

AFGHANISTAN

Talibs In Afghanistan Let Women Die In Childbirth

Original sources: The Guardian, UK newspaper; De Volkskrant, Feb 2, 1995; Haagse Courant, Dutch newspaper, April 8, 1995; reprinted in the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights Newsletter 49, Jan - Mar 1995.

Talibs in Afghanistan (Islamic teachers and their students) now control large parts of the country including four or five provinces.

While many people may feel safe and at peace with the talibs in power, others fear the country will be controlled by a severe regime with little respect for women's rights. Already, in the areas

controlled by the talibs, girls have been banned from school, female teachers have been fired, and school directors are being advised to restyle the curriculums in order to re-establish the madrassahs, religious colleges.

The talibs canceled all training for midwives, contending that women should not work. Furthermore, they urge male doctors to deny any treatment to their female patients; in a city like Kandahar, many women die in childbirth.

Other restrictions that have been recently imposed on women include sanctions on going out alone; they should be accompanied by a man, and even then, they should be veiled. Women who challenged those restrictions have been known to be tortured by fanatic talibs. Just before going to print, the latest news that reached us suggests that the restrictions for women going out have been relaxed; provided that they wear a burqa (which covers the head and the whole body, leaving only some holes to look through at eye level), they are allowed on the streets again. Also, nurses and midwives are allowed to work again in the hospitals.

CHINA

Female Farmers 'Key To Nation's Growth'

Source: Associated Press, South China Morning Post, June 24, 1995.

Female farmers are the key to China's economic development because they produce between 50 and 60 percent of the food their countrymen eat, according to a study released yesterday by the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

"China's remarkable economic progress has been both a cause and a result of the increased empowerment of rural women," it said. In the future, women living in rural areas would produce a greater proportion of the food because they were becoming better integrated into the country's economy and men were going to work in cities, fund president Fawzi Al-Sultan said.

But rural women still faced discrimination and a large proportion of them lived in poverty, he said. Despite improved education, laws affirming women's equality and the government's efforts to alleviate poverty only 48 percent of rural women can read and most cannot borrow money to put into rural businesses, the study said.

Rural women worked an average 11.35 hours a day compared with 10.06 hours for their male counterparts.

The report called for an expansion of training programmes for women, particularly in remote impoverished areas, greater access to credit, including direct loans to women, and implementation of laws ensuring equality of the sexes. Beijing co-operated with the Rome-based fund in preparing the 131-page report, "The Status of Rural Women in China", which was released in London. The fund is a development agency affiliated with the United Nations.

Mr Al-Sultan said the study was one of the most extensive international surveys of women living in the countryside in the developing world. "Especially during the past decade and a half, the social, political and economic status of rural women in China has undergone dramatic improvement," it said. "However, long-ingrained ideas and practices do not vanish overnight, despite laws, and Chinese women -- in particular rural women -- still have a long way to go before they are, in fact, treated as equals of men."

Amnesty Caims Abuse Of Women In China

Source: South China Morning Post; June 28, 1995.

Chinese women who express dissenting views face harassment, imprisonment and sometimes torture, says a report released on June 27 by Amnesty International. The 27-page report, titled Women in China: Imprisoned and Abused for Dissent, was timed to draw attention to human rights abuses in the host nation for the United Nations World Conference on Women. The report concludes that dissidents in China who are women face the same harsh treatment their male counterparts receive.

Women also suffer rights abuses associated with China's compulsory birth control policy, including forced abortions. Women "continue to suffer human rights violations for activities which are considered entirely legitimate and central to the work of NGOs across the world," the report said. They have been jailed for participating in demonstrations or discussing issues that would be the subject of public debate in other countries. Women who have criticised the Government or pursued the release of detained relatives have been harassed and detained, it said. Among the women mentioned in the report is Ding Zilin, a professor who has asked the Government for a full account of the June 4, 1989, violent suppression of the pro-democracy protests in Beijing. Her son was killed in the crackdown. She and her husband, Jiang Peikun, have been under almost constant police surveillance, and both lost academic positions and part of their salaries. The report also gave examples of torture including beatings and electric shocks.

Fiji

Fijian Women Organize Around Rape

Source: Kinesis; March 1995.

Fiji women's groups are outraged by the repeated lack of convictions for rapists, and are organizing to raise awareness of the sexism of the judicial system.

In a recent court trial in Labasa's Magistrate Court, six men, who admitted to having raped a 15-year-old girl, were let-off because the Magistrate said the "well-built" girl appeared to look older than her age. In his sentencing remarks, the Magistrate suggested that because the victim looked as if she were

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the age of consent (17), she may have consented to having sex with all the men. Authorities are reconsidering whether to file an appeal.

In another case, a Chief Justice in Suva was criticised by women's groups for saying that, because of a teenager's previous sexual experience, her rape at knifepoint would have no adverse effect on the victim. In yet another case, in Nadi, a magistrate passed a lenient sentence against a rapist because the woman he raped was drunk and asleep when he attacked her.

GERMANY

Supply Cannot Meet Demand For Women In Reunified Germany

by Roby Alampay
Source: Today, June 12, 1995

"Did you buy your wife?"

Elnora Held, a Filipina in Berlin and the wife in question, couldn't believe what she was hearing. It wasn't so much the query as how it was asked. She and her husband, a German, were at a dinner party when Mr. Held's friend approached. He asked "so coolly, matter-of-factly" with "no malice at all." Small talk and nothing more. I knew that many Germans had this attitude toward Filipino and Asian women, but when it was asked right in front of me, I was dumbfounded."

A new study released by Ban Ying (Thai for "House of Women"), a nongovernment organization, documents the plight of Filipino, Thai and former Eastern bloc immigrants, lured, brought or bought from their native lands as mail-order brides, or hired to work Berlin's cobblestone streets as prostitutes.

Sigrund Katins, Elnora's co-staffer in Ban Ying, discusses their paper *The Trade in Women in Berlin* --- a first attempt to document the problem.

The market in women has existed for years, in cities all over Germany, all over Europe and the Western world, Katins begins.

Thais and Filipinas, singled out -- in that order -- from all other Third World women have been among the primary "goods." Poverty at home or at least just the promise of a better life abroad had lured them to Germany. Invariably, many ended up as wives to divorced or middle-aged German bachelors, or as prostitutes. Either way, many risked -- and found -- trouble.

"Everybody knows that many Filipinas here are being abused, kept prisoner by their own husbands," Elnora says. Ban Ying receives around five walk-in

Filipinas and Thais a month in an undisclosed center for abused women in Berlin. "They found out about our center by word of mouth, usually. Filipina friends or even friends of their husbands tell them about us or us about them," Elnora says. "Now we're coming out with posters -- in Thai and Filipino -- to try to reach more women who may need our help."

Ban Ying offers counselling and legal services. The most important task now for the organization is to document a phenomenon that in many ways is still not acknowledged by the German legal system. Ban Ying laments the lack of hard data on the plight of women in Berlin. In mid-1994, it only knew that 3,799 Thai and 621 Filipino women were registered -- as tourists -- with the police in Berlin. Authorities would only acknowledge that "the actual number (of trafficked women) must be much higher" because "the estimated number of unknown cases is very high."

Beyond defining the market, though, Ban Ying notes with alarm an apparent expansion of this network of exploitation -- a rise that ironically corresponded with Berlin's own rebirth and liberation.

"After 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the markets for everything expanded," Katins said. Former East Germans, deprived of political and economic choices for an entire generation, wanted a taste of all the forbidden fruits the West had to offer, and provided room for expansion.

"I shudder when we speak in these terms," Elnora says. In this harsh reality, after all, the same forces affecting car sales are the same factors at play in the exploitation of women. "But I know that it's unavoidable, discussing 'the market.' It's the only way to understand the problem."

HONG KONG

Source: Hong Kong Standard Vol. II, nos. 3 & 4, July - Dec 1994.

Nepalese Domestics Trapped In Sex Racket In Hong Kong

Up to 50 women from Nepal are being forced to provide cheap sex to their countrymen and Indians in Hong Kong. A spokeswoman for the Joint Action Network for Nepal (Jann), Sujita Shakya, told the Hong Kong Standard that a number of the 600 Nepalese women recruited by Hong Kong-based recruitment agencies as domestic helpers and sales girls allegedly ended up working as prostitutes in the territory.

The trafficking of Nepalese women started about four years ago because of

the growing demand for cheap sex in the territory.

Today, Hong Kong is the second biggest market for Nepalese victims of sex trafficking. The bulk of Nepalese victims - estimated at 100,000 are in India.

Mainland Women Tricked Into Working As Domestics

Rural mainland Chinese women are being forced to work as domestic helpers in Hong Kong in spite of their having applied for non-domestic jobs. Chinese maids, who are often aged over 50, do not usually complain about their illegal work because they receive a higher salary than foreign domestic helpers. Because they can communicate better with their employers, their salaries are comparatively high, ranging from \$5,000 to \$8,000 a month.

Jump In Number Of Indonesian Domestic Helpers In Hong Kong

Indonesian domestic helpers already outnumber Thais, but Filipinas are still the favorite amahs. According to the Immigration Department, the total number of Indonesian maids reached 9,000 at the end of August. Indonesians form the second biggest group of foreign maids after Filipinos, who account for 115,000 of the 130,000 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong. Thais, formerly the second biggest group of foreign domestic helpers, have remained at 7,000. At the end of 1993, the number of Indonesians was 6,000, while there were still about 7,000 Thai maids. In 1993, the number of Filipina maids was 105,000 out of the 120,000 foreign maids registered. The director of the Asian Migrant Centre attributed the rise in the number of Indonesian maids to aggressive promotion by recruitment agencies. "Agencies have been promoting Indonesian maids as cheap and hard working," she said. Many Indonesian maids were paid only (HK) \$1,500 a month, while the minimum wage up to September was \$3,500. A higher minimum wage of \$3,750 took effect at the start of this month.