



WOMEN'S WORLD

NO. 46 / 2011

Personal Diaries



Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange
We Link Women Internationally

About Isis-WICCE

Who we are

Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (WICCE) is a global action oriented women's organisation that emulates "Isis," the ancient Egyptian goddess of wisdom, creativity and knowledge to promote justice, equality and mutual relationships between women and men. Founded in Geneva, Switzerland in 1974, Isis-WICCE relocated to Kampala, Uganda in 1993, to tap the voices of African women, linking their concerns and issues to the debates and campaigns taking place at the international level. Isis-WICCE empowers women in armed conflict and post conflict situations with a focus on women's human rights and their participation in peace building.

Why we exist

Isis-WICCE promotes the cross cultural exchange of information and skills for women.

What we believe in

Isis-WICCE envisions an informed society that values and ensures women's rights, in order to realize their capacities and potential.

What we have done

For more than a decade in Africa, Isis-WICCE has restored hope and renewed the spirits of women abused in armed conflict situations through its core programmes of skills building, documenting women's realities, networking for peace and leadership, lobbying and advocating for redress for the spoils of the armed conflict. Progressive impact has been achieved in Africa, South East Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe where women have been traumatized by wars and armed conflicts.

What we dream to achieve

Isis-WICCE is committed to the building of a fair and just society where women can equally participate in decision making and their capacities and potential are utilised for a better world through documenting of women's realities and facilitating the exchange of skills and information.

Our Network of Strategic Partners





WOMEN'S WORLD

Personal Diaries

Strengthening Women's Potential in Leadership and Peace Building



Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange

We Link Women Internationally



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Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural (Isis-WICCE)

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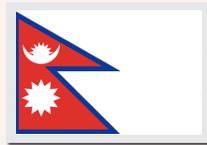
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Introduction

Strengthening Women's Potential in Leadership and Peace Building

Welcome to Women's World Magazine No 45/2011 and Mondes Des Femmes No25/2011 which feature ordeals of sexual and gender based violence of women from countries still experiencing conflict. The Women's World magazine has over the years evolved into that space through which women from all continents meet to share their experiences in the quest for rights and freedoms against all forms of Sexual and Gender Based Violence that is meted on them globally.

Violence against women in war settings has remained a key concern of development workers worldwide. Rape has overtime taken on brutal dimensions with perpetrators targeting women's sexuality, often with disastrous consequences on women's reproductive health. As an organization working in conflict and post conflict settings, Isis-WICCE has been conducting the International feminist leadership Institutes with an aim of bringing together women leaders from conflict and post conflict communities to build synergies to reflect on women's issues and how to combat violence against women.

The Women's World Magazine has remained a unique avenue for documenting the women's experiences and struggles against SGBV by providing good learning lessons for global and national efforts against the heinous practice. The 2011, Isis WICCE International Women's Institute was another space to explore and strengthen ways through which the mandate of advocating for a world where women and girls have the freedom to live their lives without fear of being abused and violated because of their gender.

The articles published in this issue were extracted from a collection of personal stories and testimonies of global feminist leaders who participated in Isis-WICCE 2011/12 Institute. The personal diaries detail encounters of SGBV committed on individuals or particular members of the community, often with devastating effects; psychological trauma and a pure denial of self esteem on the survivors.

The presentation of the experiences in form of personal diaries is a quest for a deeper approach in understanding the feelings of women by encouraging them to search deep into their personal diaries and share their experiences without fear and remorse. The strength of personal diaries lies in their ability to touch the world and reach out to governments and other non state actors to make immediate policy reviews to ensure that Sexual and Gender Based Violence is criminalized and fought wherever; while opening a wider road for peace, justice and participation of women.

We hope that the articles in this volume will act as an International diary for women who are willing to share their experiences as victims of SGBV. We also hope that their resilience can provide encouragement and learning for other survivors' worldwide to demand justice.

We wish you reflective reading.



Standing up high against SGBV

By Henda Chennaoui

“Between prison and freedom, I prefer not to hold my tongue!” Zeineb.

Henda Chennaoui is a practicing Tunisian journalist who recently witnessed the uprising that led to the toppling of the Ben Ali regime. She believes that freedom and social status of women has not changed much in spite of the liberal legislations in this Islamic nation as affirmed by the testimonies of women that ever crossed the paths of security personnel.

The torture that is exacted on women in the Islamic society that Henda grew in begins from an early age, tamed from the domestic space and gains prominence in dictatorial situations. This clearly tones down what is written and proclaimed in statutes and legislations....

However, it is no longer that silence behind the hijab anymore. Women like Zeineb find peace in telling their stories of violence louder..... It is the best expression of freedom.....

Her name is Zeineb. A lean silhouette behind a hijab and a long white skirt. Proud, beaming with delight but with bitterness and a little part of her face blackened by a heavy burden of an experience that was common. Zeineb moves in front and stands in front of the room.

It was a day when people had decided to pay tribute to the woman activist and to mothers of martyrs. The meeting room in a posh hotel in the city center was full of long and short skirts. Black, white, pink and even clear, colors and smell of incense mingled and, for once, agreed to harmonize and to honor the woman.

The first part of the ceremony was devoted to testimonies. Former political prisoners marched, wives and mothers of martyrs cried while recounting their suffering ... But Zeineb, chose to smile ... as she walked towards the podium.

Conversations here, laughter there ... the guests were not paying attention to this thin veil when she opened her mouth to tell her story: “It all started when I was barely 25 years; Since I was 17, I was an activist in a

local association whose license was withdrawn a few years later. One day, as I was going back from my work, two policemen stopped me and I was transferred to Bouchoucha.

Without questioning, they made me sign papers that I had never read. I was left naked in a room without bed or blanket. It was in January when it was freezing cold. They did not give me food. After a few days, I collapsed ... Fortunately or unfortunately, it was the day of my trial.

Before the judge, my lawyer gave evidence of my innocence. After several minutes of silence, the judge sentenced me to six years in prison. In shock, the lawyer protested and the judge just told him: ‘hold your own business and belt up’. Stunned by the news, my family decided to go to the court of appeal. However the matter ended there and the so-called court refused to reconsider my case... A sigh then a pause. This time, the audience is quiet. Some people are in shock and others have the bitterness of many similar souvenirs...

“I went through all Tunisian prisons. Each time, I was transferred to a prison even far away from my family. In prison? Everybody could find herself there, from mothers with children to pregnant women, old and young ones. There were only two types of prisoners: those accused of common law crime and those accused of non compliance to “accepted standards of behaviors.

In prison we were deprived of everything: no reading, no writing, no telephone, no television, no warm water, not even to communicate among ourselves ...

And what about Children? They were many to attend the daily scenes of violence, to listen to horrible stories of torture and suffering and to live in the same harsh conditions of prison.

Each week, prisoners were allowed one visitation except

for the few of them that the ruling system had decided to double their punishment ... After months of waiting, I managed to get a visitation which theoretically should take 10 to 15 minutes only.

In reality, this was not the case. From behind bars, I saw my mother and my sister for 5 minutes only and when they were surrounded by warders. Since then, visitations became increasingly rare and short...

You've said doctor? I have never heard of a doctor at the prison. I recall the day when I was forced to extract all alone a tooth after days of excruciating pain ... I also recall that at the prison there were children but who had no doctor...

I spent the best of my years in prison. But the worst was not the incarnation and physical punishment. The worst came after my release. I was forbidden to travel, to move and to work...

Every day, I had to report to the police station and to sign. Once at 8.00 am and the second time at 6.00 pm. I used to spend half of my time in the reception area of the police station, waiting for the Police Commissioner to confirm my presence.

I was compelled every day to seek for the police permission to go to the pharmacy to buy medicine for my sick father. I felt a terrible sense of injustice and humiliation every time I went to the station to ask for permission to go shopping or to have a walk out of the house...

And the other family members? My two brothers were harassed and prosecuted by the police every time they came to pay me a visit. Finally, we gave in and I spent six years without seeing them again ... and it was the same for the cousins, uncles and aunts who were suffering the same fate. Eventually they also gave up the idea of visiting us or even giving us a call

What about my neighborhood? Because of the fear of being threatened or bothered by the police, nobody could dare talk to me or even contact my family. Nobody could help us yet everybody knew we had no fixed source of money. We were isolated, alone and surrounded by the political police even in our rooms.

On my wedding day, I had to celebrate alone with my husband and some few family members. Without friends or relatives, or neighbors, I had to hide my joy at having finally a family....

The worst day of my life was when I gave birth. Instead of going directly to the maternity like all other expectant mothers, I spent time swallowing my grief at the police

office. The Police Commissioner came late and gave me the cursed permission ... to go and deliver ... to go and give birth to my daughter!"

Tears gushed out of her eyes while sigh invaded the whole room full of women who were aware of the experiencing of the intimate feeling of delivering one's first baby.

Zeineb continues her story, this time, with a muffled voice: "of course I had no right to celebrate the birth of my first baby. Why should I when I had to report to the police station just after delivery... to sign. It is true that the suffering remained unabated for years.

After the fall of the dictator (she refuses to say his name), I thought my suffering was over although the police disappeared from my life and kept away from my family... And I applied for the same job of primary teacher that I had before I was jailed. My application was rejected on the pretext that I was over 35 years ... It was true! But my twenty years have been spent in the prison of the dictatorship. I paid dearly for the terrible silence of the people! Your silence and complicity with injustice and violence of my own executioners!

How do you want me to enjoy my freedom without any job? How do you understand freedom without dignity?" Zeineb looks at the crowd, smiling. "I'm not here to lament or to pretend that I'm a heroin. She says. There are women who deserve this title more than I do ... I'm here to tell you that henceforth, we must no longer keep quiet!

Today, it is important to raise our voices more through our speeches and to express our opinion! Today, we must be proud of our freedom and we must take it on and defend it ... Long live free Tunisia!"

Cheers and tears filled the place. She no longer paid attention to the faces in front of her ... her attention was only focused on the eyes of her two little daughters calling her at the back of the room.

She wiped her tears and quietly moved. She ignored the voices calling her and the hands that clapped on her shoulders ... she saw nothing and just moved slowly toward the two little innocent faces ... she lifted both of them, pressed her head against them and let her tears flow ...

Fifteen minutes later, the mood became relaxed and people forgot about Zeineb who stood motionless at the far end of the venue. A few minutes later she left the room ... disgusted by the few friendly words, the applause and compassion from the room.



www.barewalls.com/i/c/430186_Veiled-Tunisian-Woman.jpg

“That’s your brother! He is educating you and he has the right to beat you!”

By Henda Chennaoui

“That’s what the mother used to say to her daughter who instead used to bury her head between her legs blemished because of the kicking by her elder brother”.

Shame, anger, sadness, guilt, confusion and pain ... several feelings are pricking on the little hearts of little girls who become women and mothers and who, from what they are used to, years later , repeat the same words to their daughters ... O yes! The burden of keeping the tradition and keeping the collective memory is the most fatal aspect of the woman’s fate.

As a young Tunisian woman, I am not an exception to the rule. These words have accompanied me for years. As a child and then as a teenager. I learned to bow to that misogynistic and aggressive authority.

Quite often, it was these words that I used to hear every time that my elder brother assaulted me. Locked in my room, I could hear my brother’s taunts on one side and on the other side my mom crying and begging him to leave me alone...

Over time, the shy teenager I was learnt to confront her attacker and to revolt. The battle lasted for years and ended up with a final break between me and my brother. A break that put an end to the conflict but did not allay the pain.

By sharing my experience with other women through social networks or in real life, I realized that my experience was not the same for most women in my country ... however my story does not end here ... it has just begun...

“Top of Form Five years ago! It was on a Sunday when we were gathered for breakfast. The tension between

me and “Hedi” my elder brother was high. But this time, instead of passively waiting for blows, I decided to give him some punches to defend myself ... my sense of pride, comfort, relief and joy was just the beginning of a long stumble in my memory.

After a few months, drunk with nightmares and insomnia, I discovered the first pieces of the black box: incest and sexual harassment.

The shock was enormous when the black box of my memory began to open up terrifying images ... repeated images mixed with disgusting odors stuck to my skin until now.

At that moment I realized that a demon was hanging over my belly.

That’s when I began to understand my hatred for my body. And I also began to find explanations to the failures of my relationships with the opposite sex. For me, it was too difficult to forget and for me to talk about it was even as impossible as my healing.

Insomnia, anxiety and other attacks turned into depression and then into suicidal attempts that failed miraculously. But my story has just begun ...

After I physically recovered, I had explanations to give to my worried parents who were also totally confused. The negative tests of pregnancy and positive tests of virginity could not provide any explanation to the puzzle.

The situation was further aggravated by the constant presence of my brother. A presence that had finally

become unbearable and painful to me. His arrogance had only exacerbated my desire to escape definitively from life... But suddenly, my survival instinct had ruled. In addition, it had transformed my feelings of guilt and shame in irresistible feelings of hatred and revenge. And that's when I decided to share my remorse and my suffering with my parents. There was punishment but it did not affect my attacker.

It is difficult in our society to manage cases of incest. To spoil forever the reputation of a family, to destroy the future of a sister or a brother, to cause a heart attack to a father or a mother ... those are the heavy and fatal consequences that are hard to bear. Anyway, my decision was made... "I will trade my freedom for my silence," that's what I told my family. Fear, shame and guilt had changed sides ..."

After several months of successful swaps, I betrayed my promise and I begun to share my experience. Under an assumed name, «Henda Hendoud» opened the door of her black box on the Internet.

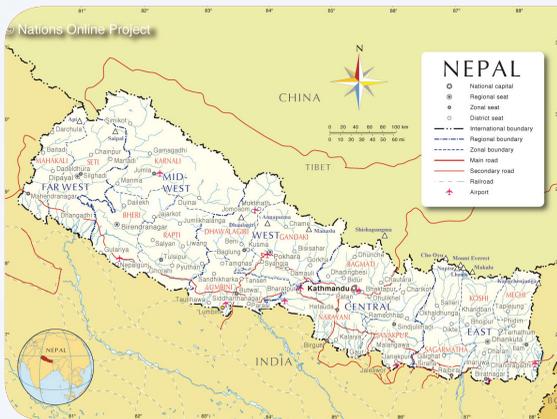
This magic tool allowed me to cross borders while remaining in privacy. My articles posted on my blog or through the social network «facebook» helped me to have interesting discussions with other Tunisian and Arab women (or even Europeans and Americans) on violence, rape and discrimination that they suffer.

Meanwhile, my pain had not subsided. I decided to deepen my research and my commitment to the issue of women; this in search for peace and mental and psychological balance. My only weapon is a bold writing that does not care about the taboo.

Many faces, a lot of tears, and secrets emerge from my keyboard while I am writing this heavy message loaded with pain ...

Since January 14 (the key date of the Tunisian Revolution), I discovered another kind of violence that Tunisian women were undergoing. It is more of political violence or rather violence from the police.

This is a well organized and well prepared violence, however silly. Since then, I do not stop to draw portraits of women activists (who are not necessarily involved into politics but) who tell their suffering.



There is lack of state accountability in enforcing justice to the victims

By Jyoti Poudel Lamsal

The situation of women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD's) has remained precarious. In a society where impunity is institutionalised, all efforts are exerted on imposing silence on human rights champions. Jyoti who was 2011-12 Institute participant believes that even with enlightened legislations, violence against WHRDs continues and becomes prominent on minority groups...

I have been working as a human rights defender for the last twelve years. In Nepal, Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) who dare to defy the status quo are exposed to various risks such as executions, torture, beatings, arbitrary arrest and detention, death threats, harassment and defamation.

Besides, they suffer from major restriction to their freedom of movement, expression, association and assembly. HRDs face discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, geography, economic status, class, caste, access to education, sexual orientation, ability and age.

In particular, WHRDs and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex defenders (LGBTI) are subjected to specific risks and vulnerabilities due to their gender and sexual orientation.

I have witnessed that WHRDs and LGBTI defenders have constantly been victims of false accusations and conviction, being deprived of proper legal assistance and denied a fair trial. HRDs work on the frontline, and these exposures open avenues of insecurity not only for them but also for their families and colleagues. In fact, family members are often used as a tool to pressurize the defenders to withdraw from their work. These are the major challenges of our daily schedule and I faced discrimination in every step during my works.

WHRDs in Nepal have aimed at breaking the well-established culture of silence that is responsible for perpetuating the lack of access to rights.

The proactive stand of WHRDs defies the feudal and patriarchal structures, relying on unequal gender power relations and structural inequalities. WHRDs are discriminated against for being women as well as being defenders. Similarly, LGBTI face double discrimination: on the one hand for defying the predominant heteronormativity and on the other hand for being defenders.

The data available shows that WHRDs became victims of marginalization, they face harassment from private actors, and from both state and non-state actors. WHRDs face specific threats to their work and capacity to contribute to the human rights movement in Nepal.

Often, their own loved ones, male colleagues, community members and family members have been cited as the main source of discrimination and harassment.

The lack of recognition of the legitimacy and credibility of women's work, even when they are operating in the most difficult and risky settings, adds to the risk faced by WHRDs.

In the Nepali society, even temporarily claiming a space other than the domestic sphere may lead to physical violence, threats or even murder.

Being a WHRD, when I am seeking the legal remedy of victims denies me any form of support from the police. Therefore, the cases I pursue would not take place further and evidence collapses.

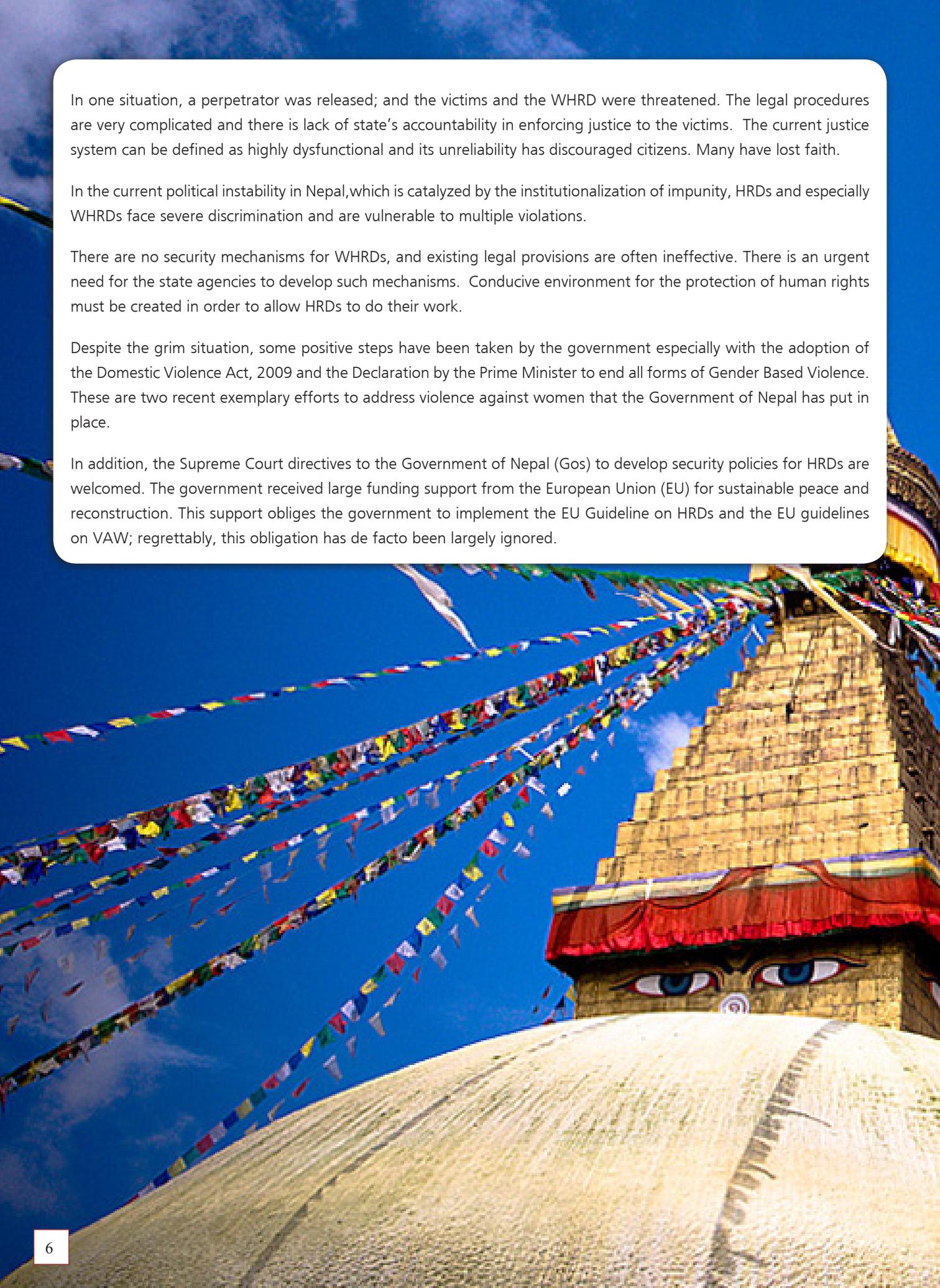
In one situation, a perpetrator was released; and the victims and the WHRD were threatened. The legal procedures are very complicated and there is lack of state's accountability in enforcing justice to the victims. The current justice system can be defined as highly dysfunctional and its unreliability has discouraged citizens. Many have lost faith.

In the current political instability in Nepal, which is catalyzed by the institutionalization of impunity, HRDs and especially WHRDs face severe discrimination and are vulnerable to multiple violations.

There are no security mechanisms for WHRDs, and existing legal provisions are often ineffective. There is an urgent need for the state agencies to develop such mechanisms. Conducive environment for the protection of human rights must be created in order to allow HRDs to do their work.

Despite the grim situation, some positive steps have been taken by the government especially with the adoption of the Domestic Violence Act, 2009 and the Declaration by the Prime Minister to end all forms of Gender Based Violence. These are two recent exemplary efforts to address violence against women that the Government of Nepal has put in place.

In addition, the Supreme Court directives to the Government of Nepal (Gos) to develop security policies for HRDs are welcomed. The government received large funding support from the European Union (EU) for sustainable peace and reconstruction. This support obliges the government to implement the EU Guideline on HRDs and the EU guidelines on VAW; regrettably, this obligation has de facto been largely ignored.





Tears of My Life

By Logshari Kunwar

It has been 9 long years that I have been engaged in marital life. I worked only with the permission of my beloved husband since I was in an affair with him. Though I am well qualified, I never got permission to work independently from my husband although my family pressured me to look for a job. I consulted with my husband if I could get a job and work but still he did not give me any permission to work. Instead, he asked me to help him in his business of journalism which I agreed to and I started working with him.

I worked hard, day and night to boost up his work. All the lower level staffs were fired from the job and I had to manage their work myself. Although we had new members of staff after sometime, they never lasted, as most worked for not more than a month due to his rude behavior. I had to manage all the things at the work place and do the household chores like cooking, washing, cleaning and attending to guests. I had opened a bank account but I didn't have a single coin on the account. Sometimes at different religious occasions, I would get money from my parents. My husband spends all the money. He neither lets me save my own money nor use his earnings. I tried a lot to make him understand without success.

Due to arguments, on some nights we go to bed without food. Sometimes we had to go to a restaurant for dinner but due to less money, we would take only one plate and eat together. At first when I was in love with him, I didn't mind. That time, it was easy but it has become too hard to bear. I had been satisfied only when I felt that he loves me more than anyone else in this world but now all that is gone from my life.

I still have a scar on my hand, which was a reward from my husband after he beat me when he came home drunk. I didn't even make it public because I had a misconception that this beating was only because he was drunk and that in other times, he loves me very much. Since we are in the same profession, we went in all the societal activities together. Seeing that all the people, relatives and family members praised us and our work, I felt that no one in the society needed to know the other story. Their words made me feel happy even if I knew there were issues.

But whenever we were alone, the true character of my husband would come out. He would have this threatening face and he would beat me. When he even became rude to my mother and father, I felt ashamed and it broke my heart. I have requested my husband many times to change his behavior but instead he scolds me by saying that I have no character. In the past, I had heard people in my community say that life of a real woman begins only after they get married and now I am experiencing that by being beaten, threatened and scolded all the time. My husband also sold the gold ring and chain my parents had given me to buy himself a mobile phone. The money that I received as a dowry during my marriage was also spent by my husband. When I was out for work for the period of one month with his permission, he got a woman and went to another city, which I came to know recently.

My husband has been unfaithful and he has no shame sharing that it was normal for him to have many girls before our marriage. I had been aware of this even before marriage. He has had sexual relations with some of my relatives. My cousin calls my husband in the middle of the night and sends different text messages on his phone. After knowing this relationship, I cried for long

and even contemplated committing suicide. The two are still in contact. But today, I do not have any feelings for him because if he really loved me, he wouldn't make me go through physical and mental stress. The scar in my body before my marriage is still on my body. He kicked and punched me a lot and whenever I remember this, I get suicide thoughts again. A well-educated female like me getting to live like this is very shameful.

I don't know how and where I can raise my voice. If I am to find any justice, how will it be? And will it be good enough to build up my future? I have been working in the sector of human rights, women human rights, violence against women, lobbying and advocacy. By working in this sector, I have realized the need of deepening my knowledge and potential to develop strong leadership quality. Though I have nine years long experience of working in this field, I feel that my knowledge is not sufficient to take some strong decisions. I want to enhance my understanding on this sector and that's why I attended the training in Strengthening Women's Potential in Leadership and Peace Building. This is a space for me to share my problems and also get ideas on how solve my personal and professional life issues. I feel that I can develop self confidence and use the gained knowledge for the well being of the community.



The fate of a daughter

By Durga Karki

Although I have not directly faced the violence, I have witnessed dozens of incidents. In my experience, violence, discrimination and other inequality start with political, social and cultural system of a particular society. In Nepal, women are suppressed in different systems. I have been through such practices. As an adolescent, I faced cultural discrimination that is still prevailing in our society. Culturally, on the first menstruation period, girls are not allowed to stay in their own house or apartment. Close male relatives along with male family members are not supposed to see the girl during menstruation. As such, the girls should shift from her house. I went through this practice and I was kept at my relative's house. In the very first period, girls are kept separate and they are not supposed to participate in regular activities like going to school or visiting outside.

There are other cultural limits to a woman where they put restrictions on what they can do. My mom used to counsel me not to laugh loudly by showing teeth as well as not to be more talkative. They say that this has an effect on the girls' self esteem.

In our culture, a daughter is supposed to be gentle, sober and more sincere yet such practice and expectations are not placed on the boy child. Girls are not supposed to go outside for a job or any other matter after evening or late night. If she goes out, questions will be aroused regarding her character. If boys do the same, nothing would be there. This is unfair and it affects the rights of girls in terms of employment.

When I questioned why such unfair practices were happening in my society, many would tell me that 'this is the fate of a daughter'. Girls grow up with their parents and they are the things (not the human beings) to be handed over to another after their marriage.

They have no independent identity. As I grew older, I began to understand the society further. Before marriage, virgin girls are worshipped as a form of a goddess. But after the marriage, she has to start new life at groom's home. Their identity remains with their parents before marriage and after marriage it transfers to her husband's family and clan. Many women in my community however have an identity of their own.

When I graduated and started my professional career as a journalist, I began to analyze the situation of Nepalese women. Women are used, misused and abused. They are misused in various forms and abused domestically. Even then, they are not in a position to complain in recorded manner.

I have produced a number of radio programs related to women's health, women's rights and other contemporary social issues. From my own experience and from conversations with the survivors I met, there are many women who are bearing domestic and other forms of violence. I have interviewed several women who have grown up in abusive environments and got into abusive relationships.

Verbal abuses are normal in the rural areas of Nepal. Women are to use respectful terms to address male or husbands while for the women, there's nothing. Financial related violence happens in our patriarchal society where men control the finance and all resources like income and other property.

There is also sexual violence that is barely reported like women are mainly considered as the enjoyment tools to their husband. Research shows that one-third of women in Nepal experience gender based violence (GBV) at home, although most violence is unreported and unrecorded in formal institutions.

Psychological violence was found to be high, followed by physical, economic and sexual violence. (From the research paper entitled 'Domestic Violence against Women in Nepal' prepared by Dr. Giridhari Paudel) The main reasons for perpetuating violence against women are the low educational status of women, offering less dowry at the time of marriage, no control over resources by women and low educational status of the perpetrators.

After a decade long radio career, it is good for me to attend the institute and work with women human rights movement. In our patriarchal society, traditionally defined patterns of social roles and responsibilities have led to a system of discriminatory institutions resulting in gender-based violence.

After a decade long radio career, I am here to work with the women human rights movement. In our patriarchal society, traditionally defined patterns of social roles and responsibilities have led to a system of discriminatory institutions resulting in gender-based violence.

Promulgating a law to criminalize GBV perpetrators and the formulation and implementation of educational and training programs to reduce GBV are immediate needs of the country.

After the people's movement of 2006/2007, now there are some changes in my country. The Interim constitution 2007 has included different rights for women. Now the country is preparing for the new constitution. Women human rights organizations are pressurizing political parties to formulate a women friendly constitution.

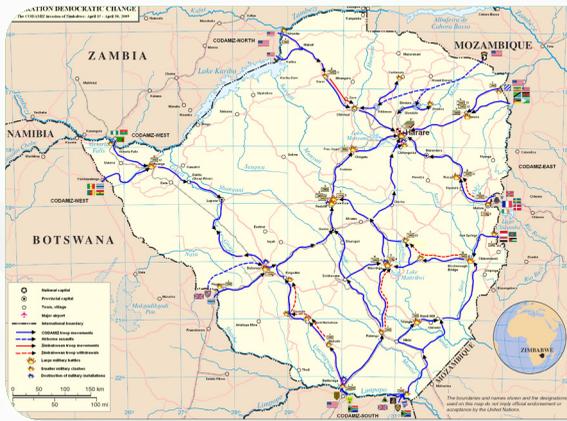
In collaboration with international aid agencies and national NGOs, there is heavy pressure that is created through different campaigns to lobby for stronger measures to eliminate domestic violence. It is only in 2010 that the Nepal government enforced through the law on Domestic Violence (Crime and Punishment) Act 2065.

Although the enactment of this law is a big positive step in liberating women from unnecessary agony, the law still remains lenient to the perpetrators. In fact according to the law, perpetrators are only subject to up to four months of imprisonment and a fine of Rs6,000 (about US\$76).

The accomplices (who are very common in the circumstances) are to receive half of the perpetrator's sentence. It seems so much changed during the drafting stage that actually happen in the patriarchal society like the one of Nepal.

Whereas the draft version of the law stated the maximum penalty for offenders to have been six-months prison term and a fine of Rs25,000(aboutUS\$325), or both, the original version is not only so lenient but pretty pathetic. Even more painful, victims of domestic violence can file a complaint with the police, the local government, or women's commission within 90 days of being subjected to the act(s) and the hearings on their cases will be in camera.

This has toned down what would have otherwise become a fundamental step in enhancing women's rights.



Using sexual violence to terrorise women

By Grace Kuvengurwa

I have worked for women's companies and organizations over my career, starting with Kubi Cosmetics Company, Indigenous Business Women's Organisation, Zimbabwe Women's Bureau and I am currently working for Jekesa Pfungwa Vulingqondo (JPV). I have seen my mother pulling through even when my father was no longer at work due to ill health. She is my source of inspiration thus my interest in her work for grassroots women. My mother would supplement her husband's income by sewing clothes and selling them for our schooling and upkeep. During the course of my work and life, I have encountered and experienced conflict. For example, I had a brush with the war veterans during a regional study on cross border trade in Nyamapanda near Mozambique.

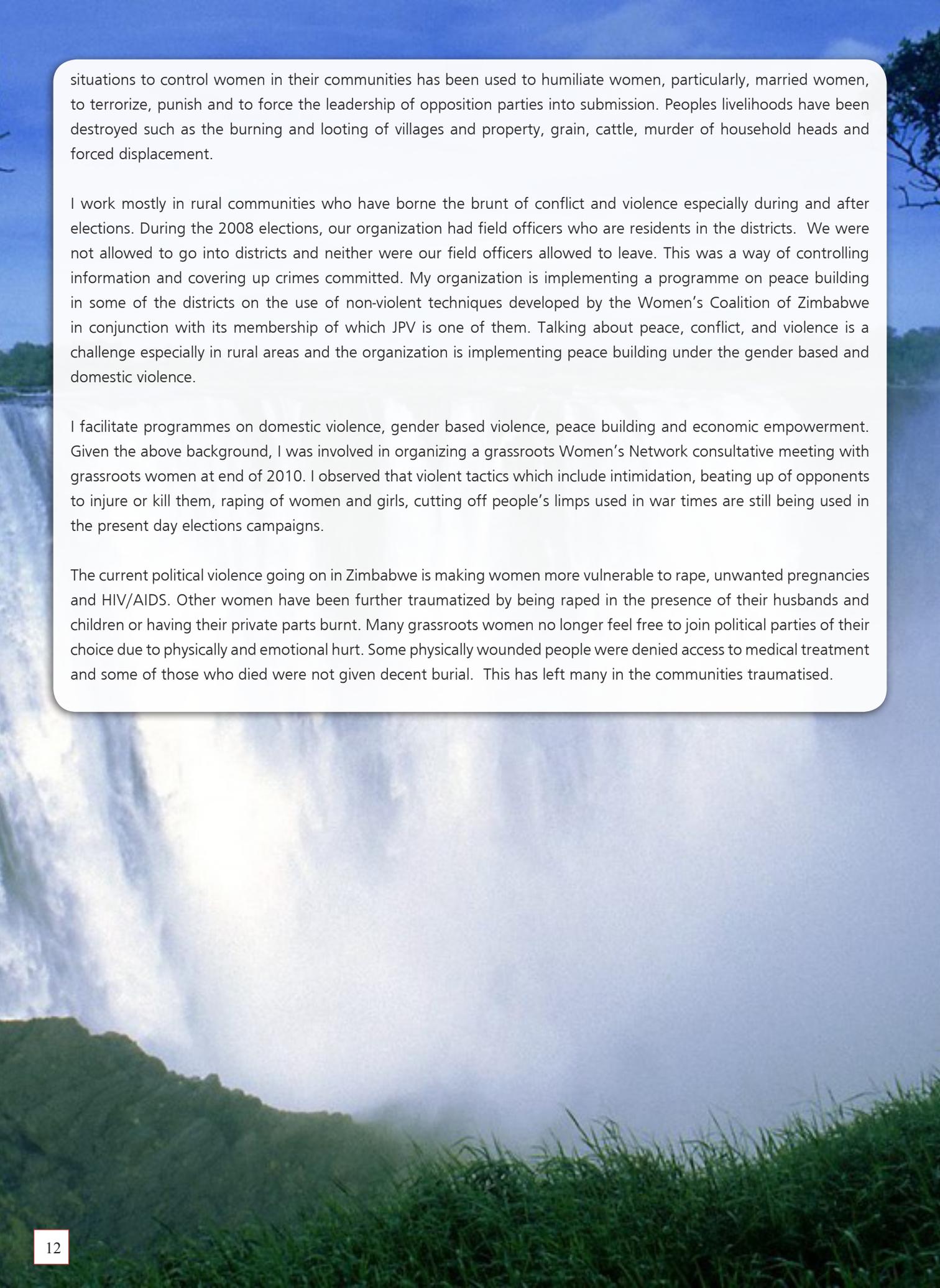
We were interrogated about the role of the organization and why we were doing the study during that particular time when the opposition had just started. They aligned us with the opposition, their assumption was that they also worked with NGOs and educated people. We had to seek for guidance from the group of the war veterans and from the President's Office. The emergence of strong opposition parties resulted in the use of violence as an election campaign tool in most rural areas, rendering females vulnerable to physical and other forms of violence.

Violence against women in the rural areas has been perpetrated particularly under conditions where political contestation has occurred and the political dominance of the ruling party is challenged. Violence that occurred during the conflict years was not addressed at the end of the war era as it fell under the blanket amnesty. National

healing was not considered a necessity resulting in rural women remaining largely outside the development mainstream and valued only for their vote that has kept the ruling party in power for the last twenty years of its rule. The emergence of a strong opposition party in 2000 caused the eruption and escalation of violence during the period preceding the national elections in 2000, 2005 and 2008 and the presidential elections in 2002 and 2008 and the aftermath of the elections.

Violence also occurred during local government elections. Violence has therefore become an entrenched culture in political contestation. Violation of rights has been perpetrated in the form of destruction of livelihoods such as the burning and looting of villages and property, grain, cattle, murder of household heads and forced displacement. Disempowerment tactics include using terror tactics in communities to erode the support system to instill fear in the whole community. Women have faced violence as a result of their husbands, sons and male relatives being suspected to be members of the opposition party. Female candidates and activists have fallen victim to political violence while leaders at the local level such as social workers and health advisors working with opposition candidates are victimized.

In Zimbabwe rural women have not be left untouched by the intimidation and violence. Violations on them take on forms of bodily assault, torture, sexual violence and intimidation, rape including gang rape, forced incestuous sexual intercourse, abduction of young girls who have been kept at militia camps for purposes of sex. Rape and sexual violence which is commonly used in armed conflict



situations to control women in their communities has been used to humiliate women, particularly, married women, to terrorize, punish and to force the leadership of opposition parties into submission. Peoples livelihoods have been destroyed such as the burning and looting of villages and property, grain, cattle, murder of household heads and forced displacement.

I work mostly in rural communities who have borne the brunt of conflict and violence especially during and after elections. During the 2008 elections, our organization had field officers who are residents in the districts. We were not allowed to go into districts and neither were our field officers allowed to leave. This was a way of controlling information and covering up crimes committed. My organization is implementing a programme on peace building in some of the districts on the use of non-violent techniques developed by the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe in conjunction with its membership of which JPV is one of them. Talking about peace, conflict, and violence is a challenge especially in rural areas and the organization is implementing peace building under the gender based and domestic violence.

I facilitate programmes on domestic violence, gender based violence, peace building and economic empowerment. Given the above background, I was involved in organizing a grassroots Women's Network consultative meeting with grassroots women at end of 2010. I observed that violent tactics which include intimidation, beating up of opponents to injure or kill them, raping of women and girls, cutting off people's limbs used in war times are still being used in the present day elections campaigns.

The current political violence going on in Zimbabwe is making women more vulnerable to rape, unwanted pregnancies and HIV/AIDS. Other women have been further traumatized by being raped in the presence of their husbands and children or having their private parts burnt. Many grassroots women no longer feel free to join political parties of their choice due to physically and emotional hurt. Some physically wounded people were denied access to medical treatment and some of those who died were not given decent burial. This has left many in the communities traumatised.



Women subjected to the law of the jungle.

By Aiba Atsin

The 2010-2011 political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, which began after the second round of the Ivorian presidential elections of 2010. The electoral dispute that was associated with electoral fraud between Laurent Gbagbo and his challenger Alassane Ouattara plunged the country in war. The fighting that went on led to the suffering of many people especially women. The Executive Director of AFDI-CI Mrs Atsin in her testimony believes that although people experienced violence in different forms, women suffered most.

Between November 2010 and May 2011, Ivory Coast experienced the worst crisis in the country's history. Indeed following the presidential elections between incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara, there were two contrasting results:

The first results announced by the president of the Independent Electoral Commission were in favor of Alassane Ouattara and the second one was announced by the Constitutional Court in favor of Laurent Gbagbo. Each of the candidates claimed to be elected President of the Republic of Ivory Coast.

Despite the calls by national and international community to reconcile the two camps, the road to reason in the country stalled and the war at the time was inevitable.

From January 2011, fighting begun in the economic capital precisely in the parishes of Abobo and Anyama located in the northern part of the city and hosting the supporters of President Alassane Ouattara. These areas had been declared war zones by the Gbagbo's government.

Their inhabitants were then moved to the southern part of Abidjan and to the surrounding cities including

Adzope where I was living by then. The town of Adzope is located one hundred kilometers from the capital city, in the south east of Ivory Coast.

In February 2011, all the banks were suddenly closed and there was a ban of all types of medicines.

The road from Abidjan to Adzope was unusable because it had become very dangerous due to the presence of pro-Alassane fighters who had occupied the area including the road leading to Abidjan.

In my house, I hosted my mother and my four sisters. We were 14 people including my family members and other relatives and few other people who fled from these combat zones in search for a safe place.

When our provisions got finished, we had to look for food in the bush and we began to take only one meal a day. In addition, we had no access to medical care and the transportation charges had increased threefold.

In March 2011, the Gbagbo government managed to reopen a few banks. The bravest people, who ventured to go to the capital city to withdraw some money in order to feed their families, were always robbed by armed men on their way back home.

In April 2011, when the fighters pro Alassane reached the city of Adzopé, they released all the prisoners; and the prison got burnt, while the police station and the police barracks were occupied by the new forces. Houses were attacked and looted, while women were raped. Our movements were limited, and we were forced to go to bed at 18H 00, and we were all subjected to the law of the jungle.



The abuses continued in the surrounding villages as there was a police check point at the entrance of each village and villagers were systematically robbed of their produce. A few weeks after the former President Gbagbo was arrested and when President Alassane Ouattara came to power, the abuses continued for some few days. First the new authorities reorganized the army under a new name: Republican Army of the Ivory Coast (FRCI).

In Adzope, the FRCI erected barriers at the crossroads in villages and at the entrance to the city. At each station, the travellers were forced to pay a fine. The FRCI imposed a sum of 5000FCFA to each organization. Any case brought to the police had to attract some fees from 10,000FCFA to 25,000FCFA as appropriate. The entire institution of the General Council of the Department of Adzope was occupied by the new forces.

To date, there no case of criminal investigation that has been conducted because the prisons are not functioning. However, apart from these irregularities, economic activities have gradually resumed and students have returned to school.

In May 2011, we conducted a humanitarian mission in the city of Douekoué which is located in western of Ivory Coast. This region experienced the greatest number of massacres, particularly in the area called Carrefour, a home to 4000 people.

We saw the entire area decimated. During our mission, we were shown: a mass grave with the remains of pregnant women, a mass grave for men, a mass grave for children aged 4 to 17 and a mass grave for babies. The results of our survey indicated that 2000 people were massacred in one (1) day.

According to the testimonies gathered on site, pregnant women were disembowelled. The killers believed that these women were carrying male babies. In other situations, all male children were forcibly taken from their mothers and executed. Most young people were also killed at their homes.

In Abidjan, the fighting intensified after April 11, 2011 when the former President was arrested in Yopougon (located in the east of Abidjan). One thing worth noting is that the abuses were committed on both sides, the Gbagbo camp and that of Alassane Outara.

What remains is forging national reconciliation that remains a real challenge for the new government. Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Commission for Dialogue (CDVR) has been established and its president was inaugurated, a lot more needs to be done.



As a female, you have to sacrifice everything to your brothers

By Hisfa Dost Mohammad

As a female, I have faced problems of violence. I come from Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa province which is still neglected and backward. Even though the community is educated, people are still intolerant and consider females of a very low profile.

Although I am from a good and educated family, there are some complications and problems, which I have faced since childhood. When I was young, my sisters and I were always treated in a different manner than my brothers. They were given special treatment as our society is male oriented and females are taught from the very beginning that they have to sacrifice everything for their brothers. Traditional beliefs exist in our society where females are supposed to follow the orders of males and accept decisions taken by males. My mother also went through similar situation. Due to gender discrimination, she was not allowed to work outside but stay at home and look after children.

This concept is passed from generation to generation since many years ago, where mothers teach their daughters to obey their husbands and senior male relatives. This is what I have learned from my mother that I have to cater to needs of my brothers and obey them. My brothers were supported by my mother and they were given priority compared to my sisters and me. I was not allowed to go out of home for enjoyment even on holidays but my brothers were allowed to go out and have fun in parks. I always wished that I could go out as well with my brothers but I was not allowed only until I was 5 years old. After that, my mother told me that I had to stay at home. My brothers were provided with all the facilities as compared to us. Even in the case of food, they were provided the best food of their choice and quantity. Even my grandmother

always supported my brothers that they should get more and good quality food as compared to us. Toys of their choice were provided but we were neglected.

Gender discrimination is the reason why females are far behind males in every field of life in my home area. Boys are given more importance than girls and their education is more stressed than that of girls. When I became an adolescent, my father told me that I couldn't go to parks and bazaar. I stayed home to do house work and studies. When I joined college for further studies, in the beginning, my brother took responsibility of my pick and drop because the vehicle was with my brother only. One time, I was late because I was busy doing my practical work and my brother left me at college. It was the first time I ever travelled by bus and I was surprised that even in local transport, there was no gender equality. Women were standing in the bus because the sitting arrangement was in such a way that only 4 seats were for females and the rest of the bus was for men and boys. If the seats were full, the rest of the females were supposed to stand. Female status is not accepted by the males because this is a male dominant society and in this patriarchal system, everything is decided by men and no one can go against it. And those who are against it suffer. It was very tough for women to keep on standing for the whole way. I was harassed by the bus driver and other men who were travelling because sometimes I had to stand due to non-availability of seats. While standing, the boys always tried to touch or push me but I tried my best to stay safe. I slowly noticed that the world out there was only for males and females couldn't survive. But then I decided not to lose hope and to struggle for my survival in a society where everyone is trying to degrade you. When I joined university, the majority of students were male and there were only three girls in my batch. It was difficult to adjust myself in that environment. When I finished my higher studies, I spent

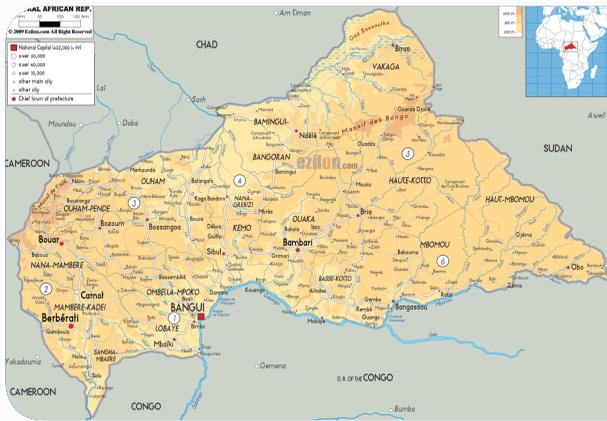


a year at home because my brother wouldn't allow me to find a job and work. After a year, I started applying for jobs and i was called by some organisations. When I discussed this at home, my mother told me to get permission from my brother who was not in favor of my employment. I refused the job and I was detained in my own home. I wasn't allowed to get out.

In my country Pakistan, women have very few choices in selection of occupation. Most of them are teachers, doctors, nurses or beauticians. Due to this reason, I applied for teaching and I did teach for one year until I realized that I am not weak and I can face the society. I started applying for office jobs but I was very disappointed with male's attitude towards females. In every place, men were the superiors and they were trying to exploit me. It was the sexual harassment and everywhere, men demanded sex from me. It was a mental torture for me and I was discouraged. Having faced all this, I know all females are facing the same problem but they are unable to complain due to personal reasons or family background. Even in offices, the seniors exploit women because they know

there is no way out of it. To them, women are helpless because many of them don't know where to go and what to do.

Now I am working in an organization on women's rights and human rights. I am very much concerned about the violations of the rights of women, minorities and children in my community both in public spaces and at home. Our province Khyber Pakhtoon khawa has been facing militancy for many years. Women especially in tribal areas are at risk and their rights are violated. By defending their rights or referring them to rights organizations or the institute, we are facing challenges too. The US State Department categorises Peshwar as one of the areas facing highest crime rate in Pakistan. The area is faced with regional terrorism acts and political violence. In high crime areas, women face extra pressure and their rights are violated on top of violence in their homes. Peshawar, which is located on the edge of the tribal region close to the Afghan border, has been the worst hit Pakistan region with Taliban insurgents over the years.



Working as a Women's human Rights Defender

By Nadia Carine

Nadia Carine, *the Secrétaire Générale, Association des Femmes Juristes de Centrafrique (AFJC) has been working as women's human Rights defender in Bangui, the Capital city of Central African Republic. As the 2011/12 Institute participant, she was able to bring out her experiences and that of her organisation through working with different organisations, groups and individuals in defending the rights of women. Her personal diary shows that in many countries in Africa, the torture of women is a major problem, with rights violated by mostly those who are entrusted with their protection...*

As a Human rights Defender, I was shocked for the first time when I was on a mission to assess the needs of women in an area where I was assigned to work. This mission brought together Human rights Defenders, the Ministry of Justice and Attorneys. It was about trying to find ways on how to improve the conditions of detained women in post conflict situations.

As soon as we arrived at the prison in the city, I entered inside and I asked to see the cell on the women's side. To my surprise, there were three (3) women among whom one aged 50 and two other women in their thirties. They were accused of witchcraft and had been in custody for more than three months (3). The most striking thing is that they were victims of torture by prison guards. One young lady had a broken right leg that was swollen and festered. For the elder one aged 50, the torturers had burned plastic papers and left it to flow down her leg. Both had never got any treatment.

The third one had been impregnated by another prisoner who had run away.

Thus, I first contacted the Sisters of Caritas and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) who took care of these two women victims of violence as well as the pregnant lady. I then made my report and sent it to

UNDP, which speeded up the works for the construction of a women prison.

The second experience was that of a young lady in her thirties and mother of a five (5) months baby. She had been tortured by her employer who accused her of trying to kill him by witchcraft. She had been tied up and left hanging on a tree for an hour.

As a result, she is paralyzed. Parents came to see me where I work at the Centre for Legal Aid and support to women victims of violence. I first talked to NGOs working for Human Rights before going to court to file a complaint with certificates and photos. Unfortunately, we have not been successful because the perpetrator of the violence who was also the employer to this lady happened to be the son of a government official in the country.

Another experience is of an old lady aged 80 who was accused of witchcraft. People beat her and almost killed her. We drove the old lady to the hospital because she is a widow, has no relatives around since all her children are abroad. Since recently, at the Center, we are seeing cases of rape of minors and the perpetrators are the biological fathers. Quite often, parents prefer to deal with these issues within the family because the matter is taboo.

Through awareness campaigns to individuals or groups or even through the media, I sensitize them about people's rights and the consequences of violence on a human being and within the society. Another important activity is the dissemination of materials on Human Rights in general, Women's rights and Children rights and in particular, materials on violence against Women at the national and international levels. We have also made an effort to introduce abused women in income generating activities (IGA) within a program of financial empowerment of the victims.



Raped in front of their families....

By Lydie Solange Yahoumbi

Lydie Solange Yahoumbi, aged 37 years is a journalist by profession living in the seventh District of Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR), that was a battlefield during the various military coup d'états that rocked the capital Bangui between 2001 – 2003. As a Producer and Director for a Rural Radio in Central African Republic, she was a participant in the 2011/12 Exchange Institute. While she has been active in using the media to defend the rights of the population and women, unstable political settings and draconian legislations remain major impediments for all women human rights defenders...

On May 28th, 2001, the Central African Republic experienced a failed military coup that was attempted by the former President, General Andre Kolingba. The then government led by President Ange Félix Patassé had sought the intervention and support of the rebel troops of Jean Pierre Bemba from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The targeted districts were the sixth and seventh districts because they were adjacent the Ubangi River and predominantly hosted ethnic groups such as Yakoma, Sango, Ngbougou and Gbanziri. In addition, many areas such as Ngaragba, were suspected of harbouring some fugitives in the military who were involved in the coup, hence these fugitives had to be arrested or executed.

Given this situation, the population in these areas lived in fear. This was followed by migration of populations to different areas in the city following the logic of ethnic reconstruction in different areas of Bangui. These people were in search for peace in the situation of violence and terror caused by the presence of members of the regular

army and the rebels. Many families were forced to leave Ngaragba to join their families living in other non targeted areas. As a result, many households were decimated through the torture, violence and displacement.

Women carrying children on their backs and heavy luggage on their heads were crossing the city towards areas supporting President Patassé and where militias led by Boy Rabe and Miskine were operating. Meanwhile, women who had been married by local people but were not from these areas also had to leave their husbands and their households and join their places of origin and their ethnic groups and families living along the river.

The Banyamulenge under Bemba had occupied Ngaragba where we were living. People were subjected to all forms of abuse under their command. Older women and girls were raped in their homes in the sight of their husbands, children and parents. The rebels looted goods (TV sets, radio, clothes, and foam mattresses) that they were taking across the other side of the river towards the town of Zongo on the opposite side at the bank of the Ubangi. Civilians especially males were arrested or beaten if they were not executed. Although this tense situation lasted for more than a week before the rebels finally left, but the damage on the population especially women was grave.

Women and girls who were raped by the Banyamulenge in front of their husbands, their fathers, or the entire family or even in public or on the street were highly traumatized. Yet in our tradition, such acts are not acceptable nor are they tolerable. As a result, some victims decided to commit suicide. Stigma also led many

people to be marginalized, some of them left the area and went into isolation; in cities the family settings broke up; while the community also continued to marginalize the victims of sexual abuse.

During all these events, I had to flee with my family. All our belongings had been looted to the extent that doors and iron sheets have been removed from our houses. When we finally returned, we had to undertake new and unexpected expenses to recover from the damage. Funny enough, according to information from some neighbours, our dog had also been slaughtered and eaten by the militiamen led by Bemba.

At the time of these events and several months later, I could not resume my activities in the Rural Radio. Everyone who was from the same ethnic group with President Kolingba was banned from all radio programs. Police records were established for everyone in order to monitor all the activities of the returnees from Zongo in DRC.

It took the intervention of the Minister of Communication, who was also from an ethnic group from the riverside, to allow us to access the services alongside our former colleagues. The coup plotted on 28th May 2001 destroyed the former relationships among people from different ethnic groups in Central African Republic. Mixed marriages between local populations and those of the savannah regions have been weakened. There have been many cases of divorce and separation coupled with mutual distrust and lack of dialogue between people from different ethnic groups.

My activities as a Human Rights Defender and my membership to the AFPC were motivated by the negative implications of experiences during the violence that rocked the sixth and seventh districts in Bangui. Since the implementation of our subcommittee, our office has conducted several activities funded by development partners namely BINUCA (United Nations Integrated Office in Central African Republic), UNFPA, PANOS Institute, UNDP, etc.

Their support enabled us to achieve the activities with the female population in the CAR as initially planned and to raise their awareness on the need for the reconstruction of civic peace through the following actions:

1. Organize magazines and TV programs about violence in war zones in the Northern CAR;
2. Organize workshops and train trainers on legal statutes on the protection of citizens especially women in times of armed conflicts;
3. Organize roundtables involving leaders of political parties from the side of the presidential majority, the democratic opposition and religious movements to create a synergetic action on peace and the fight against gender-based violence;
4. Carry our mass awareness campaigns through programs held in public places in Bangui and in its surroundings (Mbaiki, Boda, Boali) ;
5. Undertake field visits and exchange programs in schools and universities on the concepts and practices of violence;
6. Organize public radio shows and panel discussions on issues of violence, peace building and national unity in Bangui and in areas involved in the DDR program (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration) of ex-combatants.



Marriage, children abandoned due to blows, insults and violence

By Angele Bahige

Wars and conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo over the past decade have been synonymous with cases of sexual violence against women. Rape has particularly become more violent and more common, coupled with the lack of or breakdown of the institutional frameworks that are supposed to protect women from all forms of human rights abuses and gender based violence.

Angele Bahige, the Coordinatrice de l'Organisation, Appui aux Initiatives de Bienetre Familial [AIBEF] was a participant in the 2011/12 institute. She notes that the gender based violence has continued to have serious impact on the lives of women and women must stand up firm against all forms of exploitation and injustice that demeans them...

I witnessed my cousin's plight. She was married to a man older than herself and who was from a region different from ours. Immediately after her adolescence, and as a result of instability in the household where she used to live, she was compelled, by force of circumstances, to get into early marriage.

One in her household, she lived in an almost permanent situation of violence and discrimination. My cousin came to live with her husband in a household where there were seven brothers under her husband's care, and most of whom were older than the lady, and all of them were unemployed.

Soon after, my cousin found herself totally overwhelmed by that situation. In whatever she did and every time, her husband and his brothers kept watch on her. She was totally under the command of all of them although she was still very young, without any child and without any person to run to.

Already, in the first months of her marriage, she began to suffer insults from the brothers-in law who commanded her at any time to do this or that, to wash their clothes, to give them food even when the meal was not ready yet. Unfortunately, when she complained to her husband, or when the brothers- in- law abused her in his presence; he would instead side with his brothers against his wife.

Each brother-in-law was giving orders and bullied her his way and according to his will. Unfortunately, the husband did not do anything to defend her even when he realized that she was suffering. Actually, my cousin was a maid doing all sorts of work for everyone, with no rights; even the right to raise her voice.

Being from the Eastern Congo (her husband was from the western), my cousin was called Rwandese, which was a very serious accusation at the time when Congo was at war against Rwanda.

To escape this harsh family life, she decided to further her studies in an Institution of Higher Education where I was also studying. It was important for her to spend the day away from this household environment of violence and injustice.

When she got her first baby, that's when I was brought in to live with her and help her by looking after the child and allow her time to study well. That's when I personally experienced her suffering.

Meanwhile, the family life was becoming tough as the husband began to beat her at the least claim she dared make. For any simple allegation that a brother- in-law accused her of or any fault that she may not have committed, the husband used to beat her and ridicule her in front of his brothers.



toomuchvenusenvy.blogspot.com

By then we were living in Equator Province. Two years after their marriage, the husband lost his job. This forced us to leave for the capital Kinshasa. My cousin and I had just completed our studies.

My cousin's husband was from Kinshasa. So by going there, we were entering the stronghold of the same family and the source of the wife's unhappiness. It was not only the bullying from 7 people that she was coping with, but the terror of the entire tribe.

In Kinshasa, more than ten people came to live in the house; they used to rotate, demanding this or that; although their brother was no longer working. They could take her personal property like clothing and she could not dare to speak out. They were the ones running the house and their word was law. For the meantime, my cousin and I, had got jobs.

In Kinshasa, we met people from our province and from our ethnic group. They were informed about the kind

of life my cousin was going through. That's how they helped us to get jobs whereas my cousin's husband was still jobless.

Since we were now working, it was finally my cousin and I who had to feed the entire family and provide for everyone. This increased our ordeal; the husband had become even meaner. He began to keep an eye on her, to question everything, accusing her of all sins. Whenever my sister could buy a new cloth, a perfume or a pair of shoes, her husband would accuse her of prostitution, and quite often in the presence of his brothers.

Whenever she returned home late because of professional reasons or for lack of taxis in a city where transport is hectic, the husband used to throw her down and to beat her. He could even throw away all she had come with. As for his brothers, they could add abuse to the suffering.

The relatives of the husband wanted their brother to marry a girl from their tribe that speaks their language.



My cousin was considered to be an intruder who had to be pushed away.

The ordeal lasted for ten years, until when, unable to bear it any more, unable to put up with the blows, insults and violence, my cousin decided to leave. After she had obtained a divorce in proper form, she decided to abandon her three children and start a new life elsewhere.

As a result of this experience, she decided to leave the capital city; also because even after leaving the household, her ex-husband continued to follow her everywhere, to threaten her, to come and beat her wherever she was living. She was not allowed to see her children, or to feel at peace. Along the way, she feared at any moment to bang into her ex-husband and being beaten in broad daylight on the street. She was afraid of reliving the same experience of violence. That is why, after her divorce, she decided to leave the capital city, to quit her job and leave her three children and go back home in her province of Bukavu.

In Bukavu, she is currently remaking her life. She started a new family with a husband and three other children who helped her to forget her former situation. She got a new job and is presently enjoying full social, familial and professional situations.

I also had to return upcountry. Because of my academic background, I was easily reintegrated. With my cousin, we quickly set up as part of new initiatives within an organization that we put in place and work in the field of development at the grassroots level, along with rural communities and women groups.

In a way or the other, as experience and its impact, violence and discrimination that we experienced, my cousin and I have opened new opportunities for us. These conditions helped us to mature, to understand that life is really a struggle and that we should not give up in a situation of injustice. We have understood the need to be available for and committed to help other women living in situations of injustice, violence, and social insecurity, cultural or material poverty.

Difficulties are part of life. It is after we have ourselves experienced rough situations that we can better feel the misfortune of others and that we can realize the need to take things rather positively.