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Economic and environmental questions: women and development

Statement submitted by Talented Girl Students Trust, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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** E/2012/100.



Statement

There is Mrs. Baloch, who is the first woman superintendent of prisons in Pakistan. Hers is a heroic journey. This pioneering girl showed great determination and fought all odds of parental opposition to female education and went on to do her graduation, and then to obtaining a masters degree and finally a law degree (LLB). The Balochistan Public Service Commission appointed her to the Prisons Service, and she is raising a family with a future. Of the nine other girls, one is an officer at the Agricultural Development Bank, two are college lecturers, one is a civil servant and three are schoolteachers. The social barrier has been breached and a way forward has been shown. Hundreds of other girls belonging to poor families of tribal origin have entered the portals of Balochistan University and other professional colleges.

Female literacy in Balochistan is as low as 3 per cent. There was not a girl who had gone beyond the intermediate level (12 years) of education. However, there were a few brave girls who wanted to defy the custom and seek higher education. Besides the tribal and familial barriers confronting them, there were the financial constraints. Making use of all the powers and prestige of the job, I could, with difficulty, succeed in persuading parents of 10 girls to allow their daughters to pursue higher education goals at Quetta, the principal city in Balochistan. Parents placed all kinds of demands in order to jettison the project, including greater security for housing. We met all these demands at much expense to us. We hired a house and posted a guard for security. More importantly, we arranged their admission to the girls degree college.

The establishment of this non-governmental organization occurred in 1984, when I was serving as Commissioner of Sibi Division, comprising of several large districts, a very underdeveloped area within Balochistan and with one of the highest rates of poverty and the lowest rate of literacy. The people lived as people did in the middle ages, with no access to running or non-running water or electricity. Education was never on their minds, particularly for girls. Social stigma was attached to girls' education. It was considered unnecessary because what all the girls were required to do was to marry at age 12 or 14 to the man of the family's choice and procreate before they turned old by the age of 30 and died early.

Among the 10 girls, there was only 1 Baloch girl who had 12 years of education. Baloch is very conservative and fiercely opposed to female education. We were delighted to have this girl in the first batch. However, there was another issue involved in her education. She was already married and also had a child. It was necessary that her mother stay with her at Quetta to help her go to the college. It also required that her husband be permitted to stay with her whenever in town. We stretched out resources at the breaking point to accommodate all these demands.

But that has not been enough, considering the need for education and other poverty alleviation needs.
