**Committee: Commission on the Status of Women**

**Country: Yemen**

**School: Lorne Park Secondary School**

**Represented By: Iman Sheikh**

**Topic 1: Women and Sustainability**

Crisis’ affect men and women differently. Due to Yemen’s civil war conditions for women and girls across the country are deteriorating. “Women and girls are the most vulnerable group in conflict-affected areas,” said a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) expert on gender issues in Yemen, Ahlam Sofan. According to humanitarian experts, the stress and chaos from the crisis, plus the rooted gender inequality, women and girls are left extremely vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation. As men join the fight, more women are left to manage households by themselves. These women often struggle to access basic services and to protect not only themselves, but also their children. Many have been displaced from their communities. In Yemen there are also many socio-cultural taboos related to menstruation. Due to this majority of adolescent females lacked accurate knowledge about the the process of menstruation prior to their first period. According to the Al-Azhar Assiut Medical Journal(2011), statistics showed 77.1% of girls had poor knowledge, 21.3% had some knowledge, while only 1.6% had good knowledge. Girls’ main source of information (69.1%) are from their mothers, displaying the lack of knowledge available for these girls from educational institutions and professionals. Menstrual hygiene is an issue in Yemen as the level of personal hygiene and management of menstruation were found to be quite unsatisfactory. 46.4% of females do not change their pads regularly and 73.8% do not at night, while 81% do not bath during their menstruation (due to the lack of accurate knowledge many females believe that they should avoid bathing during menstruation). In order to aid the women caught in the country’s conflict, the UNFPA uses the dignity kit. The dignity kit is filled with personal hygiene items, like sanitary towels, toothbrushes and laundry detergent, as well as culturally appropriate clothing. The kits allow women to maintain their personal hygiene, particularly menstrual hygiene, as well as give them more freedom to move around when seeking for humanitarian aid. So far, 100 000 dignity kits have been handed out by the UNFPA to Yemen’s most vulnerable females, women and girls alike.

**Topic 2: Elimination of Gender-based Violence**

Gender-based violence is a huge problem in Yemen which needs to be eliminated. Prior to the war the status of women and girls was already at a low of 92% of women reporting about violence against women, commonly happening in the home according to the country’s 2013 demographic and health survey. There is no legislation in place in Yemen addressing domestic violence. Today, even more women are vulnerable and exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation although numbers on gender-based violence are extremely difficult to obtain, especially during the current chaos within the country. Yemen is a country where female genital mutilation is still an issue, even after being banned by the Ministry of Public Health. Data from 2003 shows that 40% of women aged 15-49 had undergone some form of female genital mutilation. Unfortunately, the low status of women in Yemen means there are huge barriers to care, an example is that often the consent of a male relative is required before a women can be admitted to a hospital. In Yemen, rape is a criminal offence, however the law does not recognize the idea of spousal rape. On top of that many girls are forced to marry at a young age as Yemen has no legal age of marriage and state policies that give families control over whether or not a girl marries or not. The common practice of forcing young girls into marriage (most before they reach puberty) was condemned as “child rape condoned under the guis of marriage.” In 2009 a proposed law setting a minimum age of 17 for women was opposed by conservative Yemenis, including females. However, a more recent Children’s Act which seeks to set the minimum marriage age at 18 has been drafted. The UNFPA has been working in Yemen to provide life-saving sexual and reproductive health services to females and protect them from gender-based violence. Over the past year, more than 6000 survivors of gender-based violence have been provided with psychosocial support, legal aid, access to safe houses and referral to health and other services by the UNFPA. In order to address the cause and effect, UNFPA has conducted 200 awareness-raising sessions for men and boys on preventing gender-based violence.

**Topic 3: Women in Education and Employment**

Yemen is currently considered to be one of the worst countries for women to live in due to many reasons including gender gaps in salaries, workforce participation, highly-skilled employment, access to basic and higher education, representation in positions of power, life expectancy and the proportion of men and women in the population. The disparity between women and men who study at Yemeni universities is among the highest in the world, according to United Nations’ Arab Human Development Report published in 2010 with around 15 000 women compared to 60 000 men. Around 11% of graduate students in Yemen are female. Narrowly defined gender roles, early marriage and segregation between the sexes contribute to the divide, the report discovered. The lack of support for girls in primary and secondary schools is one of the most major obstacles for women attending university in Yemen. Yemeni families often refuse to allow men to teach their daughters, creating few schools to have the sufficient staff in order to educate large numbers of girls. According to the Ministry of Education, only around 28% of teachers in public primary and secondary schools were female and 15.5% in higher education. According to UNICEF statistics, approximately half of the primary school age girls do not attend and 2 out of 3 women in the country are illiterate. Yemen’s Ministry of Education has recognized the low enrolments of girls in both primary and secondary schools, and has started a campaign to increase female enrolment rates, and had estimated 4500 new female teachers to be necessary in order to carry out the program. Fortunately primary school attendance among women is in fact increasing. According to the Education Ministry the girls’ primary school completion rate rose from 33% in 2001 to 53% in 2011. Yemen has no female parliament members, and only 1 in 10 ministerial positions are held by women, enabling the country to more easily disregard issues that mainly focus on women. In 2008 a 15% quota for women in parliament was attempted but abandoned after intervention from a hastily convened 'Meeting for Protecting Virtue and Fighting Vice', made up of Islamic clerics and prominent tribal chiefs, who declared that 'a women's place is in the home’. The 1995 Labour Law in Yemen banned discrimination on the basis of gender, however, even though women have the right to pursue education and seek employment, some guardians restrict these activities. The majority of women who work outside of the home do so as agricultural labourers, either receiving payment on a day-by-day basis, or no payment at all. This means, they are not protected by employment legislation. According to Pratibha Mehta, UN Resident Coordinator in Yemen women constitute only 30 percent of the workforce. Despite the government’s goal to increase women’s economic participation, the labour force participation remains low for women in Yemen at 25% (OECD Gender Index 2014). The gap between the literacy rate and enrolment in education of girls compared to boys in Yemen is among the widest in the world.

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