



Workshop on Women's Security Issues and Police Reform

A Yemen Polling Center Workshop

Tuesday, January 29, 2013

On January 29, 2013, the Yemen Polling Center organized a workshop as part of a wider YPC project on security sector governance, funded by the European Union within the framework of its Stability Instrument. As this project aims at bringing society into the ongoing reform of the security sector within the Yemeni transition process, the main objective of this workshop was to facilitate information exchange between the Restructuring Committee of the Ministry of Interior, female members of the police, and activists who have been working in the wider field of women's security. This information exchange was intended to a) allow workshop participants to understand the nature of work of the Restructuring Committee and the current state of their reform efforts, and b) allow workshop participants to feed their understanding of the nature of women's (in)security and police work into the ongoing work of the Restructuring Committee. The Restructuring Committee was asked to give a short introduction into its work, while the 28 workshop participants were asked to introduce themselves and their line of work in the field of women's security. In addition, they described the obstacles they have faced in the past in regard to their work, particularly from the side of the police and other state actors. Those obstacles can be summarized as the following:

A: Civil Society Organizations Related to Women's Security:

1. There is a lack of awareness in regard to the importance of policewomen.
2. Parents are reluctant to allow their daughters to join the police forces due to misconceptions related to the profession.
3. Excluding policewomen from 'real' police work and limiting them to tasks in inspection at official events and airports.
4. Bad infrastructure of police departments, which are too narrow and inconvenient for receiving women who want to file complaints or report ID loss. Also, women fear sexual harassment in case they need to visit police stations where policewomen do not serve.
5. The fact that policewomen do not take part in shifts at police stations particularly during late hours of the night makes women visiting police stations prone to sexual harassment and in the case of arrests there may be a higher degree of violence and sexual assaults.

6. Police stations do not have detention spaces for women, which exposes them to long hours in investigation and then direct deportation to Central Prison before turning them to prosecution. Accordingly, female inmates spend a long time in the central prison even while their case is still under investigation.
7. There is an inadequate number of qualified policewomen to guard and supervise women's prisons. Especially in rural areas policemen and not women take care of guarding female prisoners, especially at night, making them prone to sexual harassment.
8. There is an inadequate number of qualified forensic doctors which affects the fairness of investigations.
9. There is an insufficient number of shelter homes for women who survived violence.
10. There is a lack of rehabilitation and training programs designed to rehabilitate prisoners and reintegrate them into society.
11. Policewomen do not commit to formal dress codes, i.e. uniforms, which creates a sense of policewomen’s absence in society.
12. The civil status authority does not cooperate with civil society organizations when it comes to issuing identity documents for women who survived violence as well as their children.
13. The incarceration of children of different ages with their mothers in prisons makes these share the punishment for a crime they did not commit.

B: Policewomen:

1. Depriving policewomen from leadership positions and access to decision-making positions makes their progress in work extremely difficult and discourages them from making an effort.
2. There is a prevalence of favoritism [wasta] in making appointments and promotions with examples of the appointment of some basic education graduates for positions that require college education.
3. Low wages and the fact that they are not granted transportation allowances when sent away for certain tasks affect the performance of policewomen.
4. Male dominance and exclusionary practices within the Ministry of Interior deprive policewomen from practicing the job they were trained to do and limit them to doing administrative work.
5. There are cases in which security leaders imposed orders on policemen and policewomen to do raids without legal warrants according to the principle of "first obey, then discuss", which makes policemen and policewomen violate citizens’ rights.

The participants made specific suggestions to the present members of the Restructuring Committee in regard to how the Ministry of Interior as well as the Yemeni police forces could be reformed structurally as well as in regard to procedures, education efforts etc. in order to enhance the security of women and girls in Yemen.

A: Restructuring and Policewomen:

1. Create a department for policewomen in the Ministry of Interior to empower policewomen and upgrade their role in policing. However, this department should not be managed in such a way that it ends up segregating women and widening the gap between them and men.
2. Assign policewomen to do tasks they were trained to do and do not limit their duties to administrative and secretarial work.
3. Train more policewomen to effectively cover more areas.
4. Work on restructuring wages in a way that ensures policewomen a decent life so as to be able to perform their jobs to the fullest.

B: Women’s Security and the Police:

1. Improve police stations’ infrastructure, taking into account the separation of personal services offices from the rest of the offices to encourage women to carry out such transactions.
2. Assign policewomen in all locations including police stations, investigations and raids in order to encourage women to report and provide testimonies in a safe environment where they do not encounter sexual harassment and assault. Also, ensure safety for female inmates during arrest and detention.
3. Provide policewomen to guard women's prisons throughout all hours of the day and night in order to protect female inmates’ rights.
4. Improve the overall situation and basic services within prisons.
5. Enhance rehabilitation programs inside prisons (such as education and professional skills) in order to give inmates the skills they need to achieve financial independence and integration into society.
6. Activate the role of civil society organizations in fighting gender-based violence.
7. Establish safe shelter homes for women who leave prison with no place to turn to or who fear their family’s revenge.

C: Civil Society, Media and Policewomen:

1. Increase awareness programs that educate society about the importance of women joining the police.
2. Integrate policewomen’s images and roles besides policemen in basic educational curricula so that new generations of Yemenis get acquainted with women working in the police.
3. Encourage civil society oversight of the police particularly on how it deals with women whether in the case of reporting violations and crimes, providing testimony, or in the case of detention.
4. Encourage initiatives and projects that provide protection for women and involve them in conflict resolution programs.
5. Establish regular meetings that bring together policewomen and policemen with civil society and media representatives to bridge the gap between the society and the police and to facilitate the discussion of ways of cooperation to achieve security and to address imbalances in police performance.