



United Nations Population Fund

COMBATING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE
IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS / AZERBAIJAN



Combating Gender Based Violence Project in Azerbaijan is a 3-year initiative that aims at creating an enabling environment for reducing gender based violence in the society in order to support protection of human rights, gender equality and women's participation in decision-making processes.

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Life Betrayed: Stop Trafficking Before it Starts



SCWCA, the Government of Norway) and "Prevention and Response to the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence for IDPs and Refugees/Asylum Seekers in Azerbaijan" (SCFWCA, UNHCR, EC, Ward).

Highlighting the issues of gender-based violence, this documentary is intended to break the silence on the problems of human trafficking by bringing together a personal life account of a victim as well as scattered imaginations about the phenomenon. It is interesting to note that in the vast majority of cases people just read official figures about human trafficking from various sources without clear understanding of the personal tragedies of those who face this vis-à-vis in their lives. There are also cases when the people are aware of such a case, and sometimes they also know the victims, however, they do not realize that this is regarded to be a criminal offense according to national and respective international legal documents.

By narrating the experience of the main character throughout the whole documentary the film provides a unique insight into the problem of human trafficking in Azerbaijan. Talking about the factors that had forced her into becoming a victim of human trafficking, a hero mostly attributes what happened to the cases of violence that she was subjected to from her relatives. She tells that she had a husband and a daughter, they were not rich, but they were happy. Her husband fell seriously ill when their daughter was four years old. Despite all her efforts to save him he died. The actual nightmare started right after this. The parents of her husband were forcing her to sell the apartment she had. Each expression of disagreement was a reason for being beaten by the relatives, the ones who were in fact supposed to be of assistance. Being financially dependent she could not resist such a behavior too much.

Perhaps that is why the offer of an employment in Dubai came as a salvation to her. She could not even imagine that she was about to become a victim of human trafficking

Each year tens of young girls and women are recruited from Azerbaijan to work in the sex industry abroad. Sometimes, an offer of employment represents a rare chance for the majority of them to escape from the problems, especially financial hardships they experience. Being completely unaware of possible negative outcomes of such an "opportunity" these women become victims of human trafficking - a form of contemporary slavery the people are so reluctant to talk about, particularly when it affects their own families.

The documentary "Life Betrayed" represents a story of a woman who became a victim of human trafficking due to a number of interrelated circumstances including but not limited to lack of educational qualifications, limited economic opportunities as well as severe cases of domestic violence. The film was produced within the frames of the projects on "Combating Gender Based Violence in Azerbaijan" (UNFPA/Azerbaijan,



and face sexual harassment instead of working as a cleaner at the hotel.

In some cases the passports of women traveling abroad are taken away from them through deception or by force. You need to REMEMBER! In no case give your passport or any other document to anybody! If it is necessary, you can just show your passport and only give away its photocopy.



"All these things happened to me without my consent, but unfortu-

nately, our society disapproves of women like me... However, we need society's help and support... We as a society cannot solve the problem of domestic violence and trafficking unless we get the general public involved," says a hero of the film.

The launch of the documentary "Life Betrayed" was held in the "Europe" Hotel on April 30, 2009. The demonstration of the film was followed by the speeches of Mr. Peer Sieben, UNFPA Country Director for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, Mrs. Hijran Huseynova, the Head of

the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, and other representatives of state structures as well as national and international NGOs who stressed the importance of expanding the outreach campaigns on human trafficking and gender-based violence, its causes and consequences and the rights and responsibilities of those concerned. The importance of adopting respective legislation was emphasized among the major measures directed towards the elimination of these phenomena.

Azerbaijani Family in the Focus of the National Cinematography



Domestic violence continues to represent one of the most prevalent and less visible forms of the gender based violence in Azerbaijan. The challenge in addressing the phenomenon is linked to the strong foundations of patriarchal family structure that set down the hierarchy of power relations among family members, in certain cases allow for

the use of force as a mechanism of subordination as well as strictly protect the family interactions from any outside intervention. That is why the importance of culturally sensitive approach is absolutely crucial in addressing gender based violence in Azerbaijani context.

To tackle such an important impediment in raising GBV awareness and combating DV in Azerbaijan the

GBV project together with UNFPA CO, the XXI Century without VAW project and the State Committee on Family Women and Children's Affairs, the Ministry of Youth and the Azerbaijan Cinematography Foundation initiated a documentary contest entitled "Azerbaijani Family: past, present, future". The contest represented a comprehensive public awareness campaign focusing on

promotion of the egalitarian family values and support of the long-time tradition of mutual respect and non-violent methods of conflict resolution in Azerbaijani family environment.

Overall, 26 short documentaries addressing the social issues that affect Azerbaijani families at present (domestic violence, labour migration, reproductive rights, divorces, traditions, etc.) were submitted to the Selection Committee composed of the representatives of the above-mentioned agencies.

The award ceremony was held on May 12, 2009. Cultural Center of the Ministry of National Security of Azerbaijan Republic. Opening the ceremony Mrs Hijran Huseynova, the Head of the State Committee on Family, Women and Children's Affairs, emphasized the Government's commitment to protect the family and combat all forms of gender based violence in the country. She also stated that the number of the films submitted to the Selection Committee within a short period of time serves as an indicator of society's sensitivity to family values in the country. Mr Jamil Guliyev, the Head of the Azerbaijan Cinematog-



raphy Foundation and Mr Oqtay Mirqasimov, national artist and film director, both were of the opinion that the contest has not only fulfilled the mission of raising awareness on contemporary problems encountered by Azerbaijani families but has also played a great role in promoting modern Azerbaijani cinematography. All speakers expressed the wish for the event to be held on regional and international levels periodically.

Following the official opening ceremony the following films were announced to be the winners of the first three places: "Family tree" (1st place), "The Outsider" (2nd place)

and "The elderly" (3rd place). The representatives of the Selection Committee attributed their choices to the relevance of the selected films to the main idea of the documentary contest as well as the strength of the messages delivered by the films to the attention of the target audience.

In addition to the first prizes a few smaller awards were also presented to five other documentaries by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Ministry of Youth and Sport, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the National TV and Radio Broadcasting Council as well as the Ministry of Education. The GBV project's documentary "Life betrayed" did not take part in the official selection process due to ethical considerations. Nevertheless, the film was awarded a prize by the Ministry of Internal Affairs for providing a unique insight into the problem of human trafficking in Azerbaijan, its causes and consequences and the rights and responsibilities of those concerned.

The films are planned to be used as awareness raising resources during the campaigns held by the GBV project, the SCFWCA and other related agencies.

Media as an Agent of Change in Addressing Gender Based Violence

Media is one of the most important vehicles capable of increasing public awareness on any specific issue including the protection and promotion of women's rights, gender based violence and other related sensitive matters via delivering clear messages to the target audience. Transformation of negative stereotypes around women as well as perceptions on gender based vi-





olence would not be possible unless there is an active media involvement. The outreach activities by the GBV PCU aimed at national and local media strive to address this problem. The representatives of the project participate at different seminars and workshops aiming at raising awareness among the media representatives in general and improving their reporting skills in particular.

On May 26, 2009 the representatives of the GBV PCU participated in the workshop for media representatives with the presentation on "Women's rights: the obligations of the Azerbaijani government to CEDAW. The role of the media in addressing the GBV". The workshop was organized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Azerbaijan and brought together the representatives of several UN agencies, the representatives of the Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsman) of Azerbaijan Republic, the Country Director of the "International Media Support" as well

as journalists representing national and local media agencies. The workshop aimed at providing the audience consisting of 30 people with the information on UN human rights system, UN treaty-based mechanisms, major UN treaties, the issues related to human rights and ethics in media, women and child rights and other related topics.

The CGBV Project representatives provided the participants with comprehensive information on the major international women's rights document - CEDAW, the process of its development, the major issues addressed by the treaty, its ratification status as well as the obligations of the Azerbaijani government under this document. A second section of the presentation was on the issues concerning major gender concepts, gender definitions, gender stereotypes, gender discrimination, various forms of GBV, its causes and consequences, costs of GBV and analysis of the GBV coverage in media. The special emphasis was

placed on raising the issues of absent media law provisions on GBV, on guidelines and codes of conduct for media representatives.

"Media plays an enormous role in shaping the perceptions around women and their respective roles in a society. Conducting the workshop for journalists reporting on gender issues is very important. Media must demonstrate neutrality and impartiality reporting on such a sensitive issue" was one of the key messages of the presentation.

The speech was followed by the demonstration of the PSA "Life betrayed" produced within the frame of the GBV project in Azerbaijan. The workshop participants also had a chance to discuss these issues during the questions and answers session that followed the presentation.

The workshops for journalists and media representatives on highlighting GBV related issues and roundtables on covering gender and GBV issues in the media are planned to be held throughout the project lifetime.



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About UNFPA

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect. For more information please, go to www.unfpa.org

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