

July 2009

Project Title: Iranian Family Court Advisors Human Rights Training Programme

Date: 2nd to 13th July 2007

Location: London and Nottingham

Unit: Short Courses and Training

Core Staff: David Harris, Emilie Hunter

Student Assistants: Sophia Soares

Project Summary

A two-week residential training programme was held for Iranian Family Court Advisors, which included academic study of relevant human rights and women's rights standards, complimented by skills-based training and sessions with relevant UK experts in a range of relevant subject areas. Participants were provided with a range of tools to promote women's rights in accordance with international human rights standards within the particular context of the family court system in Iran.

Objectives

The course aimed to equip participants with:

- Understanding of women's human rights and relevant international standards in the context of Iran and its family court system;
- Awareness of the relevant international human rights obligations of Iran and their compatibility with Shari'ah law
- Guidance on best practice in relevant subject areas through interaction with leading experts on relevant women's rights issues, and dialogue with these experts;
- Skills relevant to the work of family court counsellors in the context of their functions within the Iranian family courts.

Participants

14 Participants took part in the training: 10 female Family Court advisors and four government officials from the Ministry of Justice.

Content

A programme of training and capacity-building workshops and seminars was devised on the basis of three core themes:

- **Human Rights Standards** – Including an introduction to the International Human Rights regime, relevant women's human rights instruments (particularly the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women), children's rights and Sharia Law, family law reforms in Muslim states, and women's rights in Islamic law.
- **Meeting UK Experts** – Topics included alternative legal approaches to relationship breakdowns, women holding government to account, and gender-based violence.

July 2009

- **Developing Counselling Skills** – Session topics included counselling methods for victims of sexual and gender violence, techniques for counselling couples, strategies for counselling on issues relating to children, family counselling and counselling theory.

Method

The training method was highly participatory and made extensive use of relevant case work and discussion. Peer to peer skills transfer occurred throughout sessions where the participants' experiences were relevant and beneficial to others. Sessions were conducted in English, aided by simultaneous translation between English and Farsi.

Speakers

Over 25 speakers participated in the training course, including academics and practitioners from across the UK who specialised in topics within the core thematic areas.

Visits

Study visits were made to the Garden Court Chambers, Brent Magistrates Court, the School of Oriental and African Studies and a Women's Refuge, allowing participants to examine how the system of women's refuges operates in the UK.

Outcomes

The course was extremely successful, with feedback from participants at the close of the course indicating high levels of satisfaction.

In ranking the overall experience of the course, 75% of participants selected the highest levels of satisfaction.

Comments from participants included:

"Human rights [session] was excellent. Comparisons with Shari'ah law were perfect."

"With 32 years experience in government, NGO and private practice with children and their families, this course has given me great assistance in reviewing these matters in a much more realistic manner."