



AFGHANISTAN INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

From: Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC).

Subject: Midterm progress report on the third phase (2015-2019) of the World Program for Human Rights Education in promoting human rights training for media professionals and journalists in Afghanistan.

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Introduction

This brief report explains the AIHRC and its activities in relation to inclusion of human rights topics into the school textbooks, human rights training provided for school teachers, military services, civil servants, law enforcement bodies, and as well as human rights education and training provided for media professionals and journalists.

About the AIHRC

To realize human rights in Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) as a constitutional entity is mandated to promote, protect, and monitor human rights throughout the country.

To achieve the above mentioned goals, the AIHRC has established five main Program Units such as Human Rights Education, Monitoring and Investigation, Children Rights, Women Rights and the Rights of people with disabilities unit with fourteen regional and provincial offices that covers all over the country.

Since its establishment, the AIHRC has developed four Strategic National Plans to achieve its goals: the first one from 2003-2005; the second one from 2005- 2009; the third one from 2010-2013; and the fourth one from 2014-2017. The national annual action plan of AIHRC is derived out of its strategic national action plans.

Through its Human Rights Education Unit (HREU), AIHRC has trained more than 146106 people on human rights in the last 14 years. The training has taken place through holding workshops, seminars and training sessions. Target groups included different segment of the society both rights holders and duty bearers including: students, civil society members, human rights defenders, university professors, school teachers, lawyers, women, children, minorities, police officers, prosecutors, prison personnel, military personnel, elders group, media professionals and journalists.

Background

AIHRC based on its strategic National Action plan and in line with the first (2005-2009) and second (2010-2014) phase of action plan of the World Program concerning to strengthen the human rights education in the primary and secondary school systems and higher education, and human rights training for teachers and educators, civil servants, law enforcement officials and the military, has successfully included the human rights principles in the primary, secondary and higher education programs, as well as in the training programs of prosecutors and judges. And also, AIHRC in a joint collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Higher Education(MoHE), Ministry of Defense(MoD), Ministry of Interior(Mol) and National Directorate for Security(NDS) has conducted numerous training programs for school teachers, university professors, law enforcement agencies, military and civil servants.

In its fourth round of National Strategic Action Plan that covers the period from 2014 to 2017, AIHRC actively has taken effective action to promote human rights training for media professionals and journalists. The objectives for conducting human rights trainings for media professionals and journalists, were to:

1. Increase their understanding of the universal fundamental human rights and freedoms
2. Familiarize and expose them in regards to human rights violations,
3. Equip them with the knowledge, values and skills on how to report the human rights violation cases, as well as sharing it with the AIHRC; and
4. Stand on human rights and AIHRC side for advocating for human rights and to put pressure on state/duty-bearers to abide-by their obligation to respect, protect and fulfill human rights.

Activities and Results

To achieve its objectives, the AIHRC has been working with people from all walks of life in the society at different levels. AIHRC has effectively engaged with and offered human rights training to senior governmental, non-governmental, civil society, media and elders of the Afghan community. Below are some important areas and activities that AIHRC has focused on.

1. Inclusion of human rights topics in the school textbooks.
From the beginning of 2003 AIHRC devised an innovative way of communication and established a working relationship with the Ministry of Education (MoE) Including the Minister himself and other influential figures in the ministry. As a result of this relationship, AIHRC was successful in the inclusion of human rights as an important topic in the school textbooks. Furthermore, at the end of 2005, AIHRC's strategic communication and advocacy resulted in signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between both entities (between MoE and AIHRC).

Based on the provision of the signed MoU, AIHRC was tasked to 1). Conduct human rights education workshops for the authors of the school textbooks of the MoE and school teachers, 2). Participate in Syllabus Determining Committee, 3). Conduct human rights training for school students, 4). Monitor the school textbooks development

process and collaborate with the authors so that the textbooks development & their revision should meet the commitment of the state towards the international standards of human rights.

In order to implement the provisions set out in the MoU, AIHRC employed two human rights experts and then seconded them to the Curriculum Development Directorate of MoE. The main task of these human rights experts was not only to monitor the process of textbooks development but more importantly to insure that the new textbooks incorporated human rights values and standards. In addition, it held three exclusive participatory workshops for the authors of school textbooks on how to include and incorporate human rights issues and topics in the school textbooks. Consequently, now human rights messages are incorporated into the MoE's current teaching curricula from grade 1 to 12.

2. Human rights training held for the Afghan National Defense University.

Since the start of 2016 and based on a signed MoU with the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Afghan National Defense University (ANDU), AIHRC has started teaching International human rights law (IHRL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to the professors and students of the National Defense University. Up to now 286 professors and officers of ANDU have received training on IHRL and IHL. At later stage the incorporation of IHL into the curricula of the NDU will be the AIHRC's priority.

3. Cooperation with Universities and the subsequent human rights trainings for students.

AIHRC has been closely working with the MoHE and with governmental and private universities and higher institutes. Consistent with the second phase of the world program for human rights education (2010-2014), AIHRC has been able to include human rights education in the curriculum of universities and higher education institutes. Today, the AIHRC through its human rights education unit has signed 51 MoU with universities and higher education institutes all over the country aimed at teaching human rights for students.

4. Support and human rights education offered to civil society organizations (CSOs).

AIHRC from those early days of its establishment prioritized working with CSOs as its strategic partners nationwide. Based on its constitutional mandate and strategic action plan, AIHRC took a strategic approach in supporting CSOs in Afghanistan. Here are a few examples of how AIHRC trained CSOs and how it supported them.

One, Awareness campaign about human rights and creating a vision.

In the first step, AIHRC initiated awareness campaign on human rights for CSOs members and made them understand about the mandate of AIHRC as a NHRI. The aims of this outcome-based activity was to increase respect for human rights, inform them about AIHRC and to create a human rights vision. As a result, the human rights education unit of the AIHRC conducted various workshops, seminars, training sessions,

and it was during these programs that AIHRC was able to strengthen its existing relationships with CSOs and forming new ones.

Two, Capacity building.

After having trained the CSOs, AIHRC strategically worked on building the capacity of CSO members and trained the trainers of CSOs (by conducting three to seven days ToT workshops) in order to enable them. Consequently, CSOs themselves were then able to conduct human rights workshops for people in their community and other places. In this round, the human rights values were somehow internalized by CSOs and mostly able to think critically and use human rights as a tool for change, take position, and objecting whenever and wherever human rights violations happened. Networking, advocacy, keeping mobility, and inviting CSO members into the National & Regional Level Conferences that were held by AIHRC were part of this initiative.

Three –Empowerment

The AIHRC took further practical steps so as to support Afghan CSOs and to promote human rights values in the society by focusing on the empowerment of CSOs. In this round AIHRC signed MoU and contracts with CSOs based upon which provided small scale funds to the CSOs partners to hold 3-days human rights workshops at their own capacity. This important activity was performed in the light of a definitive guideline, monitoring, evaluation & follow up mechanism. The series of this kinds of work and support of AIHRC to CSOs, assisted them to understand human rights, to promote it and also learn how to write a proposal, design a training program, implement and evaluate their work and to penetrate into the society in a wider scale.

As a result of the AIHRC’s strategic communication approach, today Afghanistan has fairly active CSOs which can take position and criticize the illegal steps, wrong doings and wrong decision-makings made by state apparatus.

Today they not only support AIHRC’s efforts but also more importantly they stand up against human rights violation and discriminatory traditional practices. They (the CSOs) raise their voice against the Government and anti-government elements to respect human rights, including women and victims’ rights in the peace talks and peace building



Local Civil Society Organization implementing 3-day human rights workshop in Badakhshan Province in 2013, while AIHRC Human Rights Education Unit trainer is monitoring the training process

process in the country. They emphasize on an inclusive peace process that should include women, minority and CSO representatives in the peace negotiations. Until today more than 800 civil society organizations have been registered in the database of AIHRC and more than 140 of them have got funding opportunity.

Further steps. Offered space to CSOs & appreciation of civil activism.

To keep the relationship and partnership alive, AIHRC has allowed CSOs to conduct their meetings and gatherings in the AIHRC office. The objectives of this activity are to help CSOs to coordinate better within themselves and to take stand collectively. Meanwhile AIHRC has appreciated the human rights activists and human rights defenders with Annual Human Rights National Awards.

AIHRC has played active role and provided support for CSOs, Media and Human Rights defenders.



Civil Society Joint Working Group Secretariat (CS-JWGS) Created on May 15, 2015.

AIHRC on the request of CSOs provided space, hosted, facilitated and monitored the election process held amongst CSOs. In this election 21 representatives (11 women, 10 man) out of 157 CSOs members were elected. The CS-JWGS will take stand and participate in the international conferences and national decision-making process that will affect people.

AIHRC supports and try to protect CSOs, Media and appointed human rights focal points in provinces of Afghanistan. Our efforts to protect CSOs, and human rights defenders particularly in the provinces are very important. For example, when Kunduz temporarily fell under the control of the Taliban in September 2015, AIHRC through its emergency communication channels with the MoDand Mol and with the consultation of various embassies were able to rescue human rights defenders, women rights activists, journalists and media partners of AIHRC.

5. Human rights training for and support to media professional and journalists.

AIHRC has held thirty-three, 3-days workshop and forty-four half a-day training sessions for the media professionals and journalists from January 2014 to January 2017, in which the total number trainees reached to 1680.

In addition to holding workshop and training sessions in the last 3 years, AIHRC via its Human Rights Education Unit (HREU) has conducted several courses and trainings for students of Afghanistan's Governmental and Private Universities and Higher Education Institutes through signing MoU with them.

Main topics that have been presented and have been discussed in the workshops, Sessions and Courses were:

1. AIHRC introduction, making them know who we are and what do we do,
2. Conventions which Afghanistan is state-party to and state obligation towards international human rights,
3. Peace & human rights journalism, and how to report in a conflict-ridden society,
4. Ethics of journalism and how to report human rights violation cases,
5. Ways of cooperation and sharing human rights cases with the AIHRC,
6. The role of media in promoting human rights values,
7. Vulnerable and minority groups that media can raise their voice,
8. Concept of human rights,
9. Human right, Peace and Conflict Resolution.

Moreover to conduction of trainings for media professionals and journalists, the AIHRC has engaged and supported the media and journalist in different ways as followings:

- Support and appreciation of media professionals and journalists: AIHC has signed MoU with the committed media outlets through its 14 regional and provincial offices so that to promote human rights values in the country through Radio, TV and Print Medias. In the last 14 years, AIHRC has broadcasted 294998 minutes radio and 58017 minutes TV programs through bilateral agreements signed between AIHRC and media (Radio &TVs). Based on its National Annual Action Plan for 2017, AIHRC will broadcast 24 fifteen minutes radio and airing 12 fifteen minutes TV programs throughout the country via local radio and TV channels.
- In some instances the AIHRC has supported writers groups, which in later stage they had established newspapers, and also supported locally published newspapers and weeklies to write and publish issues on human rights.
- Provided media partners with relevant reading stuff, and needed materials.
- Organized frequent and regular coordination meetings and press conferences and media talk shows on relevant and serious HRs issues and concerns.
- Follow up events with relevant government officials and stakeholders, as systematic advocacy efforts.
- Assessed the overall published articles by local media, and awards different media set ups with National Human Rights Prize on the occasion of different events such as international day of human rights.

Below is a case study that shows how AIHRC's worked with media and journalist and how it was effective.

Promoting a Culture of Transparency and Accountability through Cooperation with Media

According to its Strategic Plan and Annual National Action Plan, the AIHRC since its establishment has provided human rights trainings to media personnel and journalists. These trainings have been conducted through holding workshops, courses, sessions and seminars. To be more effective, AIHRC in addition to providing human rights trainings to the media and journalists has held coordination meetings with media since 2004 in order to protect the media and publish human rights issues through the media by its 14 regional and provincial offices.

In accordance with the third phase of the UN Universal Action Plan on human rights training (2014-2019) for media and journalists, the AIHRC has focused more on the process of providing human rights training to journalists and media as well as protecting and cooperation with them since 2013.

Cooperation and providing human rights training to journalists and media personnel by the AIHRC had positive effects at the national level. The practical effect of cooperation by the AIHRC with media in the western zone of Afghanistan is a good example to demonstrate. Human Rights Education Unit of Herat Regional Office of the AIHRC held a session in February 2017 entitled “The Need for Access to Information” to assess the problems faced by media and journalists. This session was attended by the national and international journalists, professors of the Faculty of Journalisms at Herat University and Head of Information and Culture Department in Herat province.

In this session, the AIHRC’s program manager who moderated the session explained the important articles of the Law on Access to Information and emphasized on the need for the execution of the Law, and highlighted its importance for the establishment of transparency and accountability in various institutions. Then, a few journalists and officials of media and other networks in Herat province talked about the lack of access to information and non-implementation of the Law on Access to Information and considered it a serious problem of journalists in that province, and stressed on the enforcement of the Law on Access to Information.

On the side of this session, Head of Information and Culture Department in Herat province spoke and promised to hold a session with provincial authorities and the Heads of the State offices to assess the lack of access to information and non-implementation of the Law on Access to Information as soon as possible.

To abide by his promise, the Head of Information and Culture Department held a meeting with the Governor and Heads of the State offices in Herat province a week later and discussed the right of access to information. In this session, the Governor of Herat province stressed on supporting Media’s free and lawful activities and timely publication of information by the media. The Governor of Herat Province considered access to information as a human right of the citizens and instructed that all State administrators are to put the necessary information at

the disposal of the media as soon as available. He added that all provisions of the Law on Access to Information should be implemented and all institutions should publish the necessary information to people through media in order to ensure transparency. The Governor instructed all State Offices to establish their Public Relation Offices to provide people with the necessary information.

In this meeting that were attended by the officials and heads of the government offices and Union of Journalists, the Chairman of Information and Culture Department presented a speech and emphasized on the implementation of the Law on Access to Information and added that this Law has been devised in 6 chapters and 32 articles and obliges the government departments to provide information to the citizens.

At this meeting, representatives of media, and journalists on behalf of journalist society appreciated the establishment of the provincial media center and considered it an important step toward ensuring of transparency and strengthening of good governance. The journalists expressed hope for the continuation of the activities carried out by this center to solve the problems of journalists.

For further citizens' access to information and promotion of transparency, the Human Rights Education Unit of Herat regional office conducts regular follow-up programs through holding academic seminars, workshops and training sessions for journalists, high-ranking state officials, universities, higher education centers and other people.

A seminar entitled "The Right of Access to Information" would be held in Herat province by the AIHRC very soon. This seminar would be attended by Heads of the government and non-governmental organizations and media representatives. For this purpose, the Human Rights Training Unit of Herat regional office has assigned four university professors to prepare and present their essays under the following topics:

1. The right to access information from the viewpoints of national and international laws.
2. History of the right to access information in Afghanistan and its importance in democratic systems
3. Assessment of the gaps, challenges and opportunities related to the right to access information in Afghanistan

The AIHRC through its Human Rights Education Unit in Herat Regional office would hold this seminar very soon. Efforts will be made to institutionalize the right to access information and facilitate media's access to information. All journalists become familiar with human rights values and make efforts to promote and institutionalize human rights values.

It is worth mentioning that the AIHRC, through its 14 regional and provincial offices all over the country, has consistently made efforts to promote citizen's access to their human rights as well as to their right to information.

Challenges faced by AIHRC in promoting human rights

1. Insecurity
2. Traditionalism and illiteracy
3. Weak rule of law
4. Lack of political will in abiding by international human rights standards
5. Poverty
6. Extremism
7. Terrorism
8. Corruption
9. Fearful environment
10. Incomplete and wrong perception of human rights by right-holders and duty-bearers.

The above mentioned problems and challenges have had chained negative effects on promoting human rights in the country.

Recommendations

A) To UN and International Community

The UN and International Community should:

1. Put pressure on all state agencies to respect, protect and fulfill its human rights obligations,
2. International aid for Afghanistan should be conditioned to improvement of human rights and fighting corruption,
3. UN may assign especial reporter to investigate the violation of freedom of expression by state and power holders in Afghanistan and advise them in this regard,
4. AIHRC should be further supported by both UN and International community.
5. Support civil society organizations, media, journalists and human rights defenders.

B) To the Government of Afghanistan

The government has should:

1. Stop discrimination and fight against corruption,
2. Abide-by its international human rights obligation, through report on time to the treaty based bodies, considering the reports and recommendations of UPR, AIHRC and CSOs.
3. Promote the freedom of speech and seriously refrain itself from committing violence against journalist,
4. Promote rule of law,
5. Take measures to better support AIHRC politically and financially, and comply with the Paris principle provisions in terms of commissioner's appointment and other arenas of its work.
6. Further facilitate the inclusion process of human rights education and trainings into the school, higher education, military, justice and law enforcement bodies/systems.