



Peace Efforts in the Region

The chronic issue of sectarian violence in the *Northern Areas of Pakistan* has caused hundreds of lives since 1988. The situation of violence became worst since the beginning of 2005. The law and order circumstances remained uncertain and uncontrollable for the whole year until 2006. There was targeted killing from both sides the Shia's and Sunnis. Many innocent people and the passengers traveling on the Karakoram Highway became victims of the targeted killings. There was harassment, fear and uncertainty prevailed for at least one whole year. Even some educational intuitions remained closed for more than nine months. The businesses were almost closed. The government has had to seal even the mosques of both sects as that places were being used for terrorists' activities.

During whole above mentioned scenario, the role of Grand Aman Jirga (Peace Committee) of the region, regarding peace building efforts remained very positive and proactive. Hence, there was no voice against sectarian violence and religious extremism at grassroots' level. At that moment of trail, a non-governmental organization named as AGHE raised voice against the human rights violations and for peace building. As this fact has been acknowledged several times and on many occasions by the head of Grand Aman Jirga and Speaker Northern Areas Legislative Council that for the first time during the crises, the AGHE's volunteers raised voice for peace, organized peace rally and break the ice of fear and terror.

AGHE not only organize the peace rally but continuously worked on peace building in collaboration with the Grand Aman Jirga, the other civil society organization, the communities' notables and with the Northern Areas Administration/government. AGHE undertake following peace building activities in the effected area for peace building:

Peace Rally on International Volunteer Day

AGHE For the first time in the history Northern Areas of Pakistan, AGHE celebrated International Volunteers Day on December 5, 2005 in Gilgit. On this especial occasion a peace rally was organized with the motto "Sustainable Peace for Sustainable Socio Economic Development" This rally was organized with specific perspective as the region was suffering the worst armed sectarian (Shias & Sunni) conflict. Hundred of innocent men, women and children have had become the victims of such conflicts. It is great achievement of AGHE to break the ice and raise voice for peace and to stop killing in name of religion. This rally was led by Speaker Northern Areas Legislative Council (NALC) Malik Maskin who is also heading AMAN JIRGA (The Grand Peace Committee) for the conflict resolution in the region.



Malik Maskin Speaker Head Aman Jirga Led the Peace Rally which was being organized by AGHE in 2005. The theme of the rally was "Sustainable Peace for Sustainable Development."

Seminar Role of Women in Peace Building

AGHE organized a women's seminar on peace under the theme "Role of Women in Peace Building" in the last week of December 2005. It was vital need of time to involve women in peace building process in the area as the region have been suffering a worst sectarian violence for the last one year and the armed conflict have had a hidden, dramatic and disproportionate impact on women and children of the region. Through out the conflict women's perspectives, experiences, and capacities as a peace builder remained ignored. The seminar was an important part of continuous efforts of AGHE to mobilize women and men for the transformation of conflicted sects away from armed conflicts and violence towards a culture of peace and non violence. In the seminar women developed an action plan for peace building in Gilgit. The action plan reflected the strategic thinking of the participants as well as concrete actions to be implemented. Some volunteer women were also identified for the Core Group, which was assigned the task to facilitate, coordinate and monitor the activities mentioned in the action plan. Fifty Seven females from different spheres of life (teaching, politics, NGOs, social workers, government servants) participated in the seminar. Additional Deputy Commissioner Gilgit Qamar Shehzad was the chief guest of the closing ceremony of Seminar.



Additional Deputy Commissioner Gilgit Qamar Shehzad, is addressing seminar in 2005 at Gilgit.



The Seminar under the theme "Role of Women in Peace building proved the real mile stone for establishment of First Women Aman Jirga in Pakistan. This credit goes to AGHE and the women rights' activists of the region.

Peace Efforts in the Educational Institutions

AGHE undertook various activities to involve the young people in the peace building process. For example, AGHE organized the poster and speech competitions in the educational institutions and the young children were asked to make the posters with peace messages and paste those messages outside their doorstep or at the public place in their street. The young people very interestingly participated in the peace building activities and delivered very strong message on various themes like "Peace is our gift for each other" No to weapon, Yes to Pen" etc. The school children were the most victimized group from the sectarian violence as the schools remained closed for several months due to uncertain law and order situation.



The young children were also involved in the peace building process in the region. AGHE's volunteers organized posters competitions in the schools to raise the voice for peace and against the extremism.

Teacher as a Peace Ambassador (The Teachers' Conference)

AGHE planned to organize a teachers' conference under the theme "Teacher as a peace Ambassador". All the arrangements were made but due to some unavoidable circumstances and law and order situation in the city the conference has had to postpone anyhow the AGHE's volunteers visited school to school and delivered the message/s of the conference. AGHE developed strategy to focus the educational institutions of the Gilgit city as there were print media reports that some elements were trying to disturb the education system and divert the young people attention from study to violence. There were also some reports of violent processions and disturbance in the educational institutions from the students' side. Therefore, AGHE focused the educational institutions for its peace building efforts. The educational authorities were very cooperative and involved in all the activities of AGHE at school level.

Women's Empowerment and Training for Peace Building in Gilgit Region (A Four months' project)

AGHE which is a non governmental organization aim at to promote human values, ethics and peace which must draw upon reason, science and the arts. AGHE continuously struggled for peace building and peace keeping in Gilgit district which was badly suffered due to armed conflict and sectarian violence. Many activities were undertaken by AGHE regarding peace building like organizing peace rally, conducting peace seminar, mobilizing youth and women to come forward for peace, establishing Mohallas (streets') Peace Committees of women, starting awareness campaigns, working with Grand Aman Jirga and carrying out peace activities in the educational intuitions etc.

All the above mentioned activities were undertaken without any external financial assistance either from Government or any other source. But to develop a long term strategy for peace building, AGHE submitted a project proposal under the title "Women's Empowerment and Training for Peace Building in Gilgit Region" to the Chief Secretary of the Northern Areas. The Chief Secretary of NAs at that time principally agreed and appreciated the idea and project proposal to work at grassroots level for peace and against sectarian conflicts. The proposal was also admired by the former Chief Executive of NAs; Syed Faisal Saleh Hayat who also directed the Chief Secretary of NAs to take immediate necessary action on the proposal but at end there was no response from the government side.

The president of AGHE also requested to the president of Pakistan to take notice of the traditional bureaucratic attitude of the government officials towards such important issues and the proposals, fortunately president of Pakistan took immediate notice of the issue, asked the officials to look into the matter and there were some hustle and bustle in the offices. However, at the end, NAs' government did not join the AGHE to under take full activities of such a unique and significant project so the project team has had to reduce the projects' activities due to financial constraints and other limitations. Please read the concept of the project in the reports and publications parts of our website www.aghepakistan.org

Advocacy Visits

The AGHE volunteers and female members arranged advocacy visits and meetings with the government officials to involve women in the peace building process. They conducted meetings with head Aman Jirga to Chief Executive Northern Areas for the purpose to ensure female participation in the peace building process and to share with them the results and findings of the seminar and convinced that women of the Northern Areas could play their pivotal role for peace building in the region.

The advocacy visits and meetings with head Aman Jirga always remained very successful as the head Aman Jirga for all the time appreciated the role of women in peace building process. He always ensured the AGHE members that women role in the peace building process will be ensured. And he kept his promise.

Nomination of Women for the First Women Aman Jirga

As, the Aman Jirga recognized the role of women for peace building and after seeking approval from the northern areas administration, the head GAJ asked the AGHE president to nominate and identify some active women for the women Jirga. It was really great honour for AGHE to be considered for that purpose and to assist the GAJ for the noble cause of peace building. Therefore, the AGHE assist the GAJ by identifying twenty out of forty women for the first Women Aman Jirga in Pakistan. The nominations of the women were sent to the head GAJ after seeking due consent from the nominee women and their families.

Peace Cards

On beginning of new year (2006) on January 1st 2006, AGHE sent peace cards to more than 200 peoples who include notables of the communities, high government officials, and religious leaders and to the social activists with messages of peace, harmony, love for humanity and happy new year etc. The AGHE's volunteers delivered all the peace cards on January 1st 2006. The peace messages left positive impact as the peoples appreciated this new and innovative way of educating peace in the area.

Media Campaign

AGHE also started peace building efforts through media. The main focus was on print media which is considered as the main source of information in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Many journalists, writers and intellectuals were approached and convinced to write for the peace building, against sectarian violence and on women's role as peace builder. Fortunately, many journalists and writers wrote the editorials, columns and essays on the need of peace and against the religious terrorism.

The print media played very crucial role in the northern areas to make public opinion. Dozens of article were written on peace and some of the articles were also written about the role of women in peace building.

Women Peace Committees at Mohallas (streets) Level

The AGHE's volunteers (females) organized meetings with local women at Mohallas (streets) level. Hundred of women participated in those meetings and all of them were very much enthusiastic to work for peace. The meetings were organized as per the action plan which was being developed during the peace building seminar.

During the street meetings, the volunteers delivered lectures and conducted awareness sessions on importance of peace and on the conflict management. The women participation in the meetings remained very satisfactory. Anyhow, this activity remained limited to two to three streets as it is mentioned earlier that the government didn't joined the AGHE's venture due to unknown reasons so the project activities have had to cut down.

First Women Aman Jirga (a story of success & struggle)

Majority of women in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, like other parts of the country, are playing their traditional role in the society which comprises domestic work like cooking, washing, cleaning, child rearing, collecting fuel wood, water and over all family maintenance. Mostly they are involved in agricultural activities such as cultivation, sowing, weeding, harvesting, fruit picking, rearing of cattle, poultry breeding etc. Their daily workload is heavier than that of men, but their work is invisible, poorly counted, and unacknowledged due to socio-cultural and religious conditions. Northern Areas is considered as a conservative society in terms of women status and development where women involvement in the development activities is very little because women are expected to rigorously follow the cultural traditions. Some areas of the region are so conservative where the concept of a self sustained woman is unheard of, perhaps even challenged at times.

Establishing a Women Aman Jirga (Peace Committee) was not a simple task. The idea faced opposition from many hard liners (traditionalists). It is regarded as a great achievement of members (especially female) and volunteers of a Northern Areas' based NGO named; Association of Global Humanists and Ethics (AGHE) that the concept of female participation in peace building process was first time initiated and practically followed by them. The seminar on *role of women in peace building* could be said as a mile stone for establishment of first Women Aman Jirga as a women delegation of AGHE presented their recommendations (see seminar report) to the head AMAN JIRGA and Speaker Northern Areas Legislative Council Malik Maskin to involve women in the peace building process, high government officials and policy makers like Chief Executive Northern Areas and Federal Minister of Kashmir affairs, Chief and Home Secretaries of NAs, and other high officials of NAs administration, were approached, convinced and were provided them a proposed action plan, the seminar's results and recommendations to ensure women's participation in the peace building process, to make the public opinion, articles regarding women participation in the peace building process were written and published in the local newspapers, women committees at grassroots (Mohallas) level were formed and functionalized.

It is also great success of AGHE that the head Aman Jirga and speaker Northern Areas Legislative council Malik M. Maskin assigned the task to the association to identify and nominate notable women for the Women Aman Jirga. It was really great matter of proud and honour for the association to be assigned and trusted for such a sensitive and crucial task. So women and children affairs' section of AGHE successfully completed the assignment and after having due consent from the women, AGHE nominated twenty women for the Women Aman Jirga and then it became possible for the GRAND AMNA JIRGA to make the historical decision of founding the First Women Aman Jirga.

For More information or Clarification Please Contact

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