



نہواتین محاذِ عمل

Women's Action Forum (WAF)

NEWSLETTER

January - July 2009

Overview

WAF Islamabad/Rawalpindi Chapter strongly exhorts the government to ensure that the rights of minorities and women are protected in accordance with the Constitution of Pakistan and the laws of the country. WAF is seriously concerned at the poor governance and deteriorating law and order and security situation in the country. The current army actions against the militants in the Malakand District on the request of the Provincial government and tribal leaders appears to have resolved the volatile situation but needs to be part of a larger strategy of taking on the militants powerfully while protecting innocent citizens to avoid further insurgencies. The army both in Swat and Waziristan has been badly hit but has, so far, persevered.

WAF is also concerned at the serious humanitarian crisis arising from the magnitude of internally displaced persons in the country. 2.5 million persons have fled to escape the fighting in Swat which can create a massive backlash if they are unable to return home to what is left of the damaged and destroyed infrastructure of that once peaceful area.

Pakistan's eighteen - month old transition to democracy is still on shaky ground. Will the new, independent judiciary take note to repeal the Hadood Ordinances, the Law of Evidence and the Blasphemy laws that discriminate against women and minority members as victims of systematic brutality? The guiding light reflected in the birth of Pakistan was the inclusiveness and respect for diversity but the recent incidences of organized violence and barbarity in various parts of the country are against the very foundation of our nation and if not controlled can lead to anarchy. The way forward is only through peaceful means, institutional development and good governance.

In peace and solidarity,

WAF Working Committee Islamabad/Rawalpindi Chapter.

Zarina Salamat, Memoona Rauf Khan, Nasreen Sultana, Nighat Hasibullah, Khalida Babree, Samina Imtiaz, Aqsa Khan, Farwa Zafar and Nageen Hyat

WAF Announcements...

Although still with a few Lacunas such as the removing of the clause stating Domestic Violence as a criminal offence in the original bill, WAF members celebrated its passing in the parliament since it was indeed a culmination of years of struggle and recognition that the issue of domestic violence is one that warrants serious legal action against the abusers.

WAF Islamabad/Rwp was represented by some members at the Prime Minister's function on 8th March - International Women's Day. It was a historical breakthrough for WAF National at Anis Haroon being nominated by the Prime Minister as the Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women. It is WAF's long-standing demand that the Commission be strengthened to enable positive change for women.

WAF has always shown serious concern at the deteriorating security in Pakistan at the hands of extremists. In this regard **WAF organized a panel discussion** on the “**Growing threats to National Security particularly to Women, Minorities, Art and Culture**”.

Speakers: Dr. Parvez Hoodbhoy Dr. Maleeha Lodhi Dr. A.H Nayyar

Dr. Parvez Hoodbhoy, peace activist expressed his opinion by stressing on the need for a collective struggle to counter the threat of growing terrorism. He pointed out that one off events or a demo will not create or bring any change until and unless we sustain the momentum by keeping the pressure on State for ensuring security to its citizens. He also shared that extremist elements within the different components of the Establishment, Military and Government have to be routed out, which may become fatal for the country in the next five years. Extremism he pointed with all its negativities has a direct impact on women in limiting them to private spaces, it curtails education and economic opportunities for women through regulating their private lives and leaving no scope for any public representation. **Dr. A.H Nayyar** expressed similar concerns citing examples of the growing insurgencies in various parts of the country and marginalisation of space for women, minorities and the Arts. **Dr. Maleeha Lodhi** called in to offer her regrets since she was indisposed and could not attend the meeting.

WAF speaks out Strongly Against the Gojra Incident **Statement and Demonstration to support Minorities**

The Women Action Forum Islamabad/ Rwp Chapter condemned the brutal, inhuman and shameful act of violence targeting the Christian community in Gojra. WAF demanded the government must act to prevent any attacks based on a person's faith and must ensure interfaith harmony by repealing discriminatory laws and policies particularly the blasphemy law which has been misused against the minorities.

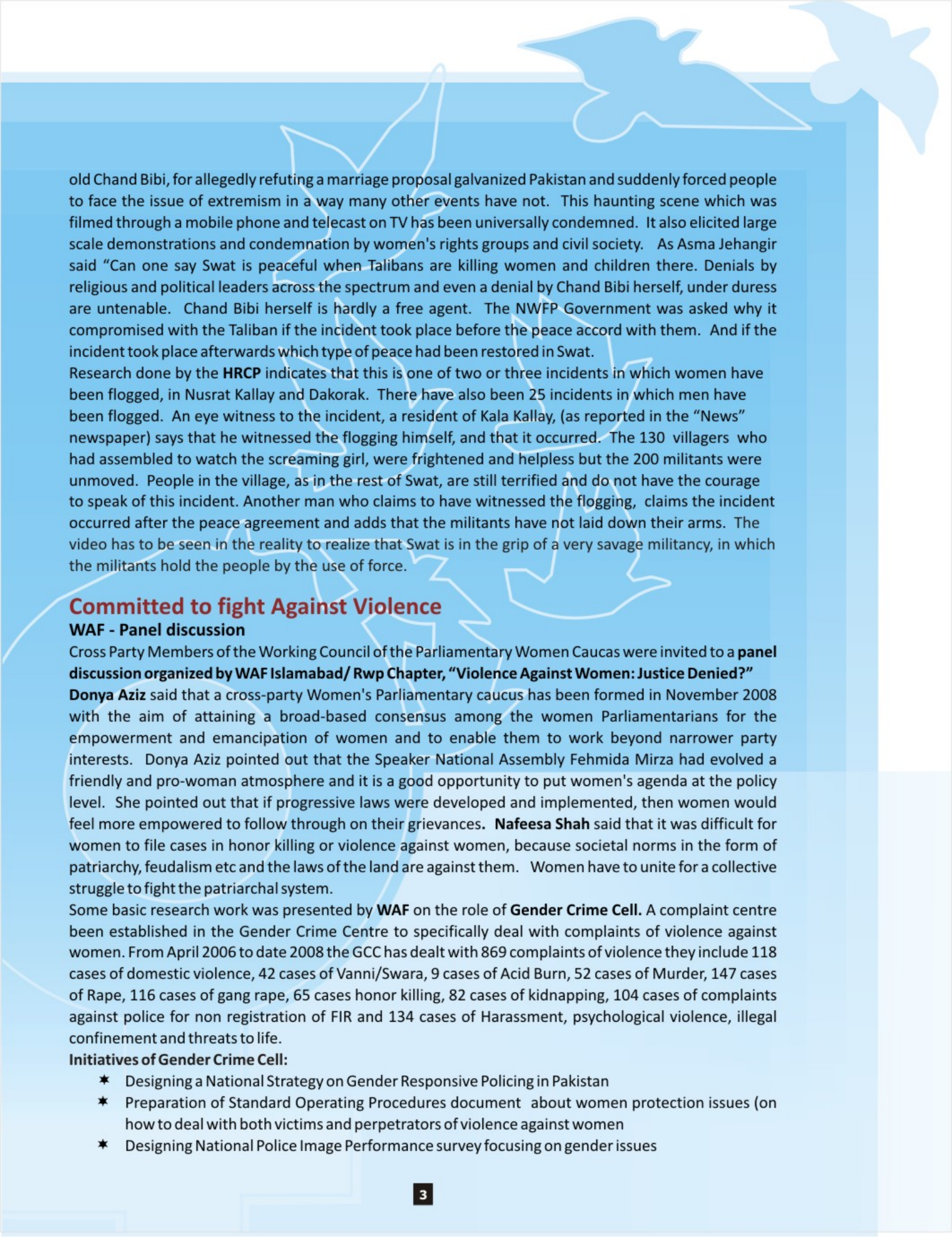
The WAF Islamabad/ Rwp expressed its solidarity and participated in the rally on Constitution Avenue, Islamabad for the victims of the Gojra incident, with the organizers Christian Study Center, Fatima Church, Chief of Islamabad Churches and interfaith groups working on peace building.



The Custodians of Faith Terrorize People **Floggings in Swat condemned**

On April 15, the National Commission on the Status of Women (**NCSW**) held a seminar in which Bushra Gohar Chairperson Standing Committee for Women's Development, Justice Nasira Iqbal and Anis Haroon the Chairperson of the NCSW were the panelists.

The current Convener of WAF Memoona Rauf presented WAF's position on the flogging of a girl incident in Swat. She stated The airing of the two minute video which captures the flogging of 17 year



old Chand Bibi, for allegedly refuting a marriage proposal galvanized Pakistan and suddenly forced people to face the issue of extremism in a way many other events have not. This haunting scene which was filmed through a mobile phone and telecast on TV has been universally condemned. It also elicited large scale demonstrations and condemnation by women's rights groups and civil society. As Asma Jehangir said "Can one say Swat is peaceful when Taliban's are killing women and children there. Denials by religious and political leaders across the spectrum and even a denial by Chand Bibi herself, under duress are untenable. Chand Bibi herself is hardly a free agent. The NWFP Government was asked why it compromised with the Taliban if the incident took place before the peace accord with them. And if the incident took place afterwards which type of peace had been restored in Swat.

Research done by the **HRCP** indicates that this is one of two or three incidents in which women have been flogged, in Nusrat Kallay and Dakorak. There have also been 25 incidents in which men have been flogged. An eye witness to the incident, a resident of Kala Kallay, (as reported in the "News" newspaper) says that he witnessed the flogging himself, and that it occurred. The 130 villagers who had assembled to watch the screaming girl, were frightened and helpless but the 200 militants were unmoved. People in the village, as in the rest of Swat, are still terrified and do not have the courage to speak of this incident. Another man who claims to have witnessed the flogging, claims the incident occurred after the peace agreement and adds that the militants have not laid down their arms. The video has to be seen in the reality to realize that Swat is in the grip of a very savage militancy, in which the militants hold the people by the use of force.

Committed to fight Against Violence

WAF - Panel discussion

Cross Party Members of the Working Council of the Parliamentary Women Caucuses were invited to a **panel discussion organized by WAF Islamabad/ Rwp Chapter, "Violence Against Women: Justice Denied?"**

Donya Aziz said that a cross-party Women's Parliamentary caucus has been formed in November 2008 with the aim of attaining a broad-based consensus among the women Parliamentarians for the empowerment and emancipation of women and to enable them to work beyond narrower party interests. Donya Aziz pointed out that the Speaker National Assembly Fehmida Mirza had evolved a friendly and pro-woman atmosphere and it is a good opportunity to put women's agenda at the policy level. She pointed out that if progressive laws were developed and implemented, then women would feel more empowered to follow through on their grievances. **Nafeesa Shah** said that it was difficult for women to file cases in honor killing or violence against women, because societal norms in the form of patriarchy, feudalism etc and the laws of the land are against them. Women have to unite for a collective struggle to fight the patriarchal system.

Some basic research work was presented by **WAF** on the role of **Gender Crime Cell**. A complaint centre been established in the Gender Crime Centre to specifically deal with complaints of violence against women. From April 2006 to date 2008 the GCC has dealt with 869 complaints of violence they include 118 cases of domestic violence, 42 cases of Vanni/Swara, 9 cases of Acid Burn, 52 cases of Murder, 147 cases of Rape, 116 cases of gang rape, 65 cases honor killing, 82 cases of kidnapping, 104 cases of complaints against police for non registration of FIR and 134 cases of Harassment, psychological violence, illegal confinement and threats to life.

Initiatives of Gender Crime Cell:

- ★ Designing a National Strategy on Gender Responsive Policing in Pakistan
- ★ Preparation of Standard Operating Procedures document about women protection issues (on how to deal with both victims and perpetrators of violence against women
- ★ Designing National Police Image Performance survey focusing on gender issues



WAF Commemorated The National Women's Day on February 12th 2009 by organizing a panel discussion on "The Rise of Fundamentalism and Militancy Creating a State of Terror in Swat".

Eminent speakers comprised of **Ms. Sherry Rehman** Federal Minister of Information and Broadcasting, **Dr. Rubina Saigol** Social Development Activist and **Syed Talat Hussain** Senior Journalist and Talk Show Host of AAJ Network.

At **WAF's General Body meeting** in late 2008, **eminent writer and journalist Ahmad Rashid** spoke on the sensitive topic of **Security Issues: Militancy and Solutions**. The meeting was well-attended by members and supporters and followed by strong exchanges in the Q & A session.

WAF Islamabad/Rwp held their Working Committee elections in **June 2009**. The following members were elected: Zarina Salamat, Nasreen Sultana, Memoona Khan, Nageen Hyat, Aqsa Khan, Nighat Hasibullah, Khalida Babree, Samina Imtiaz and Farwa Zafar.

The Nomad Gallery, Islamabad in conjunction with the WAF-Isb/Rwp Chapter and members of Lighthouse School, Barakahu are supporting 120 displaced families (680 women, children & men) from Swat since May 2009. They are based in Maloot Village, Barakahu, on the outskirts of Islamabad.

Our support/donations consist of food rations, clothing, bedding, water containers, toys, medicines + we have conducted art therapy workshops and set up medical camps at a central location which is accessible to the families. All donations are made by us on a personal basis and by the kind support of family members, friends and philanthropists. Since the IDP's hail from District Matta, which is undergoing a major army operation against the militants, they are unable to head back home in the near future and will need further support to survive. Since Ramazan is very close more donations are required to meet their needs....

YOUR SUPPORT & GENEROSITY IS NEEDED AT THIS DIFFICULT TIME to provide rations and medical support...

For further information kindly contact us through email:
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