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FROK: UK Friends of Khwendo Kor

WOMEN’S RIGHTS

Khwendo Kor’s support for women’s rights underlies all its activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas . In this Newsletter, it can be seen in the example of KK’s work on marriage issues in Mansehra (below & p3) and the presence on its govern-

ing board of a leading women’s rights activist (p2). It is also the motivation which leads courageous KK staff to take women’s adult education into dangerous conflict areas (p4) and to increase the access of women in remote areas to a sustainable livelihood (p4). This issue

also illustrates the various ways in which FROK helps through seeking out new donors (p2); selling micro-credit goods (p1, 4); and providing specialist support such as helping edit publications and proposals (p3, 4). We would welcome new support in all these areas.

Right to choice in marriage: Farzana’s story

In Mansehra District, Norwegian Church Aid has funded KK to provide counselling and legal support for women suffering forced marriages, domestic violence or deprivation of their inheritance. FROK is helping KK to edit a booklet of studies selected from these cases. The story below is abbreviated from one of these. More cases are on page 3

Farzana and her childhood sweetheart had long wanted to marry. The boy’s family had sent repeated proposals to her family, who refused without consulting her. Eventually, she and the boy married without permission. Her furious family then arranged a Jirga, an unofficial court involving elected political leaders of the area.

The Jirga decided that the

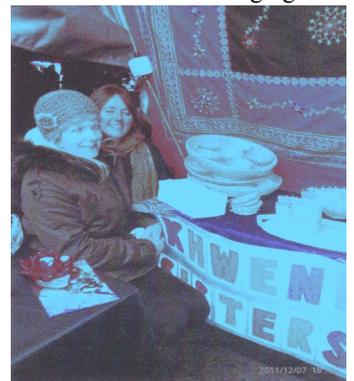
boy’s sister, barely 9 years old, should be given to Farzana’s brother in marriage as a “wani” (this is a custom in which if a man marries a woman without the consent of her family, then a woman from the man’s family is given in marriage to a man of the woman’s family, irrespective of whether she is a minor or is willing or not). The Jirga stated its decision was confidential, but Farzana requested KK’s help.

Owing to the sensitivity of this case, it was referred, first to the Regional Office, then to the KK Area Coordination Committee, which met both families to probe the facts. Counselling sessions were held and the matter was reported in the local newspaper.

Contd on back page

IN THE BLEAK MID-WINTER

Benson is often mentioned in weather reports as having had the lowest overnight temperature in Britain. It was here on the coldest evening in December that Elizabeth and Monika ran a KK stall at the Christmas street market. Despite freezing weather, it was very successful. FROK thanks Elizabeth and Monika for their stoicism and hopes it may inspire other members to volunteer to run stalls. Summer fetes are guaranteed to be less challenging!



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Special points of interest:

- Focus on Women’s Rights—inheritance rights, marriage choice and freedom from violence
- KK staff and Board members in the UK
- A timely reminder of the physical threats to safety facing KK staff
- Opportunities for FROK members to get involved in editorial work

KK 'HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER' IN YORK

In our last Newsletter, we reported that Khalid Usman, Director Operations of KK had been awarded a Human Rights Defender Fellowship at the University of York. Khalid arrived in the UK in January and will stay until



Khalid giving a public lecture about KK's work at the University of York

the end of June.

For FROK, this gives an opportunity to learn more about his work for KK. For Khalid, it provides a chance to explore new approaches to human rights with 'Defenders' from other countries. It also offers the possibility of his approaching new UK funders for KK's core costs. Khalid has already attended a FROK Committee meeting at which this was discussed and possible initiatives were planned.

FROK member, Jacqui Chainey and friends ran a stall at the venue where Khalid recently gave a public lecture and made £170 from sales of

jewellery and home-made produce. Look for her tips on how to run a successful stall in our next issue.

Khalid Usman (2nd from left) and Rukhshanda Naz j(2nd from Right) join members of the FROK Committee at their February meeting in Oxford



Leading fighter for Women's Rights comes to the UK

Another senior figure from KK attended FROK's February committee meeting. **Rukhshanda Naz** is a member of the Khwendo Kor Board of Governors and will shortly be at Warwick University studying for a further law degree.

Rukhshanda's struggle for women's rights began as a teenager, when she defied opposition from her family in order to study law (then a male preserve) instead of entering the usual arranged marriage. She practised at the bar only briefly before deciding to work full-time for women's rights. She was a major figure in the Aurat Foundation (www.af.org.pk) from its early days until two

years ago, when she moved to set up an office for UN Women in Peshawar. She has won numerous awards and was chosen to present the NGO statement at the United Nations CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women) session in 2007.

Her friendship with Maryam Bibi began in 1993, when Maryam was establishing Khwendo Kor and Rukhshanda the Aurat Foundation office in Peshawar. She has made herself available to FROK while in the UK, both to work with Khalid and the Committee on funding and to speak at events.

COINCIDENCE OR INSPIRATION?

"We have always found you anxious to do something for the betterment of the lot of the women of this Province.....It was the result of these efforts that today we find social relations amongst the women of Peshawar which did not exist earlier..."

"You always made it a point to go round the refugees inhabited area to see for yourself the condition of the refugees and always insisted on their being provided with the necessities of life. But for this personal interest and supervision the lot of the refugees would not have been what it is."

These words, which could so easily have been written about Maryam Bibi, KK's founder, were in fact part of the *Farewell Address by the APWA to Lady Dundas* (wife of the High Commissioner) on the eve of her departure from NWFP at the end of the 1940s.

A chance encounter by FROK member, Betty Hooper, with Lady Dundas' daughter, Anstice Onians, led to Anstice joining FROK and meeting Maryam. In the course of sharing photos and memories, they discovered an additional link. When Maryam finally decided to defy her family and take a job, that first job was with the All Pakistan Women Association, which Lady Dundas had founded for the "Educational, Social, Cultural and Economic Advancement" of the women of the North West Frontier Province. Can it be just coincidence that these aims correspond so closely to KK's? Or did the ideals of the APWA continue to echo for Maryam Bibi, as she continued into the 21st century the work with women which Lady Dundas had started in the mid-20th?



Mary and H.H. Muzaffar-al-Mulk, Mehtar of Chitral at Sharasham in October 1948

WOMEN'S RIGHTS—Inheritance, Freedom from Violence and Child Custody

The Norwegian Church Aid project in Mansehra described on the front page is a good example of KK's integrated and holistic approach. At the heart of KK's work are the Village Organisations which they set up to lead development work in each area. These Organisations have been involved in providing referrals to the project and support for the women seeking justice. The work has been based in KK's local Community Facilitation Centres (CFCs), established with the help of UN Women.

KK uses an area's own resources and culture to subtly change attitudes. Initial counselling and mediation may include interpretations by religious leaders of the true meaning of the Koran and Hadith. Jirgas (the traditional courts of elders and religious and political leaders) are often involved, but their verdicts are challenged when necessary, providing an opportunity to educate

them in new ways of thinking. Only if defendants ignore the decisions of Jirgas, is the authority of the Family Court invoked.

As mentioned on p1, with editorial help from FROK, KK is preparing a booklet of case studies from this project, to provide material for discussion and education, and encourage donors to support such work....more abbreviated examples below:

A Widow's Pension— Jabba's story

During a field visit to her village by CFC staff, **Jabba** shared her problem. She married in 2004 and after a happy year, gave birth to a baby. Then in the devastating earthquake of 2005, their house had collapsed, her husband and child had died and her own leg had been broken. She had received Rs100,000 compensation from the Pakistan gov-

ernment, which she handed over to her mother-in-law. Despite this, her mother-in-law had applied to the bank to stop payment of Jabba's pension as the widow of a government servant, on



KK gave immediate help to this woman injured in the 2005 earthquake and is still giving help to those like Jabba who continue to suffer

the grounds that she was not the person legally entitled to it.

The CFC referred this case to the Regional Office, which called a meeting for mediation. Both parties wanted to solve the issue out of court, but requested time for more thought. At a second meeting, after long discussion, the mother-in-law agreed to withdraw her application. Jabba has confirmed that the pension was transferred into her name and she is receiving it.

Violence and child custody...Aneela and Alia's stories



Children deserve a life away from violence (picture not of Alia or Aneela's son)

Alia told CFC staff she had lived happily with her husband until the birth of her first baby. Then he had started to be cruel to her both mentally and physically. One day he told her that he wanted his brother to become engaged to her younger sister. When she did not reply, he had gone to her parents with the proposal but they had refused. At this, her husband threatened that if they rejected the proposal he would divorce Alia. For the sake of her child and her marriage, Alia persuaded her parents to accept. With the engagement agreed, she hoped her husband's behaviour would change for the better, but it became even worse. Finally, she felt compelled to leave him.

She had now been living with her parents for two years and wanted a divorce.

The CFC staff arranged a meeting with the husband, at which he consented to a Jirga. At this, he agreed to divorce his wife and to pay back her dowry. The Jirga also decided that the child should stay with his mother and that his father should pay for his health care and education.

Aneela was referred to the CFC by a member of a Village Organisation. She told them that almost immediately after her marriage, her husband and other members of his family had started to torture her. Her husband had routinely beat her like an animal and she had not been allowed contact with her own parents. Then she gave birth to a baby boy and, according to tradition, had visited her parents to introduce them to him. On her return, her husband had beaten her and burnt her arms and legs with cigarettes. She had accepted all this and not told her parents to preserve the honour of the family. Eventually a neighbour told her

**FROK's membership year is
1st April to 31st March.
Consider making an additional
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parents and they had fetched her back to their house. During the last six months, when she had lived with her parents, her husband had neither contacted her, nor paid maintenance for his child.

The CFC staff failed to involve the husband for mediation. Therefore they referred the case to the regional Office, which filed a suit for maintenance before the Family Court. When the defendant failed to appear at two hearings, the court passed a decree awarding maintenance to Aneela.

KK WORKER AND GIRLS CAUGHT IN GUN FIRE

The incident reported below is a vivid reminder of the dangers faced by the courageous KK staff whose work we support. The Women's Literacy Centre at Jamrud was set up and is run with a grant from the J. A. Clark Trust, which has worked in tandem with FROK since our founding.

Khwendo Kor has become so expert at working in conflict areas that their staff are seldom directly caught up in violence. However, on 23rd January, Community Facilitator Nain Tara Syed spent six hours as an unwilling eye-witness of a battle between terrorists and the Frontier Corps (the FATA army) in Khyber Agency.

Nain Tara had planned to drop some supplies for the Women's Literacy Centre in Jamrud en route to a field

visit. As the office vehicle was unavailable that day, she shared a taxi with two colleagues as far as the Centre.

When they arrived, Nain Tara went into the Centre to ask for help to unload the supplies, but hearing bullet fire, quickly returned outside. She then saw that her colleagues were no longer waiting in the taxi and the whole area had been sealed off by troops. While she was looking, an army official pushed her back, but at that moment, he was shot dead beside her.

She rushed inside and stayed there through all the shelling that followed. Some girls attending the Centre were also confined there. At one point, when the shelling stopped for a while, Nain Tara was able to evacuate those who lived nearest. However, those who lived outside the enclosure would have been in the line of fire, so she kept them with her. After six hours, she and the girls were rescued without injury.

Right to choice in marriage

contd

Eventually, with the agreement of both families, the Jirga stepped back from its decision.

Customs such as "wani" are a clear violation of human rights. Under Pakistan's new Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act 2012, they became punishable offences. Farzana's situation was resolved without involving official courts, but the KACC had given this Jirga a powerful warning of the way such practices will be viewed under the new law.

MICRO-CREDIT NEWS

Big Expansion of KK's Sustainable Livelihood Programme

Last summer, the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund offered KK's Sustainable Livelihood Department a Rs.15 million credit line to consolidate its work with women entrepreneurs and home-based workers. As a result, KK has expanded and re-organised this department and begun a three-year programme to enhance the work skills and marketing ability of 4,500 women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Our illustration is taken from a new catalogue being prepared by the mazri department. We hope to have some new items and colours available soon, in addition to the old favourites. **Can any of our members volunteer to show the catalogue to local fair trade and craft**

FROK NEEDS YOU — FROK helps KK by editing the English of publications, reports and proposals. The work is interesting, increases insight into KK's activities and involves personal contact with KK staff. **Could you offer occasional help with this?** (Such requests are sporadic but, like London buses, may then come three at a time!).

The **Newsletter Editor** would also welcome help on any aspects of preparation, including writing up FROK news items, monitoring KK publications for news, and finding illustrations. **Help could be with individual pages or single issues.** All suggestions and offers welcome—contact Marilyn (mac7@york.ac.uk) or Elma (elmasinclair@yahoo.co.uk).

shops, or run a stall with the new stock? If so, email: elmasinclair@yahoo.co.uk.



Success for KK Baskets in Amnesty Catalogue

The New Internationalist/Amnesty online catalogue has almost sold out of

KK's large storage baskets. As a result, the buyers are considering including our wastepaper baskets and jewellery boxes in the next catalogue. We thank the members who supported us by buying FROK products from the catalogue at Christmas and hope you will continue to do so for presents on other occasions. Friends of the Earth will be joining the NI and Amnesty in promoting the catalogue in future, so buying FROK baskets in this way brings benefits to a variety of other good causes.

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