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IWPR report revealed that Herat officers had been allegedly infringing rights of unmarried couples.

Police in Herat say an IWPR article published in late July on officers' reported harassment of unmarried couples found together in public prompted action that led to a considerable fall in complaints about such intimidation.

Herat Couples Complain of Taleban-Style Harassment was published on July 29 and featured allegations that young couples had been arrested and punished by the police.

But officials and local civil institutions in Herat province now say that there have been no further reports of this kind of abuse.

"In the past two months, no such cases of harassment have been committed by the police," said Nur Khan Nekzad, police spokesman in Herat province.

After an IWPR reporter interviewed Herat police chief Sayed Aqa Saqeb for the article, and its subsequent publication, more attention had been paid to the education and training of policemen on personal freedoms enshrined in the constitution.

Afghanistan's Supreme Court has ruled that while an interpretation of Islamic law would regard it as sinful for unrelated men and women to be alone together, if unaccompanied, no legal restrictions could be applied.

Nekzad said that more focus was now put on raising officers' awareness of human rights, respecting human dignity and maintaining public confidence.

"Luckily, we have not witnessed such treatment for a while now," he said, adding that some policemen who were found to have intimidated young couples had been punished.

Sharifa Shahab, director of monitoring police violations in the independent human rights commission, said the IWPR report had contributed significantly to getting the problem resolved.

"We have received no complaints in this regard in the past two months, which shows that such treatment has considerably decreased or has been eliminated.

"The publication of the IWPR report and consistent monitoring by the independent human rights commission have had a positive impact."

She said that she personally attended weekly administrative meetings at police headquarters, where the chiefs of police of all precincts were also present.

"I have witnessed the police chief of Herat discussing [personal freedoms] several times, and it shows the impact of the media in bringing about [improvements in police conduct]," she said.

Khan Mohammad Daneshjo, editor-in-chief of the Abadi Weekly in Kabul, said that the spokesman of the ministry of interior affairs, Mohammad Sediq Sediqi, called him to congratulate him after his newspaper republished the IWPR report.

"I am 100 per cent sure that any change in [police conduct regarding personal freedoms] in Herat province is the result of the publication of the IWPR report," Danshejo said.

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