



APNE AAP WOMEN WORLDWIDE –an initiative to end sex trafficking

RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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A2W2 Joins Global Human Rights Movement at ISF

by Tinku Khanna

New Delhi, Nov. 13: Civil rights activists, academicians, and political activists working for social justice issues in India and all over the world came together for a four day meeting at the India Social Forum (ISF), in Delhi's Pragati Maidan, from November 9-12. This was the third such event organized by the World Social Forum (India) after the 2003 Asian Social Forum and the 2004 World Social Forum. The theme of this ISF was "Building Another World: A Vision for the Future," and its aim was to create a space for all the organizations and

individuals working on civil, economic and political rights to meet and interact to mobilise resources for a better future.

Apne Aap Women Worldwide was able to participate significantly in the ISF. A2W2 members, about 50 in total, from the red light areas of Forbesgunj (Bihar) and Khidderpore (Kolkata) came to participate, along with Kishori Mandal leaders from Khidderpore, Topsia (Kolkata), and Subhash Camp (Delhi). A2W2 set up a stall in which film CDs of *The*

Selling of Innocents, copies of the book *The Place Where We Live is Called a Red Light Area*, and copies of *Red Light Despatch* were available for circulation. In addition, the women hosted a panel discussion on the issue of how the marginalization of certain communities in the era of globalisation contributes to making them vulnerable to trafficking and prostitution. This discussion was so popular that, even though the room's capacity was for 75 people, around 120 came to participate and listen. In addition, A2W2 was privileged to

have Dr. Ritu Priya and Prof. Ramesh Pranesh, a noted scholar on nomadic tribes, in the audience

Activists from several other organizations also joined the discussion. When Mohammad Kalam, an A2W2 worker in Forbesgunj, and Anna Biwi, the Forbesgunj Mahila Mandal President, talked about the problems of intergenerational prostitution, women from the Badi community in Nepal and the Bawariya community in UP also started speaking out passionately about their exploitation. The

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"I was Deprived of My Rights" : Tamanna Speaks at ISF

(recorded by Janaki Dubey)

New Delhi, Nov. 10: My name is Tamanna Perveen, and I am a Kishori Mandal member from the A2W2 centre in Topsia, Kolkata. First and foremost, I would like to thank Apne Aap for providing me the opportunity to speak and to share my experiences in front of the panel at the ISF, and I am very grateful to the didis [A2W2 workers] who have helped me to be able to speak in public.

From my childhood, I saw that different types of domestic violence, torture, and inequality prevail among girl children in my community. I saw that girls, from a very young age, suffer from unequal treatment in the family. Girls are deprived of food, education, and

clothes by their parents. I am from a very conservative family, and being the only girl among 5 siblings in my family, I was also deprived of my rights. I couldn't continue my education. Only after a lot of struggle and hardship was I able to convince my parents to let me come to the Apne Aap centre to learn tailoring. When I came to the centre, I got to know about many schemes and programs for the protection and empowerment of women and girl children. In the centre, we were trained to speak out about our sufferings. We had a weekly activity called *khula manch* where we practiced how to raise our voices through advocacy.

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“Our Show Told People that Prostitution Must Stop”: Three Girls’ Experiences at ISF

(as told to Ravi Patil)

New Delhi, Nov. 12: Pooja: My name is Pooja, and I study in the sixth standard. I was one of the participants of the Subhash Camp puppet show at the India Social Forum. On the day of event we took a bus to Nehru Stadium at 7 in the morning. We all enjoyed ourselves very much in the bus. We were singing songs and playing Antakshari the whole time. I also like that we got to eat chhole chawal, chhole bhature, and chips and that we got to see other shows too. In Nehru Stadium, there were many people who were sloganing and dancing and presenting activities related to atrocities on girls, problems of unemployment etc. When it was our turn, we started performing with the puppets, on the subject of how women are victimised in the red light areas, for a small audience. I played the role of a student named Kajal, and I was nervous because we had learned our roles from Shobha di in only 7 days. The Apne Aap staff and the mothers of many of the girls were in the audience, but there were many more people too.

They all really liked it, and asked us to perform again. The second time we performed the puppet show, many more people came. Even those who were eating something were more interested in the puppet show than in the food. All the people watched the show very closely. I was happy because my mother also came to Nehru Stadium to watch the show and she praised it like everyone else. People were taking our photos and

talking in a friendly manner, introducing themselves to us. I would like to participate again in such programmes, along with my group, on behalf of Apne Aap so that we get chance to see the outer world and interact with people outside our community. I would like it especially if they keep praising us!

Chanchal: My name is Chanchal. I study in class 6 at the Aap Women Worldwide community centre in Subhash Camp. We organized a puppet show programme, which Shobha di and Jagdish sir [A2W2 helpers] helped us prepare. We saw all sorts of things there, we saw people campaigning for farmers, for the unemployed, for labour worker and against atrocities on girls. Some people organized exhibitions and sold posters, books and pictures. Some children were dancing, some were addressing the meetings. Some were singing songs, some were presenting events. There was a lot to eat and drink, and I had a good time interacting with all these different people.

Sadama: My name is Sadama. I am student of class 4. I presented a puppet show with my friends at Nehru Stadium during the India Social Forum. The first thing I did when I arrived was that I ate two samosas. When our show was over we went to a food stall for lunch where we ate more good food, chhole chawal, chhole bhature.

I liked the puppet show and all the events. In the puppet show I

played the role of a dog belonging to paanwallas, and I spoke a few words at the beginning. For the first time in my life I was standing onstage, before thousands of people. It made me feel very good. There was very good atmosphere, we were dancing and sloganing and watching many other people do the same. If I could go there again, I would be so happy. If I get the chance I would like to visit again there.

People came here from different parts of the country and it was nice to meet so many different people. Our puppet show was on the subject of atrocities on girls – rape, exploitation, trafficking. In our puppet show, we showed how brokers sell the girls and earn a lot of money. This is not fair. We should stop it. Prostitution will have to stop. And our puppet show told people this.

This story can fit 150-200 words.

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My Views on the Outside World by Iqbal, carpentry student

(as told to Janaki Dubey)

Khidderpore, Nov. 28: For the first time in my life, I have come out of my village, travelled a long distance and landed in a metropolitan city. It was an amazing experience in my life and was stranger than anything I had imagined. I still feel like I am in a dream land. The difference between life in the city (where life is fast-paced and energetic throughout the day and night, and where everyone seems to have their own work, which they complete systematically and with discipline) and life in the small village where I was born (where the only life anyone knows is the life of the Bihar red light areas), is like the difference between heaven and hell. In our village, our community depends completely on the earnings of the female family members, who are forced to feed their families by offering prostituted sex for money. In the city, though, we feel that there are other opportunities to earn a livelihood for our families.

Here in Kolkata, I got the opportunity to live in a world outside my village. There is a different ambience here, and people can live with respect and dignity and without as much fear of violence. In our community, we always face an abusive environment with lots of addictions (to alcohol, drugs, etc.), which always effect our lives. Having left that environment, I feel like staying permanently in the outside world, where my mothers and sisters can have a life of dignity and respect.

While I have been in Kolkata, I have even gotten a few opportunities to participate in different events and activities because of my involvement with Apne Aap Women Worldwide (A2W2). One of the events, which was organised by the local Rotary Club, was a visit to NICO Park. A2W2 was invited, so we started the trip early morning. Everything was provided for us during the day (breakfast, lunch, and snacks in the evening) and we were able to see music and dance programs in the end of the day. We also had fun going on the different types of rides.

Aside from these fun outings, we are also getting an extensive training on carpentry during our stay in this "outside world." I think that this carpentry course may change my life and I may be able to plan my future differently, and help all my dreams come true. After I complete this course, I don't want to get back to the village. Instead, I would be happy to work and earn to help bring my family out of the profession, and help them into the mainstream of society.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The stigma attached to prostitution and the clandestine nature of operations makes it difficult to arrive at authentic numbers of the girls and women in prostitution.
- 70,000 to a million women and girls are in prostitution. More than 35% were pushed into prostitution as children.
- Within India 72 per cent of the trafficked girls are kidnapped, abducted, tricked and lured into prostitution.
- 63 per cent of the prostituted and trafficked are from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and minority religions. The tribal communities identified are Bedia, Kanjar, Gujjar, Devadasis and Nutts.
- The special law in India dealing with trafficking is the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act of 1986. It punishes acts by third parties facilitating prostitution like brothel keeping, living off earnings and procuring.
- The substantive law in India is the Indian Penal Code of 1860 which prohibits trafficking and sale of minors.
- The Goa Children's Act 2003 is the only Indian statute which gives a legal definition of trafficking and is child specific.
- A bill to amend the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act of 1986 is pending in the Indian Parliament. The amendment calls for harsher punishment for traffickers and buyers of prostituted sex and decriminalises women in prostitution for soliciting in a public place. Apne Aap Women Worldwide supports this amendment and advocates for the right of Indian women not to be prostituted.

Source for figures: Trafficking in Women and Children in India: A study by the National Human Rights Commission, Orient Longman, 2005

SHAME BY SITA

(as told to Sudebi Thakurata)

Kolkata, Nov. 25: I am Sita. No, not the one our society worships as a Goddess for her purity and chastity, but the one that society has pushed its darkest corner now refuses to recognise as one of its members. I have lived in the gloominess of the Khidderpore red light area for the past 37 years. I was an innocent 14 year old girl, belonging to a very poor family. My family forced me to marry a man who would not take a large dowry for the marriage. Though the wedding cost us little money, the marriage itself was very expensive for me, since my husband put me through intolerable torture and trauma. He would beat me and rape me at will. One day, when I could bear my life no longer, I fled with my sister-in-law to Kolkata in order to earn money, with which I hoped to reshape my shattered life. I met a

lady at Park Circus, who promised me a good job. My sister-in-law urged me not to accept, but the world was not so familiar to me then. Money was the only thing I could think of to change constant remaining agony and shame in my life.

I realized too late that I was being sold to the brothels of Khidderpore, from which no return was

*“My younger daughter
Refuses to talk to me
out of Shame”*

possible. My dignity was torn to pieces, but I had no other way of supporting the family that had escaped with me. I asked my malkin, who was a little compassionate, if I could keep my brothers with me, as there was no other breadwinner in my family. I never wanted my

daughters to have the same fate. Is their any mother who would think otherwise?

Only my brothers, my younger daughter and my son know the truth about my life in prostitution. My family and my husband’s family thinks that I work as a domestic help in Kolkata. Even though these people trapped me in a piece of hell, wasted my life, and shattered my dreams, I still do not want them to have to feel ashamed by knowing that I work by selling my body.

I used to cry a lot. But I soon learned that some things will never change, no matter how much you cry. So I stopped crying one day. At the beginning I thought I would try to bear the trauma and, after saving money, I would escape this life. But even after 37 years, I have no savings. But I feel glad that I have been able to save the lives of my family members. I

feel proud that my brothers honour me and my struggle. To them, I am not a dirty woman who sells her body. I feel happy and sad at the same time when my son asks me to quit my job as it hurts his self-respect. I tell him “My dear son, you die of shame today because of what your mother does. But you would have been dead long before today, if your mother did not do that, because you would have starved.” My elder daughter does not even know about me as I always kept her away. My daughters’ in-laws also are ignorant about my status. It hurts me when my younger daughter refuses to talk to me out of shame, failing to understand the trauma of her mother, the trauma of a woman who wanted to live but let others live instead.

Why is it that I will always be ashamed of what I do, but that society will never be ashamed of what it has done to me?

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discussion was followed by a screening of the documentary, *The Selling of Innocents*, which generated an overwhelming response from the audience. After the screening, the adolescent group of Subhash Camp staged a puppet show on the victimization of the women in brothels at the hands of the police. The performance received huge applause from the spectators and was singled out for a repeat performance in the main exhibition ground.

The four days at ISF taught the A2W2 participants many things. Many felt that they could interact with different organizations because the ISF helped them

see the interconnectedness of different issues and the importance of solidarity. The ISF also helped everyone see that people are struggling for their rights all over the world, in different ways. In the words of Tamanna, a Kishori Mandal leader from Topsia, “For a long time, I used to think that Apne Aap is the only organization that works for the betterment of our lives. But here I get the feel that we are not alone in this work. This gives me more conviction to grow up and work for children’s rights.” Quresha Biwi, from Forbesganj, was overwhelmed to see the people dancing, singing, clapping all over and she felt that had she not come for the ISF meeting, she would have never imagined that such a vibrant life could exist.

Nobel Peace Prize Winner Dr. Shirin Ebadi Visits India

by Manisha Munshi

New Delhi, Nov. 26: Apne Aap Women Worldwide (A2W2) recently hosted Dr. Shirin Ebadi, a 2003 Nobel Peace Prize Winner from Iran, as she made her way across India – stopping to visit the red-light areas of Kolkata and Mumbai before finally stopping in New Delhi. Once in Delhi, Dr. Ebadi acted as the guest of honour at an A2W2 event at the Gandhi King Plaza of the India International Centre, and gave a lecture on “Gender Discrimination and Sex Trafficking” in conjunction with Dr. Sayeeda Hameed, member of the Planning Commission.

The event began with introductions by Ms. Ruchira Gupta, Founder and Executive Director of A2W2. Recounting her travels with Dr. Ebadi in Kolkata, Ms. Gupta told the audience that she had never met someone so committed to meeting the real people in the red light areas. She recalled, “When I tried to take her [Dr. Ebadi] to one of the famous Calcutta clubs, she said, ‘No. I don’t want to go here. I want to be among the people.’” Even in Delhi, Dr. Ebadi was less interested in meeting politicians than in meeting the poor people with whom Apne Aap works.

After Ms. Gupta’s introduction, Dr. Ebadi

proceeded to address the audience, with the help of a Farsi-English translator. She first elaborated on the historic connections between Iran and India, and expressed her hope that cooperation between NGOs of the two countries will result in fruitful action on behalf of the vulnerable sections of society. She then went on to discuss the different ways in which various legal systems confront the issue of prostitution, emphasising prostitution’s intimate link with poverty and noting that governments that punish only the men and women trapped in prostitution are, in effect, punishing poverty. Also touching on how prostitution and trafficking are related to the spread of HIV/AIDS, she concluded with a discussion of prostitution and women’s rights in Iran saying, “I hope for a victory for all women of the world.”

Following Dr. Ebadi’s speech, Dr. Hameed also spoke extensively on the subject of sex trafficking. Focusing on the close links between gender discrimination and sex trafficking, Dr. Hameed gave several examples of this connection from her own research and writing. Following the speeches, both Dr. Ebadi and Dr. Hameed did the honours for launching the A2W2 publication *The Place Where We Live Is Called*

A Different type of Exploitation

by Kamla (as told to Neelam Kohli)

Delhi, Nov. 22: Women and girls like me, who make a living as a domestic worker face a different kind of behaviour from their employers than most people do. Sometimes, if the householder is a good employer – meaning that he gives payment on time, he allows time off if we are sick and he even makes payment for those days – our lives become easier. But most people are not like this.

Most of the householders I have worked for eventually show their evil sides. One lady used to give me a lot of work, which I could not always handle. She did not allow me any leave. Once, I had a critical situation at home, as my mother was in very bad health, and there was no one to look after her. My employer spoke to me very badly because I told her I had to take off, and she cut payment for my days, even though I told her I needed the money for my mother’s hospital bills and that I would work more in the coming days.

This treatment is not the only problem that we domestic workers face. I know girls whose male employers misbehave with them, especially if they are young girls, because that girl is unable to complain to third person. If she does complain, nobody will believe her; on the contrary, even outsiders will then abuse her, saying ‘Who are you to defame respected persons?’ Even though they say this, everybody knows what happens in such houses. But rather than feeling bad for us, other people also molest us, saying, ‘Oh! You completed your work at a brothel (the abusive household), we know what type of girl you are.’ So we, as domestic workers, face abuse by both householders and society.

a Red Light Area, written by the children of the Kolkata red light areas. They cut the ribbons on copies of the book and were then presented with bouquets by members of the Apne Aap Subhash Camp Kishori Mandal.

Following the book launch, the speakers and guests – the latter of whom included distinguished persons from political, corporate, and artistic fields – moved

to one of the rooms within the India International Centre for a reception honouring the chief guest, Dr. Ebadi. Toasting Dr. Ebadi, Ms. Gupta called her “one of the bravest people I have ever met,” and expressed her wish that Apne Aap Women Worldwide will continue to be privileged by interactions and joint work with people such as Dr. Ebadi.

“A Better Life is Possible for Prostitutes”: A Speech

by Dr. Shirin Ebadi

New Delhi, Nov. 25: I greet you, ladies and gentlemen. I am grateful to have been able to come to historic India for the third time and speak to you in beautiful Delhi. Iran and India have ancient ties. Centuries ago, Zoroastrians who wanted to preserve their religion after the Arab Conquest migrated to India and their descendants today live in generous India as Parsees.

I feel obliged to thank all those who have worked hard to set up this gathering, especially Ms. Ruchira Gupta and Apne Aap, and I hope that this trip can open doors for more cooperation between Iranian and Indian NGOs. I want to talk to you today about prostitution, sex trafficking, and the laws that concern them. One can divide countries in terms of their approach to the question of prostitution into several categories:

- (a) Those in which prostitution is legally accepted and treated as if it was a vocation. In this approach, those in prostitution have medical insurance and benefit from retirement provisions, which of course entails their paying taxes. The Netherlands is one such country. Police and the legal apparatus recognize prostitution as a job, much like an electrician's, and prostitutes benefit from legal accommodations afforded to jobholder. The problem here is that by legitimizing prostitution, we are in fact legalizing the use of people's bodies for pleasure and ignoring its unethical aspects. In Holland, even the television carries advertisement for prostitution. With legal limitations out of the way, prostitution is given ground and those who have wealth can appropriate the body of men and women for pleasure, alongside the elaborate home, automobiles, telephone, and private jets that they have already acquired. Such legalization benefits the rich.
- (b) In countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, prostitution is entirely illegal and the legal system and police punish those that perpetrate it, be they men or women, client or provider.
- (c) Those that punish only women and men engaged in prostitution and not those who pay for it. In these countries, the law literally punishes poverty, for no person is willingly to sell her body for pleasure without being in financial need. It is poverty that drives prostitution. In this approach justice is fully injured. Those must in fact be punished who purchase the services of a provider of sex.
- (d) There are also countries in which prostitution is illegal and a punishment is set aside for it, but, unfortunately, police and the courts do not enforce the law, and prostitution occurs with full knowledge of authorities. Your country, India, is one such country. Police knows about red light areas and how the poor are used to slake the thirst of sex customers, but they do not enforce the law under the pretext that male concupiscence needs fulfillment or that it at least brings money to the poor. This is the worst approach to prostitution. It not only looks the other way when it comes to an illegal act, but also fails to provide support for victims of violence. Prostitutes do not benefit from medical and legal assistance. Moreover, with such an approach, sexually transmitted diseases become rampant. The only thing that can help prostitutes in Type D societies is for NGOs to step in and fill the support vacuum. Those that are voluntarily doing this job are to be commended for their efforts.

The only sustainable way to eliminate the root cause of prostitution is to deal with economic poverty, the spiral of poverty. Again, no person willingly subjects her body to the desires of another without being in need; she does so because she needs to feed her children, knows no other skills, and has no independent wealth. Her body and her innocence are her only capital.

Economic poverty can become cultural poverty and together they make poverty generational. Another words, poverty will prevent people from sending their

Dr. E Badi's Speech

children to school or teaching them skills, purchasing books or buying watercolors. It is for this reason that I argue poverty is hereditary. The children of the poor are forced to remain poor. In India, intergenerational prostitution is a reality. Prostitution is no longer regarded as abominable, but, at best, as a sad reality. Daughters are forced to sell their bodies next to their mothers.

The first thing to do is to educate people about the atrocity called prostitution, the ills that it brings, physically and socially, and then start providing alternative skills to prostitutes in the hope that they may find subsistence elsewhere. The government must open vocational training schools as an important step to eliminate prostitution. Usually, though, in such cases, governments claim lack of budget. But this is only an excuse. It is simply enough for them to reduce a little of their military budget. In your country the military budget is more than the combined budget of education and health. With the cost of building a single atomic bomb — which I hold no country needs — one can do many things: build shelters, create vocational schools, and open doors for alternative ways of life.

What's also important is for the public to be sensitized to the ills of prostitution, to believe that a better life is possible for prostitutes, and for people to care for more than themselves and their family. People should constantly criticize the actions of their governments, not necessarily for the sake of changing hands that govern or take power themselves, but to remind rulers of existing social problems and force them to take action. For example, a comprehensive report detailing the demography of a red light area in India can be drafted, the cost of a project providing shelter and education for its inhabitants estimated and against the cost of building a single military item, say a plane. Such comparison can be used to highlight misplaced deeds and to force electoral candidates to crown their campaign agenda with military budget reduction. People of the world must force their leaders to use national resources in the service of every person and not for war and murder.

Let me say a few things here about the situation in Iran, in which sexual relationships outside of marriage are illegal. They are punishable as zena or sex outside marriage in two forms: First) An unmarried woman who

commits zena can be sentenced to 100 lashes of the whip. Second) A married woman who commits zena can be sentenced to stoning. She is buried chest-deep in the ground and pelted with "medium" size stones until she dies. Stones must not be too big to kill the individual upon delivery.

For years lawyers and human rights defenders in Iran have objected to this punishment, urging its overturn. They are yet to succeed but the struggle continues and recently they have started a campaign to fight it. As I speak to you, seven women have been convicted and are waiting to be stoned. All human rights defenders are trying to save them and to reverse such laws. It is significant that men can equally be punished by stoning, and that at least there is no gender difference here.

Prostitution in Iran is subterranean and illegal. Should the law enforcement find out about women engaged in prostitution, they can arrest them immediately and these women are subject to abovementioned treatments. Women who are engaged in prostitution have no recourse to the law and the protections afforded to a citizen by the state. Diseases such as AIDS are fast spreading. The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has unfortunately no long-term program to bring awareness to the younger generation — other than scattered public announcements in the form of posters around towns (at the airports, for example). Nor has it been distributing free prophylactics. HIV infection will soon turn into a serious public health problem.

When it comes to prostitution and trafficking of women, one should separate between when a woman submits to prostitution due to poverty or family dispute (for example when she is abused by her husband whom she cannot divorce and agrees to go with a trafficker) and when she is taken by force. In Iran many organizations have been found that traffic women to the Persian Gulf emirate of Dubai under the pretext of finding them good jobs. Once there, these women have no recourse to help. They cannot return to their own country. And they are kept in fear of authorities for their illegal status. Of course, they would never have

Editors of Red Light Despatch :

Ruchira Gupta, and
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agreed to go with the trafficker should they have been content in their own land. Nor do they probably have an incentive to go back, fearing such dangers as honor killing. Therefore only a few of those who have been smuggled in this way will sum up courage to report to the police.

Women and young girls who are trafficked for sex, with or without their own consent, usually end up in Arab countries or littoral countries of the Persian Gulf, of which the names of UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait often come up. Young men and boy are also victims of such trafficking. Pakistan and Afghanistan join the previous list of culpable countries. Unfortunately, the same is true with Iran, which according to reports traffics women into the country, especially from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the caucuses. One of the tools trafficker use is addiction, which is one of the major problems in Iran.

One of the outcomes of prostitution is honor killing. Unfortunately, in Iran, especially in smaller cities, when a woman is forced into prostitution, the men (husbands, fathers, brothers) feel like by killing her they will restore family honor. The law punishes this crime. It is the case that such murder is usually not reported to the authorities for the murderer to be punished. Also, according to an absurd law in Iran, when a father or a paternal ancestor kills his child, even if it is done intentionally, the court can only sentence him to at most ten years in prison. Another words, killing an offspring brings reduced sentence for murder. As such, there are times when the father commits murder to absolve family honor and uses this law to escape a murder sentence. He usually stays in jail for no more than two years.

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Now, I want to became a social worker, and serve my community. I want to work for those women and children who are tortured day and night by their own people. I want to share my practical experience: for example, one of my neighbours, who was newly married, was tortured by her in laws and husband for dowry. When she

refused, she was dragged and brought out of the house and beaten in front of the community. This incident touched me a lot and I thought to work for this type of issue. I hope that I can convince more and more families to send their daughters to schools and vocational institutes, so that these girls may learn to become independent.

Based on the above, you can see that our laws not only do not prevent prostitution and trafficking in Iran, but there are unsettling and unacceptable patriarchal customs that shackle women. It is significant that Iranian women today are even more educated than men — for they form sixty five per cent of university attendees. Iranian women are against these laws and as such the feminist movement is very strong. This movement has been able to change some of the discriminatory laws of the country in favor of women, including in 2003, when the child custody law was amended in favor of mothers. But these victories are not sufficient and Iranian women will not stop until they have earned their absolute equality, for women rights and human rights are the two pans of the same fulcrum scale. How can there be human rights when half the people of a society are deprived of their human rights. The victory of feminist movements in every country will open the way for true, not imported, democracy. As such, a sacred battle is today being fought in Iran for women and men's rights.

I hope for a victory for all women of the world.

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