared a unified position paper representing the benchmarks/recommendations for Donors, Government, and Embassies). At the end, the draft was sent to all participants for feedback.

Security threats

The security situation in Kabul in 2015 (so far) can be rated as poor as, or perhaps worse than 2014. However, it is important to note that these incidents continue to overwhelmingly target Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), Afghan government personnel and, occasionally, International Military (IM) forces or their associated civilian contractors. High profile attacks (HPAs) continue an upward trend that has been happening for several years now, with the third quarter of 2015 outpacing the same time period in previous four years. Deterioration of overall security had a significant effect on situation of women. Reported violence against women increased by 28 percent this year according to a statistical report issued by Ministry of Women's Affairs. As a result of war and increased insecurity, lack of economic opportunities and nutrition, social pressure, lack of education, false religious

interpretations, harmful traditional practices and gender inequality, a high number of people suffer from psychosocial problems. Women and children are the ones who suffer the most and are targeted by several kinds of violence. We believe that there is an immediate need for a better planning and protection mechanisms by the Afghan National Security Forces in collaboration with people to avoid such threats and ensure safety and security of citizens.

Fall of Kunduz and effects on Kabul: On Monday, 28 September, Armed Opposition Group (AOG) forces took control of Kunduz city and maintained it for three days before ANSF's counter attack partially dislodged them. There were little immediate or direct effects on the security situation in Kabul resulting from the fall of Kunduz and the ongoing fighting there and in Baghlan, Takhar and Badakhshan Provinces. Of course, the deployment of some security forces (including special police forces) from Kabul to the north to assist in the counterattack against AOG forces does cause vulnerability to Kabul, but a Kunduz-style attack on the capital is unlikely, given the significant International Military forces' presence, the substantial ANSF presence and the lack of an adjacent base of support from which to conduct an AOG operation like that in Kunduz (where AOG controlled large parts of the territory surrounding Kunduz city). In Kabul the main concern is the political instability resulting from the loss (even if temporary) of Kunduz at hands of AOG and several northeastern district centers.

The AOG successes constitute major blows to the National Unity Government and the ANSF as people's confidence in both has been shaken. An already fragile political arrangement between rival political factions that make up the National Unity Government is susceptible to

external shocks such as the unexpected fall of Kunduz, which led to gatherings by former mujahedeen commanders in Parwan Province and Kabul (including Jan Ahmad, whose home was reportedly attacked by International Military forces in June 2015 over the stockpiling of weapons). These gatherings have mostly produced calls for militias and groups of armed men controlled by former mujahedeen commanders to fight alongside the ANSF to defeat AOG fighters in the north. But there is clear dissatisfaction with the situation in their statements and their calls for the Afghan government to accept the assistance of illegally armed militias is reflective of a lack of confidence in the formal state apparatus to effectively address the situation. It is possible that the longer the crisis in the north continues, the bolder former mujahedeen commanders may become, potentially sidelining legitimate state decision making processes and usurping some aspects of state authority.

School poisoning

Location: Jebrael town of Herat city

On 31 August 2015, the officials in the western city of Herat reported that approximately 131 students and teachers of a private school were poisoned after inhaling toxic gas while they wanted to enter their classrooms.

This private school is located in the town of Jebrael in the northwestern city of Herat province. It is said that most of the poisoned students were studying at fourth and fifth grades. The Herat provincial police spokesperson added that their investigation is ongoing to reveal the details of this incident. However, no specific group claimed responsibility for this incident, and no one has been arrested in connection with this case.

The poisoned students and teachers were admitted to hospital and according to Herat police chief, all were feeling better and in good health upon discharging. Most were discharged the same day.

The district governor of Enjil, where the poisoning took place, blamed it on enemies of the government who opposed education for children.

During the recent years, this was the second time where students were poisoned at schools in Herat. Some months before to this incident, nearly 100 school students were poisoned after eating food that was sold outside of the school. Police arrested one individual in connection to that incident.