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Stop Rape Campaign mobilizes young men in Pakistan

On the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, Rizwan Latif, a national UN Volunteer Outreach and Capacity Development Officer based in Islamabad, was sharing his work with young men and boys so that they can contribute to local efforts for the empowerment and protection of women in Pakistan. Concerted efforts from all quarters are needed to stop the continued increase of incidents of rape and violence against women in the country.

UN Volunteer Rizwan Latif (right) enlists the help of young men and boys in Pakistan to stop rape and violence against women in Pakistan. (Waqas Anees, 2010)

On the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, Rizwan Latif, a national UN Volunteer Outreach and Capacity Development Officer based in Islamabad, was sharing his work with young men and boys so that they can contribute to local efforts for the empowerment and protection of women in Pakistan.

Rizwan works with Rozan, a local NGO, on issues related to emotional health, gender, violence against women and children, and the reproductive health of adolescents. Women and girls in Pakistan face many challenges due to their socio-cultural environment and uneven socioeconomic development.

Partners for Prevention (P4P) is a regional UN joint programme of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), UN Women and UNV that works to prevent violence against women. P4P works with civil society organizations, UN agencies and governments in the Asia/Pacific region. Rozan, the NGO to which Rizwan is deployed, is one of the civil society partners in Pakistan.

Besides Rizwan in Pakistan, P4P has deployed other UN Volunteers to India, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and soon will to Viet Nam.

Although there have been attempts by the Government and civil society to elevate the status of women in Pakistani society, incidents of violence against women have continued to increase. It is

evident that concerted efforts from all quarters are needed to promote the empowerment and protection of women and girls.

The engagement and participation of men and boys to prevent violence against women forms the core strategy of the joint programme. Rozan partners with P4P through its Humqadam programme, which is designed to work with boys and men in rural areas. Humqadam creates venues where men can engage on the issue of gender-based violence.

In order to raise the awareness of youth and mobilize young men on a large scale, Rozan's Humqadam Program is running a Stop Rape Campaign, targeting 15,000 young men of the age of 16-30 in the province of Punjab province. Funded by the Gender Justice and Protection (GJP) project of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the campaign's overall objective is to raise awareness of sexual violence, and in particular rape, among young men and boys. The campaign has been reaching out to young people such as university and college students, working men and boys and unemployed youth.

The campaign focuses on sensitizing them to take action in addressing the issue. "We are receiving a very positive response from young people who want to actively participate and contribute to building a supportive and protective environment for women and girls in the society", says an enthusiastic Rizwan.

The campaign is using a competition format to encourage young boys and men to reach out to other young men and boys. In a stepwise process, primary participants attend 4- to 5-hour Stop Rape Campaign orientation sessions carried out by Humqadam team members directly in rural communities and at colleges and universities. These participants are provided with documents and fact sheets about rape cases in Pakistan as well as questionnaires to complete.

Correct answers qualify participants to earn a prescribed score, advance in the campaign process and be eligible for the small gifts given out during the campaign. The gifts take the form of books, documentaries and films about the devastating effects of gender-based violence and rape and the effective role men and boys can play to prevent them.

After successfully completing the questionnaire, the primary participants are invited to take at least 10 to 15 more young men and boys from their community, college or university through the same orientation process they underwent with the Humqadam team. The contact details of these secondary participants are sent to the NGO to help track the campaign's progress.

If the secondary participants in turn send in their successfully completed questionnaires to the Humqadam team and shepherd yet more peers through the process, scores of both primary and secondary participants are raised.

"By following this format, young men and boys reach out to their peers to draw the maximum number to participate in the campaign," said Rizwan.

The Stop Rape Campaign runs until 31 April 2011, when cash prizes will be awarded to the participants who have most successfully met the prescribed criteria.

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