

Afghanistan: Jun/Jul '11 Part II

Author: IWPR

Monitoring of inmates and conditions at Kabul detention facility improved after IWPR investigation into child's death in custody.

An IWPR report (**Grave Abuse Alleged at Kabul Juvenile Centre**) about the murder of a young boy in a Kabul juvenile detention centre where it was alleged that lax procedures had left children vulnerable to abuse has led to better care at the facility.

Although supposed to house only minors under the age of 18, IWPR heard from several sources that the detention centre also included older inmates with influential relatives who had them admitted so that they wouldn't have to serve time in prison. Some of the latter had allegedly bullied and abused the younger inmates.

The IWPR investigation was prompted by the death of Massoud Khalil, 17, who was assaulted at the detention centre, apparently by two older inmates.

Mohammad Zaher, director of the criminal investigation department in Kabul, said that the IWPR story had pushed officials to look into the situation more seriously and change the way the centre was run.

A year ago, responsibility for the detention centre was transferred from the police to the Afghan justice ministry, leaving the force unable to take responsibility for security within the facility.

"After the - very accurate - report was written, the officials realised how important the police's role was in controlling the prisons, particularly the children's education and reform centre," he said.

"It has been decided that the responsibility for prisons will be transferred from the ministry of justice back to the ministry of the interior."

Overcrowding in the prison was also raised in the IWPR report, with some inmates alleging that they were being detained even though they had served their sentences.

Jamil-u-Rahman Kamgar, an appeal court judge in south Kabul, said that after the publication of the IWPR article, he ordered all the lawyers in his office to take particular care to attend to their cases in a timely and careful manner.

"The report shocked us and made us feel more responsible," he said, adding that he would be monitoring his department's performance in this regard in the future.

Mina Habib, the Afghan journalist who researched and wrote the IWPR story, found that centre staff were reluctant to talk about problems there. And even after obtaining high-level permission to visit the facility, she was constrained by the constant presence of its director.

Nonetheless, Enayat, an officer working at the centre, said he had not expected that one article could bring about so many changes.

He said that efforts were instituted to improve the running of the place after Habib came to interview inmates and officials, "I believe your report had an impact. The police enter the cells every three hours and check things out."

In addition, he said there has also been a reshuffle of senior management, "I believe that was also the result of the report."

One inmate's father, Obaidullah, waiting for his son at visiting time, said that he had heard that conditions had improved greatly in the last month.

His son had told him that not only had the officials begun treating them well, but their food and clothing had improved, with the police taking particular care to monitor the inmates and search their rooms.

Afghan journalists who read Habib's report said they were impressed how she'd overcome obstacles to researching the story.

"IWPR reports are written comprehensively, accurately and with attention to detail," said Hakimullah

Shahryar, a journalist for Ariana TV, who said he often used the stories as a basis for producing his own news reports.

“When I noticed the abuse story in the juvenile detention centre, I really appreciated it. As a journalist, I realised how difficult it was to write such a piece. But the reporter, who is a woman, prepared the article despite all the problems; her work is admirable.”

“The IWPR reports are very interesting and accurate,” said Mortaza Musavi, an employee of the Cheragh newspaper, adding that his title often reprinted the stories.

He added that he particularly respected the work of Habib, “who was able to prepare the report about abuse in the juvenile centre although she faced many challenges”.

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