Swiss Cooperation and Human Rights in Afghanistan

The Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN), a partner of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), organized a symposium on December 13, 2008 in Kabul, to celebrate the Human Rights Day and the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. The symposium provided the opportunity to discuss the current situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan and necessary measures to improve it. A statement was issued at the end of the symposium declaring that, despite the Human Rights violations, there has been some remarkable achievements. Active participation of citizens in political and social movements is one of the most important achievements.

The statement also declared that women and children are the groups most affected by Human Rights violations. Many Afghan women are still deprived of their basic rights, and more than five out of the 13 million Afghan children do not have access to education. Some of them are begging in the streets while others are carrying out heavy work, not to mention forced early child marriages and some cases of child trafficking. Lack of security and rule of law, weak state structures and weak civil society are some of the most important elements leading to Human Rights violations.


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Willi Graf joins SDC Afghanistan as Country Director

Mr. Willi Graf has joined SDC Afghanistan as the new Country Director. He started his work in January 17, 2009 succeeding Mr. Andre Huber. Willi Graf has a wide experience of over 23 years in international cooperation assignments. Prior to his present position, he was the Senior Advisor for the Natural Resources and Environment Division at SDC in Bern for four years. Continued on page 2

Benoit Meyer-Bisch joins SDC Afghanistan as Human Rights Advisor

Last November 2008, Mr. Benoit Meyer-Bisch, lawyer, joined SDC Afghanistan as Programme Coordinator / Adviser in Human Rights. He is responsible for assisting and mainstreaming our programmes in the areas related to Human Rights and Justice. Mr. Benoit has worked in the fields of Human Rights, Good Governance, and Justice since 2001 both in Switzerland... Continued on page 2

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation is Switzerland’s international cooperation agency within the Swiss Foreign Ministry. The Government of Switzerland established the Swiss Cooperation Office Afghanistan in 2002 with a view of supporting the processes of political stabilization and reconstruction of the war torn country. Today, the Swiss Cooperation Office Afghanistan is running and supervising a broad development and humanitarian program.

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Afghanistan’s commitments to Human Rights are also expressed in the Afghan Constitution (2004) as well as national strategic documents such as the Afghanistan Compact (2006) and Afghanistan National Development Strategy (2008). Within this international and national legal and political framework, to which Switzerland is also either bound or committed, SDC is acting since years in numerous ways with regards to Human Rights in Afghanistan:

1) SDC directly supports Human Rights projects:
   • Support to the set-up and functioning of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) since its beginning;
   • Contribution in the set-up and/or capacity building of Civil Society organizations in the defense of Human Rights, like the Afghanistan Civil Society Forum (ACSF) and the Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN);
   • With the contribution to Global Rights, support to the Faculties of Law and Sharia through theoretically and practically training the law students and graduates to become active Human Rights professionals.

2) SDC contributes to common efforts of the international community, such as supporting financially and technically the governmental and civil society institutions in the establishment of an efficient, fair and transparent electoral system. It also provides funds to the broad humanitarian actions of ICRC and UNHCR.

3) SDC strives for mainstreaming Human Rights in other SDC projects in Afghanistan through Human Rights-based approaches (especially in the livelihoods ones), building the capacity of the rights holders to effectively exercise their rights and helping the duty bearers to better answer them.

While working at all levels of the Afghan society, Switzerland also acknowledges that much remains to be done, and that the challenges are still huge. In this regard, SDC welcomes all concrete commitments by all stakeholder towards the Human Rights agenda commonly agreed in the ANDS. Plans to establish a Human Rights Support Unit (HRSU) within the Ministry of Justice in order to mainstream the issue within the government and the decision to keep the existing human rights unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to report on the Human Rights situation in Afghanistan to the international conventions, are interesting steps in that way. On the other hand, the involvement of civil society is crucial for the promotion and protection of Human Rights in Afghanistan. Such an involvement particularly lies in the core reflections and strategy of SDC in this country.

Willi Graf joins SDC Afghanistan...

During his career at SDC, Willi Graf has served as the Deputy Country Director for the Swiss Cooperation Office in Bolivia from 1998 to 2004 and worked in the Agricultural Division from 1991 to 1998. His only service out of the SDC is his employment in the Regional Bean Research Program for the Great Lakes Region of Africa from 1985 to 1991, with an international agricultural research center.

Willi Graf was born in 1958 in Winterthur, Switzerland and he is an Agronomist of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), Zürich, with a doctorate degree in Agricultural Economics.

While expressing its heartfelt welcome to Willi Graf, the Swiss Cooperation Office Kabul would like to thank his predecessor Mr. Andre Huber for his efforts and enthusiasm in carrying out his work. Andre Huber will be linked to Afghanistan a couple of months longer by placing his broad experience at disposal of the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Benoit Meyer-Bisch joins SDC Afghanistan...

And international development-cooperation assignments. Before taking up his present post, he was a Project Assistant and then Project Coordinator in the areas of Juvenile Justice and child trafficking for the Terre des hommes Foundation (Swiss NGO) for 3 years in Nepal, Brazil, and Afghanistan. From 2001 to 2005, he worked with different Departments in Switzerland such as the Department of Criminal Law at Fribourg University, Cantonal Criminal Police of Fribourg, and the Courts for Juvenile Justice of Berner Jura and Seeland. Benoît has released 2 publications in the areas of Juvenile Justice and Human Rights-based Approaches. Mr. Benoît has earned his Bachelor and Masters Degrees in Law from Fribourg University in Switzerland and Heidelberg University in Germany, as well as an interdisciplinary Masters Degree of Advanced Studies in development and cooperation from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), Zürich.

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