

The 2nd International Islamic Women Police Conference on Gender Responsive Policing: Building Synergies for Gender Reforms in Law Enforcement

Aliya Sethi

Abstract

The second International Islamic Women Police Conference was organized in Pakistan in November 2011 as a part of the gender responsive police reforms introduced by the Gender Responsive Policing Project. The theme of the event, 'Gender Responsive Policing in the Islamic World: Enhancing Women's Role in Policing,' was motivated by the objective to raise the profile of women in law enforcement by positioning them as catalysts in reforming the culture of police organizations and making the institution responsive towards addressing the distinct needs of women and girls and victims of violence. The accomplishments and recommendations of this successful conference will be described in detail.

Keywords: Women in policing; gender-responsive policing; Pakistan; Islamic World

Introduction

The second International Islamic Women Police Conference (IWPC) was organized in Pakistan from November 21-24, 2011 as a part of the gender responsive police reforms introduced by the Gender Responsive Policing Project implemented jointly by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the National Police Bureau- Ministry of Interior, and the police organizations of Pakistan. The theme of the event, '*Gender Responsive Policing in the Islamic World: Enhancing Women's Role in Policing*' (GRP IW), was motivated by the objective to raise the profile of women in policing by positioning them as catalysts in reforming the culture of police organizations and making the institution responsive towards addressing the distinct needs of women and girls and victims of violence.

The conference was the continuation of the dialogue and sharing of experiences by women involved in the law enforcement profession that had been initiated in the first conference organized by the Interior Ministry of Afghanistan in 2007. The focus on the Islamic world aimed at providing the opportunity to draw upon a shared faith and cultural identity of different Muslim countries and to analyze how the gender agenda is finding a niche in different policing contexts. Discussions on current law enforcement practices, cultural influences, policy environment and gender related police reforms – perspectives, challenges, and prospects – were aimed at building synergies and leveraging a context specific gender equality change.

Conference Premise and Participation

A key aspect of gender responsive policing is providing women and men equal opportunities in law enforcement for work and career development and improving the operational capacities and services to protect the security rights of all citizens fairly. Given the historical disadvantages and asymmetrical gender relations of varying degrees worldwide, women's role, aspirations, potential and achievements have not been fully acknowledged and respected. The human rights of women as articulated by Islam and duly acknowledged by the international treaties and national instruments on human rights and gender equality have not been upheld. Women's access to justice, response of institutions on gender based crimes, women's inclusion, and participation in public sphere institutions are influenced by cultural perceptions, and thus find reflections in institutional policies and the practices of the police. Therefore, it becomes imperative to promote gender responsive police reforms.

The conference was an opportunity to call upon the governments and police organizations to work effectively to ensure policies and legal guarantee of women's dignity and rights under the broader theme of 'Enhancing Women's Role in Policing.'

The purpose of the conference was to build synergies and promote professional cooperation, learning and networking on positioning of women in police and on the policing response towards violence against women. The specific objectives were to:

- Carry forward the agenda of dialogue and collaborative learning initiated in the first Islamic Conference;
- Share experiences on gender responsive policing including operational response on handling crimes of violence against women and organizational policies on women's role in law enforcement;
- Showcase innovative policing initiatives and learn from gender reform policy practices of different countries;
- Discuss ways and means of enhancing gender sensitive policing capacities and services; and
- Weave the diverse law enforcement perspectives and insights into collective vision and conclude a way forward on gender responsive policing in the Islamic world

The conference brought together 66 delegates from 12 Muslim Countries including Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkey along with international and national speakers from donor agencies, research institutions, and police networks.

The deliberations were designed to address a diverse array of issues reflected through the four overarching themes of:

1. Impact of Women on Police Culture: Integrating Women in Mainstream Policing
2. Gender in Policing: Training Policies and Practices
3. Women in Law Enforcement: Challenges and Opportunities
4. Violence against Women: Policy Environment and Police Response

Conference Insights: Policing Practices and Prospects

The presentations by each participating country gave insights into the role, positioning and level of engagement of women in mainstream policing, sharing relevant approaches, opportunities and strategies, and pointing towards constructive ways and means of integrating women into mainstream policing.

A few cross cutting aspects have emerged that have highlighted the large similar set of challenges across the Muslim world. Given the issues involving the perceived limited physical strength of females, the lack of recognition of women's role in society at large, and the diminished visibility of women in executive and supervisory positions in many law enforcement agencies, the conference speakers highlighted the need for creating a representative, equitable and effective police service with adequate recognition of the abilities of female police officers. The exchange of ideas involving policing practices suggested an increased emphasis on institutional and policy reforms for gender sensitive and human rights centric police culture and services. The participants referred to the review of policing procedures and protocols for better service response and protection of victims/survivors of gender based violence. These interesting national viewpoints and experiences highlighted the aspect of establishing specialized units and desks to investigate and deal with cases of domestic violence.

The knowledge based sessions at the conference focused on significant aspects of gender responsive policing. In analyzing the role of '*Gender Justice in Islam*,' the view of justice as portrayed within the Koran was outlined with an emphasis on how Islam reaffirms fundamental human rights. The argument was that gender justice lies at the core of the ethical framework of Islam where women and men are held as equal recipients of justice, making it inevitable for inclusion in all the Muslim laws and legal systems of justice that look into the rights of women and men.

The conference perspective on '*Restorative Justice and Gender*' highlighted the role of female police officers in instituting practices of community policing and community justice as entry points for transition to restorative justice processes. Drawing on the values, principles and approaches of restorative justice, the emphasis was on utilizing the potential in women to deal with crimes given their socially determined attributes of compassion, interconnectedness, coordination, respect and inclusion.

In an elaboration of '*Community Policing in Pakistan and the Role of Women*,' the argument was to complement traditional law enforcement practices with community policing and include a greater role for female police officers. The interaction between women police officers and the community can help in identifying, analyzing and resolving social problems like drug use, child abuse, domestic violence, and juvenile delinquency.

The conference presentation on '*Challenges and Opportunities: Role of Women in Law Enforcement*' delved upon historical context and the experiences within Pakistan. The societal context of social and cultural perceptions and religious beliefs was referred to as a major influence on the induction, retention and participation of women in law enforcement. The establishment of 'women only' police stations was considered an initiative to better respond to the crimes against women.

In experience sharing on the '*Role and Integration of Women Police in Germany*,' the speaker traced the development paradigm of female police officers from the Second World War to their representation in the present police services. In Germany, where the law enforcement and criminal investigation were also considered highly masculine domains with greater representation of men, female police officers have evolved claiming at present a 10% share at the executive levels in police organizations, thereby securing more space and respect from male counterparts.

The presentation on the experiences and viewpoint in Egypt emphasized the need for gender diversification in the public security sector in order to meet the emerging security needs of women in the post-revolution era. Around 600 women joined the lower ranking members of the law enforcement institute and about the same number joined the police academy. However, women's impact on the styles of law enforcement is still very limited. The stereotypical interpretation of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in Egypt acts as one of the basic impediments towards integrating women into the police. To this end, the role of media in portraying a positive image of women in the public security sector and the need for police policy reforms were highly stressed.

The overview on the '*Role of Women in Peacekeeping Missions*' affirmed that women peacekeepers act as role models in the environment of post conflict societies, inspiring women and girls to push for their own rights and for participation in peace processes. Therefore, the UN considers women's inclusion critical and plans to increase the percentage of women police officers in field based peacekeeping missions.

At the service provision level, the '*Special Service Unit*' established by the Indonesian National Police was presented as an effective and encouraging step in handling violence against women and children and in empowering staff through capacity building to work in the unit.

A case study of Nicaragua sketched the strategy adopted by its police to improve the services for victims and mainstreaming gender by implementing a '*Gender Equity Strategy*' at all institutional levels. Six kinds of affirmative actions were introduced including implementation of special policies for promoting women to positions of authority and operational policing, a special recruitment strategy to inspire more women to enter the service, specialized training and seminars for teaching staff, improvement in facility infrastructure, and provision of services to new female cadets.

The speaker from Bangladesh shared insights into '*Police Response to Sexual Harassment*' by contextualizing the concept, types and practice of harassment. National level initiatives to address sexual harassment were explained such as legislative framework, the Metropolitan Police Ordinance, the Women and Children Repression and Prevention Act, Section 27A of the Government Servants Discipline, Conduct Rules, and high court guidelines.

Pakistan's legislative experience on enacting a law on the '*Protection against Harassment of Women in the Workplace*' was outlined with emphasis on the role of police officials in the implementation of the law. The Highway Police was the first police organization in Pakistan that has adopted the sexual harassment code of conduct. Orientation on incorporating the code of conduct and SOPs on sexual harassment continues to make the police service responsive to address the issue both within the organization and outside for the service seekers in the community.

The presentation on '*Sensitive Policing Practices: Handling Vulnerable Groups*' illustrated the issues and concerns arising out of policing vulnerable groups in Pakistan and creating an environment which would result in including the topic in the syllabus of all police curricula. The necessity for the law enforcement profession is to have an in-depth understanding of the underlying causes of vulnerability as well as ramifications in order to deal with it emphasizing the highest professional standards.

The key lessons learned have emerged from an interactive dialogue on '*Gender Sensitivity of Police Training Policy and the Gender Gaps in the Curricula.*' From a gender perspective, the systematic training approach with emphasis on a gender analysis of the curricula, inclusion of gender content, recognition of inherent gender bias in policies and procedures, support of senior officers and the willingness of female police officers to avail themselves of training opportunities with the provision of a conducive environment and basic facilities were all termed as important ingredients of steps needed within the police training environment.

The dialogue with the women parliamentarians of Pakistan on the Policy Environment for Participation of Women in Police and Pro-Women Legislation informed the conference about their perspectives on policy actions, opportunities, and challenges of engaging in the women's empowerment

debate. It was urged that female police officers be empowered and that they engage in enforcing protective mechanisms for women in both the private and public spaces.

Future Collaboration: Networking for Gender Responsive Policing

The conference delegates recognized the value of networking for learning and practice sharing between nations. There was a clear commitment to continue to meet and to share and learn from each other's policing experiences. The resulting conference declaration illustrated the resolve of female police officials from 12 countries to pursue an action oriented agenda through formation of an International Network of Women Police on Gender Responsive Policing. Pakistan is taking the lead in ensuring the support of participating countries in strengthening the Network from the forum of the National Police Bureau with technical assistance from the GIZ-GRP Project.

Conclusion

The GRP-IW conference was an endeavor in laying the impetus for gender responsive policing reforms across the Muslim world. The event drew the attention of police organizations towards the issues of role and recognition of women in law enforcement and generated interest among female police officers for networking to build synergies and advance gender equality in the law enforcement profession. The establishment of an international network and intentions for continuing dialogue through annual international conferences and network meetings will provide ideas and opportunities for change. The assurance of political leadership for policy revision to support the implementation of gender priorities in policing was an encouraging positive outcome of the conference for Pakistan and the participating nations.

About the Author

Aliya Sethi is a Senior Gender Advisor involved in the Gender Responsive Policing Project.