

INSIDE MEERWALA

NEWS FROM MUKHTAR MAI WOMEN'S WELFARE ORGANIZATION

"School is the first step to change the world. It's always the first step that causes the most trouble, but it's the start of progress."

— Mukhtar Mai

Letter from the Chairman

Although relatively small by local and international standards, Mukhtar Mai Women's Welfare Organisation (MMWWO) has a presence that reaches around the world. Mukhtar's struggle for the rights of women is a struggle for every woman, not just the women of Pakistan or the subcontinent. She is going to need the help and support of all of you reading this newsletter, perhaps for many years to come. I feel certain that we here in this remote and dusty place can count on you, and can assure you from past experience that the support you have given thus far has been of immense value both to Mukhtar and the organization she heads.

I took over as Chairman of the interim Board of Directors at MMWWO in March 2008. The organization is going through a prolonged period of maturation and change, professionalising operations and training staff as well as consolidating its position in the wider world of women's NGOs in Pakistan. We have put in place a new financial management system that allows detailed monitoring and are currently working on a reworded constitution. I hope to be presenting this for board approval at the next meeting, probably in June.

Chris Cork
Chairman of the Board



Program Spotlight: The Mobile Unit

Hanifan was frightened and crying when she reached the MMWWO office on March 3, 2009, as she feared that her husband and son would kill her daughter, Shakeela, "in the name of honor" because she wanted permission to marry her cousin. Shakeela's father and brother were against her choice of a husband, and they made a plan to kill her.

However, the MMWWO staff, along with security guards traveling with the Mobile Unit, successfully evacuated Shakeela from her home, and moved her to the Mukhtar Mai Shelter Home at Meerwala.

Shakeela stayed at the shelter for three weeks, where she received legal and other assistance. Finally, on April 12, 2009, she married her cousin— thanks in part to the support of MMWWO.



Photo: Mohammed Naqvi

Higher Learning

In Meerwala, April 14 was an historic day. It was the Mukhtar Mai Girls Model School’s “Annual Result Day,” in which the progress of students is evaluated and prizes distributed among students during a special ceremony.

Mukhtar Mai congratulated the school’s administration and students, and announced that MMWWO is going to start offering higher-grade classes (9th and 10th), providing the first opportunity for girls in Meerwala to receive a high school education. The announcement was a great source of pleasure for the students and their parents.

Change Speaks

On April 9, MMWWO hosted an open forum called “Protecting Women against Violence: Practical Steps.”

Mr. Irfan Karim of the Principal Arts College Shah Sultan Jatoi made a public apology at the event.

“I humbly apologize to my wife for any misbehavior in the past,” he said, and following in his the footsteps were other participants who made similar apologies.

Karim added that he appreciates and is inspired by the efforts of MMWWO, which is committed to ending violence against women. He said he condemned all forms of violence against women, and requested all men and women to join hands to stop it.

Long Road to Recovery

At 13, Nasha was sold in marriage by her father for about \$875 U.S.D. to an older man named Abdul.

Abdul and his parents subjected Nasha to severe violence, mainly because she was considered an asset. When her son was four years old, Nasha’s in-laws killed him and accused her of the murder. A complaint was lodged against her in the local police station, but the police declared her innocent.



Photo: Chris Cork

Nevertheless, Nasha was forced to leave her house. While homeless she was raped, and stoned by children when she took shelter in a graveyard. A woman named Rehmat Bibi found her and brought her to her house. On Aug. 8, 2008, Nasha arrived at Mukhtar Mai Shelter Home in a traumatized condition. She received medical treatment and psychological counseling, and began a slow recovery.

A divorce case was filed on Nasha’s behalf in the local court, and the trial is pending. Nasha has almost recovered from the trauma but still doesn’t know what her future is. Her case brings another challenge for the organization—Nasha requires long-term support, but MMWWO is currently unable to provide it.