

Afghan Civil Society Press Conference In Support of Review and Reform of Shiite Personal Status Law

Afghan Civil Society organizations are organizing a press conference in support of the reform of Shiite Personal Status Law in Kabul Thursday 16 April in Kabul. Afghan Civil Society represents human and women's rights activists, non governmental organizations and academics. We welcome the call of President Karzai for the review and reform of the law.

Respect of women's rights at family is the basis of the development of a democratic society which requires full and complete participation of all. Therefore, the reform of family laws/personal status in order to ensure that they conform with the constitutional rights of women is a priority issue for Afghan civil society.

Over the last year through putting together several initiatives civil society has supported the a reformed version of the Shiite Personal status law by Family Law Drafting Committee, made up of government lawyers and members of civil society which is prepared with conformity with the constitution and the international treaties Afghanistan is party to and is based on comparative study of Shiite jurisprudence of different Islamic states. A draft reform bill has been submitted to Ministry of Justice, Parliament and Afghan Government.

Civil society has in meanwhile organized many academic discourses through arranging seminars, and meetings for review of the law. We have urged government in different fora to review the bill using gender experts, and ensure consultation for all laws affecting women's and citizens rights.

We are concerned with the lack of transparency and quick processing of this law without due consideration of the most important amendments that we have lobbied for and organized a peaceful demonstration on 15 April. The demonstration was meant to welcome the call for the reform of the law and asking for improvements to women's right. Unfortunately the protest was met by violent and unlawful counter-protests which aimed to create fear and suppress the freedom of expression. The same violent counter-protestors attacked a nearby girl's school to create chaos and violence.

Attacks on peaceful demonstrations, attacking schools by those wishing to impose their view on others is extremely dangerous and against the Afghan constitution. Afghan civil society groups call on relevant authorities to take action against such illegal acts. Whilst people have the right to peacefully demonstrate, there is no right to create fear and use violence to suppress the voice of others and limit their rights. If these actions are not dealt with, these groups will believe that their actions are legitimized which in turn will set a dangerous precedent for the country.

We condemn the violent counter-protest and call on the government to take this issue seriously to ensure that the legitimate and transparent process of law is respected and the content of the law protects human dignity, including the rights of women and children.

We ask the relevant state authorities to respect the basic rights of citizen of the country and ensure that no law is endorsed in which the rights of women are violated.

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