



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:

It is rare that Afghan women and girls have any support when they face criminal prosecution or civil proceedings, but Medica Afghanistan, in accordance with its mission, provides that support. Medica Afghanistan extends legal services to women and girls, defending them in criminal cases and supporting them in civil proceedings, representations, and mediations. Medica Afghanistan also seeks to raise legal awareness and offers legal advice.

Over the first three months of 2015, the legal aid department of Medica Afghanistan offered substantial legal aid services to women and girls in need. They defended 45 women charged in criminal cases and represented 51 women in civil cases. They provided legal support to victims of violence in 15 cases. They provided mediation services to 75 clients, legal advice to 126, and legal awareness-raising sessions to 192 additional women and girls. As a result, 7 women charged with criminal offenses received reductions in their punishment, and 12 women were released following investigation and subsequent court appearances. In civil pro-

ceedings 24 cases were resolved in favor of Medica Afghanistan's clients. The cases of 15 victims of violence were presented at the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) department, resulting in the conviction of one perpetrator based on EVAW law. Medica Afghanistan's lawyers also conducted legal awareness sessions for all clients while providing legal aid, irrespective of the nature of the case. In addition, Medica Afghanistan's social workers, in cooperation with the Ministry of Women Affairs, found employment for six indigent clients in jobs such as food processing and cleaning.

lawyers resulted in their requesting Medica Afghanistan to offer the training again to their legal and judicial colleagues.



Psychosocial services to help traumatized women:

In the last three months, Medica Afghanistan's psychosocial and health experts offered psychosocial counseling to 355 clients, individually or in groups, in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar. They also conducted a four day training on the Trauma Sensitive Approach for a group of highly motivated members of the legal community, both men and women. The participants learned the difference between doing psychosocial work, as Medica Afghanistan's counselors do, and applying a trauma sensitive approach in the legal setting. Moreover, they grasped the techniques of supporting their clients in a more professional way, while maintaining their own emotional well being. Providing this influential training to the

2. Advocacy

Working to Eliminate Gender Discrimination:

These three months saw vital gains for Medica Afghanistan in championing women's rights and combating gender discrimination. Sectors targeted for simultaneous advocacy were education, access to health services, political participation, and employment opportunities.

While there have been many gains for women in Afghanistan over the past decade, increased violence against women is still a challenge and a concern for all citizens and civil society members. Therefore, the Afghan Women's Network organized a meeting to discuss recent violence cases and find a joint strategy to decrease incidents of violence against women. The main causes of increased violence against women are the reluctance of the authorities to implement the rule of law, the general lack of awareness of women's legal rights, the resulting culture of impunity for perpetrators, and more generally, unemployment and illiteracy.

Consequently, the representative of Medica Afghanistan emphasized two vital tactics: first, lobbying for implementation of the EVAW Law,

and secondly, sensitizing the judiciary, including EAW department prosecutors, through trainings, workshops, and awareness raising sessions, to apply EAW Law in practice. Finally, all the participants agreed to organize a protest in front of the Supreme Court on 23 February 2015 to convey the voice of victims of violence to the relevant officials. Medica Afghanistan joined other civil rights activists chanting “We want justice” to demand punishment for the perpetrators of violence.



Participating in One Billion Rising (OBR):

One Billion Rising (OBR) is a global movement in more than 200 countries to end rape and sexual violence against women. The campaign highlights the startling statistic that one in every three women on the planet will be raped or beaten in her lifetime. Therefore, on 14 February 2015, Medica Afghanistan took part in the OBR event that was organized locally by the Afghan Women’s Network. This campaign is being celebrated in Afghanistan, a country where violence against women is increasing.

Strategizing with the European Union to protect Women’s Human Rights Defenders:

In October, the Director of Medica Afghanistan participated with local experts in a workshop presented by the European Union to draft strategies to safeguard Afghan Human Rights Defenders, in accordance with EU general guidelines for Women’s Human Rights

Defenders. Following that workshop, Medica Afghanistan’s Director participated in the first bi-monthly meeting on Human Rights Defenders held by the EU delegation in Kabul on 15 January 2015. In this meeting the discussion focused on the feasibility of the actions specified in the EU strategy developed in October. Participants also exchanged views on the current situation of human rights defenders in Afghanistan and the mechanisms and tools needed to ensure their protection.

Medica Afghanistan’s Director also took part in the EU’s second bi-monthly meeting on protection of Human Rights Defenders, where the following topics were discussed:

1. Hotlines: Currently, two hotlines operate in Afghanistan. The first is for policewomen harassed at the police station or during the course of their work. It was agreed that this dedicated line should not be used for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). The second hotline (number 6464) is for women victims of Violence Against Women (VAW). Funded by the Asia Foundation, UK, and Australia, it is staffed by 11 counselors and currently operates daily between 08.00—16.00. A proposal to extend hotline operations to 24/7, expand service to 14 provinces, and also accommodate HRDs is being explored. Discussion centered on whether this line could serve HRDs in addition to cases of VAW. It was agreed to have a vetting system involving both a Kabul-based central committee and the regional focal points. It was also agreed to establish Terms of Reference (TORs) for the regional focal points, the central committee, and the vetting process.

Contributing to the EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society:

On 25 February 2015, the Director of Medica Afghanistan participated in a workshop on the EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Afghanistan at the EU Delegation. Medica Afghanistan participated in an EU survey to set

their priorities and funding for civil society. Medica Afghanistan's Director also had an individual interview with EU representatives to share her views regarding the challenges and future needs of civil society, such as clarifying the role of civil society as a bridge between government and the people, improving collaboration between civil society and government, strengthening the internal accountability and transparency of weaker civil society organizations, overcoming the lack of needs assessment and capacity building for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and requiring donors that support short-term projects to conduct and report impact evaluations.

Supporting the Franco-German Award for the Afghan Woman of the Year:

The German Embassy named the Director of Medica Afghanistan to the jury responsible for awarding the Franco-German Award to the Afghan Woman of the Year for 2015. The Embassies of Germany and France established the award in 2014 to be given on International Women's Day in recognition of the contribution of an outstanding woman. The former laureates were chosen from the area of arts and culture (Amina Hasani and Sharifa Danish). This year the focal area was business and economics, and the winner was Ms. Atifa Mansoori, founder and director of the Abdullah Moslem Company, created in 2011. The company exports saffron to Dubai, India, Iran, and is in the process of contracting with companies in Turkey and China. It also exports handicrafts and carpets made by women. In 2008, Ms. Mansoori had established a local NGO, New Community Development Organisation, to empower women. Its activities include building the capacity of women to make them better agents for trade and marketing, and with the support of USAID organizing 13 exhibitions in Herat and elsewhere. She also established the Razme Ghalam Foundation in 2007 to provide basic capacity building classes for 500 young children and housewives. The

laureate received EUR 20,000 to support her business.

Demanding Inclusion of Women in Government:

In February 2015, Medica Afghanistan took part in a peaceful march organized by the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) on women's political participation. Afghan women cast 38% of the votes in the last Afghan presidential election and strongly contributed to the possibility of creating a National Unity Government, led by president Ashraf Ghani and chief executive officer Abdullah Abdullah. The protesters who gathered in front of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Kabul demanded that Ghani abide by his pre-election promise to nominate at least four female ministers to his government.

3. Awards

Medica Afghanistan's Herat regional office received an award from UNHCR in recognition of its work and effective collaboration with that UN organization in Herat province.

Medica Afghanistan received the Afghan Women's Network Award on International Women's Day, March 8, 2015, in recognition of its efforts, support, cooperation, and commitment to the development of the AWN for the past 20 years.

The director of Medica Afghanistan, Humaira Rasuli received an award from the Commission on Women's Affairs, Civil Society and Human Rights of the Upper House of the Afghanistan Parliament "in recognition of her civil services and tireless efforts to promote human rights and social capacities for women survivors of Gender Based Violence."