



Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)

PEOPLE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE CONTINUITY OF THEIR LIFE AND ARE SUFFERING FROM EXTREME POVERTY

Press Release

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) releases its fourth report on the situation of economic and social rights in Afghanistan. This report assesses the progress made and challenges faced by the Government of Afghanistan in ensuring Afghan people's economic and social rights in the year 1387 (2008/09) and presents specific recommendations on the realisation of economic and social rights in Afghanistan.

In cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the AIHRC's field monitoring teams interviewed over 12,000 persons in 30 provinces across the country and the data gathered thus forms the main information source of this report. Also most qualitative data in this report has been gathered through interviews with representatives of diverse governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations and efforts have been made to discuss all issues through these perspectives. It is noteworthy that vulnerable groups and people living in remote and rural areas have been the focus of this report.

Afghan Constitution and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) are the fundamental, legal sources used as assessment standards in this report. Afghanistan ratified the ICESCR in 1983. Other relevant benchmarks, such as Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and Afghanistan's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have also been considered.

According to Dr Sima Samar, Chairperson of the AIHRC, "Despite existing commitments and the strategies and policies developed to improve the situation of economic and social rights in Afghanistan, still many men, women, and children suffer from extreme poverty, high rate of unemployment, systemic discrimination, and lack of healthcare, education, and adequate housing".

Summary of Key Findings in the Report:

- The level of poverty has not significantly changed since last year. 36% of all interviewees earn a daily income of below 50Afs (approximately equivalent to US\$1), 19.2% earn a daily income of over 50Afs, and 44.8% do not work, while only 37% of interviewees stated they earned a daily income of less than 50Afs last year.

- The level of debt shows a significant increase. Around 63.9% of interviewees have families that are in debt. The AIHRC's 1384 (2005/06) assessment estimated the level of family debt to be 57,750Afs (equivalent to US\$1,155), while 1387 (2008/09) findings reveal that average family debt level is at 102,392Afs (equivalent to US\$2,047)—an increase of US\$900 in family debt.
- Migration for seeking employment and livelihood is a challenge facing Afghans. Over 96% of migrants had illegally entered Iran. Around 78.3% (3,288 persons) referred to unemployment in Afghanistan as the reason of their migration to Iran¹. About 44.7% of deported migrants were expelled out of Iran after arriving there and before being employed². Many migrant workers were deported while their property still remains in Iran, out of which 72.2%, around 19.6%, and 4.6% respectively referred to unpaid salaries, prepaid rent, and unpaid debts as their unresolved financial issues in Iran. On the other hand, 99.8% of these people were not given the chance to clear their financial issues³.
- A comparative assessment of child labour from 1384 (2005/06) to 1387 (2008/09) shows that the level of child labour has not considerably changed. In 1387 (2008/09), 38% of interviewees stated that their under-15 children worked.
- Government's social security programmes for persons with disabilities are inadequate and ineffective and cannot provide a comprehensive response to the needs of these persons. Afghan National Assembly has approved no budget for the protection of persons with disabilities except a monthly stipend of 400-600Afs for these persons⁴.
- Kuchis, like other vulnerable groups of people, are deprived of many services. Kuchis' access to education and health is lower than that of other people. Only 33.6% of Kuchi children regularly attend school, while 66.4% of Kuchi children either do not go to school or rarely go to school or sometimes go to school. The Government of Afghanistan has taken no effective measures for the settlement of Kuchis in accordance with Article 14 of the Afghan Constitution. Government's indifference has caused serious problems between Kuchis and local residents, costing a heavy price for both.
- Afghan women face various problems. Forced marriages, child marriages, *bad* marriages, *badal* marriages, beating, humiliation, failure to provide alimony, employment and other social restrictions, rape, and even murder are considered women's most important problems. Cases of violence against women registered by the AIHRC in 1387 (2008/09) show that 42.2%, 9.3%, 8.3%, and 6.7% respectively are related to beating, abortion, failure to provide alimony, and forced marriage.
- The biggest problem related to access to clean water is in Kabul city. Around 70% of interviewees did not have access to clean water and used water wells that are not safely covered. Open sewage system in Kabul that has polluted water wells is extremely worrisome⁵. According to the AIHRC's findings, 33.7% of people across Afghanistan said that water used by them was not clean and safe.
- Despite optimism and achievements in the health sector, still a considerable segment of population does not have access to health services. In general, around 62.4% of

¹ Human rights monitoring database of deportees in 1387 (2008/09)

² Ibid, 1387 (2008/09)

³ Ibid, 1387 (2008/09)

⁴ Interview with Sadeq Mohebbi, Chief of Protection of Persons with Disabilities Unit, MoLSAMD, August 2009

⁵ Interview with Najibullah Patan, Head, Directorate of Water Supply and Canalisation, June 22, 2009

interviewees had access to governmental, NGO, or private health services and around 37.6% of interviewees had no access to governmental, NGO, or private health services. About 29.9% of interviewees referred to long distance, poor quality of medicine and equipment, and inexperienced and unprofessional health personnel as reasons for not using government or NGO health services.

- Problems related to access to education have remained unsolved. Approximately 46% of children do not have access to education, which includes 5,300,000 children. This comprises around 7% of children who are out of school in the world—a high and shocking percentage given the population of the country⁶. AIHRC’s findings show that only 60.2% of students (66% boys and 54.3% girls) regularly attend school. Poor quality of education, inadequate number of schools, long distance, labour, and marriage are the reasons why students do not keep a regular school attendance.
- Employment is at the top of people’s list of priorities. Human Rights Field Monitoring (HRFM) findings reveal that the priorities of interviewed families are employment, potable water, and health services, in order of importance. 19.7%, 13.8%, 12.8%, 11.7%, and 10.9% of interviewees have respectively regarded employment, potable water, health, food, and education as the priorities of their families. Interviewees have prioritised their day-to-day needs and requirements over security, reconstruction, and so on. It is, therefore, found that people are concerned about the continuity of their life and are suffering from extreme poverty.

Recommendations

1. To protect migrant workers, the Government should explore effective avenues to have their work recognised and strengthen bilateral ties with the government of Iran.
2. The Government should enhance people’s living standard by creating jobs and providing livelihood options. Creating job opportunities should be at the top of Afghanistan’s economic policy in order to reflect the public priority given to this area.
3. The Government should increase vocational training for unskilled workers. Parallel to this, the Government should further strengthen and support small industries in the country.
4. Within an inclusive social security framework, the Government should identify and register all people entitled to social protection, including persons with disabilities, women- and children-headed families, children at risk, IDPs, older persons, and families with more than eight children, and a specific, practical mechanism should be designed and implemented in the framework of ANDS to assist such people.
5. Marriage registration and usage of marriage certificates should be nationalised and made compulsory through the establishment of accessible registration offices.
6. The Government should expedite the judicial reform process so that the justice system is trusted by the public and is able to resolve disputes, including disputes over property.
7. The Government should design such a long-term strategy to address poverty and food insecurity based on Afghanistan’s priorities.
8. In order to strengthen economic infrastructure and rural development as part of the overall economic development process, the Government should ensure people’s access to safe potable water, fund water supply projects, and build the capacity of relevant authorities in this regard.

⁶ MoE, government’s report to people, 1387 (2008/09), p167

9. More local health personnel should be trained so as to respond to the health needs of vulnerable persons and rural communities, including by providing pre- and post-natal health care, both for mother and child. It is necessary to provide women with incentives so that more women are trained as doctors, nurses, and midwives.
10. The Government should adopt a balanced approach in considering distance and population density as the criteria for the construction of health centres.
11. The Government should increase its funding of health projects and pay special attention to the quality of medicine and health services and the capacity of health personnel.
12. Educational services should be provided for disadvantaged and poor children by extending local education, especially for girls. It is necessary to pay special attention to the quality of education by developing an appropriate curriculum and teaching methods.
13. The Government should pay serious attention to educational development and take special measures to encourage increased girls' school enrolment. Training female teachers for secondary and high schools can be an effective solution in this regard.
14. The AIHRC strongly urges all parties to the Afghan conflict to respect IHL by not targeting schools, health centres, and other public places and not obstructing people's access to health and education.

This report can be found at the AIHRC's website <http://www.airhc.org.af> in Dari, Pashto, and English.

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