ARIC

From: Karima Hessami <karima.hessami@undp.org>
To: <gender@brain.net.pk>; <npourzand@unicef.org>; Katharina Lumpp <lumpp@unhcr.ch>; Homa Sabri <unchs@isb.paknet.com.pk>; Nancy Dupree <aric@brain.net.pk>; GraberR <GraberR@whoafg.org>; Sippi Azerbaijani-Moghadam <womensco@pes.comsats.net.pk>
Sent: Friday, June 29, 2001 10:08 AM
Subject: SG report on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan

>From Norah Niland

Dear Colleagues,

I have, literally, just received this; I have not read it but given the very short timeframe I am forwarding it to you for any comments you may have. I am sorry but it appears that I need to receive these by first thing on Monday morning (02 July) so i can forward them to Geneva which needs to finalize the report.

With thanks for your understanding on this, regards, norah

-------- Original Message --------
Subject: SG report on the situation of women and girls in territories occupied by Afghan armed groups
Date: Thu, 28 Jun 2001 22:06:58 +0200
From: "Christina Saunders" <csaunders.hchr@unog.ch>
To: norah@UNDP@AFG.ORG.PK, "Norah Niland"
<Norah.Niland.UNCHR@unog.ch>, karima.hessami@undp.org

Dear Norah,

please find pasted below a draft report for the sub-commission on the situation of women and girls in territories occupied by Afghan armed groups. You will see that it still needs work but I thought that by sharing it with you at this stage it could be finalized faster. It is brief as it will merely provide new information not already mentioned in the comprehensive CSW report on the same issue, which will be circulated at the Sub-Comm as a reference document. The draft has been based on information provided by KH to the CHR, the UN Weekly Updates and the PHR report.

6/29/01
Please kindly revise, cut and add where appropriate. As the other report contains the substantive overview of the situation, how much material do you think we should include in this one? A lot of the information is from UN Weekly Update is that ok as a source? Please cut out any politically sensitive material or material you think is irrelevant? What structure should the report take? Order? Chronological or by subject? The concluding remarks are particularly important as they are normally picked up for the resolution thus your insight as to what the sub-committee should recommend would be useful. I have also included some specific queries in the text in bold.

As usual we are working to a tight deadline so please let me have your comments asap, preferably before Sunday and if possible make changes directly on the text, so that we can submit the report to docs control in time for editing/translation.

Many thanks for your usual help and guidance.

Best regards, Christina

DRAFT 27 June 2001

Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights
Report of the Secretary-General on the situation of women and girls in the territories occupied by Afghan armed groups

I. Introduction

The present report is submitted in accordance with resolution 2000/11, in which the Sub-Commission requested the Secretary-General to report on the
situation of women and girls in the territories controlled by Afghan armed groups.

This report is an update to the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the forty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of women in March 2001 entitled, The situation of women and girls in Afghanistan (E/CN.6/2001/2/Add.1). The earlier report provides an overview of the current situation of women and girls in Afghanistan against the background of the deteriorating socio-economic conditions, continued conflict and discriminatory edicts issued by the Taliban authorities. The report also contains information about actions taken by the United Nations system and assistance community in Afghanistan to improve the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan as recommended in the Economic and Social Council resolution. It also identifies areas in which further efforts are needed.

To avoid duplication the present report will only include relevant new developments/material since March and should be read with the earlier substantive report, which will be circulated at the Sub-Commission as a reference document.

In recent months a number of resolutions have been adopted on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan:

At its forty-fifth session (March 2001) acting without a vote, the Commission on the Status of Women recommended to the Economic and Social Council to adopt a resolution on discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan. It strongly condemned the continuing grave violations of the human rights of women and girls, including all forms of discrimination against them in all areas of the country, particularly in those under the
control of the Taliban. It also condemned the continued restrictions on women's access to health care and the systematic violation of their human rights in Afghanistan, including the restrictions on access to education and employment outside the home, on freedom of movement and on freedom from intimidation, harassment and violence.

At its fifty-seventh session (April 2001) the Commission on Human Rights adopted resolution 2001/13 on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, without a vote. In which it strongly condemned the mass killings and systematic human rights violations against civilians and persons deprived of their liberty, for reasons related to the armed conflict and noted with alarm the resumption by the Taliban of a wider conflict during the past summer, resulting in the massive forced displacement of the civilian population. It also noted with deep concern the continuing pattern of human rights violations in Afghanistan and the continuation of armed hostilities and the complex nature of the conflict, including its ethnic, religious and political aspects, which had resulted in extensive human suffering and forced displacement. The continuing grave violations of the human rights of women and girls were condemned, and all Afghan parties were urged to respect fully all human rights. The Commission decided to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan for one year.

II. Background information-the ongoing conflict do you think in this type of update I should limit the amount of info about the conflict? and instead just stick to new developments? I included it because it is not covered in much detail in the CSW report.
The ongoing conflict is making a catastrophic humanitarian situation even worse. The conflict and its destructive impact on communities and the right to life, and the accumulated and indirect effects of war contribute to a massive human rights deficit. This deficit includes the denial of the right to food, the right to health and the right to education. Nor do Afghans enjoy freedom from fear or freedom of association. The collapse of civil society and the limited ability of Afghans to participate in or influence decision-making have a direct and negative impact on their right to life and other rights essential for livelihood and survival with a modicum of dignity. Women and girls suffer disproportionately in the realization and enjoyment of all their rights and there are few indications that this will improve significantly any time in the near future.

Despite an agreement in November 2000 by the two warring parties to initiate a process of dialogue under the Secretary-General's good offices, aimed at bringing about, in the shortest possible time, an end to the armed conflict in Afghanistan through political means. Unfortunately, both parties have engaged in military operations resulting in resumption of conflict in different parts of Afghanistan, extending from July 2000 to date.

All the warring parties have been guilty of grave breaches of international humanitarian law. The involvement of Afghanistan's neighbours and other states in providing weapons, ammunition, fuel and other logistical support support their war making. State and non-state actors across the region and beyond continue to provide new arms and other material as well as training and advisory assistance. The arms provided have been directly implicated in
serious violations of international humanitarian law. These include aerial bombardments of civilian targets, indiscriminate bombings, rocketing and other artillery attacks on civilian populated areas, massacres involving reprisal killings of civilians, summary executions of prisoners, and torture.

Reports supported by reliable eyewitnesses document some of the summary executions and massacres carried out in January 2001 in Yakawlang. These reports indicate that in the taking and re-taking of Yakawlang breaches of humanitarian law were committed by both parties as they violated the neutrality of medical facilities in the district and disregarded the rights of civilians to be treated as non-combatants. Yakawlang was captured by the United Front forces (Hezbe Wahdat and Harakat Islami) on 28 December 2000 but was re-captured by the Taliban in early January 2001. Taliban forces reached the district centre of Nayak in the morning on 8 January 2001. Following the re-taking, there are reports of mass arrests followed by summary executions carried out between 8 to 12 January 2001. A number of aid agency personnel and a United Nations staff member were among those who were killed. The Human Rights Watch report, published on 19 February 2001, has identified civilian victims who include a number of aid workers and staff of international humanitarian agencies, hospitals and local relief and assistance organizations. This report indicates that search parties were organized to round up male civilians following house-to-house searches. Those rounded up were detained and many of them, the total number being estimated at several hundred, were reportedly executed. It is reported that a number of Hazara elders who came to intercede with the
Taliban were also killed. Some of the execution sites identified include the outside of a relief agency in Nayak, the outside the district hospital, the ravine behind the mosque in the old bazaar area, the outside the prayer hall of Mindayak village and Qala Arbab Hassan. A number of sites of mass graves are also identified. Also, the identities of commanders who present in the area at the relevant time are available in these reports.

On 16 February 2001 the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published a statement on Afghanistan. In view of the pattern of repeated massive violations of human rights and humanitarian law, the High Commissioner called upon the international community to establish an independent international inquiry into the massacres and other grave human rights violations committed by parties to the armed conflict in Afghanistan. This statement was made in the context of reports, among others, of summary execution of civilians by Taliban forces in the Yakawlang district of the province of Bamyan in January 2001.

It is now recognized that the impunity enjoyed by those who have been responsible for ordering and carrying out the massacres and summary executions and the absence of accountability for such gross violations of human rights and grave breaches of humanitarian law has contributed to the repeated occurrence of such violations. There is thus a growing opinion that in order to deter and prevent the occurrence of such atrocities, an effective international initiative is called for to expose and hold to account those responsible for war crimes, breaches of international humanitarian law and gross violations of human rights.

International
cooperation would be needed to deny impunity and enforce accountability by developing mechanisms to undertake full investigation to gather evidence and to identify those responsible in order that they may be brought to justice. The Taliban authorities and the Islamic State of Afghanistan will be expected to respect their obligation to cooperate in the carrying out of these investigations. The findings of these investigations would provide a basis for enforcing accountability through appropriate mechanisms at the national and international levels.

On 18 June 2001 the Secretary-General/I expressed my dismay at the persistent failure of the warring parties to abide by international humanitarian norms and to hold those responsible for gross violations of human rights accountable for their actions. Reacting to the alarming reports from Afghanistan of indiscriminate bombing, including attacks on the District Hospital and local aid agency facilities, and violence against civilians, during the take-over of Yakawlang by Taliban forces on 11 June. As well as the reported widespread burning of homes and other property and the large number of civilians said to have been detained and removed from the area. I urged the international community and human rights organizations to explore new approaches that would prevent further abuses and put an end to the climate of impunity.

III. Discriminatory gender policies

The policy and practices of the Taliban authorities, which exacerbate the discrimination already suffered by Afghan women, continue to be a major concern. Women’s mobility, including their ability to undertake paid employment outside the home, continues to be severely restricted.
The recently released population-based study by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) documents the degree to which Afghan women perceive that violations of human rights by the Taliban regime are responsible for affecting their health and well-being. It is one of the first studies ever to assess the Afghan people's attitudes on women's human rights and the importance of these rights for community health and development in Afghanistan. While noting that the causes of women's suffering in Afghanistan may be related to a number of factors, and not simply the effects of Taliban policies, the study focused particularly on the effects of official policies of discrimination against women because of their unique significance. The PHR underline that policies restricting women's rights are not the product of years of conflict and social and economic deprivation, which are arguably difficult to resolve; they are man-made policies that can be revoked as easily and swiftly as they came into being. Such policies are as detrimental to the health and development of the Afghan people as they are to the credibility of the Taliban regime. They report that although the Taliban claims that their gender policies are rooted in Afghan history and culture, this claim is contradicted by the views of the Afghan women and men in the PHR study. Over 90% of Afghan women and men sampled in PHR's population-based surveys strongly support rights of women restricted by the Taliban regime, including equal access to education and work opportunities; freedom of expression, legal protection for women's human rights and participation in government; and agree that women's human rights issues should be included in peace talks. Approximately 80% of women and men agreed that women should be able to move about freely.
and that the teachings of Islam do not restrict women's human rights. Seventy-five percent of women and men expressed that women should be able to associate with people of their own choosing. PHR's finding that the vast majority of both Afghan women and men do support women's rights provides critical insight into the extent to which Taliban policies fail to represent the interests of the Afghan people.

IV. Women and girls in the Rural Areas

Q. I included this because of the comment made by WFP on the CSW report do you think we should have a separate section on rural areas or just try to incorporate it into the body of the text, and if so where?

Women and girls in remote rural areas while largely escaping the imposition of Taliban edicts, which are implemented most rigorously in the urban areas, are however particularly affected by other factors that are often overlooked. As an example of the situation in rural areas I have chosen the isolated district of Shar-i-Buzurg in Badakhshan province which is facing a precarious situation requiring an emergency response following two consecutive years of drought. This situation is particularly difficult in terms of food security, and the situation is aggravated by the fact that the district has no road links to the outside world and can only be reached on horseback or on foot, while 97% of the arable land is rain fed. Finally, the ongoing conflict and the precarious economic situation prevents the district from drawing assistance from more developed neighbouring areas.

ACTED (please spell out), present in the area since 1998, implemented a thorough survey of the area from 5 to 25 May 2001, surveying every one of
the 63 villages in the district. This evaluation, the first comprehensive one to be undertaken in the area presents an overview of the situation with special focus on the food situation, the medical situation, water and sanitation, and agriculture. The findings underlined the emergency nature of the situation especially in terms of the food deficit, the exhaustion of cropping strategies, and the lack of seeds for the next harvest. In some areas, up to 10% of the local population have already left their homes and gone to swell the number of IDPs in Tarkhar and Baghlan or have left for Pakistan and Iran. However, because of the remoteness of the district and the unavailability of cash, it has been noticed that, even if the situation is particularly precarious, the local population is waiting for the last moment before leaving their villages. If steps are not taken to address the situation in this district, it can be estimated that a significant portion of the local population could become displaced in the next months.

ACTEDs survey found that the food shortage has already reached a state of crisis and is poised to worsen in months to come. Given the fact that only about 42% of the available land had been sown for the first spring harvest in the first place, the population is likely to face serious food shortages for the rest of the year aggravated by the fact that the local population has already sold an estimated 50 to 70% of its livestock to cope with cash and food deficiencies. The survey revealed that most families have eaten the seeds that they normally keep for sowing their land for the next harvest. As a result, in the coming months, serious seed shortages will likely be the most pressing problem in the district. Without external assistance, and notwithstanding next years weather
conditions, it is clear that most families will not be able to sow much land, thus prompting another serious food deficit next year. Following the announcement of a state of emergency in the area, food items were distributed by FOCUS to over 3000 families from 22 villages and by SNI to over 2,000 families from 16 villages. As of today 3,527 families from 33 villages (40.5% of the overall population of the district estimated to 8,694 families) have not been covered by any food distribution.

The main problem in terms of water and sanitation in the district is the lack of availability of drinking water. Except for 2 villages located in the south of the district, all villages rely on spring water, and some of them are located far from the main settlements. With the drought, many of these springs have dried up or considerably reduced their outputs. OXFAM has implemented a successful programme in the area covering 19 villages by building water supply systems. In those villages which were not covered by OXFAM, ACTED determined that the situation of drinking water was of concern in 25 villages, and critical in 12.

As noted by the MSF survey in March 2001, the number of deaths linked with the emergency situation is on the rise; according to the ACTED survey, approximately 410 children have died from diseases and malnutrition induced by drought in the Shar-i-Buzurg district since January 2001. The survey also confirmed the numbers given by other NGOs regarding malnutrition figures. Approximately 30% of the children of the sample selected proved to be suffering from nutrition deficiency, and some from severe malnutrition (up to 5%), and required medical care. The district has only one clinic and has no specialised facilities designed to
deal with food deficiency. Moreover, no Mother Child Health (MCH) facility exists in the area, the nearest one being located in distant Rustaq, (anywhere between 5 hours for the closest village to three days horse ride or walk for the most remote villages). The poor access to drinking water in many villages also has an impact on the incidence of water borne diseases, as exemplified by the high number of diarrhoea and dysentery in many areas. The situation in Shar-I-Buzurg district will probably continue to worsen as the food deficit, aggravated by a poor harvest, take their toll on the local population, with a direct impact on the health situation. It must be underlined that similar situations are reported in many other more remote districts in northern Badakhshan, where few or no aid organisations are operating because of access and logistical constraints. In the end, the ability of the aid community to address the short and mid-term needs of the local population of Shar-I-Buzurg and other drought affected areas in crisis will have a direct impact on the decision of the vulnerable segments of the local populations to stay in the area or go swell the number of IDPs and refugees.

Q. Is this far too much information? Please cut what is irrelevant.

In April 2001 Save the Children conducted a nutrition assessment in Faryab provinces mountainous Kohistan district, a region inaccessible by road during the winter. The assessment found that mortality rates had reached alarming levels in the four preceding months, with the crude mortality rate of 2.6 per 10,000 per day and the under-five mortality rate of 5.9 per 10,000 per day. In this period, mortality was due to acute respiratory infections and outbreaks of measles and bloody diarrhoea,
made worse by drought conditions and economic insecurity. Half of the reported deaths were of children under 5 years old. The report reveals nutrition is a serious problem, with acute malnutrition highest among children under 30 months. Residents in a number of villages are afflicted with scurvy, or vitamin C deficiency, due to the unavailability of fruits, vegetables, and even wild foods during the district's snowbound winter. The absence of medical care and clean water in the district exacerbates an already dire health picture. Most families in this remote area have depleted their supplies of grain and sold most of their livestock. Many people are selling their land, becoming displaced, begging and taking loans with high interest to survive. Many men have left their homes to seek work in neighbouring Iran. Moreover, daughters are being given for marriage at a lower age and for a bride price six times lower than normal.

VI. Internally Displaced and Refugee Women

More than half a million people, the vast majority of whom are women and children, are estimated to have left their homes and become newly displaced during 2000 and early 2001, heading towards impoverished cities and other areas. They have flocked to the bigger towns and cities or crossed the border into Iran and Pakistan. According to a report of 31 January 2001 by the Office of the United Nations Coordinator for Afghanistan, over 110 displaced persons in camps in Herat died due to extreme cold on the night of 29/30 January. The same report estimated the number of displaced persons in six camps outside Herat City to be approximately 80,000, families having started to leave their homes as early as June 2000 because of the severe drought which resulted in crop losses averaging 75 per cent.
and a 50 per cent reduction in livestock assets.

According to UNHCR officials in Pakistan, there has been a marked increase in new arrivals, the total number estimated to have arrived since mid-2000 is around 170,000 and a significant number of these are from northern Afghanistan. The refugee flows are caused by the interrelated impact of conflict, drought, and hunger. The situation of refugees is aggravated by the imposition of the ban on new arrivals by Pakistan which, having hosted the single largest and one of the oldest refugee populations in the world, has argued that it simply cannot cope with new inflows. This has resulted in the suspension by regional authorities of the verification process commenced on 25 January 2001 by UNHCR to determine those who are most vulnerable and in need of urgent assistance, followed by the Government decision that all undocumented Afghans would be subject to deportation. Following these decisions, there are reports of forcible deportation of thousands of Afghans.

Reports received in regard to the IDP compound in the former Soviet Embassy in Kabul are of concern. The Taliban controls the access of the IDPs to the city and women are reportedly not permitted to leave the area without a written medical note to seek health care. The living conditions in the compound, are poor clean water and adequate toilet facilities are lacking. Even though the IDP population was largely composed of women and children, reportedly more toilets had been constructed for men than for women. The women interviewed confirmed their fragile and vulnerable states. Many women had been separated from their husbands some of whom they feared had been killed.
in the fighting
and others were detained in prison.

According to reports at the end of June 2001 the number of the IDPs in the Khoja Bahauddin camps has increased. Approximately 300 new families from Khwagaghahr, Dasht-I-Archi, and southern Dasht-I-Qala, and Shar-I-Buzurg have arrived. Most of the families are without shelter. Displacement from Rustaq and Chah Ab because of the weather has also been noted. WFP screened the IDP list for Faizabad and identified 1,400 out of 2,051 who constituted genuine IDPs. After agreement with the authorities, WFP will conduct a food distribution and move on to Keshem, Argu, Rustaq and Chah Ab districts. An allocation for 5,000 families is available of 100 kilos per family. In addition, 1,000 IDP children in schools in Faizabad will receive wheat through the Food-for-Education project.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement specifically recognize the particular concerns of IDP women and girls and call for measures to protect them. They call for IDP women to be included in all phases of planning and distribution of humanitarian assistance, and for IDPs to be protected from all forms of violence including rape and other gender-specific violence, including forced prostitution. An international NGO has encouraged aid agencies to take new approaches to assisting internally displaced persons; in particular, to focus greater attention on protection, on sustaining livelihoods, on self-determination and independence-building activities, on involving women in the peace and reconciliation process and on managing community development activities. It has also made the following recommendations, which merit serious consideration:
(a) Although extremely difficult in war zones, sex disaggregated data collection is crucial to providing effective programming for internally displaced people. Access to good representative data prevents mistakes like the example cited above where more toilets for men were built in a population of mostly women and children.

(b) Agencies need to engage gender specialists to assess internally displaced persons settings so that appropriate actions can be taken to address the different needs and rights of women and men.

(c) Given that the level of literacy of women in many displacement situations is low, information on entitlements and programming should be provided in oral or visual formats for non-literate women.

(d) Lessons-learned documentation from various internally displaced settings need to be published and distributed to enable programmes to be better implemented and past mistakes avoided.

(e) Internally displaced women must be involved in planning, designing and monitoring of programmes. In cases where displaced women have input and ownership in programme activities, as well as in reintegration processes, the risks of gender rights abuses occurring are reduced.

(f) The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement should be translated into local languages and distributed to women.

(g) United Nations agencies should consider promoting an inter-agency mechanism to ensure institutional responsibility for gender in situations of displacement.
(h) More attention is needed on programmes that encourage self-determination and community development efforts and less on short-term emergency measures.

(i) Periodic gender audits should be commissioned by the lead agency in a given setting of internal displacement to assure that gender issues are addressed according to international standards and guidelines.

VII. Education

After more than two decades of conflict, Afghanistan has some of the worst education indicators in the world according to a UNICEF Afghanistan paper entitled "Education - a chronic emergency in Afghanistan". It records how access is low at all levels, especially for girls but also for boys. According to recent UNESCO data, as few as three per cent of Afghan girls and 39 per cent of boys in the relevant age groups may be attending some form of primary education, the quality of much of which remains poor.

In May 2001 a setback to the provision of education came when six schools run by a Turkish Islamic group were shut down in Afghanistan. (endnote BBC NEWS 17 May, 2001) In a country where the state education system is suffering from a chronic lack of resources, the Turkish schools were said to be rare centres of educational excellence. Some 2,000 pupils attended the six Turkish schools, which were free. They had a curriculum that was strong in science and languages, as well as religion, and they were well resourced. Almost uniquely in Afghanistan, each school had a laboratory and a library. It is reported that they had been ready to accept many of the Taleban's demands - that teachers should grow long beards, for example, and
pupils wear turbans - but they would not agree to hand over their budget to the Taleban. The Taleban had reportedly wanted all the Turkish teachers to leave the country, leaving just one official who would hand the budget over to the Taleban education ministry for it to distribute.

Q. did they provide education for girls? it wasn't clear from the text, if not we should cut it out.

VIII. United Nations activities in the context of the principled approach

I refer to point 2 of WFP Afghanistan comments re DAW's report:

The gender training provided to WFP took place two years ago (June 1999).

Have there not been more recent activities to which the report can refer?

(In this regard, WFP Afghanistan has organized its own gender workshops)

Q. If there has been more recent gender training/activities which should be included please ask WFP to send me a short paragraph on it asap so it can be inserted into the text. Thanks.

A two-day joint (date) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Bank conference was organised to work more into the mainstream of assistance programmes for Afghanistan. Studies on Afghanistan's international trade relations and on the socio-economic impact of mine action, along with findings of earlier workshops and conferences on basic education, health service delivery and food security strategy in Afghanistan, were discussed at them conference. Other studies include those on the socio-economic impact of remittances on the Afghan family and household (in progress) and an overview of agricultural production in the country. The project also supported a capacity building programme in Peshawar for about 600 Afghan women working with NGOs. At the conclusion,
donor, NGO, and UN representatives urged the World Bank to expand the range of its analytical works in partnership with UNDP and embark on a second phase of the Watching Brief strategy.

IVX. The operating space for the UN and aid agencies is narrowing

In May 2001 four days of intensive talks between the UN and the Taliban in the Afghan capital, Kabul, broke down without reaching agreement on the crucial issue of using women to conduct a survey of the capital's most vulnerable people. The ensuing stalemate could result in the closure of the UN's bakeries, which feed almost 300,000 people in Kabul, and ultimately puts the fate of the UN's other humanitarian programmes in the balance. (endnote ISLAMABAD, 30 May (IRIN))

On 25 May the World Food Programme (WFP) announced that it would have to suspend its bakery programme by 15 June unless the Taliban allowed a survey to be conducted to identify the capital's "most needy". The current list of approved recipients of the bakery project is outdated and the UN claims many hungry people are having to do without. WFP says it needs to hire between 20 and 30 Afghan women to conduct the survey, but the Taliban refuse to allow the UN to hire local women.

In a meeting with a nine-member UN team, the Taliban foreign minister, Mowlawi Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil, suggested that if the five-year-old bakeries were forced to close, the Islamic Emirate (Taliban) authorities could take over the running of the programme, an option which was applauded. It was welcomed as an effort by the Taliban authorities to start taking care of their own people and start to feed them. The Taliban also mooted two alternative options. The first was to hire men to

6/29/01
conduct the survey, in spite of the fact that, under Islamic Emirate rules, men cannot talk to women. The second option was to hire women of Pakistani, Tajik or Iranian nationality. The UN opposed both proposals. Q. Has the issue been resolved? what is the outcome?

The deadlock comes amid what has been called a "narrowing of the space available for relief agencies to operate effectively in Afghanistan". The UN has expressed its serious concern during the meetings with Taliban ministers over what is called harassment from "guests" - an increasing number of visitors to Afghanistan from the Gulf and other countries who had been directing abuse and sometimes death threats at aid workers and UN staff. The cases had escalated to such a degree that international staff are no longer able to walk freely, and had resorted to travelling in vehicles to avoid such incidents. Equally, the conduct of the Taliban's religious police from the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice had become increasingly hardline, engaging in indiscriminate arrests.

The operating space for the UN and aid agencies is narrowing it is felt that the international community must make it clear that: these are the conditions under which they can operate, and if that is not acceptable, then, unfortunately, we will have to close down, or stop or suspend programmes. Whereas the WFP bakeries could be the immediate casualty, the risk of other UN humanitarian programmes also closing has not been ruled out if the trend of increased harassment and obstacles continues.

Meanwhile, the UN did succeed in reaching agreement with the Taliban on a
number of other "basic operational requirements", including the need for free and unhindered access for aid workers, security of staff, the ability to independently assess and monitor programmes, and the need for such programmes to be based on "universality, impartiality and neutrality". The UN and NGOs have underscored that they are bound by certain basic principles set by the international community.

The Taliban authorities in Afghanistan have ordered female aid workers to stop driving. A letter issued by the Taliban religious police in May says that foreign women driving cars in Afghan cities "is against Afghan traditions and has a negative impact on the environment." It states that in future, foreign women must not drive cars and must "abide by the regulations of the Islamic Emirate (of Afghanistan)".

(endnote BBC NEWS, Thursday, 31 May, 2001)

The move came amid increasing tension between the Taliban and the UN over the treatment of foreign aid workers and the use of women employees. It is not clear how much impact this edict will actually have as the UN and larger non-governmental organisations who can employ Afghan male drivers, however it is thought that it could affect smaller aid organisations.

On 24 June 2001 police from the Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue raided an Italian-funded emergency hospital in Kabul, beating several staff members and forcing the hospital to suspend operations because male and female staff allegedly mixed in the dining area and operating wards. Taliban authorities have also recently blocked the delivery of humanitarian aid to large parts of the Hazarajat region, which is populated mainly by Shi'a Muslims and includes centers of armed
opposition activity.

The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Co-ordinator has expressed his concern about the increasing harassment and abuse of Afghan national staff of the UN and NGO community, and restrictions against programmes that attempt to help women as well as men. Humanitarian aid currently reaches well over four million people in Afghanistan, one of the world's worst crisis areas. Yet the recent pattern of harassment represents a general narrowing of space available for humanitarian agencies to operate effectively. Such behaviour may limit the ability of aid agencies to continue helping Afghans in need. He called upon the Taliban to take immediate steps to improve the working environment of the humanitarian community. (endnote 27 June Weekly Update.)

VX. Concluding remarks/recommendations

The Afghanistan Support Group paper succinctly depicts the situation which needs to be addressed if human rights are to be protected against further deterioration:

"It is increasingly apparent that the coping capacity of those who are most vulnerable has been severely weakened as a result of the war; the majority of the population struggles to survive at near subsistence levels. The situation of females, including in particular female-headed households, is of particular concern given the many old and new restrictions that limit their ability to provide for themselves and their families. Indeed, for women and men alike there are very few job opportunities outside the subsistence economy; for many, the only available option is the criminalized economy or
re-location to another area. Afghanistan's socio-economic indicators are well known and are likely to get worse as the drought takes its toll and the underlying causes of poverty and underdevelopment are largely ignored. It is this reality - coupled with the knowledge of what was possible in pre-war Afghanistan - which should motivate the international community to tackle the dynamics which contribute to a worsening of the crisis and with it a further deterioration of the human rights situation."

Ø A set of UN policy guidelines to deal with issues such as international women being asked to leave meetings by the Taliban, national women's security and mobility need to be developed.
Ø Women must be brought into all levels of the United Nations. Furthermore those with gender-specific expertise must be included in senior management if the United Nations is to develop appropriate and effective policies to protect and assist women and girls during and after armed conflict.
Ø Norah please add here anything that you would like to see in the sub-commission resolution conclusions/recommendations etc..