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Female Afghan police officers face sexual harassment: HRW

April 25, 2013



The Human Rights Watch (HRW) expressing concerns towards sexual harassment of female police officers, urged the government of Afghanistan to take immediate action to ensure that the country's female police officers have access to separate, safe, and lockable restroom facilities in police stations.

HRW following a statement on Thursday said workplace sexual harassment is a serious problem in the public and private sectors in Afghanistan and female police officers are frequently the targets of harassment and assault.

The statement by HRW comes amid numerous media reports of rape of female police officers by male colleagues.

The lack of safe and separate toilets makes women particularly vulnerable, according to Human Rights Watch despite Kabul's police chief issued an order on April 10, 2013, for the province's police stations to provide separate toilets and change rooms for women, but similar orders have been ignored in the past, leaving all but a few of Afghanistan's 1,500 women officers without suitable and safe facilities.

Human Rights Watch Asia Director, Brad Adams said, "The Afghan government's failure to provide female police officers with safe, secure facilities makes them more vulnerable to abuse."

He said, "This is not just about toilets. It's about the government's recognition that women have a crucial role to play in law enforcement in Afghanistan."

"Harassment and abuse is an everyday experience for many Afghan women," Adams said, adding that, "Without the consistent presence of female police officers across the country, legal protections for women will remain an unfulfilled promise."

The report also comes amid Afghanistan Interior Ministry's goal to hire 5,000 women in Afghan police by the end of 2014, which is currently very small and forms 1 percent of police officers across the country.

The Afghan government, with the support of international advisors and donors, has tried to address this problem through the creation of specialized units in police stations called Family Response Units (FRUs), the report concluded. However their effectiveness has been seriously hampered by the lack of female police officers available to staff them.

HRW in its report also urged Afghan authorities should take various measures to prevent and punish workplace sexual harassment of female police officers.