



Gender MPI 16 december 2015

Aanwezig: Marit Maij, Ingrid de Caluwe, Wassila Hachchi en Roelof van Laar

Gender MPI een geslaagde bijeenkomst. Aan het begin van de vergadering heeft Ingrid de Caluwé (VVD) het voorzitterschap overgedragen aan Wassila Hachi (D66)

Het onderwerp was: Syrische vluchtelingencrisis vanuit een genderperspectief.

Gast sprekers: Reem Alhafez, Syrische mensenrechten activiste en Fulvia Care international, hebben beiden genderaspect van de Syrische vluchtelingenproblematiek belicht. Hoe zorg je ervoor dat Syrische vrouwen een

Introductie van de gast sprekers Hala Mejanni en Reem Alhafez

- Speech van Reem Alhafez (zie uitgeschreven speech)
- Speech van Fulvia (zie ook uitgeschreven speech):
 - We need to understand how the roles of men and women changed during the conflict
 - We (Care Turkey) use a gendersensitive approach and implementation in order to be able to support the women refugees
 - It is important to know how you can address the problems of women and girls
 - Breaking the silence is crucial if women have suffered gender based violence
- Questions of the Parliamentarians
 - Marit Maij: could you share more knowledge on helping other women who are in this difficult situation?
Reem Alhafaz: I haven't started an organizations yet, although I have a lot of connections. I had no clue how to help women at first: I didn't know the system. Right now I try to inform women as they arrive here as asylumseekers. The information is very limited or is not accessible. More information gatherings and workshops are important. Information is needed on the education system, health system and legal system. Women don't know what rights and responsibilities they have: it is very important to know what your responsibilities is f.e. regarding your children.
 - Wassila Hachchi: can you elaborate on your experience with refugees in Syria?
Reem Alhafaz: women have no documents or are never registered, so they have no rights, they are not recognized as human beings
Hala Mejanni: it might make sense to support women refugees where they already are (in the region), since there are the big numbers of refugees



- Ingrid de Caluwe: how could we help you in building your network?
Reem: it very hard to be an activist in Syria right now. However we have some brave women who try to enlighten women or to give them hope. Women don't have safe networks or 'places' within their communities. Women know the problems of the women refugees and they know how to communicate.
Hala: technology and social media can be a way. There are organisations that exist and are getting stronger: linking these women and support women to join is important.
- Roelof van Laar: is Rojava an example for the country as a whole?
Reem: this region has more freedom and the people are better organised. There is more security so it helps to initiate new projects. People are trying their best, but when your basic needs are not fulfilled, it is hard to start communities like these.

Recommendations:

Hala:

- we need diplomatic solutions
- funding and policies should be gender sensitive
- while the NL is EU chair there are opportunities to address to need for a gender sensitive approach
- we should gender based violence in a gender sensitive way
- empowerment of refugee women

Reem:

- (zie uitgeschreven recommendations)

Good afternoon everybody, my name is Reem Alhafez, I am a Syrian lawyer and refugee and I am thankful for your interest today in discussing the Syrian refugee crises from a gender based approach. I actually knew a lot about refugee women before I became one myself, I worked with Palestinian, Iraqi, Somali and Lebanese refugees as a volunteer with the Syrian Red Crescent long before the Syrian crises began. But I know now that you can never understand what it is like to be a refugee unless you become one. Prior to the Syrian revolution, most Syrian women played traditional roles as part of a community that didn't have much interest in applying gender equality standards. But ever since the uprising in Syria, women from different backgrounds became involved and took the lead in organizing peaceful demonstrations and civil activities



demanding freedom against an oppressive regime and ensuring that women voices and rights are being heard and respected!

We felt we had a major opportunity and responsibility to create change. Thus, we stood hand in hand with men and took our share in being targeted, detained, abused, tortured and even killed for our beliefs. Gradually, as the voice of violence dominated, our peaceful anti militarization and radicalization efforts became hardly visible and our voices could not be heard! We were marginalized!

Now, in all held peace talks only men can be seen negotiating our countries future and failing even to ceasefire!

Meanwhile, Syrian women are indiscriminately suffering the brutal impact of the oppression and armed conflict that damaged basic infrastructure in civilian areas, and resulted in a complete failure of the rule of law. Moreover, sexual and gender based violations escalated inside Syria and in refugee camps in neighboring countries. And due to legal deficiencies and local gender restrictions in the region, Lack of national documentations imposed additional negative impact on refugee women, which in many cases resulted in having no access to health care, education or legal system.

In Lebanon, approximately 30000 refugee women have given birth to babies without being able to register their marriage or children, the same is happening in Jordan and Iraq. These kids will have no nationality and thus be deprived of basic child rights such as vaccination and education!

Quite a dark image, I must admit. And yet, we, Syrian women do not see ourselves as victims! We are strong, resourceful and active women who have always supported our families and local communities! We did not lack food; we lacked freedom and dignity, our basic human rights.

And even now, against all odds, women activists are playing vital roles in humanitarian efforts, providing essential medical relief, demonstrating to demand release of detainees, negotiating access to schools and hospitals, providing safe spaces for women and children, advocating and raising awareness inside and around Syrian borders.

Moving on to Netherland, there is quite a focus on fulfilling refugees basic safety and survival needs, which is really great and appreciated, although it seems that asylum seeking and integration regulations could be improved by enhancing more transparent channels to vital



information. Experiencing miscommunication problems, new arrivals tend to seek answers through fellow refugees, which is not very accurate or practical, especially for women who have no access to informative men gatherings. Thus, women refugees are left not well informed about their rights, responsibilities and applicable laws and regulations.

This circulates lack of trust causing adjustment and integration difficulties. Especially that the current integration system only seems to care about teaching refugees the language to find them low wage jobs, For no matter where you come from or what you have been through, what your skills and experiences and certificates say, as a refugee your access to work market is determined by your status and municipalities estimations. This not only causes low self-esteem, but also is a big waste of useful diverse knowledge and expertise. I believe that giving the right tools and support, Diaspora women can become major actors in mobilizing their communities across borders and leading the way in reconciliation efforts, building bridges, embracing diversity and justice and putting these mandates into practice.

Having that said, starting from the roots I would kindly suggest:

- 1- Putting international humanitarian law into action to protect civilians from the indiscriminate use of weapons! The cause of most women and children casualties and the main reason people are fleeing their homes at the first place!
- 2- The appeal for a solution for lack of documentation issues that are strangling thousands of families in neighboring countries.
- 3- Improvement of women refugees' legal protection and access to health and educational services in neighboring countries by initiating practical sustainable projects.
- 4- Investing in women grass root organizations that have better understanding of their communities' needs.
- 5- Knowledge is power: Give diaspora women access to clear information, provide expert help when and where needed. Offer flexible study loans, and practical access to better coaching system.



6- Women are natural peace builders; treat them as potential partners in bringing peace and security to both their host and original societies.

Thank you!