

## 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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