

Exclusive interview with Najla AFZALI from Afghanistan.

Ms Najla Afzali hails from Kabul, Afghanistan. She is a Civil Engineer by training but has been involved in many activities, including social work. Her first international exposure was in April 2002, when she attended the Geneva Conference on Human Rights.

During the interview, she responded to a number of questions.

1. What is the situation of women in your country?

In Afghanistan women have a lot of problems. They want to study but cannot due to many factors. The most prohibitive factor is the preconceived ideas that males have towards women. It is generally believed that women's place is at home to look after the family, the husband and children. In fact, women are over exploited as they toil right from dawn to dusk and the worst part is that their efforts and contributions are not recognized.

2. The Afghan government has embarked on a program of reconstruction after the War. What place women have in this program?

The present government is conscious that education is essential for human progress and economic development. It also implies empowerment for women for economic advancement. It firmly believes that educated women will be able to raise healthy families and instill the values of education into their children. So far parents have been educating their girls up to the end of the primary cycle as they believe that their role is to get married and found a family. Hence they believe that girls need not study till university.



Currently, the Government is implementing a plan of action for encouraging more women to study up to university level.

3. How did you come to participate in GASAT 11?

I met Mona Dahms when I enrolled for a seven week course organized by OXFAM.

We exchanged ideas on women condition in Afghanistan and the need for international exposure to better serve women at home. She was very receptive to my views and feelings and invited me to attend GASAT 11 in Mauritius.

Mathematics is taught as from Standard II while science including Chemistry, Biology and Physics is taught from Standard VI. There is even a University which specializes in the teaching of the Science subjects and there is a considerable girl enrolment there.

In Afghanistan till recently some parents were reluctant to send their girls to schools because they would be taught by a male teacher. But over the years the attitude has changed. The ratio of women teacher to male teacher, too, has seen an upward trend. In fact more women prefer to take up the teaching profession than any other job.

5. What is your impression of the GASAT 11 Conference?

I am extremely impressed by the organization of this conference. It is a unique opportunity for somebody like me to interact with women of such high academic background and such openness of mind. Such an exposure is extremely enriching and will be helpful in my personal development and in my endeavours to improve the lot of women at home. Everyone is so friendly and good here.