

WORKING WITH SHARKS

Countering Sexual Harassment In Our Lives

BY

FOUZIA SAEED, PhD

Islamabad, Pakistan

Harf-e-haq dil men khatakta he jo kante ki tarah
Aaj izhar keren aur khalish mit jae
...Faiz Ahmad Faiz

(The truth that pains me in my heart like a thorn
Should be expressed today so the pain vanishes)

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of Dr. Fouzia Saeed.

First Edition: 2012

Title Cartoon: Sabir Nazar
Title Design: Asif Shshjahan

Published by
SANJH PUBLICATIONS
Pakistan

Price: Rs. 10,000

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..... | 6 |
| GLOSSARY | 7 |
| Cast of Notable Character Names | 8 |
| PROLOGUE: From Personal Grievance to Public Law | 9 |
| SECTION ONE: DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES..... | 15 |
| 1. THE WORLD BEYOND PESHAWAR..... | 15 |
| 2. BACK IN PAKISTAN..... | 20 |
| 3. JOINING THE UNITED NATIONS | 23 |
| 4. MY EARLY STRUGGLES | 27 |
| 5. DEALING WITH DICKENS..... | 31 |
| 6. CLOSE ENCOUNTER..... | 33 |
| 7. ARRIVAL OF THE KING | 38 |
| 8. RECOGNIZING TARIK..... | 40 |
| 9. GETTING TRAPPED..... | 44 |
| 10. THE OTHER WOMEN IN THE UNDP..... | 47 |
| 11. REMEMBERING MY LOK VIRSA DAYS | 49 |
| SECTION TWO: STRUGGLING FOR DIGNITY | 54 |
| 12. A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN..... | 54 |
| 13. AN INTERESTING ADDITION | 56 |
| 14. BATTLES OF A PROFESSIONAL WOMAN..... | 61 |
| 15. CELEBRATING BIRTHDAYS..... | 65 |
| 16. NEW POSSIBILITIES, OLD CHALLENGES..... | 67 |
| 17. TRANSIT TO FRIENDSHIP | 71 |
| 18. FIRST MEMBER OF THE GENDER TEAM..... | 73 |
| 19. ADDRESSING THE GENDER GAP..... | 76 |
| 20. MY TEAM IN ACTION..... | 81 |
| SECTION THREE: BITTERSWEET REALITIES | 84 |
| 21. STARTING TO GET SERIOUS | 84 |
| 22. 'I AM THE PROCEDURE' | 87 |
| 23. BUILDING TIGHTER BONDS..... | 90 |
| 24. OPEN CONFRONTATION..... | 92 |
| 25. TARIK GETS A PROMOTION | 96 |
| 26. EMPTYING MY HARD DRIVE..... | 99 |
| 27. A HORSE WITHOUT REINS | 101 |
| 28. PAYING THE PRICE..... | 104 |

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 29. | BONDS OF ETERNITY..... | 109 |
| 30. | WEDDING PREPARATIONS | 112 |
| SECTION FOUR: COURAGE AND CONSEQUENCE | | 116 |
| 31. | PROGRAMME SUCCESS, OFFICE FAILURE | 116 |
| 32. | MY HUMAN RIGHTS!..... | 120 |
| 33. | COMING TOGETHER TO REPORT | 128 |
| 34. | REPORTING THE MANAGEMENT TO THE MANAGEMENT | 132 |
| 35. | THE ELEVENTH COMPLAINANT | 137 |
| 36. | REACTIONS TO OUR COMPLAINT | 139 |
| 37. | CIRCLING THE WAGONS | 143 |
| 38. | POLITICIZING MY CELEBRATIONS | 145 |
| 39. | OUR WEDDING | 147 |
| SECTION FIVE: SEEKING JUSTICE | | 154 |
| 40. | THE INVESTIGATION BEGINS | 154 |
| 41. | SPILL OVER IN THE PRESS | 158 |
| 42. | MY PARTIAL SOLUTION | 162 |
| 43. | ATTEMPTS AT COMPROMISE | 166 |
| 44. | 'NOT SEVERE ENOUGH'..... | 169 |
| 45. | OUR RESPONSE TO THE REPORT | 173 |
| 46. | OPERATING FROM A DISTANCE | 175 |
| 47. | BACK TO SQUARE ONE..... | 177 |
| 48. | 'HIS CASE IS VERY CONVINCING'..... | 181 |
| 49. | DISSOLVING MY TENSION IN SEA WATER..... | 186 |
| 50. | 'SERIOUS CONCERNS PERSIST' | 190 |
| SECTION SIX: THE MOMENT OF TRUTH..... | | 193 |
| 51. | PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER..... | 193 |
| 52. | HELLO, AMERICA! : DAY ONE IN NEW YORK..... | 196 |
| 53. | MEETING MARCO: DAY TWO..... | 198 |
| 54. | GHAZALA COMES THROUGH: DAY THREE | 202 |
| 55. | RUNNING INTO TARIK: DAY FOUR..... | 208 |
| 56. | THE HEARING BEGINS: DAY FIVE | 212 |
| 57. | CROSS-EXAMINATION: DAY SIX | 223 |
| 58. | THE MOMENT OF TRUTH: DAY SEVEN | 234 |
| 59. | GOOD, BAD AND UGLY | 238 |
| 60. | TESTING OUR PATIENCE | 242 |
| 61. | WOMEN OF INTEGRITY | 244 |
| EPILOGUE: Closing the Circle..... | | 250 |

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to recognize all of the working women of the world who have dealt with sexual harassment and, despite such agony, still bravely complete their studies and advance their careers. I salute all of the women who have dared to take action against sexual harassment, particularly my colleagues in the United Nations who joined with me in our complaint. Our experience together was transformational.

I am eternally grateful to my parents for giving me the confidence to stand my ground and the courage to write about my experience. My profound thanks go to my sister, Maliha, who returned from America to take over many of my responsibilities in AASHA. Without her help, I would never have had the time to complete this book. I will always appreciate my brother, Kamran, for the clear advice and emotional support he gave me at every turn in this long process. I am thankful to have a husband like Paul, whose understanding, patience and active encouragement gave me the strength to pursue the case, the law and this book. Every time he thought the battle was over I started it again from a new angle, yet he willingly sustained my struggle as an integral part of our lives from the moment we were married until this very day.

I am thankful to my family and friends who helped me go over drafts of this manuscript and gave me substantive feedback to make it a more useful and readable document.

Fouzia Saeed

GLOSSARY

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Ammi | mother |
| Baji | elder sister |
| Bedari | means 'awakening'; is also a name of a women's organization in Pakistan |
| Bhangra | an energetic traditional dance from Punjab (Pakistan and India) |
| Chaddar | a big sheet of cloth used to cover a woman's body, a part of her apparel |
| Chai | tea |
| Chand raat | the night of the new moon, typically used for the night before Eid |
| Chuchu | slang term of endearment, used mostly for children |
| Dholki | a small drum played on weddings, particularly by women signing together. |
| Doctor Sahiba | formal address for a woman doctor (medical or PhD) |
| Dopatta | a large scarf about three feet wide and six feet long, a part of the national Pakistani dress, used to cover one's head or is thrown over the shoulders |
| Eid | celebration among Muslims after one month of fasting |
| Ghagra | piece of clothing like a skirt |
| Ghutti | first taste of food for a baby. A South Asian tradition |
| Jani | love word, used like 'honey' for a wife or a girl friend |
| Kana Karna | to make somebody indebted for securing favours later on from him |
| Luddu | a traditional sweet, yellow and round, used to announce good news |
| Maha guru | master, specialist |
| Mehndi | the wedding ceremony when henna is put on the hands of a bride |
| Nikah | religious (Islamic) marriage contract of Muslims |
| Pashtun | an ethnic group that lives mostly in Pakistan and southern Afghanistan |
| Parathas | round and flat wheat bread, which is fried, mostly eaten at breakfast |
| PPP | Pakistan People's Party |
| Quran | Islam's holy book |
| Ramzan | the month of fasting |
| Sahib | respectful way of addressing a man, like Mister |
| Sura Yaseen | a set of verses from Quran, believed to protect the one who recites them |
| Sitar | a South Asian stringed musical instrument |
| Sarong | a piece of cloth wrapped around like a skirt, mostly worn in East Asia |
| Tabla | percussion musical instrument |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| Urdu | national language of Pakistan |
| Walima | the last day of celebration in a wedding when the groom gives a party |
| Yaar | slang for a friend—in Punjabi |

CAST OF NOTABLE CHARACTER NAMES

This is a story of my personal experience. Due to its sensitive nature, I have changed some of the names and descriptions of the characters to protect their identities. The names of the individuals, perpetrators, abettors or complainants are not so important. I do not want this to be perceived merely as a tale of person-to-person harassment. This case is important because of its description of the institutionalized retaliation meted out by the management after the complaint was filed. All the complainants were either fired or pushed out of their jobs with the organization. The senior international managers in the Pakistan office knew what was going on, allowed the situation to fester and, then, punished the women who had complained. Despite significant attempts at internal reforms, The Secretary General of the UN wrote, in 2009, that sexual harassment remains a 'scourge' in his organization. It remains a scourge in many organizations. This story is not just the story of these characters, but the story of the many women in many organizations around the world who have not yet spoken out!

United Nations Personnel (in order of appearance)

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Tarik Khan | Officer in Charge, Operations |
| Maria | Telephone receptionist |
| William Dickens | Operations Deputy before Robert's arrival |
| Robert England | Head of the UNDP in Pakistan |
| Kausar | Tarik's girl friend in the office |
| Paul | Governance advisor |
| Liunga Fiumi | Operations Deputy, briefly between Dickens and Dictus |
| Harumi Sakaguchi | Deputy for Programmes |
| Richard Dictus | Operations Deputy who arrived much after Fiumi's departure |
| Nawaz | Assistant to Tarik Khan |
| Loriot | Head of the UN Legal Office in New York |
| Marco Carmignani | UN legal counsel for the complainants in New York |

Complainants (in alphabetical order)

| | | | |
|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| Fouzia | Pakistani | Rachel | British |
| Ghazala | Pakistani | Rensje | Dutch |
| Laila | Pakistani | Sadia | Pakistani |
| Masako | Japanese | Sheeba | Pakistani |
| Nabila | Pakistani | Tasneem | Pakistani |
| Nageen | Pakistani | | |

PROLOGUE: From Personal Grievance to Public Law¹

I had been sitting all afternoon with my colleague, Aqsa, in the visitor's gallery of Pakistan's prestigious Senate hall. From my seat, I had a good view of the dark, wood-paneled walls, the rows of Senators occupying their heavy leather seats and the Chairman, Senator Farooq Naek, seated in his black robe on a high dais at the front. Below him sat three senior staff members of the Senate secretariat, who also wore black robes over their clothes as a symbol of the power of the Chairman's office.

The day's proceedings had been going on in a normal fashion. Attendance was a bit low, but I noticed that the religious politicians were in full strength and sitting close to one another. Suddenly, as the Chairman began to read the next agenda item, a rowdy noise erupted from the floor. The Chairman peered over the top of his slim reading glasses to see what had happened.

Long-bearded Senators from various religious parties had risen in unison from their seats and were interrupting the session. Despite the disturbance, the Chairman continued to read aloud the title of the next legislative item on the agenda: 'A bill that would declare sexual harassment of any citizen of Pakistan to be a crime.'

"We won't allow this western thinking to bring offensive values into our culture and ruin us," yelled one old Senator, whose grey beard flowed down to his stomach. He was wearing loose white clothes, covered with a half-sleeved black velvet robe, trimmed with a thick gold border. Together with three other religious party Senators, he continued to shout in order to prevent the Chairman from beginning the discussion. They each started shrieking.

"Islam has given women all necessary rights."

"We will not permit such vulgarity to take root in our culture."

"Only women of easy virtue incite men."

"No man in his right mind can harass a woman in an Islamic society."

This bill only asked that organizations establish a dignified work environment for both men and women. The religious politicians were claiming that the bill was anti-Islam, but they were having a hard time making a logical argument of how it violated Islam, which protects human dignity in all cases. One Senator, with a big bulging belly and a long black and white beard with the same contours, began reciting Arabic verses from the Quran, knowing that he would not be interrupted. When he decided he had recited enough to make his point, he made some illogical arguments claiming that the bill would force all women to work and ignore their children and husbands, thus ruining the society.

Sitting in the visitors' gallery, helpless and voiceless, I panicked when I saw one of our main supporters from the ruling party, Senator Mian Raza Rabbani, get up and leave the hall. Something must be wrong; otherwise, he would never leave our bill in such a perilous situation. I could hardly breathe as I tried to figure out what was happening.

¹ Ten years after the conclusion of the United Nations case described in this book, Pakistan passed national anti-sexual harassment legislation comprised of two related laws. One was passed on 20 January 2010 and the other on 25 February 2010. The events portrayed in this Prologue are true, but the passage of the two laws has been summarized and amalgamated here to give the reader an insight into the final stage of the process.

One religious politician got up and said, “This is not a problem related to most of Pakistan’s women, but only those who are fashionable. They work in NGOs and work with men.” The other bearded men nodded in agreement. “They travel together with men and sleep in hotels with them.” This group of Senators, all of whom looked like characters straight out of Lawrence of Arabia, roared their agreement. The attack continued relentlessly. Before one stopped speaking, another began. They left no space for the Chairman to discipline them. It was clearly a planned assault.

After a few minutes, I saw Senator Rabbani re-enter the hall and return to his seat. The “Lion of the Senate” walked with grace, looking around at the institution he had worked so hard to build, just as a lion roams its territory making sure everything is satisfactory. “He’s back, he’s back,” we whispered, holding each other’s hands tightly. I started to breathe again, believing things would be all right.

All of our supporters in the Senate, whom we had been lobbying for months, were dumbfounded. The religious crowd was gaining ground. They broke all the rules. None of them raised a hand or waited for the Chair to recognize him. Only one progressive Senator got a word in. The Chair had to make an extra effort to enable him to speak. Senator Afrasiab from a secular Pashtun party rose to put the religious Senators to shame. He said it was embarrassing how such custodians of our religion could oppose something that only asks for the dignity of women. His was the only voice they allowed. Clean-shaven, but conservative, Senators joined their voices with those of the bearded politicians. They would not sit down despite the Chairman telling them, repeatedly, to be seated.

Since we were not allowed to speak, we could only communicate with our eyes to the Senators who supported us. I tried hard to make eye contact to motivate them to speak up in support, but most seemed overwhelmed by the attack.

“Please, Senator Rabbani, say something,” I said in my heart. “Somebody...please say something.” I saw Senator Rabbani raise his hand and he was not ignored. Regardless of the fuss from the choir of religious Senators, they had to give way to ‘the Lion’. He very politely reminded the Chair that he had a pending adjournment motion that he was keen to attend to urgently after discussion of this bill. The Chair got his message and quickly announced a ten-minute recess. He said the time left in the session was limited so the members could decide whether they wanted to continue the discussion on our bill or switch to Senator Rabbani’s adjournment motion. This was a very unusual break.

A small group of Senators gathered on the floor. The microphones were turned off so we had no idea what they were discussing. I saw Senator Rabbani swiftly move into the middle of this crowd. We were clueless, until a friendly Senator came and told us that no one was talking about our bill. The discussion was revolving around who would be nominated from each party to speak about the adjournment motion.

“What about our bill?” we wondered. After the recess, and without any announcement, the discussion moved on to the adjournment motion. What happens next? What happens to our bill? We looked at each other. Was that a deliberate intervention? Did they act intentionally to divert attention from the unexpected volcanic reaction by the conservative lobby? I had no answers, but I trusted Senator Rabbani and Chairman Naek to do whatever they could to support us.

The uproar of the religious leaders had shaken me so much I could not concentrate on what was being said on the floor. Only a few days earlier, a senior leader of the largest religious party had openly expressed his support for the pending legislation. Within three days, their stance had turned around completely. I was also grumbling to myself about all the good Senators who lacked the courage to cut through this uproar. They had clearly been intimidated.

My body felt heavy and I had a hard time controlling my tears. We had gone through so much in the past two years, but the last few steps seemed to be the most difficult. We had succeeded, against all odds, in getting the draft legislation approved by the Cabinet, unanimously approved in the National Assembly and cleared by the Senate Law Committee. We were at the tail-end of the process, so close to the final decision and yet so far away. The stakes were high. We wanted so badly for this to be the last day of our struggle, but the conservative Senators had lashed our bill, and the women of Pakistan, with their tongues.

The Senate session had moved from the aggressive attack on our bill to Senator Rabbani's adjournment motion. Gradually, as the attendance thinned out, the Chairman moved to other routine matters. They had deferred discussion on our bill without saying when it would be placed back on the agenda. I went out to the Senate lounge to ask if anyone knew when our bill would be re-scheduled and was told that it would come only in the next session—a wait of almost a month.

After the National Assembly passes any proposed legislation, the Senate must pass it within ninety days. If our bill was deferred to the next session, we would be scraping close to that limit. We prayed for a miracle. I went back into the Chamber, resolved not to leave the visitor's gallery before the Senate session ended.

I wanted to wait for the Chairman so he could personally tell me when our bill would come on the agenda again. I sent several messages through his personal assistant and then sat down to wait. Some of our Senate supporters looked at us, wondering why we were still around since our bill had already been deferred. We would not give up. I wanted the Chairman to tell me to my face. He knew very well how hard we had worked to get this far and how badly we wanted the bill to be brought up for a vote in this session. He had helped immensely by finalizing the draft with me when he had been the Law Minister, nearly two years earlier.

When the session ended, we rushed to the Chairman's office. His assistant told us that he was surrounded by several Cabinet members and might not have even a minute to see us. We kept insisting and sent him more messages. Finally, the assistant informed us he was about to leave and quietly told us which hallway the Chairman would take on the way to his car. We quickly rushed to the corridor and waited for him to pass. When the time came for his departure, security guards took over the whole area and tried to push us away. We refused to move. Fortunately, some of these guards knew us and felt sympathetic, having seen us frequently coming and going over the past several months. One of them whispered quietly, "Let them stay".

A few seconds later, the Chairman walked briskly out of his office with an entourage of ten people behind him. We quickly caught up with him and I asked him when our bill would again be on the agenda. I knew of the intrigues that were going on behind closed doors. He looked at my worried face and laughed, saying simply, "Tomorrow". I suddenly felt that the impossible could happen. I thanked him profusely and rushed out. Night had already fallen and we had a lot to do to prepare for the next day's session.

During the previous two years, we had seen the best, as well as the worst, among our parliamentarians. Many supported our agenda regardless of their party's stance. The strongest and the most consistent supporters were a few women parliamentarians who fully understood the importance of the issue, like Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Sherry Rehman and Bushra Gohar. The senior leadership of the PPP wanted to continue Benazir's agenda for progressive reform aimed at moving our country into the twenty-first century. We had people like Senator Raza Rabbani on our side; giving us strength and making us feel brave.

On the other hand, we knew several "beardless" Senators who claimed to be progressive, but who were actually more unprincipled than the religious Senators on women's issues. Some were even Pakistan People's Party (PPP) members. They pretended to be fully in line with the Party manifesto, but acted in total contradiction to it. Unable to oppose the Bill openly, they did everything behind the scenes to discredit it. It had nothing to do with the merits of the bill; these parliamentarians were simply anti-women.

A week earlier, one such powerful man, who had successfully nestled himself in the progressive PPP, tried to throw us off track by referring our bill to the Senate's Law Committee, assuming that it would simply disappear. However, through intense and persistent lobbying, we successfully brought it back out from the monster's belly. In reaction, this man had now made some promise to religious elements in the Senate, who we had been able to keep with us so far, if they would condemn our bill in the name of Islam. All this drama happened three days before the final vote. We were so close to the end of the struggle, when, suddenly, the process had almost been derailed. Deferring discussion on the bill for a day gave us a chance to rally our troops. We were confident of our lobbying strategy and knew we had the numbers, if only they remained courageous.

By the time we got home, Aqsa and I had already divided our tasks. She would organize a delegation of working women to sit in the gallery when the proceedings re-opened the next day while I focused on last-minute lobbying. I stayed on my phone until quite late at night calling a number of Senators who were on our side. I purposefully made my pitch emotional. We wanted to give them courage to stand up to the religious Senators. Each one to whom I spoke assured me that he would do just that. My strategy was to reinforce those who were clearly on our side, while convincing others to abandon the side of our opponents.

Aqsa was successful in gathering her working women: two policewomen, two lawyers, two factory women and a couple of others from different professions. We could not get more in because the security clearance was a big barrier. Given the political situation and the recent militant attacks, our Parliament House was in the highest security zone of the city. The office of the Chairman of the Senate was helpful in getting us these few entrance passes. We had also brought loads of mithai, traditional sweets, with us. We wanted to be sure that if the bill passed we would not find ourselves without tokens of appreciation to pass around. We were confident of the Senators who truly respected women and did not just mouth patronizing clichés. We were confident of our own intentions. We knew well that this could be a major turning point in our lives and in the lives of Pakistani women, so we gave it nothing less than a hundred percent of our effort.

Just before the session began, we sent text messages to those Senators we desperately needed to be in attendance. We kept counting the number of our supporters as they entered the Hall. The working women with us sat proudly in their uniforms. My team members were anxious. When our Bill came up on the agenda, the religious Senators started their act again. Rowdily, they spoke without turn, but this time our supporters were ready. One after another, they got up and made substantive speeches. They appreciated the drafting of the bill, they emphasized the need for such legislation and they legitimized the right of women to work and engage in the public sphere. A few even made jokes about the religious Senators. One quipped, “I can imagine someone like me getting nervous about being caught by such a law against sexual harassment. What I do not understand is what our dear religious leaders are afraid of.”

The voting concluded and the religious Senators, reduced now to a small disgruntled group, had not even cast a single ‘nay’. Some had left the session when they saw clearly that the vote was going against them. We were thrilled beyond our imagination, weeping with delight and hugging each other. We rushed out of the gallery with our huge baskets of sweets, offering it to the guards, the staff and the Senators, who were now trickling into the lounge to see us.

This was a victory for Pakistani women and a major milestone in our long struggle for equality. It not only opened opportunities for professional women, but it legitimized access to public space for all women, something that had slipped away from us as the “talibanization” of our society pushed women into the shadows. Passage of this legislation was an assertion of emancipation that was badly needed in a society that kept giving way to an increasingly conservative wave that threatened to engulf women. It was a day of celebration for everyone.

President Asif Ali Zardari signed the legislation in a very special ceremony on March 9, 2010 in order to tie it to the programmes for International Women’s Day. He invited one hundred women leaders from all over the country to witness the event. He remarked that although harassment was one of the most common problems for women in Pakistan, this legislation was historic because the State had finally recognized it as a crime. He also noted that this was the first comprehensive progressive legislation for women in our country since the Muslim Family Law of the early 1960s.

I celebrated this victory with my friends who had helped me to form AASHA, the Alliance Against Sexual Harassment a decade earlier. At the same time, I quickly started making plans to keep the momentum going to ensure proper implementation of the law. I wanted the Government to be serious about implementation and put monitoring mechanisms in place. I wanted women to speak up, to be brave and take men to task who violated the law. I wanted the law-enforcement agencies to play a role in enforcing the law and I wanted civic organizations to use it to change the mindset of people.

It seemed I had been waiting all my life for the passage of this legislation. All the pain of healed wounds and bruises came rushing back. I wished my family had been sitting right next to me. They had been equally involved in my struggle. I had wanted this legislation so badly. I knew all the other women did as well. We were tired of the treatment we received daily in the markets, in the streets, in public gatherings, at bus stops and at work. People used to ask me if I had statistics on the frequency of sexual harassment in Pakistan and I always laughed and said there is

not a single woman in our country that has not experienced it. I come from an educated, middle-class, family, yet I experience it nearly every day.

Some say my struggle started ten years ago when I founded AASHA. Some say my struggle started when I registered the first major sexual harassment case in my organization, which became a landmark for the movement against this crime, but I knew that this struggle started as far back as I could remember. It started with the first time I felt humiliated by the touch of a man, by the ogling eyes that made me feel naked, by advances that I could not even comprehend at the time. I was too young to articulate what I felt, but I knew I wanted it to stop.

I clearly remember the days when I first yearned to be fully in charge of my life. I wanted to travel, study abroad, participate in every adventure of life, become a professional woman and, in return, help transform the lives of Pakistani women. There are many women in Pakistan with those same heartfelt desires. I had that chance, but, for many, those dreams could never be realized because of their fears, or their parents' fears, that they would be harassed and humiliated if they ventured out into the working world.

Sexual harassment is a global phenomenon that takes on many forms. The case described in this book set many precedents in both the United Nations and in Pakistan. I chose to write my story in detail so that readers could understand what sexual harassment, and the struggle to deal with it, felt like in the context of my personal life and my culture and how it affected my growth as a professional woman. However, it is important that readers do not think of this as a 'he said, she said' story. It is more than just a power struggle between individuals. The purpose of writing this book is to stress the need to bring organizational governance norms in line with a growing, and increasingly empowered, female workforce. This is particularly crucial in those organizations, like the United Nations, that operate outside the legal framework of any single nation.

I was not alone in this struggle. I have written the story of our decision to speak out against blatant abuse in our organization...and what happened to us after we did. Our managers purposefully punished us for reporting our humiliation, yet they were never punished for their institutional harassment of us. After that bitter experience, I knew that I had to continue the struggle so that organizations could not easily provide safe havens for men who harass, humiliate and abuse women. I pushed this agenda with the conviction that women should not hold back, but must speak out. We have now seen some success, but we will keep speaking out until there is no room for any organization that protects such criminal characters. In this light, I have written this book as my way of speaking out.

SECTION ONE: DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

1. THE WORLD BEYOND PESHAWAR

In August of 1975, I stood on the balcony of a hotel in Tahrir Square, Cairo, holding three small pyramids in my hand. My father had taken our entire family on a vacation to see the world outside Pakistan and I was trying to feel the power of ancient Egypt. I was sixteen and imagined myself to be Hatshepsut, an Egyptian queen over three thousand years ago, who had attempted to minimize the cultural restrictions placed on women by putting on a false beard and dressing up like a prince. For reasons I did not completely understand at the time, I thought she was pretty cool.

Up to that point in my life, I had just imagined the outside world through books and a few western movies. On that trip, the world began opening up for me and my life would never again be the same. I wondered if the brightly colored guards at Buckingham Palace were actually statues and I suspected that some of the statues in Madame Tussaud's wax museum were real people. Signs everywhere said: "Do Not Touch!" Of course, I did anyway, wanting to see if they could be tickled into releasing their tedious poses. I ran through Trafalgar Square, creating an ocean of flying pigeons and I rode the famous red double-decker buses, clicking my camera at every new and fascinating sight. I played on Libya's sandy beaches and was stunned by the sight of an oasis, sitting like a jewel in the endless desert. For years, my father had told us many stories of Arabia's travelers, adventurers and thieves. Here we were gazing at the green palm oases dotting those same golden deserts. In Saudi Arabia, I stared in awe at the thin, bearded men, wearing long, flowing white gowns. We called them angels. The beautiful waters of the Red Sea left me breathless. All these images became a precious part of my learning treasure box, but the majestic pyramids and other treasures of Egypt's ancient history influenced me the most.

In the stories of ancient Egypt, I was pleasantly surprised to hear of women as cultural leaders. Some were historical figures: Queens and Princesses. Others were mythical goddesses, like Isis with power of creation and Hathor, the patron of musicians and artists. This introduction to the culture of ancient Egypt provided an early basis for building my pride in being a woman and the courage to become a person of my own making.

To this day, I am grateful for my father's wise decision to invest in our minds rather than real estate. More than any experience in my life, this trip opened my mind to the diversity of cultures and helped formulate ideas that have guided my life's work. Beyond that, it inspired a life-long taste for travel and exploration.

My travels started when I was only twenty days old. Shortly after I was born in my maternal grandmother's house in Lahore, my mother and I took a flight to Karachi and before I was one year old, I moved with my parents to Dhaka. My father's job in the Pakistan Airlines took him to many different cities, so I developed a taste for changing environments quite early in life. For most of my schooling and initial college years, however, I lived in Peshawar and that was home for me, although Lahore made the strongest impression on my personality. Like the stereotypically, high-spirited, 'Lahoris', I loved life and never missed any excuse for a celebration.

I liked living in Peshawar, a city near the Afghan border in northwest Pakistan. I quickly became accustomed to small-town life where people were supportive, even of strangers and outsiders. Such values were quickly being lost in some of the more advanced parts of Pakistan. Living as a young girl in a community with a strong patriarchal culture, however, proved to be a challenge. As I matured, I recognized the paradox between the claims of reverence for women and the degrading reality I saw daily in the market place, even for women covered from head to toe.

I began to learn my lesson when I was quite young. One day, when I was in the sixth grade, about ten or eleven years old, I was in a crowded market with my mother near our house. This was a shop for sewing materials, embroidery threads, beads, trimmings for clothes and so on. While my mother made her choices, the shopkeeper came up to me from the side and touched my bottom. I froze with fear, not knowing what to do. To this day, I remember my humiliation. I came home and cried for hours. I looked at myself in the mirror and thought I had become dirty. I never told anyone, not even my mother. All the subtle socialization messages I had subconsciously absorbed came into play: It had to be my fault. For weeks, I was quiet.

As time went on, however, I began to look inside myself and gain confidence in my own feelings. I started trusting my own conscience and realized I should not blame myself for the actions of others. I began fighting back in subtle ways. By the time I was going to the market by myself, I had developed a way of walking with my elbows out, pushing my way through the crowds. This worked most of the time and scared away the men with groping hands. Sometimes I even carried an open safety pin, hearing their surprised shrieks as I moved ahead with a blank expression on my face. Even when such men did succeed, I remembered to blame them and not myself. I had to watch everyone walking towards me, beside me...and behind me. My whole body would be tense and ready to respond at the slightest perception of a passerby's intention to touch me. My mind was always occupied with how to get through the street safely. My heart yearned for a carefree walk where I could enjoy the colors, people and activities around me with leisure.

As a young girl in Peshawar, I had few learning opportunities outside my home. My entry into the university opened a sphere of activities that easily gained my family's approval, so I made full use of it. In time, I became quite involved in the student politics of the university and so moved out of the segregated, and protected, all-female environment of the Women's College. I also became a member of the University Student Executive body, one of three women on the committee. My parents would not allow me to run for any major position in the University-wide elections because they thought these were too closely linked to the activities of the national political parties, and the violence and corruption that went with them. I tried to convince them, but failed. Without their permission, I could not go ahead, so I had to be content with being elected President of the Women's College's student body for two consecutive years.

I became quite engaged in the elements of student politics that were linked with national issues. I still remember all the demonstrations we organized after the military dictator, Zia-ul-Haq, took over the Government in a military coup and imprisoned the popularly-elected Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Like most students at the time, I admired Mr. Bhutto and idealized him for bringing about a new kind of awareness and empowerment among the common people. My parents were extremely nervous about my new political activities, especially when they learned I was organizing student rallies.

At the same time, however, I often felt as if I was outside the mainstream of student life, because most of my classmates were more interested in talking, endlessly, about possible in-laws and husbands. This was the major issue in their lives and, indeed, would be a major determinant of their future social status, but these discussions did not interest me.

I was simply uninterested in either men or marriage. I felt I did not have time to think about those things. Having seen the bad outcome of my elder sister's arranged marriage, I made a promise to myself that I would never be trapped by that glorified social institution. I felt it would be better to live alone and have my own social standing in life. Arranged marriages remain the norm. For many families, if a daughter chose her life-partner on her own it would be perceived as ruining her family's honor and shoving them into a social darkness of shame. This fear encourages most families to closely chaperone their daughters and arrange their marriages quite early to prevent any risk of being exposed to unknown boys.

I clearly told my parents they would never hear any rumor about me having trouble with boys as long as they trusted me and let me go freely to my various activities on public transport. This was the main reason they were lenient with me and allowed me to engage in many activities. They felt that at least I was not asking liberties in areas that could bring them "shame" and "dishonor".

In Peshawar University, women had to wrap themselves in a *chaddar* from head to toe. This was not optional. University regulations required it. As if that were not enough, the Vice Chancellor, Mr. Ali Khan, added a rule that men and women had to walk on opposite sidewalks to avoid any mischief. The security staff dealt harshly with disobedient students. The administrators created this rule to ensure that young women felt safe coming to the campus and their families felt comfortable that young men would not bother their daughters.

Nevertheless, the young men found ways around those rules. Occasionally, a guy would drive slowly behind us, right next to the women's sidewalk and ask whether we wanted a ride. We would get so scared that our legs would tremble. We never dared to look back or respond. I was a little braver than my friends, so they would ask me nervously, "What do we do? What do we do? His car is coming close!"

"Just ignore him," I would say firmly, although my heart was also racing. I am sure those boys went home feeling proud at their success at making a "connection" with the opposite sex. We came home feeling like we had had a close encounter with a shark in the ocean, hoping that we would be safer the next day.

The graduate departments had co-education with very clearly segregated social circles of men and women. The women who studied there were exceptionally brave and lucky to have gotten that far. They usually enjoyed respect from their male classmates and teachers, but the interaction between men and women was minimal and very formal.

My studies alone were never enough to satisfy my yearning to learn. Unlike most of my college friends who found the cultural restrictions on their lives to be as insurmountable as the high mountains of the Hindu Kush, I was like running water that makes its way around or through any obstacle in its path. I agreed to wear a *chaddar* from head to toe as long as I could leave the house by myself and I agreed to stay away from personal relations with men as long as I could work with them at the university. I agreed not to perform in public if my parents arranged home lessons for me to learn how to play the sitar. If my parents allowed me to learn folk dancing, I promised to

perform only on the stage of the all-female college. I promised to get straight A's in my studies if my parents allowed me to be one of the first female programme announcers at the local Pakistan Television station, which, in those days, had a five-hour, black-and-white transmission, every evening.

In the summer of 1976, my father took us to Kabul, then, the beautiful capital of Afghanistan. This was only a five-hour drive from Peshawar, over the famous Khyber Pass. I was amazed by how advanced Kabul appeared and remember being impressed by how modern the women dressed. By this time, I was developing a taste for travel and exploration. I wanted to learn from other cultures in order to groom myself for the future.

Every year I received a merit scholarship and my parents let me keep the money for myself rather than spending it on my education. Being duty-bound, traditional parents, they wanted to be sure they met all our needs. By 1977, my third year in college, my brother Kamran and I had saved enough money from our scholarships to plan a trip by ourselves to the world outside. All our relatives were shocked that my parents would allow us to travel alone. People in my college, including teachers, were surprised that we could even think of venturing out like that. I was about eighteen and Kamran was fifteen. As our father's dependents, we got free tickets from the Pakistan International Airlines and we had our own money for other expenses. We were thrilled in anticipation of this adventure.

We went to several American cities, but New York City was the definite high point. What I remember most was the ecstasy of adventure. We were so excited to see the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building, landmarks known to us only from books. I tasted a McDonald's Big Mac, rode on escalators and saw black people for the first time. Kamran and I both tried to copy their walk, as we loved its rhythm. Wearing watches with big luminous digits made us feel very modern and seeing Star Wars in a movie theater made us feel like we were visiting another planet. We walked around the city hoping to be mugged and have a real adventure like the ones we had seen in American movies. Nothing like that happened and, as youngsters, we took that as a major disappointment.

When we returned, my vision of the possibilities for my life had expanded to include the whole world. I was already finding my studies too easy. I wanted better schools, tougher teachers and more challenges. In Pakistan, I struggled to involve myself in many things beside my studies just to satisfy my yearning to learn.

All of this led me to announce that I would go to the USA for my graduate education. No one in my family took this ambitious declaration seriously. As an engineer with the national airline, my father had a modest salary. My mother had made sure we all went to English-medium schools, although the fees were beyond what they could easily afford. She made sure we did our homework and got good grades. My father was less concerned about our grades, but he developed our taste for reading things that were quite different from our schoolbooks and for seeing life from various perspectives. Our love for travel grew out of this broad approach to learning. Our parents had very different styles, but, in the end, both focused on the quality of our education.

My parents began to worry when they saw that I had started to apply to American universities. They told me they could not afford to send all their children to the USA for higher education and that it would not be fair to send only one of us. This did not dampen my enthusiasm. I diligently read all the information I received from different universities and was

amazed at the variety of courses they offered along with numerous on-campus activities. My eyes widened at the colored photos in their booklets showing students busy with cultural shows, outdoor adventures, student politics and even music classes. I was determined to go to America immediately after finishing my Bachelor's degree.

I have often noticed that paths open up when I am determined to do something. My last year in college was quite challenging. In addition to my studies, I had a full schedule of activities in student politics, as a women's rights activist and as a television programme announcer, but I still managed to remain the top ranked student in my college. As my reward, Peshawar University awarded me with their traditional gold medal at graduation, but the Ministry of Education overwhelmed me with an overseas study scholarship for the USA.

My family and my teachers were ecstatic about the enormous opportunities this scholarship would open up for me. I was also sad that many of my friends found it unbelievable that my family would permit me to take the scholarship. Most of them told me that they would not have been allowed to go even if they had been the top student in our college.

Six months later, I arrived at the Minneapolis airport on September 4, 1979. It was late evening, so I knew the University offices would be closed. I took a taxi to my host family's address. My eyes were wide with excitement as I looked around the airport and then the roads of Minneapolis. We went into a suburb and I was surprised at how similar all the houses were. They all sat on grassy lots like wooden toys. I was used to heavy concrete houses built like square blocks, each with a sturdy boundary wall clearly separating the private from the public space. These houses looked quite naked to me. Bob and Jane Lartar, the first Americans who welcomed me to their country, became lifelong friends, but they were more than a little surprised by my unannounced arrival. They had registered to be a host family, but had never received a confirmation. In addition, they expected a young European man. A Muslim girl from Pakistan, appearing alone in the dark with no prior notice was a bit too much for them to fathom. Still, being from Minnesota, they welcomed me with open arms, although slightly confused.

Going to America exposed me to worlds of new learning opportunities. I experienced a new culture, new people, new activities and new weather. I was overwhelmed with the choice of courses the University offered and soon drifted towards several options in the Social Sciences. Everything I did was new and exciting. Once I took an intercultural class that discussed the shock and stress of living in another culture. I told them, in all honesty, that I had been on one long high since the day I had landed. I had felt not a moment of stress and greeted each new experience with open enthusiasm. They thought I was in denial!

Even in America, studies alone were not enough. I plunged into the politics of the international student groups and was soon organizing various elections. I also became very involved in the women's movement. With so many opportunities, I could not help engaging in everything I could fit in my twenty-four hours. My circle of friends quickly expanded from Jane and Bob to a broad range of students and professionals of all colors and sizes.

I especially enjoyed experiencing the freedoms that women in Pakistan lack. I could choose where to go, what to do, what activities to join and, most importantly, when to go home. We spend half of our lives in South Asia worrying about what other people will say about us. What they think of what we wear, how we talk, what we say, where we go, whom we meet. In America, I could walk free, swinging my arms and looking at the other people walking in the street. Nobody

cared. I could sit in a bus next to a man without my body cringing at every move he made. I had never experienced such a calming of mind and body before.

Over time, I began to discover the hidden patriarchy in the USA as well. The approved image of a woman was quite narrow and they tried hard to fit that mould. I noticed that most women measured themselves by the standards set by men and lived their lives to make sure they remained the chosen ones. Although it seemed that, unlike our culture, they married by choice, the struggle I kept witnessing at my university was that men remained non-committal while women tried to pin them down for a life-partnership. The roads were safer to walk and there was more space to develop platonic relationships across genders, but women still had to tread carefully to retain their 'good women status'.

Not until 1986, the first year of my doctoral programme, did I become serious about leaving all other activities and focusing on my studies. This came as a shock to my friends, who by this time could not imagine student activities without my involvement. I worked very closely with my adviser, Dr. Jerry McClelland, a true professional and a very ethical person. I learned a lot from her about research and being a professional academic.

Many people predicted that after living the American lifestyle for so long I would be unable to return. I do not think they ever understood that I had focused for eight years on preparing myself for the challenges I would face when I returned to Pakistan. Contributing to my society was my main goal in life.

I walked up to the stage to get my doctoral degree with a lot of pride. My mother and brother had also come for the ceremony. I wore Pakistani clothes, a *shalwar kamiz*, that my grandmother had made especially for this occasion. I took the first flight to Pakistan after getting my degree, as I had promised myself. I left the USA, dreaming of developing a career of my own and fully committed to changing women's destiny in my homeland.

2. BACK IN PAKISTAN

I felt a great joy in returning to Pakistan after eight years in America. Finally, I was approaching the end of the preparatory phase in my life. I was anxious to find a job, engulfed in a rather naive euphoria of getting on with my goal of changing my society's attitudes towards women. Full of energy and a sense of mission, I sought a career that I thought would give me the greatest opportunities for contributing to my country. However, I ended up learning more about the challenges of being a professional woman and surviving in our system. During my student days, I had concentrated so much on building my academic knowledge that the very different struggles of the professional world came as a surprise.

However, my initial challenge was to help my parents become accustomed to my changed attitudes and behavior. My family now lived in a comfortable, medium-sized house, surrounded by flowers and green trees in the middle of Islamabad. I had been back for about three months and had a room upstairs that I had rearranged for myself. The most imposing things were my bookshelf and study table, next to a small window, where I spent most of my time. I was happy to be home, but was still trying to adjust to living with people around me all the time.

Our house was always full of guests, relatives and family friends. My welcome home to Pakistan continued with people coming to visit and congratulate my parents on the completion of my doctorate. These visits ranged from short evening dinners to stays of a few weeks. Our domestic help was kept busy making tea and snacks, lunches and dinners, for the guests, while the rest of the family entertained them. I was repeatedly called into the living room to tell my tales of life among the fabled Americans. Finding it hard to deal with such a constant stream of visitors, I scurried back to my room whenever I could.

One day, my mother rushed into my room when she heard me howling at our maid. "What's the problem?" she asked with a tone of annoyance.

I was standing by my study table and complained angrily, "Ammi, I told this maid not to touch anything on my desk, but now it's all disorganized. I can't find anything."

The maid rushed to my mother and pleaded, "I never touched a thing. Her cousins went through her things and moved them around."

My mother smiled and answered dismissively, "Is that all?"

I was furious, "I can't stand this. They have no business coming into my room."

"And since when have you started cutting our home into rooms?" my mother asked with a stern face. "The next thing I know, you'll even start locking your door," she continued.

I pouted with anger. She hugged me and asked, "What's the big deal? Do you have secrets or what? We're all still one family!"

Thumping my foot on the ground, I raged, "That's not the point. This is MY room and these are MY things. I don't want anyone to touch them."

My mother left, shaking her head with a sigh, "These American germs! I guess we'll have to deal with such things now."

I had thought that regardless of my involvement in American culture, I was too Pakistani to change my basic attitudes, but I kept surprising myself. I had trouble re-adjusting to the group-thinking and group-living aspects of my culture. My re-entry into Pakistani society affected my new sense of time and privacy the most.

At an intellectual level, I knew that in Pakistan, privacy is linked only to the body. People cover their bodies thoroughly and touching only occurs between intimates or family members. Otherwise, everything, other than the body, gets blended into the 'us'-oriented group lifestyle. However, American individual privacy is less linked to the body and more to the space around a person and the things that surround them. It is easy for Americans to expose their bodies to strangers by wearing mini-skirts, shorts or bikinis, but they are incensed if someone violates their space or uses their things without permission. I had not realized how much I had changed from 'us' to 'I'.

I was also reminded that people never have to ask if they can come to visit or stay with us. They just arrive...and they leave when they want. Siblings use each other's things without asking and this is not considered rude.

During my initial years in America, I was shocked at men and women sunbathing with their whole bodies exposed while strangers walked around. I was also very surprised at young women who slept with men they hardly knew. My socialization had taught me that people are sexually close only with those with whom they want to spend their lives. There are other ways to

know people without sleeping with them. My Pakistani upbringing caused me to continue to maintain the privacy of my body, but without being aware of it; my eight years in America made me expand that concept to my things and the space around me. As my mother said, the 'American germs' had infected me.

On the other hand, I started noticing that we hardly had words for anything related to the body or sex, but preferred using indirect phrases. Feeling shy about saying someone is pregnant, we would say, 'her lap will be filled' or 'her feet are swollen' or 'you will become a mother soon'. For getting a woman married we would say make her hands yellow (with henna) and for crimes like rape we would say, 'dishonored' or 'adultery by force'. Talk of body or sex remained a very private matter, even among those who were intimate. This language gap is intentional because our culture believes that all personal matters should remain private. This attitude also makes it difficult for women, in particular, to complain if their intimate space has been violated.

My readjustment into my family and cultural context was gradual. My family's love and close connection helped a lot. This process gave me a continuous and a clearer perspective on how we think and do things in comparison to other cultures.

On the career front, I was committed to getting a Government job to serve my country. I was mindful of my four-year bond to work with the government upon my return from my scholarship. I kept calling the Education Department in Islamabad and Peshawar to clarify if my bond was with the Provincial Government or the Federal. Finally, they got tired of me and told me to get lost. They were not interested in where, or if, I worked.

My spirit and commitment to work for the Government was too strong to dismiss easily, so I decided to stay in Islamabad and begin my work with the Open University, a government-run, distance-learning, college. The super professionalism I had learned in the States from my professors, like Jerry McClelland, could not deal with the intrigues, internal fighting and low standards of professional output I found in that organization. Within a few months, I found another opportunity as the Deputy Director of Research for the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, known as Lok Virsa. I decided I would put my knowledge to use designing non-formal programmes and educational experiences. In any case, research was my first love and I wanted to explore our traditional culture. I guess, through this process, I wanted to re-learn my culture and fill any gaps I might have had in my understanding. I used the time I was with Lok Virsa to travel to every corner of Pakistan. I sat with village women, sang and danced with them, and learned about their lives, their challenges, their burdens and their troubles.

About that time, I joined our local women's movement and started working on different issues, but I decided that I would not try to create a new organization until I was comfortable that I had a better understanding of Pakistani women's deeper yearnings. It was not until 1992, that I founded a community organization, called Bedari, with some like-minded friends. Bedari means "awakening," in Urdu. The organization focused on violence against women and aimed at making our society a more just and equitable place for both women and men. Community support was overwhelming and Bedari soon became the most talked-about organization in Islamabad. I felt closely connected to issues related to the violation of women through humiliation, abuse and assault that became Bedari's agenda.

I still felt I had much to learn about the process of social change in Pakistan before launching a more comprehensive campaign. I had no idea back then that my campaign strategy

would end up being little more than just living my life. Each time I faced a roadblock and pushed it out of the way, I felt I was making a path not just for myself, but for other Pakistani women as well.

3. JOINING THE UNITED NATIONS

I thought that my extensive education had prepared me for anything, but I came to realize that the realities on the ground were even more difficult than I had imagined. I had been preparing myself for major challenges, but unexpected, minor issues sapped much of my energy. In the real world, personalities are more important than institutions. A powerful person's word carries more weight than a pile of evidence. My competencies were less important than my abilities to manoeuvre interpersonal links. Nevertheless, I remained focused on my career and on creating volunteer-based programmes to work on my country's social issues. My determination and spirit were still strong.

I clearly remember the day I first considered joining the United Nations (UN). On one weekend in August 1994, I was visiting my family in Islamabad from Karachi, where I was working at the time. I was sitting on the carpet in our living room in front of a glass door opening into our garden. Kamran and I were finishing a breakfast of potato-filled *parathas*. The rain had just stopped, but I could still hear the trickling of water from the terrace shades; it was a perfect morning!

Kamran is three years younger than I am and has dashing looks, dark hair and a brilliant mind. I often complained about him to my mother, demanding to know why the same genetic background did not give me such good looks. She always replied casually, "He took after me; you took after your father."

Kamran was saying that one year in Karachi was enough and I should come back to Islamabad. He had recently returned from the USA after eleven years of studies and was completing his doctoral dissertation in Islamabad. He emphasized that now when he was home it was a pity to be living a thousand miles apart.

Kamran said with an affectionate, but firm voice, "You travel back and forth on this two-hour flight so often that if we haven't told anyone you moved, most of the people think that you still live here in Islamabad. You are here for every significant community activity. You visit us every weekend. You even bring your dirty laundry to Islamabad to get it washed!"

My mother, who was sitting close by on a big sofa chair, smiled and said, "You don't laugh at my daughter for bringing her dirty laundry home. I want her to do that."

Kamran came close and sat right next to me. "Ok, on a serious note, we are very worried. In Karachi, the house next to yours was broken into. Your maid was attacked. We understand that any city with twelve million people would have problems, but these political and religious riots over the last several years have made Karachi the most unsafe place in the country right now. Stories of kidnappings, muggings and murders are becoming more and more common."

In the face of that loving onslaught, I hesitantly shared an offer I had from the United Nation's women's programme (UNIFEM) in Islamabad. This was for a position to coordinate

preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing next year. They were ecstatic. I told them it was more like a request to apply for a job, so they should not get too excited.

My mother was surprised that I would consider joining the UN. She said that I had always refused to join an international aid agency and wondered why I was now changing my mind. I was surprised and pleased at her observation. She was an excellent student of life and her environment. Although she never went to college, I regarded her as one of the wisest persons I knew.

I explained that I always wanted to be in the local camp because I did not want to abide by the policies of bilateral² aid agencies, since I do not agree with many of them.

“What’s different about the UN then?” she asked.

I came close to her, sat at her feet and put my head in her lap. I loved being able to switch between being an adult and a child with her. “Ammi, the UN is not ‘them’, it’s ‘us’. What I mean is that the bilaterals are the ‘others’, but UN should not be seen like that. All the countries of the world are members and every country donates to it, including Pakistan. Its staff is composed of people from all over the world. It belongs to us just as much as any other country.”

“But other countries dominate the UN, not Pakistan,” she said as she stroked my hair.

I smiled at her brilliant answer, but tried to explain my dilemma. “My work through local groups will continue. I have gained experience with several local organizations, but I do want to do big things also and maybe the UN could give me that platform. I want to do big things for our women, Ammi.” I explained to her that there was no rush and we could think about it.

After that weekend conversation with my family, I had several discussions with the UN people who wanted me to take the Coordinator position. I finally applied and was soon called for an interview to the office of the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), in Islamabad. The UNDP is like a parent to many other UN organizations, including UNIFEM, which use its financial, administrative and personnel services. The palatial building that housed the UNDP had an elaborate security maze and it took me a long time to get through the various checks and inquiries.

This is where I met Ghazala for the first time. Ghazala, a senior secretary in the organization greeted me with a smile. I talked with her briefly that day, but I got to know her quite well over the next few years.

I sat down outside an office door. After a short wait, a fair-complexioned man, who looked and sounded like a Pashtun from the northwestern part of the country, came out of the room and with a toothpaste-advertisement smile and asked, “Are you Dr. Saeed?”

Ghazala immediately jumped up and stood as if he “owned” the UN agency. He was wearing a black suit and a black tie. He looked at Ghazala and said, “It’s ok, I’ll take her in, you just let the next candidate wait.”

I followed him into the room where I met the interview panel of four. The man introduced himself as “Tarik Khan, from UNDP,” and clearly acted as the host. He introduced the others on

² Bilateral development agencies are financed and managed by the government of a single country. Multi-lateral agencies, like those of the UN, are financed by many countries and managed by a professional service that is not responsible to the policies of any single country.

the panel. One person asked me a question about some research I had done in the past. Before I could answer, Tarik cleared his throat and interrupted. "I think it is better if we focus on her work experience rather than student life." He then quickly asked me a few straightforward, yet odd, questions about my last two jobs and two more about living in Islamabad. After that, I noticed the panelists' questions were asked cautiously, as if trying to gauge Tarik's reaction. The interview was rather simple and I was disappointed at not being challenged intellectually. When it ended, Tarik rose and told me that they would let me know the outcome soon. He opened the door for me and with a big smile thanked me for coming. This was my first introduction to Tarik Khan.

Shortly after I had returned to Karachi, I received a call telling me that I had been selected. The voice told me to join as soon as possible. It was almost like a computerized message. Just two sentences: no "congratulations" or "I am happy to inform you." or "I look forward to working with you." or any such human nonsense. In any case, I was thrilled. I put the phone down and screamed loudly. I made about ten calls in the next minute to tell my family and a few close friends. They were all excited. My mother slaughtered a goat and fed it to the poor, her routine response to very good or very bad news. She did this to thank God for good news and to ward off the evil spirits in case of bad news.

I felt a little strange since the regional head of the UNIFEM, an affectionate Nepali woman named Chandni Joshi, had already moved to Delhi, leaving this UNIFEM position under the UNDP's supervision. Unfortunately, I knew no one in the organization and wondered who would help me find my way.

It turned out that my concerns were justified. I resigned from my job in Karachi, negotiating a one-month notice instead of the usual three. I packed my things, shipped my car back to Islamabad and headed home, but still had not received a formal letter offering the UN job, let alone a contract to sign. I called the UNDP office many times, but no one seemed able to answer my questions. Later, I learned that this was their usual manner of doing things. Paperwork moved from one table to another, but no one took charge. Each function was broken up into so many parts that no one took responsibility for the whole task. Even those already working for the organization had to pursue their own contracts and payments.

When I reached Islamabad, I contacted the office again. They told me to follow up on my contract with Tarik Khan in the administration unit. It was as if the hiring process was my responsibility and not the organization's. I was concerned, but all this failed to dampen my excitement about joining the UN system. After several attempts, I finally reached Tarik and was glad that he, at least, talked nicely on the phone. "I am so sorry that it took us so long to process your contract, but now that you have drawn my attention to it you just leave everything to me." I was relieved that someone was taking charge of the matter and thanked him profusely for his help. He said, "Don't worry, the decision has been taken, it's just that the processing has its own pace. Rest assured that I have taken over all your worries related to your job from now on. You just relax. I will let you know once the process is done."

I put the phone down and ran to tell my mother about it. I said, "Ammi, I got a very positive response from someone in the UNDP office and I feel so bad because I thought he was a very odd person when I met him earlier."

"Why?" she asked.

“Oh, just because he had dyed his hair too black and asked me odd questions when I was being interviewed. You know...questions that were not relevant to the job. I didn’t think he had...you know, the finesse that I would expect from someone working in the UN office.” I laughed sheepishly. “But he was very helpful today.”

Whenever he called, Tarik sounded diligent and official and at the same time polite and friendly and eventually, did get my contract processed. He then asked me to come to meet his boss to negotiate the terms. Going through the security maze again, I eventually found myself standing in front of a reception desk.

A short, dark, middle-aged woman greeted me with a smile. Her plaited dark hair and simple clothes showed she was from a lower middle-class family. Her maroon fingernails were obvious as she quickly pressed buttons linking calls to different people. She must have spoken to five people and connected them to their requested numbers between the time it took me to say hello and ask her about Tarik Khan. During that same time, she also examined me from top to bottom. This was Maria, the UNDP receptionist as well as the telephone operator, for the entire building. The way she quickly extracted the necessary information about what I was doing there, I sensed that she was not just a friendly and efficient receptionist, but also an important repository of information.

Tarik came out to meet me in the main lobby. He greeted me professionally and took me to the office of his boss, Mr. William Dickens, a heavily-built, man of almost sixty. He was dressed in a suit, the usual attire for men in the UN offices. Snake-like eyes embedded in his bearded, oval face, inspected me carefully. He looked like an old ship’s captain. Right away, he proudly told me that he had a military background. Pointing to Tarik, he said, “He also has that background, which is why I picked him to work for me.” I did not know how to respond, since I did not share in their comradeship.

“So you were in the army also?” I looked at Tarik.

He smiled, looked down at the floor and then up at me, saying hesitantly, “Sword of Honor”.

“Sorry?” I could not understand what he said.

“I said I got the Sword of Honor when we passed out!” He gave me a beaming smile. I nodded and gave him a polite appreciative look, thinking that it must have been a very important moment in his life.

Dickens mentioned the terms of the contract and I said, “Yes, I would like to discuss it with you because there are a few minor changes I would like to make.”

He looked at me and said in a rather loud voice, “No discussion. Take it or leave it!”

I was surprised and responded quickly and just as loudly, “Is this called 'negotiating a contract'? I thought that was the purpose of this meeting today.”

He looked at me sternly. I realized I was in a weak position since I had already resigned from my previous job and moved to Islamabad. Tarik was quiet. I decided to go with the flow, but kept wondering whether this militaristic style was how the UNDP normally operated.

4. MY EARLY STRUGGLES

It must have been my fourth day on the job when Mr. Dickens suddenly turned up in my office. He walked with a slight limp and looked a little like Peter Pan's Captain Hook. He rushed through my office, looking in each room and then stopped by my desk to ask if everything was okay. I followed him around and tried to be cheerful and responsive, sounding like a highly enthusiastic, new staff member. Tarik accompanied him, but did not say much, only smiled. I was very impressed by senior officers taking such care of a new employee. I had been getting used to a faceless organization, since no one had contacted me after I had been put in this office outside the main building, but Tarik and Mr. Dickens changed my impression. I felt happy and felt indebted to them for saving me from making a wrong judgment about the UNDP staff.

Mr. Dickens sat on my office chair and tried out my computer, becoming upset upon discovering that no one had yet connected me with the office email system. Tarik apologized repeatedly and said his staff would fix it immediately. I felt bad that my initial impression of the UN system must have been wrong. They were not just parts of a big machine, as I had thought, but human beings after all. They welcomed me as a new person and showed me respect and care. After a thorough check up of my room, both men left. Mr. Dickens assured me that he would respond immediately if I needed anything. I was very pleased with them, the UN system and with myself, for joining this institution. When I went home that evening, I praised my colleagues, saying that I had been wrong about calling them robotic, plastic and unprofessional; now, they seemed to be nice people after all.

Then, their visits continued. Mr. Dickens would get angry at small things lacking in my office. He wanted to know if the air-conditioning and the heaters were working, if I had a problem with the computers or if my assistant was performing well. At times, I felt concerned about all this attention and felt bad for Tarik, who had to run around to urgently acquire whatever Mr. Dickens told him was lacking in my office. I began to feel that the level of personal attention I was getting was not quite professional. After all, I was a staff member, not his friend. However, on each occasion, I would suppress my feelings and criticize myself for doubting my colleagues.

Mr. Dickens was the Head of Operations, the second, most-senior position, in the office. Tarik was the Head of Administration, so he had a senior position as well. I felt bad when such a senior man had to take care of every little problem that Mr. Dickens pointed out to him. It seemed a bit odd, but I ignored my feelings. No one from the Programme side visited or talked much with me. They were all absorbed in their work and getting a new colleague was not that important in their professional lives, whereas, for me, joining the UN was a very big deal and a source of constant excitement.

One requirement for a new employee was to have a full medical examination. Although it was a minor task, it turned into a major incident and one that foreshadowed events to come. From a UN list of recommended clinics, I picked one strongly recommended by Tarik and went there for the medical. It was a private clinic on Embassy Road, in an old residential area of Islamabad.

I explained to the receptionist what I needed and presented the set of complicated medical forms, which I hoped would make sense to them. The staff seemed familiar with the exercise and, without saying much, told me to collect samples for various tests. An expressionless man with curly black hair appeared wearing a white gown and asked me to follow him. He handed me a small container for a urine sample and showed me to a bathroom. I was surprised that I had to pass

through two sets of black curtains, almost like entering an old-style photography lab, before reaching the door of the bathroom.

The bathroom was spacious, with imported blue tile and a huge wall mirror by the sink. Inside the toilet, I had a strange feeling. I could almost swear that someone was watching me. I looked around carefully and saw a small hole that had been drilled in the bathroom door. Quickly straightening up, I opened the door and saw a shadow rushing away. I went out and found the man who had showed me in standing by a counter. He looked at me calmly. I became confused, unsure if he was the person who had been peeping in or if that person had run away or if there had been no one at all. "What should I do," I asked myself, feeling uncomfortable and confused.

After I had handed the man the sample, he turned around and instructed me to accompany him to the X-ray room. I followed him, still upset by the whole situation. I was very skeptical when he showed me the changing room and looked around carefully. I buried myself in one corner and very quickly changed into a gown while my eyes scanned the walls and the door for mysterious holes.

The man now asked me to stand in front of a cold metal plate for my chest X-ray. He stepped forward and moved my arms up, brushing my breast from the side under the pretense of correcting my position on the metal plate. I spoke angrily. "Don't touch me; just tell me what to do." He tried fixing my posture again, subtly slipping his hand to touch me from the side. He did it in a way that one could not be sure. From childhood, we women learn to doubt ourselves and believe what others tell us. I tried to make my tone of voice firm and repeated, "Do not touch me!" Without saying anything, he moved back and went to the adjacent glass room to operate the X-ray machine.

With two incidents in a row, I knew who the perpetrator was. I felt disgusted. "Do I confront him; do I report him or do I just walk away and never come back to this clinic again?" I felt burdened. My enthusiasm for my new job and moving back to Islamabad suddenly dampened. Why do such situations keep reappearing in my life? My abdomen churned with revulsion.

Changing back into my clothes, I was still smoldering about his behavior. Although a part of me wanted to get on with life, return to my office and begin my workday, another part could not let anyone humiliate me and get away with it. I kept struggling between my options and decided that I had the obligation to report the incidents to the doctor in charge.

After handing over all the samples at the counter, I asked to see the doctor in charge, the clinic's owner. He was an older man with grey hair and had passages of Quran written on the wall behind his chair. I felt very uncomfortable, but built up enough courage to say, "I would like to report that your bathroom has a hole that your staff uses to peep at women."

He raised his eyebrows and looked at me without saying anything. I continued, "The same man who was peeping into the bathroom also touched me indecently while fixing my position for the chest X-ray." I had a very hard time choosing my words; blurting it all out at once was the best I could do.

The old man seemed surprised, but not shocked. He took a long breath and tried to recover. I had no clue of what he was thinking about my complaint or me. He swung his chair to face me directly and said coolly, "You must've misunderstood."

I was shocked at that casual attitude. He gave his judgment without asking any questions. Just as we women look at such incidents and doubt ourselves first, I guess others also immediately doubt us.

I protested in a calm voice, "Don't you think you should inquire into what I am saying first."

He rang a bell and called for the lab attendant. Then he turned around and said to me. "But we have a woman nurse for ladies!"

"I didn't see any woman. All my instructions were from a man," I replied quickly.

"No, but we do have a nurse to deal with women," he insisted.

"Well, let me repeat, I don't know if you do or do not, but I was not treated by a woman nurse," I said, sounding angry. I felt as if I was being robbed of my integrity.

The man arrived with a blank and slightly sheepish expression. The doctor spoke to him in a low and quiet manner. "This lady says you bothered her. Is there any problem?"

Making no eye contact with me, he said obediently, "No, sir. There is no problem!"

The doctor quickly swung his chair towards me and said, "See, there is no problem."

I was furious and embarrassed with this response. It took a lot for me to make my complaint and now I was the one feeling guilty, as if I was accusing an innocent man. I wondered if the doctor believed I would make up something like this.

The doctor raised his eyebrows and looked at me, as if he had his answer from his staff and that was sufficient. He turned and started talking to another staff member while the lab attendant left his office. The hearing was finished; the case was closed. I rose from my chair and said loudly, "You are old enough to have grown daughters. Do you think I would create this story just for fun? You don't even have the sense to get up from your chair and come with me to see with your own eyes the hole in the bathroom door and the black curtain set up before it. Just sitting here, you have decided that I am mistaken!"

He gave me a look as if I was insane and said blandly, "Didn't you hear my lab attendant say there was no problem?"

I could see that making a fuss was not going to help unless he was responsive, so I only said, "I am very disappointed in you." I left the room trembling with rage. Surprised by my reaction, the doctor gave me a strange look of disbelief. I knew he was just being defensive and wanted to protect his clinic's reputation. Not for a single moment did I feel that he actually wanted to know what happened. He did not ask a single question, but just tried to get me to shut up. At that point, I felt vulnerable and angry, angrier with the doctor than with the lab attendant.

I went straight back to my office, but could not focus on anything. I went through the motions and took care of essential tasks, hardly communicating to anyone. I could not even share it with my assistant. Perhaps if I had a close female colleague in the office, I would have opened up, but everyone seemed too focused on work.

That night I lay in bed with a strange discomfort that did not allow me to sleep. "I did report it, didn't I?" I said to myself. "I didn't stay quiet. I did not ignore it. I spoke up, okay!"

I tried to console myself, but my mind replied with a harsh. "So what! The man violated you and nothing got done, not even a slap on his hand." I felt bad. I kept changing sides in my bed

and tried unsuccessfully to convince myself that I had done what I could. I thought about the way the doctor had looked at me. His eyes said, "What kind of a woman are you? Shameless!"

"I did report. What else could I do?"

"That's not enough," I argued with myself. "You have to do more than that. Reporting did not take care of the problem."

The next day I wrote my experience in the form of a complaint letter and took it to Tarik. He was on the phone and signaled me to sit down. When he was free, I handed him my complaint against the clinic and asked him to take some action right away. He listened to my whole story without any interruptions. When I finished he broke into laughter. I was shocked.

He said, "Do you think he watches every woman that goes there? What a set up!"

"You find this funny. Is that it? You find this funny?" I said with disgust.

"No, tell me...he touched you twice?" he tried to make a serious face, but failed.

"Tarik, I could hardly sleep I was so upset and YOU FIND IT FUNNY?"

"No, I'm just amazed at the guy. That bastard has a whole set up." He shuffled in his chair with a smirk on his face.

I said very firmly in a loud voice, "You have to tell the doctor to fire that man."

"Oh, come on. Why are you after that poor man's job?"

I hit his desk with my hand and said, "I can't believe I'm hearing this from you."

At this, he straightened his coat, became a bit serious and said, "No! No! I am taking serious note of it, but please be realistic. I can't make the doctor fire his staff."

"Then I will complain since the clinic is on the UN recommended list and you strongly recommended it," I threatened.

"Okay! I'll tell you what I can do. And remember, I am very concerned about you, okay." His tone changed to a very caring and responsible one. "I will get this clinic off the list of the panel recommended for the UN staff."

I took a deep breath and said, "Fine! I guess that is alright with me." I was somewhat satisfied that at least he agreed to take some action.

Before I left his room, he spoke in a concerned manner, "You can come to me with any complaints. Sorry, I wasn't laughing at you. I was laughing at that guy who set up this whole system to watch women. Just don't worry about anything. Remember I am here, okay!"

I smiled at this reassurance and said thank you. I was pleased that at least someone in the UNDP was human and looked after a new employee.

I went back to my office and thought about other incidents I had experienced during my life, where some shopkeeper, teacher or colleague had tried to touch me. "Does it happen to all women? I would never do this to a man. I would never try to impose myself on another person. Why do men do this? Why do women have to go through this humiliating experience? Why can't I just focus on my work and my personal life? Why can't it stop?"

5. DEALING WITH DICKENS

My position was quite independent. I had an Italian boss who was also new to UNDP Pakistan, but not to development work. Nicholas Rosselini was a shy, but competent professional who spoke only when necessary. Chandni was my UNIFEM boss, based at the regional office in India. I quickly developed a good professional link with Nicholas. My bigger challenge, however, was to satisfy the Steering Committee, which represented the interests of various UN organizations. To be successful at this work, I had to navigate a multi-layered labyrinth of relationships among the UN agencies.

My responsibility was to assist in formulating a plan for the development of women in Pakistan for the global conference on women to be held in Beijing. The task required intensive consultation with community organizations that were working on women's issues. This subject was very close to my heart so I involved myself deeply in the process. I designed programmes to help community groups prepare action plans. Fortunately, I only needed to get approval from Nicholas to get them started.

Initially, I did not see either the complexity or the diverse interests of the UN agencies sitting on the Steering Committee as a problem. However, the underlying intrigue, conflict and lack of trust among the UN agencies were difficult for me to fathom. Over time, it became increasingly difficult for me to hold on to my romantic ideas about the UN system.

Although the initiative for a Coordination Unit had come from UNIFEM, that agency had moved its regional office from Islamabad to Delhi and asked the UNDP office in Islamabad to manage the activity for them. In the two quarterly Steering Committee meetings that I witnessed, the UN and other aid agencies contributing the funds, fought mostly about the visibility of their respective organizations. Every minor issue regarding the Coordination Unit became an excuse for playing out their tensions and power struggles. I quickly realized that the UNDP and UNICEF could not agree on much at all. UNICEF was a fund created for emergency relief for children, but over the years, it had greatly expanded its mandate to cover all the developmental needs of women and children. UNICEF pounced on Nicholas at every opportunity, even to the extent of humiliating him. It was clearly a struggle for who would run the show.

As I struggled to comprehend the professional setting into which I had dropped, I was also at a loss as to how to expand my personal connections with my colleagues. For a single woman, having an open social life can be a challenge in Pakistan. Living with my family helped as I could easily invite people over. Other than Nicholas, whom I saw only occasionally, I hardly met other UNDP colleagues. Struggling to get to know them, I thought of inviting them to a party that I was planning at home.

In the Pakistani urban tradition, where dating is not generally acceptable, going out with a group is usually tolerated. The upper-class has considerable freedom, but among the middle and the lower classes, the space permitted for pre-marital relationships hardly exists at all. The pattern varies from family to family, but, in general, social activities are gender-segregated for younger or unmarried adults. Unmarried couples need to keep their relationships secret and either look for excuses to meet within a group or build a good alibi in case someone exposes them. If they are exposed, the woman usually suffers all of the consequences.

For me, the issue was not how to meet young men, but how to develop professional contacts. It is very difficult for a young single professional woman in Pakistan, where being over 25 and single means being 'available' for 'relationships-other-than-marriage'. Our Pakistani men have difficulty accepting that a woman can be single out of her own choice, thus, an initiative to get to know a man within a professional circle is fraught with danger. Men do not have to think much about these things since their professional circles are mostly male. However, women, who are surrounded by male colleagues, have to tread very carefully so their social image is not tarnished as they attempt to expand their professional contacts.

Later that month, my brother and I gave a big dinner party. In addition to about fifty friends, I invited five of my new acquaintances from the UNDP: Mr. Dickens and Tarik Khan from the Operations office and three others I had met on the Programme side. Only Tarik turned up and that too for a short while. In return, I got an invitation from him for a party that I accepted when I was told that several people from the office were coming. However, once I got there and realized that it was just Tarik and Dickens from the UNDP at the party, I quietly slipped away.

The next morning, Dickens jolted me with a cold call ordering me to return a computer manual he had lent me. He made me wait outside his office for half an hour and when I went in he did not even respond to my "How are you?"

About two hours later, he called me again and asked me to bring my Unit's budgets to him. I was surprised since he had nothing to do with them other than the small portion that the UNDP contributed to the Unit. However, I took my files over to him, wondering what was going on. Again, he made me wait outside his office for about twenty minutes before calling me in. He did not even look at the files or ask me anything specific, but made me sit across his desk while he kept doing other work for a long time. He ordered me to his office two or three more times. In an attempt to avoid him, I asked my assistant to answer the phone whenever it rang. I felt angry and flustered.

The next day he met me in the corridor in the main building and quizzed me authoritatively about where I had been. He told me loudly that I could not leave the office without formal permission. I felt like a five-year-old girl, but I maintained my composure.

Later, he phoned me and ordered me to come to his office. When I arrived, he sternly instructed me to sit, pointing at the chair opposite his table. Suddenly, however, his voice became very affectionate and soft and he told me that his wife was in Japan and he was in Islamabad. Putting both hands on the table and bending towards me, he said, "Isn't it sad that a couple has to be separated. This is how these agencies work." Attempting to look innocent, a challenge considering his features, he continued, "I have to compensate by having girlfriends wherever I am."

I was very embarrassed by this conversation and tried hard to come out of my polite collegial mode and be direct. He told me he lived on the street next to mine and that I should come over to his place sometime to watch TV. I wanted to make it clear that I was not interested in him at all. I had many good friends of my own. If I wanted a boyfriend, I could pick anyone of them and make my parents happy by marrying him. However, I felt constrained, so I just tried my best to be assertive. I gathered up some courage and said, "I have no desire to watch movies or to

be a girl friend. I have many things to do. I'm not bored and I'm not looking for male company." I got up and left saying, "Please excuse me, I have work to do!" I thought I had made myself clear.

This explicit sexual advance from such a senior person disgusted me. I had thought that Dickens was a nice man who simply wanted to help because I was new in the organization. Much later, I realized that new employees are the easiest prey.

Over the next few weeks, Dickens's attitude grew worse. He became abrasive with me, calling to ask questions about my finances, pretending he was monitoring my accounts. I avoided contact whenever possible and got most of what I needed directly from Tarik, who was helpful, friendly and cooperative. Nicholas was too busy with his other work so I had limited contact with him. He had told me to go ahead with my work and contact him only for approvals of projects and budgets.

Suddenly, Dickens' behavior changed again. Although I still tried to avoid him, when he saw me in the hallways and corridors, he would try to hug me or hold me by my shoulders with both hands. I avoided any close contact, but it made the situation awkward. On several of these embarrassing occasions, I saw Maria smiling as she watched us from the corner of her eyes. Each time, I tried hard to brush the disgusting feeling away and focus on my work. This behavior felt extremely inappropriate, not just in my culture. I felt that no boss should try to be physically close with an employee.

6. CLOSE ENCOUNTER

Over the next several weeks, I was kept busy mobilizing a number of civic organizations to prepare a Pakistan plan of action for women to be presented at the landmark Beijing Conference. I explained to them that the Conference would produce two major documents that would outline the path for the women's movement over the next decade so it was important for Pakistani women to work together as a team.

On the management front, coordination of the aid agencies was not going well. Nicholas grew tired of the donor politics. After discussions with senior management, UNDP asked UNIFEM to give the leadership of the group to another agency. They simply did not see any value in staying involved in the never-ending fights over who gets the credit and who pays the bills. It was disappointing to see such an initially energizing process transformed into petty squabbles.

The Coordination Unit struggled with the tug-of-war among the aid agencies and finally the UNDP surrendered to the strongest wrestler, UNICEF. I argued against this decision and explained to Nicholas that most countries had been planning for their participation in this conference for the last three years. Pakistan was already late and the momentum should not be broken, but I was just a small fry with no influence. I was simply told that I would go with the Unit to UNICEF and my contract would be switched over smoothly.

Instead, I decided to resign and get out of this childish game. Fortunately, Philip Regan, the acting Resident Representative and Nicholas were very pleased with what I had accomplished in six months and offered me an opportunity to stay within the UNDP. UNIFEM was establishing a post for a National Programme Officer for Pakistan and they asked me to consider taking that

position. It was expected that there would be a smooth transition from one UNDP contract to another.

A small part of my job description was to look after the UNDP's gender activities and so Nicholas asked me to shift my office to the main UNDP building. My supervisors remained the same: Nicholas was my UNDP supervisor and Chandni was my UNIFEM supervisor. Although quite diligent in his work, supervising me, somehow, always seemed to be an extra burden for Nicholas. Our relationship was pleasant, but minimal.

I was very excited about my new assignment. I examined all of UNIFEM's policy and strategy documents. I thought of supporting women in agriculture, in political decision-making and in science and technology. Most of all, I wanted women to become empowered to deal with violence and oppression. My yearning was for our people to realize that women can feel, think and dream, just as men do.

I called Chandni to discuss the many new ideas I thought were appropriate for UNIFEM in Pakistan. The effect of the conversation was like a cold shower. Chandni told me there were no funds for designing new programmes. Even my salary was coming out of their overhead.

"Should I try to raise funds?" I asked anxiously.

"We don't intend to continue this position or the office for more than a year," she replied.

From this conversation, I realized I had accepted a job designed to close off existing projects and wrap up the UNIFEM Programme in Pakistan. This was clearly not the brilliant opportunity I had envisioned for Dr. Fouzia Saeed to serve the women of Pakistan. My enthusiasm dampened. I was not used to thinking of phrases like "wrapping up" and "winding down". I was still in the spirit of "setting up" and "taking off".

I quickly realized that a lot of my work would require me to engage with the UNDP administrators rather than looking for new partners to work on women's issues. As I feared, Dickens called me to his room soon after I started my new job. I was hesitant to refuse his orders. Besides, I had already experienced how he acted when I made the excuse of not being available. He asked me to bring a file of UNIFEM's old expenses. I knew he did not need me to bring that file because his finance office already had all that information. So, I made the mistake of asking him if there was any problem. Annoyed that I questioned him, he exploded, "I think you didn't hear what I said. I want you to come to my office RIGHT NOW!" However, he was too important in the office to be ignored, so I picked up the file and said to myself, "Here I go to see Captain Hook again." I grumbled all the way, as I walked through the reception area to see him.

When I entered his office, he asked me to sit down. The light was dim because he had only a table lamp on. I sat across from him. He bent over and rested his forearms on the table, almost crouching. He said, "I'm very lonely." He took a long breath and made a long face. His face was so close to his table light that every pore of his skin was lit up and I could see the whiskers of his beard emerging like wires from his skin. The vision disgusted me.

He said, "I'm a strong, rich and a good looking man, but all alone."

I looked at his face, which looked very old, wondering what experiences his life had given him. Suddenly, I realized that he had made another objectionable pass and I had not yet said anything in reply. I cleared my throat and thought hard about what to say to get out of this situation. Simple assertive sentences had not worked before.

He stretched his head a little more towards me and said, "You only live one block away from me. Why don't you come over? We could have drinks and watch television together."

I could not understand his fascination with television. Why in the world would I want to watch TV with him? I took a long breath, made my voice very firm and said, "I told you before that I'm a very busy person. I work for many voluntary organizations, so, my evenings are booked." I felt extremely uncomfortable. I started to get up and continued assertively, "And I don't watch television...excuse me."

As I got up from the chair, he almost shouted, "YOU CANNOT GO! TALK TO A LONELY MAN!"

Trembling, I sat back down in the chair for a moment. Then, getting my senses together, I stood again and walked quickly to the door without saying anything. He also moved swiftly, lunging towards me like an old crocodile grasping its prey. Wrapping his arm around me, he smiled. It happened so fast I was astonished. I built up my courage and said simply, "Mr. Dickens, I have to go." As I walked towards the door, his hand slipped down and he held my bottom. Furious, I ran out and went straight to my room. I was so enraged that I could not think about anything. I did not even notice who saw me running or who was in the reception. I could not see a thing. My heart was pounding. He had crossed all limits. I was shocked that a man so mature in age, a senior manager of the United Nations, could be so crude! I ground my teeth and told myself I had to report this dirty old man. I did not care how senior he was.

I sat in my office and cried in anger. I kept seeing his snake-like eyes piercing through me from above his reading glasses, like a predator eyeing his prey. I took deep breaths and started to pace my room. "What should I do," I asked myself. He was the one to handle reports of misbehavior at the work place. "My god, he's the head of all Operations. How I report this man?" After I calmed down a little and relaxed my tense shoulders, I called Tarik. I briefly told him what had happened and asked if the agency had some procedure to report such an incident.

To my surprise, he laughed. Then, noticing the silence from my side, he quickly became serious and said, "It's just unbelievable, I'm laughing in disbelief." I kept quiet, wondering whether he was trivializing the matter or was surprised at what I had told him. When I did not reply, he continued cautiously, "Why don't you come to my office and we can talk." I hesitated since his office was in the same cluster as Dickens', but I thought he would help me. I did not know how to write a complaint of this nature to make it officially correct.

When I walked into his office, he stretched back in his chair with both hands behind his head, smiling broadly. He looked amused and asked me to sit down. I kept standing, studying his face and wondering whether I was wasting my time. He noticed my worry and tried to appear serious, but amusement was written all over his face. When I finally sat down, he became a bit more solemn and looked at me with concern, "Now tell me exactly what happened."

I told him everything. His smirk bothered me. He seemed to be trying hard not to grin. When I finished, the office echoed with his laughter. I sat there, partially angry and partially puzzled by his reaction. He clapped his hands and said loudly, like announcing the results of a cricket match: "The old man's tricks backfired!" He seemed quite amused by his boss not being able to capture the woman he wanted.

Huddled on the edge of my seat, I was holding my whole body rigid and was very serious. I said, "Listen to me Tarik, if you think this is so funny just forget it. I am sorry I came to report him

to you. I will go directly to Philip Regan. I only came to ask if UNDP has any policy against such behavior. If there's no special format, I'll just write it on plain paper and take it to the boss." I rose to go.

Tarik quickly changed his mood and begged, "Sorry, sorry, please sit. Okay, I take this seriously. I'm laughing because...well, look at this man's age and his actions!" His act took a 180-degree turn. The sober expression on his face calmed me down and he said, "Now, let's think this through. The old man is about to retire. Why give him a bad name? Besides, this office is strange. You know how our people are. Everyone will blame you. They need juicy things for the gossip mill. You're the one they'll gossip about, not him."

I became furious. "What are you saying? Of all people, you, the officer in charge of Administration and Human Resources, should not talk like this. I am so..."

He cut me off and said, "As a friend, I am telling you it is better to compromise."

"What compromise?" I almost shouted and got up again.

In a caring tone, he strongly suggested I simply avoid seeing Dickens. He assured me he would handle any related business I had with Operations. He looked in my eyes and said, "As a sincere colleague, I'm telling you no one will take your complaint seriously because he's retiring anyway. They will simply ignore it. I'm telling you. I know this system and I know these people very well."

"Even if they won't do anything I'd still feel that at least I had reported him. How can I just let it go?" I asked, feeling that I was running out of options.

"What will you gain? I already know that no one will take it seriously. Why make this known to everyone in the organization? Don't you have to work here? Do you want people whispering around you and gossiping that you must have encouraged him? You know the mentality and in UNDP we have some pretty narrow-minded people." He spoke with a lot of feeling, but although I thought I could sense his concern for me, I knew he did not understand my disgust. I felt like I was under water and running out of air. I got up suddenly, needing to breathe. Flustered, I left his office.

At home, I talked to Kamran. I did not want to distress my mother. My brother was a close friend, as well as a clinical psychologist. He could truly empathize without getting upset like a typical Pakistani brother. He listened to me intently and helped me deal with the emotions that were shattering me. I told him that talking to Tarik did not satisfy me at all. I was still very angry and wanted to file a complaint. We decided that I would report the incident to both my supervisors, to Nicholas in Islamabad and to Chandni in Delhi.

The next day I tried to meet Nicholas, but he was out of town, so I called Chandni in Delhi. When Chandni came on line, I spilled the whole story at once, like a child, telling her how disturbed I was and saying that I suspected Tarik would not be supportive. His insensitive response continued to enrage me.

Chandni had always been affectionate, but to my surprise, she now became quite brusque, as if she did not want to hear the details. She cut me off and said, "I think you're mature enough to handle this. I don't need to hear more."

Wrapping the phone cord around my finger in tension I pleaded, "But Chandni I want to file a complaint against him or do something about this. I'm asking you how to do it."

She said sternly, "I'll trust you to handle this matter in a mature manner. I just want you to know that UNIFEM is a small organization and we need to maintain good relationships with the UNDP Operations Office in Pakistan, both Bill Dickens and Tarik Khan. YOU MUST UNDERSTAND THIS. All our funds come through them so we need to maintain good relations so, especially with regards to closing our Pakistan office."

"That's it?" I asked.

"Yes, Fouzia," she replied, ending the call.

I got my answer right there and my whole world caved in on me. I was filled with rage, resentment and a strong feeling of helplessness. Dickens's behavior did not make me as angry as being unable to do anything about it. I sat in my office and cried my heart out. I felt violated. I was letting myself down. My body ached with the burden of my own disgust.

I tried talking to another colleague who I thought would give me some advice. I did not openly describe what had happened, but only asked indirectly about Dickens's behavior with women. He told me other women had complained about Dickens before. The previous head of the UNDP chose not to do anything about it and he predicted that an acting head would never take action on any such complaint.

Getting no support within the organization, I reconciled with my revulsion, anger and sorrow and gave up the idea of filing a report. I began focusing on my work again, which always lifted my spirits. Whatever work I did was meaningful for me and I took pride in it. I wanted to be good in my profession, but this experience made being an enthusiastic UNDP employee more difficult.

I found comfort in my work with Bedari, the women's crisis center, where there were many women. Whenever I felt bruised by the lop-sided power relations between men and women, my enthusiasm for working in Bedari soared. It offered many programmes. Bedari House was a refuge for me and for thousands of others. The space itself gave me a peaceful feeling. We worked in small groups with men and women of all backgrounds; we arranged big seminars to raise awareness of women's issues, as well as arranging small discussion groups to help develop concrete actions. We had one-on-one counseling for women who had experienced violence and harassment in their personal lives. Being at Bedari became more rewarding every day, working for other women and for my own empowerment blended well.

A few months later, Tarik gave a lavish lunch for all the staff to say good-bye to his boss, Bill Dickens. It was different from the usual, modest, farewells organized for colleagues who were leaving. Everyone noticed Tarik's special attention to his boss. I ignored the party and focused on preparing for Bedari's birthday celebrations. I immersed myself in the planning; hoping organizations like Bedari could change society enough so men like Bill Dickens cannot get away with humiliating women. Little did I know that my intimidation by senior officers in the UNDP had only just begun.

7. ARRIVAL OF THE KING

One day, a tremor of excitement ran through the otherwise dull office environment. I learned that a new head of the UNDP would be joining us soon. After more than a year, the UNDP had finally posted someone in the Pakistan office. I was curious about what he might be like.

The UNDP has a very rigid, hierarchical, structure. The Resident Representative, usually referred to as the RR, is the head of a country office. Under the RR, there are two DRRs, Deputy Resident Representatives, one for Operations-including the administration, communication, transport, finance and personnel, and the other for Programmes-the teams focused on environment, social sectors, rural development and other technical fields.

Dickens had been DRR for Operations, so his retirement left a big gap in the senior leadership. The process of finding replacements seemed quite slow. Although we now had a new chief, he had no deputies. Tarik saw this as an opportunity to take control and handle all Operational matters on his own.

When Robert England arrived, the organization had already been running on autopilot for over a year. The long vacancies at the senior level had affected the office in different ways. On the Operations side, rules and regulations depended on a few people's personal interpretations and changed frequently, without much accountability. The Programme side was too scattered; individual staff ran their own projects with little knowledge of, or interest in, coordinating with others. One part of the office could be doing something different and contrary to another, but no one had an interest in collaboration.

The staff had been waiting a long time for a new chief, and Robert England arrived with full pomp and ceremony. He was a tall man with close-cropped curly grey hair. A short beard gave him an air of credibility, but his beady eyes gave the impression of a cunning character. I went to listen to him address the full staff in the big hall of the UN Annex. I listened carefully, trying hard not to judge him right away, but he kept repeating one comment that left a strange impression of him. He said, "You must be committed to your organization because it pays your salary." This did not resonate well with me at all. I always felt I was committed to my organization because of its goals; otherwise, I could be making money selling soap.

Tarik gave him the full red-carpet treatment and Robert did a good job of playing up to our stereotype of the British as colonial masters. After nearly 100 years as a colony, we still assume that any Brit is a master. Robert was more British than most Brits. He was also a smart man, excellent at public speaking and a wizard at putting across his ideas perfectly. He had a very impressive personality. During meetings with Pakistani bureaucrats, he always impressed them by articulating his ideas and concerns beautifully. He could quickly grasp the essence of any complex situation or crisis.

Considering the usual dichotomy between a manager and a leader; Robert was clearly a leader, not a manager. He especially loved to lead the other UN agencies. The head of the UNDP usually coordinates all the other UN agencies in a country with the title Resident Coordinator. Thus, Robert wore two hats. The UN has a large presence in Pakistan, so he much preferred his second hat. It seemed to be the realization of his dreams. Now he just had to prove that he was the ideal leader for the UN Agencies, someone who would bring all the agencies together by moving

them under one blue flag, one goal, one development mission statement, one venue, one security plan, one future plan as one body... which he would head.

As a result, most of the other agency heads took an immediate dislike to him. In keeping with the internal tribal politics of the UN agencies, they resented the UNDP's high-handedness in assuming that "coordination" always meant "leadership". They felt that the UN Resident Coordinator should just coordinate, not lead. They wanted him to limit his role to handling joint security matters, coordinating any joint meetings with the Government and nothing more.

Robert wanted all the UN agencies to move into a single multi-storied building where they could share security and logistical services and, in addition, present one face as the larger United Nations. Many people felt that he pursued these initiatives just to impress his bosses in New York, so, they resisted.

The other agencies' resentment stemmed from not only Robert's overbearing personality and his desire to be a star, but there was also a long history of negative inter-organizational relations. I had tasted the dynamics of it when the UN agencies struggled to dominate each other over the Beijing Conference on Women. I had seen what was beneath the surface of the collaborative facade.

I had an appointment with Tarik, who had called me to his office to discuss a request Chandni had sent him about UNIFEM's old equipment. I went happily, hoping to get some insight from him about our new boss. Tarik's office was unusually busy. People kept dropping in and out. We had hardly started our conversation when an electrician interrupted us.

Tarik turned to him and said, "Have you checked all the wiring."

The man responded, "Yes sir!" in a military tone.

"Ok. Go now. I don't want to hear any complaints from Robert."

I smiled and turned towards Tarik saying, "You are getting Robert's office fixed."

He stood up and proudly tugged up on his belt two or three times, expanded his chest and said with a beaming smile, "Not just his office, but his house as well. I'm getting to look after Robert completely."

I was not sure what that meant or why he was so proud of getting the electricity of Robert's house fixed, but then I was still naïve in office dynamics.

He phoned his administrative assistant to sit in with us on this meeting. In the meanwhile, another person came in and Tarik sat down to look at some papers he had brought. He gave me a quick glance and said, "I'm sorry, I'm so busy."

Before I could respond, he said to the man in frustration. "No, these are not the papers I want, there's another file. I do not want any hitches in Customs clearance in Robert's shipment. I told the whole team to be on their toes. I have personally gone to the Customs office twice. You people cannot handle the smallest thing!"

The phone rang. Tarik answered and suddenly rose from his chair. It seemed that his boss had called. He talked in the military position of "attention". He was responding like a new recruit in the military. I found that very amusing. The staff member, who looked embarrassed about getting a scolding in front of me, took this opportunity and left the office with his head down.

All I could hear of the phone conversation was “No, Sandra...Yes, Sandra...No, Sandra...Yes, Sandra. Right away! I will come myself and make sure the air conditioning is fixed. I am so, so sorry that you had to call me for this. My staff is just so incompetent. I will do it personally and you will never ever have a problem with air conditioning as long as you live in Pakistan. Yes, yes, I will see to it. Right away!”

I chuckled at this entertaining conversation.

He paused to listen to Sandra on the other side and then said, “DON’T WORRY ABOUT YOUR DOG.”

I arched my eyebrows.

“Right now! I am going personally, right now to get your dog. I am leaving RIGHT NOW! Yes...yes, poor dog, he must have felt lonely in the flight...yes, yes, it must be worrying. Don’t you worry! My other colleagues will take care of the air shipment and I will bring the dog straight to you right away. Personally!”

He was still standing like an obedient student in front of an authoritative teacher. He put the phone down. Obviously obsessed with his new responsibility, he said, “I’ll catch up with you later. I have to get Robert’s dog through the Customs.”

I laughed and asked, “Who is Sandra?”

He looked at me with surprise. “Don’t you know? She is Mrs. Robert England. I’m taking care of them. I have all this responsibility now and will be working very closely with Robert. What an opportunity!” Just the thought of this privilege brought a big beaming smile to his face as he raced out of his office, calling two or three of his staff as he ran down the stairs.

I stood in his office for a moment still amused about how happy Tarik was for the opportunity to win his king’s heart and do all sorts of things for him. People are thrilled with different aspects of their jobs, I thought. I decided to go back to my office and search for the more thrilling aspects of my job because it was becoming duller by the day.

8. RECOGNIZING TARIK

I looked around as I stepped into the lobby of the Pearl Continental Hotel in Peshawar with its huge chandeliers and bright lights reflected on mirrored walls. People in fancy clothing rushed in and out with uniformed staff following behind, carrying their bags. I had to stay there simply because I worked with the UN. Otherwise, I always shied away from such lavish places. My trip to Peshawar was a part of my efforts to meet women’s groups and guide them in creating new strategies for advancing women’s issues.

Peshawar was only a three-hour drive from Islamabad, so I always used my own car rather than depending on the office transport. Anyway, I enjoyed driving myself because it made me feel free and independent.

On this trip, I took my time and drove leisurely, as I wanted to arrive late in the evening. I had received a message from Tarik’s staff the day before telling me to attend a dinner in Peshawar organized for Robert England. Investigating the surprising invitation, I learned that Robert was also in town on his introductory trip to Peshawar. He was meeting with the senior staff of the UN

and other development organizations that lived in the area. They were all having dinner together at a midtown restaurant. I wanted to arrive late enough to miss the dinner and keep this trip focused on my work.

As I parked my car, I was happy with myself for successfully keeping my trip separate from the big entourage that had landed in the town from our office, but my smile did not last long. Tarik was waiting for me on the hotel porch. In his gray suit, maroon tie and well-combed hair, he looked all dressed up. He was upset with me, but remained polite. “You’re so late. Everyone has gone for the dinner. Didn’t you get my message?”

I answered, surprised, “What are you doing here? Why aren’t you at the dinner?”

He held my arm and took me to the front desk to check in. I saw some other UN admin people milling about as if they were handling an emergency. He ordered one of them to take my bag and another to get a UNDP car in the driveway so we could leave immediately. I kept trying to get out of this situation, but could not convince him. He not only waited for me, but also told me about how he had worried so much after hearing that I was driving alone.

The dinner was at a decent restaurant downtown, an area very familiar to me. One look at the crowded main road made me nostalgic because I knew our old house was close by. The road was wide and bright with streetlights. All sorts of transport, from donkey carts and bicycles, to big, loud cars filled the street. Hardly any women could be seen on the street, something that had not changed in this frontier town since I had left nearly fifteen years ago. Next, I noticed a Bata shoe shop and took a deep breath. My school bus used to stop right in front of that store. I smiled at the shops, vendors, signboards, cars and street signs as long lost friends of my youth.

“Come, come, come, we’re late!” Tarik exclaimed.

I straightened my clothes, ran my fingers through my hair, clasped my purse and entered the restaurant with Tarik and a few other colleagues. Arriving late at the dinner was not a problem since Robert barely noticed me. A small, dimly-lighted hall in the restaurant was entirely filled by this event. UN staff from different agencies sat at several clusters of tables. Tarik moved towards Robert and the others at the main table and I went towards the back. I looked around for any other colleagues from UNDP, but did not see any. I ended up at a table with UNICEF staff and had a decent time talking about education and the general politics of the province.

The next day I spent most of my time in meetings with different women’s groups. I was ready to go home by the late afternoon. I returned to the hotel, checked out, grabbed my bag and headed for my car, parked in the hotel lot. As I was walking out, Tarik saw me and rushed out behind me.

“What driver is with you?” he demanded in a tone mixed with authority and concern. I looked behind and noticed that the rest of the UNDP group was also just about to leave for Islamabad.

I said, “I didn’t ask for a driver or a vehicle. I’m driving myself.” I turned around and continued to walk, regretting that my departure had coincided with theirs.

Tarik had a very worried face as if his “protector” psyche had risen to the occasion. “Are you crazy? This is Peshawar, not Europe. You drove here alone and you are driving back alone? Are you nuts? That is very unsafe.”

“Oh, spare me, please,” I mumbled to myself. I sighed and said sternly, “I lived in Peshawar for over ten years and know this area very well. I am very familiar with the road between Peshawar and Islamabad. It’s not even a three hour run. I have no problems going home by myself. Pleeeeeease don’t worry about me!”

In the meantime, I saw Robert England’s car pulling up to the porch and I caught a glimpse of him getting in. Tarik, now concerned about leaving his king unattended, rushed to him. I thought it an excellent opportunity to be on my way. Just as I was exiting the parking area, Tarik ran back to me and jumped into my car. I was shocked.

He said, “I’ve told Robert that you’re driving by yourself and it would be very ungentlemanly of me to let you do that. I must keep you company.”

I could not believe it. I put my foot down and refused to move my car until he got out. I argued that it was absolutely not appropriate for us to ride together. I repeated that I had made the trip a number of times alone. Once he realized that I would not move my car, he grudgingly got out.

When I got home, my mother gave me a puzzled look and asked, “Who is Tarik? He called five times to ask if you’d reached home yet.” Tarik had estimated the travel time and kept calling my home to make sure I arrived safely.

I threw my overnight bag on one side and smiled, speaking casually, “He’s from UNDP and was in Peshawar when I left. He was concerned because I was driving alone. He means well, but you know how these men get into the usual *abba* (father) syndrome.” My mother laughed.

I coined this term, *abba* syndrome, to point out the patronizing and protective behavior a man might suddenly display, thinking he needs to protect a seemingly helpless woman. He may not know the woman at all, but will immediately assume the role of her father. Men have been socialized by our patriarchal system so that the role of protector, problem solver and caretaker is built into them. In western societies, some balancing between men and women in these roles takes place, but in most developing countries, this behavior is still linked to honor and is considered the appropriate way to act.

A few days later, Tarik called me into his office. When I arrived, I saw that he had already gotten a cold drink for me, tea for himself and sandwiches for both of us. His room was quite bright, with sunlight streaming in through two big windows. After the formality of asking me some questions about my work, he started talking about Bill Dickens. A big smile spread over his face as he told me how he and Dickens used to have long discussions about me. Raising both hands in the air, Tarik said, “I left you for my boss. One can’t make friends with the girl the boss likes,” he giggled, returning his hands to his lap.

I sat there, shocked. I raised my eyebrows, not fully believing my ears.

He continued, “My boss was very interested in you so, as long as he was trying, I didn’t dare make a move towards you.”

I finally understood why Tarik had taken on the role of a friend, making sure he won my good-will. He laughed, “Now that he’s gone, I have no obligation to him. I can be more frank with you.” A strange smile spread over his face and I could almost see saliva collecting in his mouth as he said, “I want you to be my special friend.”

I looked at his face, trying to figure out whether this was a distasteful joke or whether he was serious. I sat expressionless, astonished by what I was hearing. Someone else in my place, with more experience, would have understood right away and probably long before, but I was still naïve and had not seen through his seemingly friendly behavior. I had had my hunches, but had not fully comprehended his intentions. I had also been riddled with self-doubt, troubled that I was misreading what was simply a helpful nature.

Now, here I was, sitting in his office listening to him bluntly telling me that he wanted to have a sexual relationship. I found myself thinking about his wife and children. Maybe his wife knew about his flirtatious habits and sent him to the office every morning pretending everything was fine. Many women live such lives of denial and console themselves by telling others how much their husbands care for them. Perhaps she was naïve and really did not know. Maybe she had some doubts, but felt the truth was too burdensome to face. I kicked myself for being so concerned for his wife at that moment. I had to figure out my own response.

His confidence was amazing. He must have had this conversation with many women. I understood then why he did not take my complaint about Dickens seriously. Probably they sat together that very evening drinking beer and laughing at how I had charged into Tarik's office to complain about Dickens. Tarik must have told him with gusto how upset I was. No doubt, he scored some brownie points for handling the situation by calming me down and preventing me from making a formal report. Dickens would have grumbled and Tarik must have consoled him, adding a few tips on how to handle Pakistani women. What an act! I was not a colleague. I was a toy they could play with.

I was jolted out of my thoughts when Tarik shook my arm and said, "You haven't touched your Coke."

I looked at his face. He had the smile of a winner. I realized I had to say something before he thought my silence meant his behavior was acceptable. I felt so heavy and burdened that I didn't even have the energy to speak, but I pulled myself together and said calmly, "Listen to me very carefully, Tarik. I am not interested in having an affair with you. If I wanted to have a romantic involvement, I have a plenty of men to choose from."

Seeing my composed and serious expression, the smirk left his face and he leaned back in his chair. I could tell he was quickly thinking of what trick to pull out of his hat to change the solemn mood that had suddenly settled in the room. I looked straight in his eyes and continued, "I especially do not have any interest in romantic involvements or affairs with men who are married. They turn me off, especially if they go around acting like pious saints."

His face fell. He quickly tried to recover and said, "Oh, I haven't had any physical contact with my wife for years."

Partially disgusted and partially afraid, I ignored his comment and continued, "Above all I dislike men who have double standards, a conservative set for their wives at home and a supposedly liberal set for their women colleagues and female friends."

I was careful not to break eye contact with him. I also made sure he would not turn my words into a joke and trivialize them. I took a long breath, gathered my courage and said clearly and firmly, "I am not interested in having an affair with you!" I know that he felt the strength of my words in his gut.

He was smarter than I thought. He backed off and returned to his friendly collegial role so I would not reject him or report him to Robert. He quickly changed the topic and said, “Do you know I like modern music? You probably like classical music, don’t you?”

I did not respond, but just looked at him. I had considered him a friend and thought he respected me. I felt he had stabbed me in the back. I badly wanted to slap him, but did not dare.

He continued, “I like this new song by...what is his name...this young singer? I will give you a cassette of his and you tell me what you think. I listen to his music in the car all the time.”

I kept quiet. Either he was trying to ease the situation and retrieve the possibility of a relationship or he was trying to convince me that he was a man with modern tastes, since I had pointedly said I did not like conservative men.

Giving me no chance to return to the earlier topic, he quickly continued, “I get so tired of the demands of my work. I do enjoy working hard, though, I really do. It is just that it keeps me busy until late at night. I have to take care of all of Robert’s instructions. My staff is so incapable that I cannot count on anyone. I have to do everything for Robert myself. Please, please! Have your drink,” he insisted, pushing the Coke towards me.

I maintained my strong façade, “I’m glad you like your work. Just be sure you keep doing it with professional ethics.” I am sure he got my message clearly, but he pretended it was a casual comment and kept laughing for no reason and repeating, “Please let me know if you need anything.”

My body felt so dull that I had to tap my emergency energy reserves to move. I wished I could get a crane to lift me out of his office. I left with a heavy heart.

I could not believe what had happened. A slap in the face would have been easier to deal with than this degrading behavior. Coming face to face with this side of Tarik jolted me. I knew it would not end here. Knowing him, I was sure he would return to it in other ways. A deep fear crept into my soul.

I did not talk about this at home at all, not even with my brother Kamran. I was embarrassed at yet another story of such distasteful behavior. I was not disappointed in myself, but was disgusted with Tarik. Despite certain doubts, I had considered him a supportive colleague, but now I knew his true nature. I hoped I could avoid him in the future, but I was wrong. Soon I was faced with a problem at work that required his help.

9. GETTING TRAPPED

Studying the UNIFEM files and records, I discovered much unfinished business. Many projects had ended years ago, but were still alive on paper. Piles of loose paper from previous years needed to be properly registered and filed. My dreams of using this international platform to create wonderful opportunities for Pakistani women already had been shattered. Now it seemed I would never be more than a glorified UN clerk put to the task of cleaning up an old mess.

I did not want to believe this was true, but to add to my disappointment, the next time I approached Nicholas for help, he said that I should contact Tarik to guide me on the forms for closing the old projects and any other financial matters I needed to sort out. I felt I was falling into

the ocean without a life jacket. I argued that since Tarik was not my supervisor, he (Nicholas) should be helping me. In turn, he insisted he did not know UNIFEM procedures and said it all fell within the ambit of Operations.

When I approached UNIFEM Delhi, they referred me back to Tarik. Then, I tried to contact UNIFEM in New York for procedures and formats to use in closing the projects, but they referred me back to UNDP Operations in Islamabad. Every time I went to see Nicholas for help, he pushed me back to Tarik. In the Operations Division, the heads of sections like Finance, Personnel and Logistics were so disempowered that they all referred my questions back to Tarik. My dream had become a nightmare, a labyrinth where every path led to the same door and passing this door meant dealing with Tarik. I gave myself pep talks about being a strong professional woman who could face any problem. I would not give up. I had to accept every challenge the job offered.

I approached Tarik in the most professional and polite manner possible. He was like a slippery fish, never saying no, but never helping me either. Generally polite, he confirmed he had the information I needed, but kept dodging me. He would tell me to see him after office hours or would suggest talking over dinner in the evening, which I tactfully refused. He asked me to call him at a certain time, but then he would not answer his phone. Then he started calling and telling me tales about his wife, giving me no chance to get a response on my business issues. It became a game: Me trying to get the ball into my court while he played smart by keeping it hidden.

One day he called and immediately started talking about his wife's infidelity, complaining that she had another lover, but expected him to cover her expenses and, in addition, support her brother who lived with them, violating their privacy as well as their bank balance. I listened for a while, but he made me angry. I knew if I hung up that would upset him and I didn't want to deal with the consequences. I was walking a tight rope and hated it. I constantly felt misused and yet I felt I had to put up with it. I wanted to pass through the gate that Tarik guarded, hoping my real professional life lay just beyond. I needed to clear this hurdle to prove to myself that I was a true professional. I was not going to let being a woman get in the way.

Resigning was an option that came to mind several times, but I had already resigned from two jobs within one year and didn't want my record to look as if I couldn't handle being in an organization. Although I had solid reasons both times, in professional life people rarely take the time to understand the reasons behind the record. Besides, I had to show myself that I could handle difficult situations.

After about three months of playing a stressful game of hide-and-seek, I finally decided to stop. Clearly, Tarik would not help me without a heavy price, something I was not willing to pay. I had decided not to resign, but to try a different strategy. I befriended the lower staff of the Finance Section and started getting information directly from them. I recreated financial records and wrote to UNIFEM's partners for their last reports. I felt embarrassed asking them for their records, but that embarrassment was easier than putting up with Tarik's slimy calls.

To rejuvenate myself and get my mind off Tarik, I became more involved in the community preparations for the Beijing Conference. Neither the UNDP nor UNIFEM was funding any of its staff to attend, so I made my own plans with my friends at Bedari. Dealing with Tarik had been draining all of my energy and I hoped that being a part of this historic event would give me a boost.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing lived up to its billing, full of color, superb organization, vast spaces and flamboyant ceremonies: an ocean of people with a strong feeling of solidarity. Our Pakistani group had prepared several activities and we got fully involved in attending others' programmes. I also attended every session I could fit in on working women to gain some insight on how to deal with my situation at work. For two full weeks, I remained on a high and forgot about my personal tension. I got deeply into the Beijing mode. We were constantly in high spirits: connecting with people, reflecting on issues, jointly strategizing, joining hands, taking vows, accepting differences of opinion. It was a momentous occasion in all of our lives and each of us came back full of enthusiasm.

When I returned to Pakistan I tried to resolve the situation with Tarik, but his calls continued with the same informal chatting and presumed intimacy. Late one night he caught me at home. I had finally told my parents and Kamran about his advances and asked them to block his calls, but unfortunately, this time I picked up the phone and was trapped. He told me he was very depressed. Sounding like a victim, he whined, "Women just come after me. They chase me. How can I satisfy them all? Even a strong man, like me, cannot handle so many women." Strangely, he changed his stories from time to time. He felt no need to be consistent or make his stories realistic.

Then he started to tell me about a woman in the World Food Programme, another UN agency. "She wants all my attention. I am a married man and cannot do that. Why do you think all these women want me so badly? I like wearing nice clothes and I think I look good but..." His speech slurred a bit.

I answered seriously, "You have quite a reputation," wanting to show that I knew what people thought of him. Hearing this made him anxious and he asked me what I had heard. Trying to guess what I was referring to, he made a strange confession.

"What can I say about people?" he complained. "They always gossip. They even talk about me having an affair with my mother-in-law, my first wife's mother."

I was shocked, but kept silent.

He continued, "It wasn't my fault. Actually, I did seek her out and spent a lot of time with her at her home, but she wanted me for her daughter. You see, I was attracted to her, but she entertained me thinking I would be good for her daughter. Okay, I don't care what people say, but this is the truth."

"You don't have to explain," I said hesitantly, wondering what sort of Pandora's Box I had opened talking about his reputation.

"After I married her daughter she still wanted me. Whenever her daughter was out she would come after me and..."

"Listen, I don't need to know all this." I said urgently, feeling very disgusted.

"One day she threw me on her bed..."

I hung up on him. I could not listen any more. I unplugged the phone to be sure he could not call again. He did not talk to me for several days, but then he got back in the swing. I put up a polite and an extremely professional front, untouched by his effort to win my sympathy. I thought he would eventually give up when he didn't get a positive response.

About a month after my return from Beijing, the number of calls suddenly dropped. I was very happy that it seemed Mr. Tarik Khan had finally gotten my message. Unfortunately, I was wrong. It was not my cold response that changed his behavior, but a new development in the office.

A cute and quite naïve young woman applied for a temporary job as Tarik's secretary. Kausar was about twenty, short and thin, with a roundish face and pouty lips. Tarik hired her immediately and diverted his full attention to this new catch. I felt guilty for feeling happy about my release since it meant he was after another woman. I was concerned for her, but also relieved as Tarik followed her around like a dog in heat.

10. THE OTHER WOMEN IN THE UNDP

The day was rainy with heavy clouds. This is wonderful weather for us desert dwellers. Children love to take off their clothes and bathe in the rain, splashing water on passers-by. We cook certain dishes only on rainy days. We have many songs about rain: children's songs about being wet and splashing in puddles, songs where people miss loved ones who cannot enjoy the beautiful weather because they are far away and love songs where a couple meets secretly on a rain-filled evening. Living in an arid, agricultural country, heavily dependent on rainfall, this feeling must be almost hereditary, a part of our biology. I cannot help but be happy and excited at even the sound of raindrops.

After getting to know how Tarik operated, I hesitated to become friendly with other male colleagues. Nevertheless, I wanted to be less isolated within the office. I had been in the UNDP building for almost eight months, but I still felt like a newcomer. Since I only worked on UNIFEM projects, I was not integrated into the rest of the office. My room was located far from the Programme staff, tucked away in an area surrounded by Finance and Administration. For quite a while, I had felt the need to make an effort to reach out to the other women in the office.

There was a Dutch woman named Rensje who was new to the organization, an affectionate and responsible woman of about fifty. She was with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and was located in the Annex Building, where my first office had been. I became close to Rensje quickly, but she traveled a lot and I did not see her very often.

Ghazala was married with children, yet still looked like a model. She had worked in the UNDP as a secretary for many years and was always so busy, rarely mixing with the others. Saima was another woman in the programme section. Her family was wealthy, so she was used to VIP treatment and had a social circle that included no less than Ambassadors and other senior dignitaries. In her perfectly curled hairstyle, designer clothes and big diamond rings, she would throw her head back and say proudly, "I am UNDP's poverty focal person."

The other women in our office held relatively junior jobs, but I was happy to make a connection with them. Except for Maria, our receptionist, they were all new to the organization. Maria, a single parent of two, belonged to Pakistan's suppressed minority Christian community. She had a hard time making ends meet. Although her salary from the UN was not bad, she always

needed more money. Her daughter was seriously overweight and Maria was always paying for slimming parlors to help her. Her son enjoyed spending money and often got into trouble with the police. So, she had learned how to make money by collecting donations on the pretext of helping poor girls.

The others were on short contracts with low salaries. These included the child-like Kausar, Tarik's new girlfriend, still intoxicated with her newfound love for her boss. Sarah was an intern who had just joined my unit. She was young and bright, but with little exposure to the world outside her home. Zamurad, a meek computer expert, was Sarah's only friend in the office. New in their jobs, these young women had time for making friends.

On this rainy day, Sarah, Maria, Kausar and Zamurad rushed in, filling my office with a splash of color and giggles. They objected to working inside when the weather was so romantic. They wanted me to take them out for lunch. I liked the idea, but my car was at a workshop so I tried to excuse myself. However, they insisted that they wanted to go as a group and sing along the way. They told me that Maria sang like Lata Mangeshkar, a well-known Indian singer.

Kausar spoke to Tarik and got his car for us. We all got in and drove away in the spirit of adventure. Over lunch, the young women joked about different men. They mentioned one bachelor who considered himself a hero. I said I worried more about married men with grown children who behaved like bachelors. This startled Kausar and the others went quiet. I continued, saying that married men might think they could have fun safely, living in the best of both worlds, but I worried about the girls. I just wanted to warn Kausar a little. This group went out a few more times, but I never brought up the topic of Tarik again.

Sarah finished her internship and left to look for a better job. Zamurad took another temporary job, but asked us to look for better options for her. She had been on a month-to-month contract with the UNDP. Kausar got an extension from Tarik and she became very busy, so I hardly saw her. I was left by myself once again.

I called Zamurad one day to tell her about a job opening at the UNDP for an IT person. She did not sound excited and told me she would never get it. Surprised, I reminded her that she wanted to support her family and make a better living. She hesitantly confided to me that Tarik would never hire her. She said he had often asked her to stay late in the office, but she never did. He offered her rides home, but she never accepted. She told me she was very afraid of him. I could almost feel the trembling in her voice.

Shocked, I said, "But he wasn't your supervisor. You were in the IT section, with your own supervisor. Tarik had nothing to do with you."

She took a deep breath and replied in a low voice, "Tarik sahib has everything to do with all young women, especially those on temporary contracts." We both were quiet and then she continued, "If I had been friendlier with him, my contract would have been extended for a year. However, he kept extending it one month at a time to see if I would give in. I chose not to. He tried to take liberties many times. He even told me that I should cooperate with him, but I didn't." Her voice cracked. "I never told my family about him. I was afraid they wouldn't let me work again. Tarik scared me. I don't know how I found the courage to refuse his advances every time."

I hesitantly mentioned Kausar, just to hear her response. She said Kausar was probably smart, but she could not act like that. I told Zamurad that she was suffering because of Tarik now

and that Kausar would suffer later when she realized how she had been used. Zamurad also mentioned that she could not be like the new receptionists. That comment puzzled me.

She told me that during the interviews he had selected a few pretty, young women from poor families and asked if they wanted to spend a night in the Pearl Continental Bhurban Hotel in the mountains with him. Two of the candidates agreed to his suggestion and they were hired. I found this hard to believe and asked her how she knew. She said everyone in the Operations department was talking about it when she went to pick up her final paycheck. The driver who took Tarik and one of the women to Bhurban told them the story.

I asked whether she had talked to her supervisor. She laughed and said, “He was more afraid of Tarik than I was!” She asked me to talk to him if I could, which I did later. He insisted that he kept telling Tarik that Zamurad was very competent and should be offered a one-year contract, but that Tarik had made him write the recommendations according to Tariq’s instructions, demanding, “YOU WILL WRITE WHAT I TELL YOU TO WRITE. NO QUESTIONS!”

I often heard grumbles around the office about the UNDP facilities being abused by Kausar. An official vehicle was designated to pick her up and drop her drop wherever she wanted to go and her absences were not allowed to be recorded. I later heard that Tarik had secretly rented a place in a middle-class neighborhood where they could meet. Group living is the norm in Pakistan, so finding somewhere for an unmarried couple to meet freely is a major challenge. I worried about Kausar and was stunned that everyone could talk about Tarik’s actions, yet the senior management seemed unaware. Were they actually unaware of this or did they deliberately choose to close their eyes to it, I wondered.

11. REMEMBERING MY LOK VIRSA DAYS

One morning I was sitting in my office, a bit burdened by my thoughts on men, when my eyes wandered to a paper horse in one corner of my bookshelf. My heart filled with delight to see the brightly decorated horse. With red, yellow, blue and pink stripes, a big proud neck and thin sticks for legs, it resembled a giraffe. It reflected the free and unburdened existence of the nomads who make these toys. This horse was the only thing I had kept from the days when I documented Pakistan’s traditional culture in my position as the Deputy Director of Research at Lok Virsa, the Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage. Somewhere in my soul, I have always felt like a nomad with a wild and free spirit. I often dreamt of myself as a wild bird flying over the oceans or running through the wilderness like a wild horse, but right now, I was temporarily reined in and saddled to my UN job.

Unlike the UNDP, Lok Virsa was a liberal work environment. I was one of three women in a staff of about one hundred. The Institute head was supportive and encouraged me to be creative. Women were not kept in menial positions. One of my woman colleagues was a producer in the Media Section. The other woman was a senior manager, the Director of the Museum Galleries.

While at Lok Virsa, I had been fully engaged in learning about the roots of my culture. That is also where I began learning about how to deal with men in a professional setting. I was an enthusiastic young professional who tried her best to prove her abilities. I plunged into my career

full of energy. I developed new research ideas, traveled to rural areas and interviewed people from many walks of life. Nearly every day I learned something new about our traditions. My perspectives on life, my taste in music and even my style of dress changed. I improved my understanding of culture and, with that, my appreciation for rural people and their ways of life. I enjoyed every minute of my work.

At first, I had no problems interacting with my male colleagues. We sat together, developed ideas and engaged in creative projects of making documentaries, conducting research and publishing reports. Soon, however, I noticed that working with liberal men had its own set of challenges. Sometimes I suspected that, within the middle class, men chose to be “liberal” because they thought it gave them free access to women and alcohol. It would not be fair to make this judgment of all liberal men, but there was a strange sense of entitlement when these men made sexual advances, especially when women did not want them. These liberal men labeled women as conservative and 'stuck in their middle class morality' if they refused their advances. It never crossed their minds that a woman might reject a man's romantic advances simply because she did not like him. Their egos could never accept that possibility.

I noticed that the senior woman on the staff, who was happily married and did not want any such relationship, ignored all sexual jokes and advances and generally pretended that she didn't understand them. Most colleagues, though, enjoyed the dual-meaning jokes and never objected to the undertones of seduction in the work environment.

I was not interested in developing any romantic relationships with men and just wanted to focus on my career. I did not even let my parents discuss my marriage. I was very keen to establish myself in my profession before moving down that path. I wanted no interruptions and no diversions. However, at each of my workplaces I experienced a lot of unnecessary pressure that I had not expected.

Alcohol is officially banned in Pakistan and it is not sold or consumed publicly. One can be punished by law if found drunk or in possession of alcohol. Non-Muslims need a special permit to buy it. However, these are the rules for common people. Alcohol is served frequently at the homes and parties of upper-class families and those who consider themselves liberal, such as artists, rich businessmen, writers and ex-communists. Most people cannot afford alcohol in any case since it is mostly found only on the black market. While the middle and lower classes consider alcohol a vice or a curse, the upper class and liberal circles consider it fashionable and a stamp of being open-minded.

I distinctly remember an occasion where my immediate supervisor embarrassed me for not conforming to his idea of liberal morality. It happened during a party at his house. People were sitting in three adjoining rooms. Some were standing and talking while others sat around on brightly colored sofas. I was sitting on a low stool by a cluster of my liberal colleagues. Most people were drinking alcohol and chatting away. I was operating at my American best by not judging them when they acted as they wished. I only wished they would treat me in the same manner.

People kept offering to make me a drink and I kept refusing, saying I already had one. Seeing the glass of orange juice in my hand, they would raise their eyebrows. My supervisor asked accusingly, “You didn't drink alcohol in your eight years in America?”

I answered casually, “No.”

He continued, “Now, you’ll tell me that you never had relationships with men and never dated.”

I was upset and said, “Listen, what I do is my business. You have no right to judge me!”

Ignoring my angry tone, he persisted, “Are you serious? Have you come back from America or a Punjabi village?” Then, addressing everyone, he said loudly with a drunken slur in his voice, “Did she actually go to America? Please check her credentials!” The room roared with laughter.

In the US, no one judged me for not drinking or dating. I was shocked that in my own country, where this behavior is not even a part of our culture, people were putting me down. They made me feel I was not a real liberal because I had not gotten over my “hang up” about drinking alcohol.

Despite these nuisances, I gradually started making friends at the Institute. I was obsessed with my assignments and found a deep joy in whatever I did. Sometimes it surprised my colleagues that even writing a simple note on typical green government file paper could become a sacred task, to be done perfectly. They joked about it. Being new to the professional world, I wanted to learn everything and gave it my very best. However, all my enthusiasm was sprinkled with a vague discomfort about the male-female work relationships.

Checking out women seems to be almost a ritual in patriarchal societies. From the time I began my work, I sensed that the men at Lok Virsa were assessing me. I was not fully aware of the men’s conversations, but I could feel their comments in my gut. These discussions seemed to accompany a subtle competition among them centered around who would befriend me first.

Despite the openness and creativity in the Institute, an undercurrent of sexuality ran through most encounters. I noticed that vividly with my boss. He was an anthropologist and considered himself an icon of liberalism. He evidently thought this gave him the right to make sexual remarks to any woman who visited him, worked with him or just passed by his office. He made comments about our menstruation, about folk traditions involving sex and other seemingly academic, but obviously contrived topics. He especially liked to make jokes with sexual double entendres.

I tried to deal with this challenge as I had in my social life in America, getting men out of a sexual mode and into a more platonic friendship. I tried the same strategies here and, in time, succeeded in developing platonic relationships with most Institute colleagues. However, sometimes I wondered whether I was able to do this because of my efforts or because the other men thought they should back off and leave me for the more powerful male. I was suspicious about the image my boss was creating about us, but he did nothing overt that I could put my finger on. It was all very subtle.

I tried to block these uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. I told myself I was much better off than most working women in Pakistan. At least I liked my work and the men treated me respectfully, most of the time. Besides, I had other battles. The senior management had come down on me for selecting a controversial topic for research related to prostitution and I was struggling hard not to let go of that project. At the same time, many of the Institute staff had launched a labor action against the Executive Director.

I also realized that I was spending too much time in getting my research themes approved. Management issues and other struggles also sucked up my working hours. To retain my free spirit,

I decided to undertake personal research projects as well. A traditional circus landed in Islamabad. The contrast between its nomadic tents and rural talent base and the modern city of Islamabad intrigued me. I thought of exploring who these people were and what motivated them to continue their traditional entertainment business in the face of competition from television and movies. I wanted to learn each artist's personal story. I discussed this with my boss and we agreed that I would do this research early in the morning and right after work.

The circus communities are semi-nomadic groups who travel with tents and portable equipment from town to town. In Islamabad, they had settled in a huge park near my home. For two weeks, I left the house at five in the morning to spend the early hours in their tents. I talked to whoever was up that early, mostly laborers and keepers religiously feeding their animals. I spent the evenings with the circus managers and artists, staying with them until one or two in the morning, when the performance ended. In those days, neither eating nor sleeping carried much importance in my life.

I wrote short stories about the different kinds of people who were a part of the circus. In the process, I became friends with a lion-tamer named Abdul. I visited him in the early mornings and talked to him about his relationship with the lions and about accidents with the animals, the consequences and the cover-ups.

One day when I went to see him, he was in the caged stage practicing his act with a majestic lion with thick gold mane. Abdul casually gestured for me to come in. I hesitated, but he said, "Come on over, he's friendly, he won't do anything as long as you don't provoke him."

"Sure, friendly," I thought. "Dog owners say the same thing: 'Don't be afraid, he's so friendly.'"

Abdul had already told me about this lion biting off the arm of a man who tried to tease him in his cage. Anyway, I hesitantly walked in. The lion noticed me and growled. I said to his keeper, "I think he doesn't like me. Why don't I wait for you outside?"

The lion was on a small, low stool. Abdul insisted that I stand on a stool next to it. He said, "There is a girl who does this act with him. She stands with him on this stool."

"She grew up with him, but I barely know Mr. Lion," I said uncertainly.

He persisted, so, finally, I took a deep breath and stood on the stool right next to the lion. The lion gave me a look, warning that I was getting too close. I felt a rush of adrenaline and passed Abdul my camera. "I don't know when I'll be this close to a lion again. Take my picture. If I survive this I'm sure I'll enjoy the photo." I could hear the lion's breath. He was about six inches from me and did not look friendly. My heart was racing, but he was standing with his head high, like a king on his throne.

Abdul pointed the camera at me and said, "Now, put your hand on his back."

I tried to refuse. "WHAT? No, I won't do that. Sorry, but the lion is already restless. I can feel it."

Looking through the camera, Abdul quipped, "If you're a real woman, you won't be scared by a lion."

I hesitated, but finally relented, saying, "Well, if you put it that way." The lion kept turning his head towards me, signaling that he did not like me on the stool. Still unsure, I put my hand softly on his back as the camera clicked.

Wild animals are frightening, but you can usually be sure that if you do not provoke them they will not attack. With docile animals, like humans, one never knows. The facades can be friendly, but with no provocation, they can bruise you for life.

My boss bragged to his staff that he and his German wife had an open marriage contract, meaning that they both slept around with other people. He enjoyed saying things like that just to startle others, especially women. The people close to him, both women and men, seemed to have accepted this as a part of his personality. I found this hard to accept. He frequently shocked me by making comments that left me thinking for days.

One day, on the way back from a staff meeting he laughingly told me that one of our deputy directors in Sales, who I thought was the most decent and benign man in the world, was trying to guess my bra size. He told me proudly, as he stepped into his office, "We disagreed, but I'm sure I am right!" I was startled. I stopped outside his office, not knowing how to respond. I decided to confront him, but my reaction only amused him. Dropping his files on his table with a thump, he shrugged his shoulders, "This is the first thing we discuss about every woman. The second is whether she's the kind who will go for sex or the kind who plays hard to get." I was so disgusted I left his room. I could not cope with men having such fun at my expense.

Many similar issues concerned me at the office, but I returned every morning with a smile on my face, trying to be a true professional unaffected by any nuisance...and usually working ten times harder than the men. I focused on my work and tried hard to ignore all the side issues. I thought this was what women had to face and, if I held on to my principled stance, everything would be ok. I fully believed that once these men got their sexual thoughts out of the way they could become my real friends. In many cases I was right and I have kept lifelong friends, in the true sense, from my days at the Institute, but I also paid a price for believing that everyone is fundamentally good at heart.

In the midst of my musings, the phone rang, startling me out of my thoughts. I picked it up and my heart started racing when I heard Tarik asking me to come to his office for something urgent.

SECTION TWO: STRUGGLING FOR DIGNITY

12. A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

I walked into Tarik's office wondering what awaited me. With a big smile, he asked me to sit down and moved forward in his seat. "I'm going to Peshawar. My mother wants me to come." He said shifting in his chair with excitement.

"I see...that's nice!" I forced a constrained smile.

"I'll be seeing my mother after many years and even now I'll see her secretly. My father doesn't allow me to visit home." My faint smile disappeared and I raised my eyebrows with surprise.

He explained that his family was very upset when he got married because the young woman he chose had been married before. He said people make a big deal out of marrying a virgin, but he thought it was unfair. He told me that his father never accepted his wife and prohibited the rest of the family from having any contact with him. Tactically, I did not want to get into a sympathy mode with him so I simply said, "Well, good luck!" Wishing him a safe trip, I slipped out of his office.

Later, at a social gathering in Islamabad, I met some women whose husbands were in the military. After some probing, I learned about Tarik's marriage problems, piecing the story together from various sources. According to these women, Tarik had been a Colonel in the military and used his senior position to seduce the wife of a junior officer in his own unit.

I knew that compared to society in general, the military sub-culture allows the wives of young officers to participate in more of a social life than a typical middle-class "housewife". Couples are invited to social gatherings. Women are encouraged to call every officer *bhai* (brother) and men use the word *bhabi* (sister-in-law), for every woman in their community. Men like Tarik could use such familiarity to their own advantage. Tarik was known to have his way with women, an attribute that usually makes a man popular among other men, as long as their own wives or sisters are not involved.

Sumaira, who was only twenty at the time, left her husband for Tarik. In desperation, her husband lodged a formal complaint. Fortunately for Tarik, his father, who had been a senior military officer used some friends in high positions to save his family's honor. The military, I assume, preferred to eject such a black sheep out of their system so Tarik was sent to the civil service. Shifting the problem somewhere else is a universal management solution, so he was soon appointed as a Deputy Secretary in a government ministry.

People said that Tarik's father was offended by his son's repeated scandals with women. Tarik had been married before and, even then, he had chosen his own bride, but later divorced her. The woman told me that after Tarik ran off with Sumaira, his father declared he would have nothing more to do with his son. From his position in the Government bureaucracy, Tarik applied for an administrative job in the UNDP. Bill Dickens liked everything about him: his military background, his command abilities and his love for women. The men hit it off well and teamed up to chase women both within and outside the UN offices. When Robert England arrived in Islamabad, Tarik made sure that he made a strong connection with him also.

Unfortunately, the UNDP environment had been like a ship without a captain for over a year. Things only happened if someone pursued them doggedly; otherwise, decisions evaporated into thin air. Things that should happen automatically in an organization did not happen here. Several of the clerical staff whose input was necessary for the system to work focused more on their UN Staff Association activities than on their jobs. No one could question or touch them. There was a strange mafia kind of feeling among the lower staff members.

Management was a glaring need, but Robert hated being a manager. He did not like looking into who should be promoted, the Staff Association's demands, complaints regarding UNDP hiring or transport issues. He did not see these problems as indicators of a faulty system, but merely as issues to be handled. He wanted to leave the local management to someone who would just take care of things and not present him with an analysis or ask his views. Just do it!

Tarik had his formative experience in the military, which is an extremely hierarchical institution. This had taught him to instinctively obey any superior and to command his subordinates absolutely. He was excellent at doing everything the boss said and he did much more than asked. In the process, he expanded his own space and arena to command and rule.

Tarik loved to handle management issues where he decided who would be hired, who was promoted, who got leave, whose insurance bills were cleared, who went on a training tour with government ministers and who sat where in the office. Actually, he wanted people to come to him even to sanction a toilet paper roll for their bathroom so that they could see how important he was and so he could establish a position from which to negotiate favors in return.

The moment Robert mumbled a complaint, Tarik took care of it. As soon as Robert expressed a desire, it was immediately implemented by Tarik. When the Staff Association people nagged, Robert needed only to look at Tarik and he would rush to quiet them down, even if he had to take them out and buy them new shoes as a bribe for shutting up. Tarik was the man who took care of things for Robert.

After a long gap, a new Deputy for Operations replaced Bill Dickens, but Robert continued to work closely with Tarik. Liunga Fiumi, the new deputy, was from Samoa. He was one of those who the UN absorbs on the request of a member government rather than hires on merit. He quickly realized where he stood in relation to the Robert-Tarik team and became comfortable in his position, deciding not to engage much with office matters. The other staff could care less. Most people in our office only wanted to go home at five sharp and get a good salary at the end of the month. Governance of the office was not a concern.

Robert was like a king from a South Asian fable, intrigued by the love of horseback-riding or archery or another such "high" priority that he left the administration of the country to a few, loyal, but often corrupt, ministers. The only thing the king cared about was maintaining his power in the kingdom, so he could continue attending to what he loved. He did not want to be disturbed by his people's petty issues. He did not care if the ministers burdened people with heavy taxes, tortured them or abused the daughters of his farmers. He was always too preoccupied with his indulgences to be concerned about such trivial details.

In Robert's case, his love was for acquiring more acclaim as a leader of the United Nations. Even his love for tennis diminished in front of this desire for the appreciation of his superiors at Headquarters. He only wanted to make major decisions and leave the low-level managerial aspects to others.

Robert was considered to be one of the UNDP's rising stars. His colleagues who headed other country offices adored him. He was the ideal, the standard. If Tarik was a man who handled problems, Robert was the last one to worry how he did it. If problems were solved, Robert was a happy man and Tarik was even happier. They were a perfect match.

13. AN INTERESTING ADDITION

I first met Paul at a planning workshop held for UNDP Pakistan. Robert had organized the event to introduce the new corporate philosophy that was finding its way into the world of social development. It was the second-half of the meeting and the consultant making the presentation was on his hundred and twentieth slide. Bored, I was entertaining myself by curling my hair around my fingers. Suddenly, I heard someone making a strong point on the inclusion of gender as a significant parameter. I looked around to see who, besides me, in this big crowd was propagating gender issues. I noticed that the seat next to me, which had been vacant, was now filled with a tall, good-looking foreigner, wearing a nicely-tailored brown suit and a pink shirt. His comments immediately impressed me...and obviously impressed others as well. I had raised a similar point before he had arrived. My comment was easily brushed off, but his was taken very seriously. That was my introduction to Paul. It certainly left a positive impression on me.

Paul joined the UNDP Pakistan office in November 1995. He had been with the UN system for the previous ten years and had worked in other Asian countries, including Indonesia, Nepal and Mongolia. I heard that he had left behind a legacy in those countries from his work on local governance. Now Robert England had asked him to create a UNDP Governance office in Pakistan.

Paul held brief meetings with most of the staff about how we perceived the country's development challenges. Entering my office, he had to crouch under the low ceiling, something that I had never noticed. Paul had broad shoulders, fair complexion, grey hair, sharp features and a refreshingly peaceful and happy face. He was from the USA, but people always said he did not behave like an American. He was not a talkative person, so many mistook him for a Canadian. He knew how to listen and observe. He dressed formally and no one ever saw him in a pair of blue jeans. When he spoke at meetings, his comments carried weight because of his knowledge and credible professional image.

Our discussion mainly concerned the effectiveness of development work. I had witnessed the work of quite a few aid agencies as a development consultant in Pakistan. I told him many stories of the superficiality of some development aid agencies that use the jargon of community participation and then act according to their own agendas. People who said they wanted to grow food might be given flower seeds. Paul emphasized the importance of people's will and ownership of any action designed for social change. We seemed to subscribe to very similar views on development. Our similarity of approach made me feel very comfortable talking to him. A comradeship developed as we laughed together at development blunders.

After a few meetings in my office, Paul invited me for lunch at a restaurant. I happily accepted. The change of setting slightly changed our topics of discussion. As we settled down with our soup, Paul asked where I went to school in America. "University of Minnesota," I answered

proudly with a big smile. I noticed a peculiar expression on his face and I said quickly, “When I decided, I didn’t know about the winters.”

“What did make you decide?” he asked with curiosity.

I said, “I clearly remember the day I made that decision. I was standing on our covered balcony enjoying a light rain and cloudy skies. We do happen to enjoy rain a lot!”

“Yes, I have learned that,” Paul responded with a smile.

I continued, “My mother was making us *parathas*. My father came home and picked up the mail that was lying just outside the door. Getting envelopes from US universities had become routine because I was exploring my options. I usually brought my mail to the balcony so I could sit quietly and read everything carefully. Opening this one, I screamed in excitement, “I’ve been accepted by the University of Minnesota!” I danced with joy, hugging everyone in the family. My brother ran up to me and read the letter. Surprised and happy, my mother peeped out of the kitchen with a huge smile. My father thanked God and went to his room to say a prayer of thanks. I entered the kitchen still dancing and my mother asked curiously, “What kind of school is this University of Minnesota?”

I said loudly, “I don’t have a clue. One of my teachers recommended it.” Stopping for a moment, I tried to recall the details I had read in the information materials and said, “Well, I think one brochure said they have up to five feet of snow in winter.”

She lifted a *paratha* from the hot *tawa* and quickly threw it on a plate next to the stove and said “Oh! I wonder what that would be like.” She seemed genuinely astonished at the thought.

I replied in a carefree manner engulfed in happiness, “I don’t know. I’ve never seen snow in my life.” Then, picking up the plate with the first hot *paratha* and dancing my way out of the kitchen I said, “Oh, I know. It must be like a Christmas card!”

Paul smiled without interrupting my story.

“I received three more admission letters, but submitted the letter from the University of Minnesota to the government. That was my choice, just like first love. University of Minnesota was the one.”

Paul seemed more amused by my storytelling style than the substance. We continued eating. I felt very comfortable talking to him.

After a pause, I asked him, “Where did you go to school?”

“UCLA,” he smiled and changed the subject to our earlier discussions about the UNDP’s development approach.

Paul had a very pleasant personality, matching his appearance. His eyes often reflected the color of his shirts and his playful neckties revealed a spark of deviation while he maintained the formal office attire of the UN. When we talked, I noticed that my responses were like stories and Paul’s were short and precise. I added all kinds of extra information, including my family’s opinions. He was always to the point and never said anything about his family. My conversations were dominated by my exaggerated facial expressions and use of my hands. When Paul spoke, he was as still and poised as the sea.

He left Pakistan after his initial visit, but returned to Islamabad the following March. In the interim, I moved from the UNIFEM position to become the first UNDP Gender Programme

Officer. This switch meant little in an administrative sense since I had the same supervisor, similar work and the same office. The major change was that the UNDP created my position to design new projects focused on women and Chandni Joshi in UNIFEM's Delhi office would not be my supervisor anymore.

The UN Headquarters in New York had recently declared the UNDP Pakistan as a 'Center for Experimentation', so we had many trainings and planning meetings to figure out how to make the most of this opportunity. One management training programme was scheduled at Bhurban, a three-hour drive into the mountains from Islamabad. Well-known as a vacation spot for honeymooners, it was also an attractive venue for workshops and trainings for wealthy agencies like ours.

Paul had just returned, but he did not join us in this management training, which was a disappointment for me. I told him that I wanted to attend in order to get to know my other colleagues better. The training was in a large hall with big glass windows. I spent most of my time with Rensje, but enjoyed getting to know others as well.

For the past few months, Tarik had left me in peace as he romanced his secretary, Kausar. He had not bothered me other than to make some irritating sexist comments from time to time or to make an occasional call to share something personal. I had succeeded in keeping such meetings and conversations very brief and formal, but he made a strong effort to revive the 'relationship' on this trip.

During a lunch break, I passed through the reception area, I noticed that Tarik got up from a chair and seemed to start following me down the long corridor to my room. I hoped it was just a coincidence and he would turn in another direction. After a while, I realized that my hunch was correct; he was following me. All my senses concentrated on the sound of his footsteps as he came closer and closer. My whole body tensed. I felt his eyes piercing into me from behind. I kept hoping he would turn into another room, but he did not. Soon, he was next to me.

“How did you find the training?” he asked.

I gulped. His voice made me shiver. I quickly said, “Good,” barely making eye contact. By this time, I had reached my room. I stopped at the door for a second as I put my key in the lock. Attempting to conclude the conversation, I turned around and said, “Ok then...See you later.”

He asked, “Is your room ok?”

I nodded, “Yes, thank you.” I turned back towards the door and opened it. Before I could step in, he was already in the room, without even asking me. I was standing in the doorway almost blocking the entrance, but he was swift. He quickly looked over the room, giving his entry a professional pretext and then started a very personal conversation. I kept the door open and stood very close to it, just inside. I was extremely nervous.

He opened the curtains in the dark room. I remember noticing that snow-capped mountains were visible outside the window. In the light, I saw that his face looked unusually dark pink. I remained in the small entranceway of my room, my body stiff and my breathing shallow. He planted himself so that he was visible to me, but not to someone passing through the main hallway.

He growled, “I'm a broken man, shattered. Someone broke my heart. I loved this woman and she dumped me.” He was drunk. He appeared not even to have the energy to stand. His

tantrums and moods were not new to me, but this was not a telephone call to my home; I could not put the phone down whenever I wished. This was a hotel room, far from my safe home, and he was in it, right in front of me.

I pretended to be confident and asked calmly, "Are you drunk?"

He said, "Yes, I filled my mini bar with beer and I need it." I was very frightened, but controlled myself.

I told him firmly to leave the room immediately. Given his position and my new UNDP appointment, I knew that I could have a major problem if I threw him out. Aware of his power to make my life miserable in the office, I wondered how rude I could afford to be. All this affected my reaction. I was very tense and did not respond to his sad story. I did not want to give the impression that I wanted to listen to him. I kept standing by the door, my heart beating rapidly.

He asked if he could stay in my room for a while. My legs began shaking. I felt scared. I cleared my throat and said clearly, "No."

He started to cry. He knelt on the floor, whining about how miserable he was. He moved his hands forward towards me and said, "I need comfort from a friend. I need it so badly. The woman I loved terribly has ruined my life. Yesterday she told me she does not want me anymore. I am broken." After that melodramatic speech, he began to sob and curled up on the floor. I froze. The feeling of humiliation turned into a deep fear of what might happen.

Suddenly, I jolted myself back to life, took a deep breath and relaxed my shoulders, which were rigid with tension. I told myself I would not let Tarik treat me like this. Although my body was still trembling inside, I was determined to get him out of my room. I carefully avoided any conversation, asking for information or sympathizing, as I thought he would feel I was softening and would allow him to stay. He threw himself on the bed in a half-reclined position, "I want to talk to someone".

I responded quickly. "There are plenty of men around and it would be more appropriate to talk to them. How about Farhad, why don't you talk to him about your heartbreak?" Tarik paused for a second and then continued crying. He growled and moaned. How badly I wished this were all a bad dream. The worst fear I could imagine was being stuck with him alone when he was drunk. I kept trying to convince him to find a male colleague to talk to, but he continued with his loud expressions of grief.

Finally, I raised my voice and said it was highly inappropriate to talk to me like this and to come into my room without asking me. He suddenly became serious, got to his feet and started urging me to go to his room. "I have lots of beer," he said. "I want to cry on your shoulder. I want you to comfort me. I'm feeling very lonely. You can slip into my room quietly and no one will notice." His change of strategy was frightening.

My body was filled with disgust, but I tried my best to handle the situation assertively. I did not move from my calmly offensive posture and said, grinding my teeth, "I would appreciate it if you leave right away." I hesitated to push him out, as I feared he might become physical. He kept begging me to come to his room.

Somehow, I got the strength to shove him out the door. I locked and bolted the door and fell on the bed, only partially conscious. I immediately got up again in panic, thinking he might still be outside. I put my ear to the door. I did not hear anything and I could not see anything

through the peephole. I threw myself back on the bed and closed my eyes. I had rarely felt so drained.

I returned to the workshop after about an hour, but I was like a zombie. Although my mind would not focus on anything, I tried to act normally. My eyes kept looking for Tarik to be sure he did not creep up on me from behind. I stayed in a crowd where I felt safe. Until the end of the workshop, I felt afraid each time I went back to my room.

The day after returning from Bhurban, I tried to get back into the office routine. While using a photocopier, I mentally replayed the scene with Tarik. This time I was much more confrontational, shouting things like, "Don't ever talk to me again, you bastard!" My mind recreated the scene repeatedly and I said many things I had not thought of at the time. Suddenly, I was jolted out of my thoughts by a "Hello". I turned around and saw Paul smiling at me.

He said, "You take your work very seriously. I've never seen anyone so engrossed in photocopying. I said hello three times."

"Oh, sorry!" I shrugged my shoulders and kept looking at him. He was wearing a brown suit with a bright yellow tie. His eyes smiled at me with a peaceful and caring expression. Suddenly, my twisted brain cells straightened out and I relaxed. His positive energy and sense of calm engulfed me.

He enthusiastically asked, "How was the training?"

I smiled, leaned back on the photocopier and said, "On the Myers and Briggs personality scale I got ENTJ".

Paul nodded, "Robert is also ENTJ; a highly desired personality for leadership. Only five percent of people have this type."

"Yes," I continued. "They said I have leadership abilities, high analytical abilities, am outgoing in my social relations...and have relatively little patience." I smiled sheepishly.

He laughed and scratching his head, "I am an ISTP."

There was a silence. Finally, I asked curiously, "Which means...?"

Paul smiled and said, "Well, it's a bit different than ENTJs." With that, he moved towards his office, but then turned around, "How was the experience of getting to know your colleagues?"

I was pleased that he remembered the comment I had made before leaving for the training. I thought for a while. The traumatic incident with Tarik had left me with a seriously negative feeling, but I looked at Paul with a smile and simply said, "Quite okay!"

Getting over the incident with Tarik was difficult. The feeling of violation remained with me. Sometimes I woke up in the middle of the night with a mixed feeling of fear and disgust. I tried to keep busy with other things, but I knew that I could not fool myself. I consoled myself and negotiated with myself to put up with this man for a while longer. I promised myself to be self-protective and to do my best to avoid him. For the chance to do something worthwhile for the women of my country, I decided against resignation as a solution. With Paul in the office, I hoped I might have some quality support in designing sound projects in future. Paul's positive energy was becoming a strong support for me. Once again, I decided to ignore the voices inside me that said I should not put my integrity on the line.

14. BATTLES OF A PROFESSIONAL WOMAN

One day, Tarik stopped me in a corridor and asked how I was doing. He had that phony smile on his face that always appeared whenever he started a conversation in his “perfect gentleman” mode. He had mostly stayed away from me for some months. Looking around to make sure nobody was near; he leaned over and whispered, “My wife is asking for a divorce.” I made no reply, not sure what would get me out of the situation faster, saying “congratulations” with a smile or sadly saying “I’m so sorry!” Just then, Robert England walked past us and Tarik turned to him with a smile as big as a Jamaican banana. To my relief, he quickly left, following Robert like a faithful dog.

I sometimes think about how easily men in Pakistan can build their network of contacts, while women struggle to establish and maintain the most rudimentary professional relationships with their male colleagues. For women, being married and being older helps a bit, but young, unmarried women have great difficulty building normal connections with individual male co-workers. Meetings must always have a specific official purpose. At any official programme where families are invited, female colleagues are usually seated with the wives and thus miss any opportunity to meet with other senior colleagues.

With Paul, I could go out for lunch and talk informally without fearing that he would consider me a “bad woman”. I wondered whether I would do that with a Pakistani colleague in the UNDP. I was sure they would think I was a woman of questionable virtue.

Once when I took a male colleague, whom I had known as a friend, on an informal tour around town, the day turned very sour. Instead of discouraging me, however, the experience strengthened my conviction to take this issue head on.

Rashid was a colleague from Lahore, who had come to Islamabad to see Paul. He was a freelance consultant known to be competent in planning new development projects. He finished his meeting with Paul at the end of our working day, so I offered him a ride to his hotel. He smiled and said, “You keep bragging about Islamabad’s beauty. In an hour I’m going to a festival, so why not show me your city now.” We realized we both had been invited to the same festival, organized by the Asian Study Group, so we decided to go together.

I loved going on drives in Islamabad. Working intensely for hours and then taking a short break, getting out and rejuvenating myself, had been a habit since my student days in America. Here in Islamabad, I could leave the city and within fifteen minutes be in the Marghala Hills on beautiful winding roads, studded with scenic viewpoints. Sometimes I would drive to one of the two famous Islamic shrines located on either side of the city. They both attract many disciples and have colorful souvenir markets. We also have a pleasant lake with boats and some fishing close by. I told Rashid I would take him to the lake and show him a favorite spot I sometimes visit when I am in a reflective mood. It was mid-May so the weather had not turned too hot yet.

I took him to the back of the lake, away from the usual entrance. Parking my car, we climbed a small hill with huge black boulders. Once on top, a magical view of the lake suddenly appeared at our feet. Still water reflected everything: the blue sky, lush green trees all around and birds skimming the surface as they looked for fish. The lake was a perfect mirror. Rashid stopped and kept looking at it. After a while, we sat on a big stone. The sun was setting, making the heat

tolerable. I loved watching the dance of the water shivering with the slightest movement of wind. Looking at water always made me feel as if I was cleansing myself. I said, "Isn't it lovely. People criticize Islamabad for no reason. They say it's dead. Peaceful is the word I use for this city. I can come to this fantastic place in just ten minutes. Here we get used to having such beauty around the corner."

Rashid turned and said, "Quit your propaganda and let me enjoy the scene in peace and quiet." I laughed, left him sitting on the stone to absorb the beautiful view and went for a walk.

After about twenty minutes, we headed back. Suddenly, we encountered two men who ordered us to stop. They were wearing regular Pakistani clothes and looked like ordinary citizens, but they said they were police officers. I asked for identification and one man showed me a police identity card and told me his name. They separated us and began interrogating us. He asked about Rashid, whom I described as a colleague and a friend. He asked what I was doing with a colleague by the lake. I said it was none of his business and that being in a public area with a man was not against the law.

In the recent past, it was not uncommon for policemen to harass couples at scenic places. Dating is not a part of our culture and the police try to use this as an opportunity to scare young couples and extort money from them. Legally, they cannot do anything since this is not an offense, but they can abuse the social situation. If it were a dating couple, their parents probably would not know they are out together. Going to the police station has a strong social stigma, which they would certainly want to avoid. Getting a fat bribe, a wristwatch or a neck chain is a good side business for such corrupt policemen. Sometimes even married couples end up paying a bribe, just to avoid any hassle.

I had heard of such incidents, but never expected it from Islamabad police. Police here are far more disciplined than their counterparts in the provinces. Facing this situation, I was determined not to give in and decided to protect my rights as a respectable citizen. I roused my confidence and started arguing with the man who was talking to me. He said he would have to take me to the police station. Fully confident, I said I was very willing to go. He looked puzzled and said he would have to go talk to my parents. I agreed. He was not going to do either, but only wanted to pressure us so we would start negotiating the bribe.

He took out a tape recorder and asked me to say, "It is late at night and I have been found by the lake with a man." I laughed sarcastically and asked, "Am I insane? Look at the sky. It isn't nighttime!" The man came closer to threaten me. I raised my voice to show him I was not afraid and said, "I know my rights. I know I'm doing nothing wrong." He asked me questions about where I worked and where I lived. I answered confidently, but in my heart, I was concerned because every time I tried to return to my car he blocked my way, acting as if he could get physical and stop me if he had to. The other man was talking to Rashid. I called him and said I wanted to go to the car and show him my identification. I kept talking about going to the police station and slowly walked towards my car. When we reached it, I gestured for Rashid to get in. The policemen tried to open the back door.

"Don't you dare get in my car," I shouted. "If you want us to go to the police station, take your own vehicle. I will not give you a ride." They said they had no car. I said sternly, "Then arrange something, you cannot ride with us!" They became confused and somewhat intimidated.

I took out my UN ID card, rolled down the window and gave it to them. They both looked at it, seeming very puzzled. They had spent an hour with us without getting a penny and were now faced with me not letting them sit in my car. I started my engine, turned the car calmly and drove away. Shocked, they just stood there, not knowing what to do next.

Rashid and I were quite disturbed by this incident, but we still went to the festival, a huge gathering of hundreds of people with live folk music and folk dancing, games and many other family activities. Many friends came over to say hello, but I was upset all evening and did not connect well with anyone.

I could not sleep all night. Furious about the incident, I found the humiliation unbearable. Men readily use all their social contacts to get ahead in their careers. Women, on the other hand, are completely stifled in their ability to build contacts precisely because 95 percent of our colleagues are men. We are forced to live segregated lives and are socially stigmatized if we use the same career building skills as men. This is blatantly unfair, I kept grumbling to myself.

The next day, I contacted the police. They assured me that no law prohibits a woman from being out with a man in public and said they never assign officers to keep an eye on citizens in that way. They guessed the characters we met were impostors, trying to extort money and not from the Islamabad police. I decided to launch a formal complaint. I also immediately informed the UNDP in writing since the incident involved my UN ID card, which they still had. I avoided Tarik, as I did not want him to find an excuse to interact with me again.

When Paul heard what had happened he became very concerned about me. He asked about the consequences of reporting to the police. I told him that the victim is always blamed. In this case, people could spread rumors about my reputation and question why I was there with Rashid in the first place. I said my family was backing me, but I was getting a lot of pressure from other quarters. I told him that since the police were supportive, I would pursue the case, whatever might happen. Paul offered to help me in whatever way he could and asked me to keep him updated. I felt sincerity and warmth in his tone of voice.

The senior police investigation officers had me look at several suspects in a line up, but I did not see the ones who confronted us. Then, one of the culprits called my home still hoping to extort some money from me in exchange for my ID card. I immediately reported this to the police and with their help decided to trap him. I acted as if I was afraid and invited him to my office to negotiate. He was over-confident, thinking that women never speak out and that I would quietly bribe him, fearing any scandal he could concoct against me.

I cued the police and informed the UNDP operations office. The man was caught in no time. They found out that he was a policeman from Rawalpindi, a town that comes under the Punjab provincial police and was using a fake name and ID of the Islamabad police force. His accomplice was a man from his village who assisted him in this part-time venture to make some pocket money. The man spewed out a lot of filth against me as they took him off to jail. The Urdu newspapers covered the story as juicy news; the English papers were a bit more neutral. Some people probably questioned my morals, but I also received many phone calls from men and women who had been harassed in the same way, had felt helpless and had to bribe their way out. They thanked me for standing up for all of them.

Within a few days, a large group of people from the man's village came to the UNDP office. They wanted me to forgive him and not file a police report. One of the UNDP drivers, who

came from the same village, got Tarik to let them sit in his office and to send a message to me. I was furious that he would serve as a go-between. I refused to go, feeling he was siding with his driver rather than protecting me as a UN staff member.

Several large jeeps without number plates began driving past my house. I stopped answering phone calls after the first few callers threatened me if I did not back off. The main culprit had a brother working for a youth wing of a political party. Soon the threats became vile. I disappeared into my house. My family was supportive, which alleviated the pressure somewhat. Kamran kept answering the calls and warding them off. Paul called a couple of times to find out how I was doing.

The police officials were under immense political pressure themselves not to file a formal report. They were being offered bribes. It was only late one night that I was able to file the formal police report with the charges after the police completed their initial investigation.

Because of my case, several women's organizations called a meeting at Bedari with the high police officials of our area. Women complained about constantly being harassed by members of the police force working outside of their duty hours or impostors posing as police to make money. Following that meeting, the local Police Superintendent sent a special notification to all police stations in the vicinity that it was illegal to harass women who were with men in public areas. Through the newspapers, the police also informed people that if police officers were not in uniform, citizens were not obliged to follow any of their instructions or answer any of their questions.

Meanwhile, however, I was still receiving telephone threats from friends and allies of the criminal who had harassed me, demanding that I drop the case. Paul was extremely helpful during this time. He got me a cell phone so I could call the UNDP security or the police anytime I needed to. Cell phones were not common at the time. He occasionally called to find out what was going on and whether I needed something. He was kind and considerate, but never intrusive. He quickly saw that those with power in Pakistani society could misuse the system against people they disliked. People with contacts could get away with anything. The rule of law served the rich and influential. I was lucky to find honest police officials to handle my case in Islamabad.

Tarik tuned in and out of this whole story. He was aware, but not much involved. Since the new international Deputy of Operations had arrived and had gradually begun taking charge of some aspects, Tarik's powers were being reduced somewhat. In addition, since the culprit in my case was a village mate of one of his staff, he did not want to become too involved and gain the villagers' enmity, since they obviously had good connections with certain political leaders. I thought he was playing both sides.

After several months, the accused policeman was finally convicted, dismissed from his job and sentenced to jail. The process was long and took much of my time and energy. This only enhanced my feeling that professional women must always swim upstream. By fighting the case, I felt stronger. If someone humiliates me, I have to stand up for myself. I decided that no matter what others might think, I must always respect myself.

15. CELEBRATING BIRTHDAYS

My mother used to visit me occasionally when I was studying in Minnesota. During one visit, she woke up in the middle of the night and was surprised to see me in my winter coat and snow boots ready to go out. Panicked, she demanded, "It's dark! Where are you going, what time is it?"

"It's 4 am," I answered. "Don't worry, everything is ok! Just go back to sleep and I'll be back soon." She rubbed her eyes and got out of bed. Angrily, she told me to turn the light on and tell her where I was going at such an odd hour. In a rush, I said I was volunteering for an organization focused on domestic violence called St. Paul Intervention Center. The volunteers were contacted right away whenever the police call the Center to say that a woman had been battered. We were trained to go to her home to give her immediate support and crisis counseling.

My mother was frantic. "What are you involved in?" she asked. I kissed her to calm her down and promised to explain in detail later. I was meeting another volunteer at a specific place and I had to leave in a hurry. We went out as two-person teams.

Later, I talked with my mother about my involvement with different crisis centers and my volunteer work as a women's advocate. She knew I was active with student organizations, but was very surprised at this kind of volunteer work at such strange hours. She did not approve of me combining this with my studies, but deep down she was not that surprised. She had grown to expect anything from me.

She asked how such violence could occur in a developed country. She could not understand why these women would put up with violent behavior from their husbands, since all the American women she had seen seemed to be economically independent. I explained that domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment were common here in the USA, but that people were doing something about it and developing ways to stop it. Victims at least had somewhere to go to. I said I wanted to learn things so I could develop my own ideas for Pakistan when I went back home.

In the Eighties, the social movement in Pakistan was very organized with everyone focused on the battle against an extremely repressive military dictator who had made several anti women laws. By 1988, once he was gone, the movement had begun to scatter into smaller groups, with diverse objectives, trying to maintain some legitimacy by undertaking social work. This was the time when I had returned to Pakistan after completing my studies.

Small professional groups began to emerge that focused on obtaining funding from international agencies. Since that time, the Pakistani social movement has come to be dominated by organizations with paid staff rather than volunteers. The foreign aid agencies taught us to focus our attention on time-bound development projects with specific 'deliverables' rather than on social movements with strategic objectives. Old-fashioned, volunteer-based, social activism almost disappeared.

Nevertheless, in 1992, when we founded Bedari we adopted the old-fashioned approach of a volunteer-based citizen's organization. It was truly a membership-based organization with real elections and lots of room for members to form committees, participate in different programmes and provide input into decisions about programmes and procedures. Bedari became a model organization; showing how communities could own a mission and work democratically.

It was Bedari's fourth birthday, the front yard of the Bedari house became a festival ground for its members. We had a colorful and loud community festival with men, women and children running around. Children brought birthday gifts for the organization and some members carried cakes as they walked in the gate. Everyone who attended received a rose from a young member to welcome them. Small booths for fundraising were selling different items. On one side was a wide stage with differently colored banners hanging as a backdrop.

In the midst of the crowd, I saw Paul, looking more handsome than ever in beige pants and light pink shirt. His eyes sparkled as he looked around for a familiar face. I peeped through the spaces between peoples' heads and shoulders from the other end of the huge lawn, filled with Bedari community members celebrating their achievements. Paul walked through the gate to a reception booth. A young girl ran to welcome him with a rose. Paul nodded and smiled at her.

Sadia, a staunch Bedari volunteer, was sitting at the reception desk. She looked up as Paul approached and said hello with a big smile. Paul smiled back and said with surprise, "I've never met anyone around here with green eyes like mine before!" They both laughed. Sadia gave him some introductory materials about Bedari and haggled for a donation. I smiled at the assertiveness of this shy young woman. This was their first meeting. He did not know that she would eventually become like a sister to him.

As a specialist in governance, Paul was interested in how people organize themselves on different platforms. I had invited him to Bedari's birthday thinking he might like to see this community organization as an example of Pakistan's citizens organizing themselves to work on social issues, assuming the diversity of people working together would intrigue him. He moved around and talked to different members-bankers, teachers, homemakers, students-all working for Bedari and owning it as if it were their child.

Paul was pulled into buying helium balloons for a banner that we wanted to release into the sky. We got people to buy a balloon for twenty rupees and tie it to a banner that said "FLY HIGH BEDARI". I took Paul's photograph as he was tying his balloons and then I went over and said hello to him, wanting to make sure he was not feeling lost. I was happy he had come. He seemed to be enjoying himself. A loud announcement startled me. Soon the programme began. I quietly moved behind Paul and started to translate the play for him. He gave me an appreciative look. I was in a radiant pink *shalwar kamiz* and my recently permed curls were bouncing on my head. A painted flower adorned my cheek.

The theatre group performed skits, parodying different Bedari programmes and groups of volunteers. I had prepared a skit making fun of the actors themselves, which they enjoyed immensely. When the drumbeats started, I jumped onto the stage and danced to the music. Many more men, women and children joined me, as we celebrated together. Bedari was a source of satisfaction for thousands of people: for those who received its services, those who volunteered or worked as employees and for those, like me, who were founders and continued to volunteer. I had no idea that, later, I would be criticized within the UN for my relationship with Bedari.

My birthday came within a month of Bedari's. My family had, as usual, arranged a party and invited many of my friends. Although I knew some UNDP people, I had no real friends there, so Paul was the only colleague I invited. I found him friendly and genuine...and I was starting to like him.

All my friends came to the party. While chatting with them I also sat next to Paul and talked with him for a while. He asked many questions about Pakistan's music and I gladly offered to show him some good shops for recorded traditional music. I was happy to learn that he liked tabla. I told him my favorite instrument was sitar, which I had studied during my student years. As usual, my stories were long and his comments were short, not giving much detail.

During the party, a friend asked what was going on between Paul and me. Surprised, I quickly answered, "Nothing!" because that was the truth. I liked him, but had no thoughts of a romantic relationship. She asked me if he was married. I said, "He lives in Pakistan by himself, but I have no idea whether he is married or has children." She scolded me for being so unconcerned about these things. She said, "He is such a good-looking man with a calm personality, at least you should know whether or not he is married. "

I did not know what to say. My only response was, "Do I walk up to him and ask, 'Are you married?' How can I ask such a personal question? He has never volunteered any information and I have never asked. I cannot ask such things." She told me I was a stupid fool. I said that Paul and I had met within the context of work and we shared a mutual respect and a well-defined level of formality.

Her questions made me realize how friendly I was becoming with Paul while knowing so little about his personal life. He was a very private person who did not talk much about himself. I thought that asking him personal questions would make me seem too inquisitive or forward. I am not sure what the hesitation was, since I felt quite comfortable with him.

Paul was very relaxed that evening. As the party ended, it dwindled to some close friends who sat around and talked until late at night. Paul stayed and enjoyed chatting with them. I kept noticing him out of the corner of my eye; to be sure he felt happy and was having a good time. When he was leaving, I walked him out to the gate where he took a nicely folded Indonesian batik sarong from his pocket and gave it to me as a birthday present, saying he was gradually getting to know me better. My friend's question lurked in my mind. I thought about asking him so I could tell my friend that I had, but I could not find the courage, anyway, it just seemed inappropriate.

16. NEW POSSIBILITIES, OLD CHALLENGES

Endings and beginnings have always been important to me. I treat them almost sacredly. At the end of every year, I reflect on my outputs, make new plans and formally say good-bye to the passing year. Going on a long trip, I focus on completing every incomplete task before I leave rather than on preparing for the trip itself. I do not want to be at my destination wondering and worrying about the place I left behind. I want to be there one hundred percent. I like emptying my hard disk of leftovers, incompletes and miscellaneous items. Moving from the old UNDP office building to the new fancy tower was that kind of an occasion for me. I could throw away what I did not need, like my old, leftover, UNIFEM files. I looked at the building when the movers took my things away and sighed. I wished I could bring closure to some unpleasant relationships that I knew would continue to sap my energy. I sat on the floor of my empty office for a while before starting my new chapter of work.

Professionally I had earned a lot of respect for my abilities. Robert, Paul and other senior colleagues had all explicitly commented on my professional competence. At a personal level, other than the dilemmas I faced at UNDP, I had gained quite a bit of personal freedom. I was still very afraid of marriage, thinking of it as a major trap that would take away what freedoms I had secured so far and end the possibility of my becoming a professional woman. I had explained my views to my parents, but they clung to the hope that someday someone might help me change my mind.

Our office finally moved to a tall, new, building, called the Saudi-Pak Tower. It had a sterile entrance, with no Maria to say hello as you entered. Instead, the tower-lobby had scores of dark-blue clad security guards instructing you to go through one security check while your handbag went through another. In a small reception area on one side, two young girls (the ones who allegedly went with Tarik to Bhurban) sat at a high counter behind a bulletproof glass window. The two tiny openings in the glass seemed quite uninviting for conversation. Sterile marble floors and impersonal elevators took me to the ninth floor, where a dark corridor led to my cluster of offices. I did not see a familiar face on the way in. I missed our old building and I missed seeing Maria, now tucked away somewhere in a back room set up for two telephone operators. The good aspect of this move was that many other UN agencies were located on different floors of the tower, while the UNDP, occupying two floors, was less scattered than it had been in the old building. The Programme staff and the Resident Representative sat on the ninth floor while the Operations staff had their offices on the tenth.

Robert called an informal staff meeting in the seventh floor auditorium. There were no chairs so everyone stood in a semi-circle. Robert entered with Tarik on his right. Everyone went quiet. I was standing next to Rensje. "Where is the Deputy for Operations?" I asked.

"I don't know," she whispered back.

"Shouldn't he be here just for a token presence? I feel so bad for him. Tarik gets all the limelight." I complained.

"Shhhh!" she warned.

Robert had started his speech already and I heard him say, "And I must thank Tarik for his hard work, day and night. This would not have been possible without Tarik." Tarik had his famous, beaming, smile. Robert went on and on praising him, saying how proud he felt with colleagues like him. He said that he and Tarik had made history by bringing all the UN agencies together under one roof. He concluded that this move would improve our security and common services and would also lead to better coordination and a unified image of the UN in the country. Everyone clapped and Tarik nodded, looking at everyone.

After the formal speech, Robert asked if people had any problems. Immediately, people started raising concerns about the air circulation, air conditioning, office space distribution and so on. Robert disregarded them all, saying royally, "Well, well, there are bound to be teething problems. So, ladies and gentlemen, shall we have tea?"

Along with the new building, I hoped for a new management system as well. I was pinning my hopes on three things. One was the information that a new Deputy for Programmes would be joining us, the second was Paul's influence on the UNDP's decision-making and third, a review was being scheduled to take a fresh look at the overall strategy of the UNDP's work.

Robert was very pleased with this move; having all the UN agencies in one venue was a feather in his cap as the Resident Coordinator. Tarik was very pleased to be involved in large

rental arrangements, furnishings, design, security services and many other kinds of contracts. Everyone was whispering about the deals and the kickbacks. I was just pleased to see Tarik so busy with Robert and out of my hair.

The only thing that kept bothering me was my contract arrangement. Six months earlier, at the time for my annual contract extension, I had found a three-month contract on my table. I knew whose advances I was not reciprocating. I signed the three-month temporary contract in March, but three more months had now passed and Personnel had still not contacted me.

The new Head of Programmes finally arrived. Harumi Sakaguchi, a middle-aged Japanese man, ended a long managerial vacuum in that position. Paul knew him well from their time together in Nepal and considered him a friend. In the beginning, Paul, Harumi and I got along very well. We had long discussions about the effectiveness of different development approaches. I liked talking to Harumi because he seemed intrigued by new ideas and reflected on issues and actions. I established a good rapport with him. He was the opposite of Robert. While Robert thought he knew it all, Harumi hardly seemed to hold any opinions. Robert made and announced his decisions quickly while Harumi got others' opinions on everything, even issues over which he had no power to decide. Robert was too perfect to the extent of being robotic in his actions, while Harumi was too human and got into the philosophical meaning of every question.

Another three-month contract came to me well after the expiry date of the first one. It arrived without any apology or explanation. I took the matter to Harumi and he told me to discuss it with Tarik because he was sure it was a mistake. He assured me that Robert spoke very highly of me and that everyone respected my competence. He was right because everyone treated me like one of the permanent staff and appreciated my work as well. No one questioned whether I should have my job or not. They assumed I would sort out the contract issues with Tarik. I was amazed at how easily he had gotten away with turning my annual contract extension into a three-month arrangement. Nobody questioned him.

I did not consider it worth talking to Tarik; he was simply trying to force me into his office so he could have juicy conversations with me and get me to accept dinner invitations. I was surprised he could so easily get away with using such tactics to pressure me. I knew he could not get me fired, but could only show me his power in areas where he had authority. The problem was that these three-month contracts had no provision for any annual or sick leave. If I got sick for a day, my pay would be cut. However, I decided to ignore that since I hardly took time off anyway, even on the weekends. As long as I liked my work, I would try to forget about Tarik's meanness and put up with his tricks. Nevertheless, I was displeased with the senior management for not taking care of this matter themselves and leaving him so much room for manipulation.

It was time for the UNDP to review its Programme direction. This Mid-Term Review was Harumi's first challenge. UNDP operated on a six-year programming cycle and held a review at the mid-point to verify that the direction of its programming was still congruent with the circumstances in the country, the availability of resources and the organization's priority. The team-leader of a three member Review Mission was a competent UNDP retired senior professional, Jehan Raheem. He was a Sri Lankan Muslim and very interested in the real development of people. I actively engaged in discussions and produced several write-ups needed for the main report. Jehan Raheem requested my feedback on how the UNDP was handling women's rights issues and I spoke to him candidly.

When the review mission ended, one of the Mission's key findings suggested that the UNDP was not doing justice to women's issues. Although such issues were identified as highly critical in Pakistani society, under the façade of addressing gender as a cross-cutting theme in each area of development, the office had actually just ignored them.

The Mission recommended developing a separate Gender Programme to address the gender gap in the country. For me, this was a dream come true, an answer to my prayers. I had been waiting for such an opportunity. Happily, I had kept my strength and had not given up my job because of a goon like Tarik. I was thrilled at being chosen to develop the Programme.

The concluding meeting of the Review ended. As the staff filed out of the room, Tarik came up behind me. Holding my arm, he pulled me to one side and whispered, "I miss you, baby. How come you ignore me?"

I looked around. Everyone was leaving the hall in a rush and no one was looking at us. His voice was low and his expression sleazy. In a rather loud voice, I said, "I don't like this, Tarik."

He quickly changed his tone to make sure no one noticed our conversation. "Whatever you have to discuss, please come to my office," he said loudly, as he left.

I went back to my office, my blood boiling. I was dying to get back at him. I felt like punching him! I just had to tell him off. I charged to his room, fuming. His secretary rose from his chair and asked if he could help me. "No!" I answered and entered his room.

Tarik was delighted to see me and welcomed me with, "Hi chuchu, how nice that you come to my office. You've not done that lately."

"Tarik, this has to stop!" I raged.

He laughed, "Oh, I always love it when you're angry. You look so sexy."

"I'm telling you not to talk to me like this or I'll complain," I said in a threatening manner.

"I see! Sit down and tell me what's bothering you. Have you had a fight with someone?" He was very casual.

"You know what I mean." I looked sternly in his eyes.

He smirked, "Whenever I see a woman in this mood I say she desperately needs a boyfriend to make her feel good."

"This is too much!" I was furious.

"You know our colleague, Saima," he went on "she always gets angry about this and that. I don't know what her husband does, but I say she needs a big..." He made a hand gesture with his fist closed.

"You'd better watch yourself, mister. You think by fiddling with my contract you can put pressure on me."

"Oh, so that's what's bothering you. Come sit, sit. I always bend backwards for my friends. There's nothing we can't sort out. Come on, sit down and calm yourself. I've always considered you my friend, Fouzia." He tried to say all this in a caring tone, but it came across as sleazy.

I kept standing and said, "I only consider you my colleague," and moved to leave.

"Isn't that sad." he spoke sarcastically, with a threat in his voice.

Back in my room, I was even angrier than before. I decided that confrontation with Tarik was a bad idea. I might have made things worse. He was shameless and who knew what he would

do now. I did not want him to spoil what I had just gained professionally. I finally had an opportunity, but he was sitting like a thorn on the stem of a rose. Every time I tried to reach for the flower, I hurt my hand.

17. TRANSIT TO FRIENDSHIP

The workday was almost over. Paul's blue coat hung over his chair. He had asked me to come to his office. As I entered, I could see a thick red band of light in the sky through the narrow vertical window. "This slit of a window is better than nothing; you can catch a glimpse of the beautiful sunset," I said, sitting down opposite his desk. Paul looked at me with a smile. He was enjoying the pleasure that the results of the Mid-Term Review brought to my face. I smiled back. In this moment of silence, we exchanged a strong sense of solidarity and happiness.

Still smiling, Paul said, "I've had detailed discussions with Jehan Raheem and Harumi. You can start conceptualizing your full-fledged Programme on Gender now. I'll be developing a Programme on Governance myself and would like your help."

"Sure, I can help you. I am very excited about working on my Gender Programme though."

"You have your independent work, but Harumi says I can assign you some Governance related tasks also," said Paul, bending forward.

"Oh," I remarked seriously.

"You don't seem too excited about it," he said, a bit surprised.

"It's just that I'm very excited about developing the new Gender Programme, so I wasn't thinking of any Governance assignments."

"Well, like I said, you do have your independent portfolio. I was just hoping you could help me connect with community groups to develop ideas for my Programme. I hear that is your specialty and you know a lot of people." I smiled and he continued. "The other job concerns a big project we are starting in four districts as a local governance project. Harumi would like you to help out in the Balochistan segment of it."

"Ok," I said politely, but not enthusiastically. He paused, noticing the weight of obligation in my voice. He laughed aloud, which he rarely did. I liked how his eyes laughed with him.

I hesitantly mentioned my contract issue. Like everyone else, he quickly responded, "I don't know much about personnel issues, I think Tarik would be the best person to help out." I was so tired of this answer that I didn't pursue it. As I was leaving, he called me. When I turned around, he said, with some hesitation, "You look...what you are wearing looks very nice." I glanced at my clothes—dark blue chiffon *shalwar kamiz* with a big flowing veil on my shoulders. I smiled sheepishly and gave him a nod.

Paul finalized his dates for Karachi and asked me to help him organize his trip. He wanted to meet with interesting people who could become partners with the UNDP. I was my super-organized self, making detailed itineraries, squeezing in meetings here and there. My passion for the wonderful work being done by the highly committed citizens' groups, independent of foreign aid agencies, was reflected in my briefings to Paul. Sometimes I saw him smiling at my enthusiasm.

The trip would also be a good opportunity for us to learn more about each other's ideas and lives. That was certainly not the original intention, but it turned out to be a step towards each other.

During this trip, I took him to meet the dynamic Jamil Yousuf, a founding member of the Citizen Police Liaison Committee, a civic group that came into existence after the police failed to stop the indiscriminate kidnappings of the children of rich industrialists in Karachi. The need for the community to build some trust in the police and assist them in their investigations was one of the initial purposes. Gradually, the group developed skills and the trust of the larger community and the government. The senior members, including Jamil, were granted official magisterial status, allowing them to investigate crimes and coordinate with the police in a professional manner.

I also introduced Paul to human-rights groups, including the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and the Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid. I took him to see some organizations and individuals who were dealing with information technology, another aspect in his evolving Governance Programme. I had kept both evenings free for any dinner meetings we might want to plan as a follow up. The first night I asked my friends Shifa and Naeem to arrange a dinner and invite people who were active in Karachi. Paul made some interesting contacts and got a feel for citizens' involvement in larger community issues.

After finishing the second day's meetings, we found ourselves free in the evening. I decided to take Paul sightseeing, but Karachi has such bad traffic that it turned more into a journey through carbon monoxide fumes and intolerable noise levels. Finally, we arrived at the Karachi harbor. Not a particularly clean or scenic place, as such, but, at night, if you rent a sailboat especially arranged for visitors, the lights of the city from the harbor can be quite beautiful. Fishermen have adopted this business as a sideline to cater to local tourists and well-off residents. They decorate their boats brightly and put comfortable cushioned benches around the back. They sail you to the outer harbor, catch crabs with a hand line and then prepare a rough meal. This had been one of my favorite activities when I lived in Karachi and I often took my friends and visitors for this boat-dinner.

I asked Paul if he wanted to do that and he agreed. He watched me organize the boat-ride quickly, haggle over the price and order what we needed for dinner. Although he did not know Urdu, I somehow felt he could understand everything and was smiling at how I did things. I was a bit self-conscious. Our crew of four moved swiftly around the boat chasing the wind and swinging the sails. Paul and I talked about the world in general, hesitant to bring up our personal lives. We sat in the back of the boat while the crew started making dinner in the front. Our silence said more than our words.

Paul had the courage to bring up his personal life first. Without my asking, he said he had been married, but was divorced. I remained silent. He continued that he was not interested in having a relationship again and preferred living alone. We sat there quietly at opposite ends of a long seat, looking in different directions. After a while he said, "I bet you've never been married."

Looking at him for a moment, I answered, "You're right." I was happy that he had shared something personal with me, as a friend. I did not have such well-defined feelings for him to be disappointed at his confession that he did not want to have another relationship in his life. Paul was not a talkative person and from those few sentences, I could tell it was not easy for him to reveal personal things.

Two small gaslights were placed before us as the sun set on the ocean. While our food was served we talked about our ideas for the new Governance and Gender Programmes. Nothing else personal came up. Actually, we found comfort in familiar talk about work, however odd it seemed to discuss the UNDP in the romantic context of gas lamps, crab dinner and the shimmering city-lights.

By the time we returned to the hotel, we were more comfortable. We decided to sit under the tall palm trees on the hotel lawn. An inlet of water from the ocean gave this space a lovely ambiance. We ordered cold drinks and relaxed in Karachi's warm evening breeze. We were more at ease by now and started talking to each other about our personal lives. I described my background, my childhood and my struggle to create space for myself in my life. Later, I realized that I had mentioned things I had shared only with very few others. Paul also talked about his parents and his childhood. When we got back to Islamabad, I felt our friendship had become stronger. A respectful distance remained, but it was easily bridged with the trust that had been built between us.

18. FIRST MEMBER OF THE GENDER TEAM

I did not see Paul for a few days after we returned from Karachi. I knew he was leaving for Mongolia, but I hesitated to go to his office. My heart was warm in a way I could not name. Picking up the typed programme for our Karachi trip from my desk, I glanced through it, stopping at "evening free for any follow up meetings". Smiling, I put it away.

I tried to turn my attention to the initial concept paper I was writing for my Programme. I pulled out some reports and started to read. After about an hour, the phone rang. It was Paul. My heart raced, but I quickly calmed myself. "Hi, in two days I'm leaving for a month. I need to go over some things with you about your new Programme. Can you come to my office?" He sounded very professional.

"Sure," I responded. I quickly fixed my hair, straightened my *dopatta*, picked up a notebook and a pen and rushed to his office. He seemed to be buried in work, with several stacks of papers and reports piled on his desk. I said hello. He answered, but was too absorbed in his reading to look up. I glanced through his narrow vertical window and saw the Margalla hills partially covered in clouds. That gave me a good feeling. I sat on a chair facing his desk and waited, wondering whether he would refer to our Karachi trip at all.

After a while, Paul finished and got straight to business, putting me at ease. I was used to that mode of professional discussion with him. "Harumi and I talked about your new Programme. I'm managing some new funds from New York that can be re-directed so you can develop it properly." He spoke seriously.

"Oh, thank you!" I said, feeling very grateful. "Does this mean I could get some professional help and organize meetings where competent people can provide inputs?"

Paul smiled. "Yes, you can. That is how the funds are to be used. You can have national and international consultants as well."

I was thrilled with the new possibilities and said excitedly, “Maybe my decision to join the UN will pay off after all. Now I’ve got an opportunity to identify the most critical aspects of women’s issues in Pakistan.” Paul laughed to see me as excited as a child and I loved his laughter. I continued talking, without looking into his eyes. “I’ve been complaining about how the aid agencies and international agencies don’t fully understand the underlying factors leading to the suppression of women here. They only deal with symptoms and don’t touch the key issues because that would threaten the conservative male government representatives.” I looked up to make sure he was listening and continued, “I’ve opposed most of the token development programmes for women, which get them into low-paid economic activity that pushes them further into a cycle of poverty.”

“Well, now you can develop something that will set a new trend, an example to show how to develop projects around strategic issues and yet have them implemented effectively.” Paul finished my thought with confidence. He paused.

I felt that he had finished our conversation and wanted to move on to some other work, but I knew he was traveling soon and I wanted to know more about this fund and what I could or could not do before he left. At the expense of imposing myself, I fixed my *dopatta* and continued talking. “I’ve already started to design the core of the Programme.”

“Ok,” he said, looking at a file.

“I don’t think I’ll need any international consultant. We have very talented and capable people in Pakistan in every sector of development and I’d like to get them involved in designing this new Programme.”

“Sure!” he replied, glancing at his computer screen.

“If you don’t mind, I’d like to use participatory methods to draw out information.”

He paused, looked at me and then smiled, “Go for it. I fully endorse your ideas.”

I shrugged my shoulders and smiled back. I still was not done. I spoke more urgently now. “I was thinking of having a few separate gatherings—you can call them workshops. I want to invite people from different walks of life, especially those with insights into the specific themes I’ll be working on and carry out a two-day structured process with them.”

“Yes, that’s fine. I see what you’re trying to do. Go ahead. Just keep Harumi in the picture.” He pulled a file from his drawer.

“Ok then, I’ll get going.” I got up and smiled at him. He smiled back. I liked his trust and confidence in me. His smiling face froze in my memory.

Back to my office, I could not believe I had such a free hand to develop a new Programme in my own way. I sat at my desk and thought of whom I could contact to help me. I needed someone who could run with me.

Sadia came to mind. An active Bedari member, I knew she was working for some German-supported health organization. She was quite hard-working and had made a very positive impression on me as a Bedari employee. I pulled some CVs from our files to look at as well and started making calls. When I called Sadia, I seemed to have caught her at a bad moment. She was too upset to talk to me. I got worried. She told me she was having major problems at work and I said I would come see her. She agreed immediately. I drove over and found her seriously stressed. I could hardly recognize her fresh and beautiful face. She looked very innocent and helpless.

Sadia had lived all her life in Gujranwala, an industrial city not far from Lahore, while her brother had the chance to study abroad for several years. Neither he nor other members of their family could understand Sadia's yearning to make her own destiny. Most of her friends just hoped for a good husband and started preparing their dowries, but Sadia wanted to find a different path of her own. She was quiet and polite, but never a conformist. She finished her Master's degree and found herself a teaching job, thinking that outside employment would get her off the beaten path.

After teaching in a private school for a few years, Sadia wanted to leave Gujranwala. She wanted to be away from family and friends who did not understand her. She was different from the rest of her family in every way. The youngest of six siblings, she was pampered and at the same time overprotected. Getting a Master's degree and working was all her family would allow. They would never permit her to move out of town. In our society, a young woman moving to a new place with her husband was fine, but not on her own. Why should she go? What would they tell the relatives? How could they stop them from gossiping about their daughter?

Finally, her brother helped her and brought her to Islamabad. She was a stranger here and Bedari was her first workplace. She adopted it as her second home. After about a year, she had left for a job in a public health agency.

"Sadia what's wrong? I don't know anyone more polite than you. How can you have problems adjusting?" I asked her.

Sadia got up and hugged me. Then she told me about a meeting she had with the head of her organization. She went to see him because she could not take the gossip and leg-pulling that pervaded the office. She told her boss that life was hell here and he asked for more specifics. "How could he not understand what I was saying?" she fumed and started sobbing again.

I could not help laughing, "Sadia, he's right. You need to give some details and be specific about how your colleagues are bothering you."

Sadia did not appreciate my laughter and said, "I want to work and these people won't let me. They're horrible! The two who share my office are always knitting sweaters and...I hate my supervisor. She snubs me all the time and is very insecure. Do you know what I mean?"

This seemed like a good time to tell her about the option to work with me. Sadia had a Masters degree and work experience in organizing and managing activities, making her an attractive candidate for me. I told her my offer was only for a short term and she needed to think carefully before giving up a more permanent position. She was pleased about the opportunity, but told me she would think about it.

To calm her down I started talking about her past work experience at Bedari. She smiled, telling me how much she had learned. She loved organizing programmes and interacting with the members. She proudly said that she was still volunteering and I told her I was too. "Hey, you've met Paul!" I reminded her. "Remember, at Bedari's birthday celebration, when you were at the reception booth."

"Yes, he seemed to be a very nice person," she smiled.

"Well, you'd be working with me and him and our boss, who is Japanese and is also very nice."

One of her colleagues came in, gave us a dirty look and sat at her table. She took out her knitting and got to work. I smiled at Sadia and said, "I better go."

“No wait!” She held my arm and looked around hesitantly. “When did you say I could come to meet with your colleagues?” She was careful not to mention the words “job interview”.

“Well, one of them is leaving the country for a while so the sooner the better.”

“Okay, count me in. Get me an appointment, okay.”

“Sure I will. And I hope it goes well.” I replied with a wink.

Paul and Harumi interviewed her the next day and I was able to get her a modest three-month contract. I was very pleased to have a partner on my team. Now with the new office, an opportunity to develop a new Programme and a new supervisor like Harumi, I was putting together the foundation for a new Gender Unit. Life was looking great. I kept suppressing the only bad feeling I had and did not let it affect my enthusiasm, but it did affect my body. I was having unusual stomachaches and becoming short-tempered. However, I kept my focus on my Programme and went ahead with full speed like an arrow.

19. ADDRESSING THE GENDER GAP

I organized the new Gender Programme based on four key documents. The first two were the Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration, both outcomes of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. Another was the UN declaration called CEDAW, the Convention on Eliminating all forms of Discrimination Against Women. The last was the National Plan prepared by the government and civil society of Pakistan, highlighting women’s needs and priorities. In my opinion, these documents reflected years of research and cross-nation consultations on what the priority issues for women were. For Pakistan, the gender gap between men and women was the most glaring issue. Anything to reduce that gap seemed to be the first priority.

Operationally, since I was not using the local UNDP funds I did not have to go through Tarik for every transaction. Harumi gave me approval for hiring decisions and I cleared the expenditures through New York. UNDP Pakistan only arranged the final release of funds. This mechanism was a relief for me.

I was making sure to properly groom Sadia for her position and so to use her as a sounding board for my ideas. I had made space for her table in my office. A good thing about having Sadia around was that she reminded me when it was lunchtime. By myself, I often forgot to eat. One day, on the way to the cafeteria, I could not stop talking about our work. I said, “We have to build our programme around women’s empowerment. Empowerment of women is two-fold. One aspect is a personal process where the woman becomes increasingly aware of her potentials, capacities and rights. This includes understanding her social conditioning.”

“Social conditioning?” she asked, looking puzzled as she pushed the elevator call button.

“See, change alone doesn’t bring empowerment; awareness of the process of change in a person is what empowers her. For example, now that you are living in Islamabad by yourself and not in your hometown with your family, you will change. The change will take place whether you are aware of it or not. But if you are aware of the factors that are facilitating that change and of the factors that actually stopped you from behaving that way when you were living in your family, then

that process of reflection and awareness will give you certain strength.” I was explaining this while we stepped into the elevator.

“Hmm!” she thought about it and then asked, “What’s the other aspect of women’s empowerment? You said there were two.”

Happy that she was listening, I continued, “The other aspect relates to her surroundings. Changes in her surroundings can also facilitate empowerment: better laws, opportunities, open environment, access to learning, space to reflect, space for her to participate at all levels, democratic systems. These things help and support the individual process I was just talking about.” I wanted her to think about her own circumstances. I went on, “A woman unfolds her inner strengths and transforms her role by using her new awareness. We can work on both aspects: the personal process of an individual and making the environment more enabling for her to transform. She has to expand her choices and eventually transform gender relations.”

“It sounds very good, but how will we do that?” she asked very innocently. We walked out of the elevator and into the cafeteria. Sitting with our lunch at a small table in a corner, Sadia explained how coming to Islamabad had changed her. She said, “I miss my family, but I enjoy doing whatever I choose.” Her eyes sparkled, “I never experienced that before.”

“But you went to the university and did your Master’s and you had a job. Didn’t that give you a feeling of independence?”

“I was the youngest in my family,” she smiled, “always the youngest, no matter how grown up I thought I was. I did only what my parents allowed. I am not talking of unusual restrictions, just our regular way of life. I had to ask my mother for permission to go to the market or to meet a friend. When I got back, one brother would ask me where I had been, which friend I had seen. Then my elder brother would ask the same questions. You know how families are. However, I’m proud to say one thing: I used to go to my job all by myself. Most of my friends were driven by their fathers or brothers.”

I smiled and asked, “How is life in your hostel? Have you made good friends?”

“Yes, one girl. Her parents live in Peshawar and she works here.” Sadia continued, very engaged in the conversation and at the same time trying to eat. “I think that the secret of women’s empowerment is economic independence. The other things come with it.”

“I disagree,” I said with passion. Sadia suddenly stopped eating as if she had made a mistake. She looked at me worriedly. I went on. “I fully acknowledge your point, but I think it’s a deception that once women start earning an income the rest will follow. Tell me, now that you have your own salary, can you decide where to spend it or do you send it home?”

“I’m free to spend it. I basically meet my expenses from it and then buy gifts for my family when I go home.”

“When you go home and spend time with your family do you think your opinion is now as important as your brother’s?”

“Oh, no!” She laughed. “My brother is like a prince. When he’s upset we all walk on tip toes to be sure nothing aggravates him; when I get angry everyone tells me I’m a spoiled child.”

I laughed at her frankness. “Do you think if you start earning more than him things would change?”

“No, my parents have a very high opinion of what he says. Somehow it’s almost like they’re obligated to listen to him even when they don’t agree.”

“Why do you think that is?” I asked.

Sadia stopped eating; a strange worried expression spread over her face as she thought very hard. She looked at me, paused and said, “I don’t know.”

I smiled and said, “Many women might argue with me that because they earn and contribute to the family economically their opinion carries more weight. There is a lot of truth in that, but it’s not the whole truth.”

I told her that when I was in America, I noticed that almost every woman earned money. They were mobile, independent and had jobs, but that did not ensure equality. Women still faced sexual harassment, domestic violence and rape. Sadia kept eating, but I was on my soapbox, oblivious to my food. I told her about a woman I met through a crisis center; her husband had beaten her regularly for thirty years. She had a job and probably earned more than he did. She had two adult sons, but this was the first time she had the courage to dial 911 for emergency help. I have thought a lot about her these past few days. Her situation appeared to be different from that of a Pakistani woman’s, but perhaps was not so different after all. “It’s not the condition, but the position of women that has to be changed,” I concluded.

“What?” Sadia asked, narrowing her eyes.

“I said merely changing the conditions of women doesn’t help that much unless we change their position in comparison to men. No matter how intelligent we are or how much we earn, society has the concept that we are lesser humans.” I got ready to go. Sadia noticed that I had hardly touched my food, but stayed quiet. I asked her, “Do you know how common domestic violence is in Pakistan? And do you know what that indicates?”

“I didn’t realize it before, but when I worked at Bedari I learned how common it is,” she answered.

“Yes, among the poor and the rich. Actually, the lower status of a poor woman gives her more space to protest about a violation of her rights; a rich woman has much more to lose so she just puts make up on her bruises and praises her husband to the neighbors to keep up the façade.” I continued, “It’s very important that we look at the strategic needs of women, at their rights as citizens, their role in decision-making, their role as leaders, their space in business, in administration, in family and in running the country.”

Going back to our office, we saw Tarik. My expression froze, but I quickly recovered and said hello. I looked at Sadia. She was very beautiful and he must be wondering who she was. Noticing his eyes, I didn’t feel like introducing her. He did not say much, just gave me a big smile, waved at us and carried on.

I told myself that my Ph.D. and a decent salary mean nothing when I enter Tarik’s room. I turned to Sadia and said, “This is why our Gender Programme will focus on economic empowerment, political empowerment and social empowerment. Economic rights alone won’t do it for women.” I saw a satisfied smile on her face. She was beginning to understand the dimensions of our work and was more prepared to plan our upcoming consultative workshops.

Sadia and I worked out a plan for our series of gatherings on specific themes. We invited university professors, private sector people, representatives from international organizations,

government representatives and lots of very active women to attend our planning meetings. The mix of participants was full of sparks and ideas. Harumi was impressed and I was thrilled to be free to move ahead on my own.

We needed to hire a few consultants. I needed people to start preparing proposals that emerged out of the priorities identified in the meetings. Soon enough we hired several more consultants to add to the team.

I was using funds from Paul's project, which were managed directly from New York, so I tried my best to do my team's paper work directly, reducing the involvement of Tarik's office to a minimum. Sadia and I had mastered the process of getting workshop budgets and short-term consultants approved from the relevant authorities. Although the UNDP's office in Pakistan only had to release funds according to the orders of the NY office, Tarik made sure we knew who was boss. We had to tiptoe around him to make sure that our payments got through the final hurdle.

One day, he called me and said some 'matters needed to be reviewed'. To protect Sadia and the other consultants from him, I dealt with him alone. When I entered his office, he rose to welcome me in his artificial way.

"Hi, Tarik, you seem very busy." I decided to say this to him before he said it to me. Because things were going so well for our Programme, I considered him as merely a nuisance that I would have to tolerate.

"You know, that's what I wanted to say to you. You have this access to Paul's project and you don't even talk to us anymore." He spoke in his sleazy tone.

"How can I not talk to your office?" I sat down, pretending to be very comfortable and confident. "After all, it's your office that releases the payments." He offered me a drink and I refused politely saying, "I know you're busy, so I don't want to take your time. You're doing a lot of work for Robert." I sounded concerned. My comment hit him in the right place.

"I can't tell you, Fouzia. I hardly sleep! I do MY job and god knows who else's because I am doing everything. You know, my section heads are worthless and my supervisor depends on me for everything ...which means," he laughed, "that I do his work, too."

I smiled artificially and said, "Robert is lucky to have you." I hated myself for saying that. What a hypocrite I was becoming, I just did not want him to be intrusive. Our consultative process was going so well and with such good speed.

"So, what keeps you busy?" he relaxed back in his chair. His posture made me very uncomfortable. He put his hands in his pant pockets and kept stretching the crotch of his pants.

"I have a whole Programme to develop. That is a big job. We sent you the memo for release of payments...?"

"You know the best thing about getting a Gender Programme going is that we have so many women around. Believe me, it's very nice." He giggled. "Our office is becoming so colorful!"

I gave a restrained smile and picked up our memo, which was sitting in front of him. "Oh, yes...here it is. See, we'll keep doing the same kind of meetings so the process will be very similar." I ignored his comment.

He interrupted me. "I will never forgive you for one thing."

"And that is...?" My mind raced to guess.

“You interviewed so many beautiful young ladies and didn’t put me on the panel.” He blushed, laughed and continued shuffling in his chair. “Now what does Harumi know about women? What can he ask or tell about women?” He laughed again.

I maintained my smile. Controlling my temper was difficult, but I kept telling myself, “Stay calm, stay calm. You only need him to release our payments.” I quickly took charge of the conversation and said firmly, “I expect full support from your side and from your team. They’ve been very cooperative so far.”

“Yes, of course, of course.” He threw himself back in his chair and started swinging from side to side. “Tell me what I can do to help.”

I was very tempted to make some genuine demands, to ask for another room for consultants. Currently four consultants were sharing my room full time, all using my computer. I had asked Harumi for a room and a few computers but he just referred me to Tarik, so that was the end of it. Each day, the gender team waited for 5 o’clock, when most people had left, and then started working on other people’s computers. I held all that inside and just responded calmly, “Nothing, just releasing funds on time would be very good.” Still smiling, I left his office with a feeling of relief.

I noticed that the secretary outside his room was a man and Kausar was sitting in an adjoining room with the Communications Section. She quickly got up from her desk and hugged me tightly. I did not understand the meaning of this affection, but perhaps she somehow understood my concerns for her. While we talked, other people sitting in the Communications Section made several snide remarks about her, saying loudly, “She is flying high,” “The princess doesn’t have to work, she comes when she pleases,” and “We all are her slaves.” I could tell that the situation was getting out of hand and people resented housing Tarik’s girlfriend in their Section. I was annoyed that they pointed all their criticism at her. Nobody had the courage to taunt Tarik.

Meanwhile, I received a very nice hand written note from Paul mailed from China on his way to Mongolia. The letter tickled my heart and showed me he was very happy with the friendship we had established. I was pleased.

My regular office hours extended to about fifteen hours a day. During the day, we would all be organizing our meetings; some of us following up to make sure our partner Government Ministries were on board and others following up with the participants. In the evenings, we would do our written work.

One day Sadia came back from Finance and said, “We’ve developed great rapport with the junior clerks in Operations. They seem to have a lot of respect for us after seeing so much activity in our office. Many people asked me about our meetings. They said they’ve never seen villagers in our building before.”

One of our planning meetings was underway with the theme of social empowerment of women. The participants had made themselves comfortable. Some sat on the floor, some on chairs and some at tables pushing water and tea set up off to one side. Several small group discussions took place on the carpeted floor in traditional Pakistani style. Harumi came over a few times. He did not enter the hall, but stood by the door and was astonished at the ambiance and interactions. He seemed quite fascinated. I knew this group would go for the jugular. They concluded that the

first aim of the social empowerment of women should be to consider them as full human beings. They said human dignity is a right of women and should be the goal of this programme.

Human dignity was also something that women in the UNDP desperately needed. As far as women's core issues were concerned, I strongly felt that in some ways a woman in the remotest village and someone like me, living in Islamabad and working for the UN, were on the same level. I felt a strong sense of solidarity with women at all levels who had to face various kinds of indignities.

20. MY TEAM IN ACTION

We heard that two young, foreign women were about to join our office as Junior Programme Officers (JPO). The UN has a system through which national governments send promising young people for work experience with the UN development agencies. The countries fund these positions for one or two years, to give promising young professionals an opportunity to start their careers. The UN appreciates the cheap labor and the individuals gain experience. A British and a Japanese JPO soon came to work. I had always thought that, within the UN, nationalities should not matter, but interestingly enough Robert took the British JPO under his wing in the Interagency Unit and Harumi took the Japanese one to groom for the Gender Unit.

Masako, the Japanese JPO, was a thin young woman of medium height, with straight shoulder-length black hair. She was both elegant and intelligent. Quite perceptive, she quickly adopted Pakistani ways and bought loads of beautiful *shalwar kamiz*. Since Pakistanis consider non-Pakistanis wearing *shalwar kamiz* a sign of respect for our culture, she was immediately accepted and respected within the office.

The British JPO, Rachel, was a tall, thin woman, with sharp features and straight blond hair. She worked with Robert to support his interagency role. This was a forum for all the UN agencies to come together to discuss joint programming issues, security concerns and other areas requiring coordination. Tarik also worked very closely with Robert on this. Moving all the UN agencies to the Saudi Pak Tower was a part of this task. Rachel was young, unfamiliar with Pakistan and did not have a team to support her. She worked with Robert and Tasneem, Robert's secretary for the Interagency Unit, but was mostly on her own.

My team complained about the lack of space, but I could not do much. Harumi was not willing to write a simple memo to the administration for more rooms. He told me to discuss it with Tarik, which I did not want to do. I could not tell my team why I could not push the administration. I never wanted them to go to Tarik for anything, directly. I felt I had to protect them and could only risk myself, so all contact between my team and Tarik went through me.

Sitting and working in cramped quarters brought us personally close. Sadia shared the problems she heard about from her hostel-mates, all of them young working women. Masako asked many questions, seeking to understand Pakistani urban women's issues. Our gender consultants shared personal issues along with the hardships of being professional women.

We operated well as a team. Although we sat in one small room, we were quite visible. We were very active and seen everywhere. Extremely self-sufficient, we learned not to expect any help from UNDP. Actually, it was unrealistic to expect much help, as the office could never move as

fast as we did in our activities. We handled all our own logistical, administrative, secretarial and substantive work. We also had a lot of fun together.

I wanted this Programme to be a role-model for other development organizations that worked in a normal way. The development community had now started talking about rights and I wanted them to see how a programme could be built around rights with a strategic perspective. In addition, I wanted them to understand that not all programmes for women's advancement needed to be run through the Ministry of Women's Development. I personally disagreed with the concept of having such a ministry, which many developing countries had established during the mid-eighties. I wanted our projects to be linked to various government departments directly. I had to struggle hard to get both UNDP and the Government to agree to this point. Finally, we got the Ministries of Commerce, Agriculture, Labor, Information and Finance involved. In addition, we worked with the Transport Division and the Election Commission, something the aid agencies funding women's development in Pakistan found unbelievable.

My mother was very upset with me for the long hours I spent at work. She understood my passion, but worried about my health. I hardly saw my family during these months. I did not take any weekends off and if, by chance, I went home before people went to sleep, I would talk incessantly about what I was doing at work. Both my excitement and the spirit within the gender team were very high. We were literally working "day and night".

After the meetings on Social, Political and Economic Empowerment, we decided to select a few significant issues from our Social Empowerment meeting and organize meetings specifically on those. Women's mobility was one of them. This included the social constraints women face obtaining permission and support from their families to leave their houses, as well as availability and other issues of the transport system itself.

We decided to hold the mobility meeting in Lahore, with the timing to coincide with Paul's return from Mongolia so he could inaugurate it. As a major urban metropolitan city, women in Lahore are quite engaged in both formal and informal work. Access to public transportation is a major problem for women, making it a good test case.

I was looking forward to Paul's return. He was flying back directly to Lahore. I had missed our discussions and our arguments. I had missed seeing his colorful neckties. In fact, I had simply missed seeing him and decided to go to the airport to meet him. He was easy to find in the crowd. He was taller than everyone else and wore a light coat and a Panama hat. He was surprised to see me and said I should have just sent a driver. I was not sure if I had behaved inappropriately or he was being modest. I welcomed him politely. In the car, I gave him an overview of what our meeting on women's mobility was going to be like, sounding very professional.

The Gender Team was in Lahore in full strength and we had engaged a good consultant to facilitate the process. Our participants included community women who used public transport, owners and staff of public and private transport systems, traffic police, the Transport Division of the Government and other interested community people.

Paul opened the meeting. He was well-prepared for his opening, mentioning several examples in Brazil and elsewhere of communities taking the initiative to transform their local transport systems. I always appreciated his emphasis on people taking charge of their own progress and social change, unlike our traditional development experts who referred to people as "target

groups” or “beneficiaries”. As a Pakistani, I always identified with people searching for their own way out of suppression and difficulties.

Our meeting went very well, with private transporters and officials responsible for the public transportation system listening to what women had to go through when drivers or conductors harassed them. A sense of ownership developed during this meeting and later became so strong through the initiative we took with the Division of Transport and other groups that it continued long after the UNDP pulled out of this area. Women’s mobility as a genuine cause was introduced as a social issue because of our initiative and in later years, many other organizations worked on it directly.

When we returned to Islamabad, I went to Paul’s office. He was not there so I left a message on his desk to call me for a briefing on the Gender Programme. I wanted to give him the full picture. He did not call until just before the end of the working day. It was very nice to hear his voice politely asking me to come to his room if I was not busy. I immediately agreed and rushed to pick up the pile of papers and files I had prepared for him. Sadia stopped me at the door and gave me a hairbrush. I laughed, but I did use it. I fixed my dopatta and asked her, “Do I look OK, now?” She said, “Yes. Now you can go.”

Paul had piles of files on his desk. “Catching up?” I asked cheerfully as I entered his room.

“Don’t even mention it, but now it’s under control.” I sat down across from him and put my package on the desk. “Sorry I didn’t call you earlier. I wanted to take time to see what you’ve done. I didn’t want to do it in a rush.” He pushed some files to one side, folded his arms in front of him and looked at me, “Now I can give you my full attention.”

I got into my super professional mode and took out the materials from the package. I went through the overall design for developing the Gender Programme and then discussed each consultative meeting, telling him about the participants, key findings and project ideas we were thinking about. I noticed that sometimes he looked at the materials and sometimes he just looked at me and smiled. I think he was smiling at the intensity that came through in my descriptions. I went through the entire package explaining what we had done. Paul did not say a word. When I was done, I looked up and concluded, “That’s it! You saw the meeting in Lahore. Our last one will be organized in Islamabad on Women and Media.”

He smiled and raised his eyebrows, saying, “I’m impressed. I never thought you and your team could achieve so much and do such a thorough job.”

I breathed deeply and gave him a proud smile, extremely pleased with his comment. I waited for a while, but when he did not say anything else, I decided to leave on that note. I took another deep breath and said, “Ok, I’ll leave now.” He nodded, still smiling. I knew that he alone in the management could understand the worth of what we were doing. I smiled back at him, got up and left the room.

Paul got to know me better through the way I worked on social issues and I got to know him more through his way of operating at work. The next month was like magic. We understood each other without saying much.

SECTION THREE: BITTERSWEET REALITIES

21. STARTING TO GET SERIOUS

By fall, Paul and I had become quite good friends. We understood each other's ideas well and appreciated each other's professionalism and honesty. He felt comfortable enough to start visiting me at my home. He met my family and usually found the house full of different types of people—sometimes activists having heated discussions; sometimes theatre artists rehearsing on our lawn or celebrating a successful performance; sometimes musicians visiting from another town, sleeping on our living-room floor or resting before going to a performance; and at other times just relatives from Lahore eating and joking around. My home was a very lively place, open and welcoming. My mother was the central figure and made everyone comfortable. My father was in Germany at the time. Although my mother's English was not fluent, she managed to talk to Paul enough to put him at ease.

Paul liked talking to Kamran. We three had all kinds of philosophical discussions. We would question the underpinnings of traditional development models as we discussed the subtle dynamics of social change, Pakistan's political situation and future strategies for broad-based reform. At least Paul's visits made me come home in the evening. Otherwise, I used to remain at my office from 7:30 in the morning until 10 or 11 at night.

A meeting was scheduled in Quetta, the 'mile-high' provincial capital of Balochistan in Pakistan's southwest, an area marked by rugged mountains and tribal culture. The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate all of the UNDP-funded initiatives in the area. Both Paul and I were asked to attend besides several other members of the programme staff from other Units of the UNDP. We stayed at the Serena, the biggest hotel in town, where all the development lords stayed.

I had found out that the weekend was Paul's birthday. Thinking a lot about what to do for his special day, I ordered a cake and flowers for him at the hotel. In the late evening, after finishing our meetings and dinner with other colleagues, Paul and I got together for a little while, but he seemed a bit embarrassed about my gesture. That warned me that he was not into birthday celebrations the way I was.

The next day we had decided that if we finished our meetings on schedule we would take some time out and go to a nearby lake. We both managed to get to Hanna Lake, in the middle of the rugged and dry mountains, just outside the city of Quetta. Since we were always surrounded by so much work, it was nice to find ourselves in a non-work environment. A long drought had dried it out quite a bit so the area seemed almost haunted. There was a walking path around the lake and we decided to take the walk.

After discussing our previous day's meetings, we started to talk about our personal lives. Without defining our relationship, Paul and I had become closer over the past month. We were now very comfortable as friends.

Not looking at me, Paul asked, “You didn’t meet any American in Minnesota that you wanted to settle down with?”

“Oh, no! I wasn’t into dating.” I laughed as I remembered my friends’ dating games. “I was not into men at all.” Noticing a puzzled look on his face, I continued, “Or women for that matter...but I do understand those issues.”

I lowered my head and laughed again. I was reminded of my early days in Minnesota, when, quite surprisingly, I had found myself to be the dating counselor for my circle of friends. I had never dated in Pakistan or in the USA, but that did not matter. I never had to show my credentials. My friends openly shared their heartaches when their boyfriends broke up with them. I was amazed at how demoralized they felt when they found themselves without a date on the weekend.

One semester, I took a design class that was only offered on Friday evenings. I was surprised at how many students came fully dressed up and left the class in the middle for their Friday-night dates. Jokingly, I called this class “Dating Game 101”.

Cathy, a close friend who was studying to be a designer, was always sad about her heartbreaks. I would remind her of the freedom she had in her society, but we clearly looked at her culture from two very different angles. She found her system suffocating. Her main problem in life was finding and keeping good men who would not dump her for someone younger and more beautiful. In her opinion, it was a courting game, where women were constantly trying to maneuver men toward settling down and where men were only interested in flirting, sex and keeping all their options open. She carried the burden of this pain with her everyday along with her heavy design portfolio. Once when she was crying over a failed date, I suggested that she ask her parents to look for someone suitable and cut out all the crap. Her tears stopped, her eyes widened and she looked at me, completely amazed. Then, thinking I was joking, she hit me, laughing and said, “Get real!”

Another young woman told me that she never had to leave the class for dates because no one wanted to date her. When I asked why, she laughed and told me that she did not shave her legs or underarms and preferred informal sandals to 4-inch high heels, so no one was interested in her.

A lounge with food dispensers was a magnet where my classmates gathered during the ten-minute break we had in the middle of the long class session. While sipping a Coke one evening, I overheard a conversation between two students who I did not know that well. One was complaining, “I worry all the time about what men say about me. What they say about how I look or act. Every man has his own standards, so I spend half the time figuring out what his standards are and half the time making sure I fit them. Should I be smart, dumb, casual or formal~I’m just tired of guessing all the time.”

I could not help jumping into the conversation. Digging into my bag of advice, I quickly offered her a solution. I said, with a lot of confidence, “Just be you! Let them fit your standards and worry about what you like!”

She turned around and stared at me with surprise. She had only wanted a sympathetic ear from her friend and was not expecting such high-spirited advice. She stood up to go back to the class and said, “Right, right I will...let them show me who they are and...then I’ll decide whether I like them or not!”

“Yes, you just be you!” I said as I threw away my can and followed them. She turned around again; giving me a strange look, she said “Right, right, me just be me!”

I found that most women around me at my University seemed to be walking on a very narrowly-approved and socially-imposed path. As long as they stayed on that path, the social fabric appeared to provide support, but as soon as they stepped off, they experienced very subtle social sanctions. I also noticed that most were unaware of this and thought they were acting on their own choices. Just as fish are not aware of the water surrounding them, we humans are usually not aware of the social pressures that surround us all the time and push us to make the choices that we do. I however, had been quite adamant to accept the unapproved path in Pakistani social life and resist marriage thus far.

Paul stopped by a small tree, which hardly had any shade and said, “You’re awfully quiet today!”

“Sorry, your comment took me back several years. I was just thinking about my time in America.” I looked around the lake and said, “Hey, you have a big hat, but I don’t...let’s keep moving. It’s very sunny here!”

“No, let’s just stay here for a while,” he smiled. “I want to talk to you about some things.” He was looking down and moving little stones around with his feet. “I’m curious why you never got married.”

My quick, well-programmed answer came out immediately: “Never had the time for it.” I must have responded this way a million times to inquisitive friends and acquaintances. In Pakistan, you cannot escape social pressure if you deviate from the norm. The pressure always comes with love from your closest friends and relatives, who wish you well and it keeps coming until you give in. So, I had stock responses that I blurted out without thinking. I had also built an internal shield that deflected any advice about the benefits of marriage, the problems of being left alone in life and other such insights.

I laughed at my answer and then became serious. “Actually, I blocked that area out of my life completely,” I said. “I was too afraid that the freedom I’ve earned in Pakistan would somehow be taken away from me.”

“Why?” he asked, sounding surprised.

I laughed again and answered in my usual intellectual mode, my second line of defense. “A Pakistani woman is brought up to think that her purpose is to serve as a good life partner to some man. No one thinks she could achieve something in her own personal capacity. Her social circle, her social standing, her interests, the city or country she lives in. are all determined by whom she marries. I don’t want to lose what I’ve earned as a woman in terms of my personal freedom or as a professional. Your life after marriage heavily depends upon what your husband allows and doesn’t allow. It’s too complicated, so I’ve just stayed away from it.”

Paul smiled and I looked at him. I knew why he was asking me this question. That exchange of looks said much more than words could have. My heart raced. I looked down and started walking. We did not mention marriage again during our walk, but chatted about things we liked and did not like. We found amazing similarities—our professions, interest in real social change for people, traveling like nomads, feeling free and trying out new things, honesty in communication. We continued talking for a while, sometimes about my ideas for the future and sometimes about his. Somewhere around that lake, we crossed the line where words lost their real

meaning and only presented themselves as vehicles to carry the essence of the feelings we were developing for each other.

I could clearly see in his eyes the deep affection he felt for me, but it did not scare me or make me jump and run away, which had been my standard response before. I liked it, finding it very comforting. I am sure he sensed the excitement that bubbled inside me at the prospect of spending more and more time with him. His company was intoxicating for me. I had always drawn a line around myself that I would not let men cross if I sensed they had become interested in me. It was like a small moat around my castle that I felt protected me. With Paul, I never reached the moment where I consciously thought about whether to let him cross that line or not. I was unaware of the line, my protective castle and the other fears. I walked with him around Lake Hanna, feeling very free, light and happy. Somehow, all the issues about us coming from two very different worlds simply vanished; it was just the two of us talking about our future.

We reached the end of the walk, stopped and looked at each other. Paul remarked, “I’d better talk to Robert about creating your independent Unit. Although you are reporting to Harumi, technically your funding comes from the Governance Unit...and ethically, that would not be correct.” With those words, he indirectly told me what he wanted to say. I smiled affectionately at his comment and said nothing. We returned to our rented car and drove back.

When we returned to Islamabad, Paul wasted no time in talking to Robert. Robert had already sought permission from the Government to establish our independent Gender Unit, so he acted quickly. I was made the head of the Unit and directed to officially report only to Harumi.

Now in two different Units, Paul and I had no problems working together, since that was how our friendship started. We had our disagreements and meetings in which we had to convince each other about different issues, but I never felt any problem with that. We never even held hands in our office building. We always felt the office environment was somewhat sacred and that the professional code had to be respected, no matter how close we felt.

Once the professional side was taken care of, we became more expressive in our personal relationship. It felt very right to be together. We both had the same deep feeling that our relationship was for life. The fact that we came from different cultures was irrelevant. Within a month, we felt so close that we could not imagine our futures separately. We were two souls made for each other.

Although I was comfortable being seen with men in restaurants, I preferred to meet Paul at my home. Being a very private person, Paul also liked keeping our relationship very quiet. We would go for long drives, particularly late at night, and shared all sorts of ideas, thoughts and jokes like best friends, as well as our affection and passionate feelings for each other. We were in love.

22. ‘I AM THE PROCEDURE’

The Gender Team was about to begin a celebration for finalizing the Programme Concept and most of the project proposals. Celebrating each step was a common practice I had inculcated in our team. We had arranged cake and tea in our office and we were all nicely dressed up with colorful *dopattas* fluttering around. Suddenly, Tarik called, ordering me to his office. I told the group to go ahead with the celebration, saying that I would join them in a few minutes.

Tarik pounced on me as I entered his office, “I called your office this morning and a strange voice answered the phone, probably a new consultant you hired. Can you believe she didn’t know who I am?” He stood up in anger.

Trying to calm him down I said, “Tarik, these are new people, hired for a short time. It takes a while to learn who is who. Even I don’t know everyone’s name and I’ve been here for a lot longer. There are hardly any opportunities to interact.”

He looked at me very suspiciously and said loudly, “A NEW person? Working in UNDP, who doesn’t know TARIK KHAN? Am I losing control or what? She should be thankful to me for her job, she should come and thank me for getting her into the UN system and instead she says to me,” he mimicked her in a funny voice, “‘Fouzia is busy right now, where are you calling from? You can leave a message and she will call you back.’ ” Furious, he hit his desk with a fist and sat down with a jerk. I jumped up from my chair, while he continued to rage. Suddenly, he smiled, “You know, Fouzia, I wonder where you have collected all these consultants from. You should at least be aware of their looks, no?”

I wanted to leave his room in disgust, but could not afford to because, once our Unit was officially approved, we would have to begin hiring for the permanent positions. That would require a close cooperation from the Operations Unit.

Tarik continued, “It’s nice to have all these women around, no?” He slipped back in his chair and my blood pressure rose. I dreaded this because he always made sleazy comments from that position. He put his hands in his pockets and kept pulling at his crotch from inside his pockets. “I’ll be more involved when you hire permanent people. You know hiring is our job.” He started fiddling with himself again.

“Of course Tarik,” I said very formally. “Right now even I am only sometimes involved in the short-listing process. I don’t even sit in on the interviewing panel when the bosses make the final decisions on hiring. Once regular UNDP funds are used, we will involve the Operations. We follow the procedures religiously!”

“Follow the procedures?” he grunted. “I AM THE PROCEDURE. I mean, I know the procedures. You know that I was sent to Headquarters to learn UNDP procedures and rules. Even Robert consults me on the rules. I’ll guide your team also. OK?” His mood changed and he continued, with a beaming smile, “That Masako is kind of cute, no? I notice that Harumi is very possessive of her. He wants to be her guru, right?”

Ignoring his comments on Masako, I said, “I’ll continue to get your and your team’s guidance on the hiring process, but I’d appreciate the process being expedited.” With a very artificial smile, I got up to go.

As I was leaving the room Tarik called, “Fouzia!” I turned around. He said, “*Chuchu jani*, get some good looking women...that one you hired...yara...we must have some standards!” He roared with laughter.

My office was happily celebrating, acknowledging how much we had accomplished in the last two months. Team members hugged each other and joked. What a little haven we had created in this barren room.

The time came for Harumi and Robert to go to New York and present the UNDP Pakistan’s new programme at the UN Headquarters. The programme was approved, but the

Gender Programme was not fully funded. Initially, I was very angry about it and argued aggressively with Harumi, but later realized that Robert and Harumi did not have any real commitment to this programme. They bragged about it as it was the first of its kind in any UNDP office, but they never really understood the spirit behind it.

Robert approved my appointment as head of the Unit and the other positions for the Unit. I told Masako to become an expert on hiring procedures, suggesting that she get hold of any manuals and instructions and read them carefully so we could guide ourselves and not be fooled by Tarik's team. Meanwhile we heard that Tarik had reunited with his wife. I wondered whether this was good news or bad, but then figured it was good for us and bad for his wife.

My own contract expired again with no movement in the UNDP to do anything about it. I decided to plead my case to Harumi. I argued that since he was my supervisor, with all the new developments and approvals, he was the logical person to initiate at least an email to Operations to prepare a contract for me. He told me that this was the Personnel's job. Instead of listening to my concerns, he insisted on showing me a photograph of a wrecked plane from World War II that hung on his office wall. Tired, I told him that at least I wanted to take a break since my previous contracts did not provide for any leave time and I had hardly taken a weekend off in the past six months. He assured me that both he and Robert were extremely happy with my work and regarded me as an asset for the UNDP. He told me not to worry about procedural issues and went on talking about his collection of photographs of the old combat airplanes.

Faced with such a disappointing response from Harumi, it seemed I would have to do the job myself. I decided to approach Tarik's boss to pursue my contract. "Why should I always go to Tarik," I asked myself. The moment I started discussing my case, Mr. Fiumi referred me to Tarik. I hesitated to tell him that I was there simply to avoid Tarik, but before I could say anything, he picked up the phone and called Tarik himself. My breathing stopped. I felt dizzy. I did not know how to stop him. He didn't even read the memo I gave him. I knew that the situation would get worse. Tarik entered the room immediately; he was just next door. He looked at me with surprise, wondering what I was doing in his boss's office. Not knowing how to react or where to look, I kept my gaze down. Without even looking at Tarik or me, Mr. Fiumi said, "Tarik, please help her with whatever issue she has," and handed Tarik my memo about the renewal of my contract while intently examining another piece of paper on his desk.

Tarik took it, looked at me and said cynically, "Why don't you come to my office, Doctor *Sahiba*."

My body felt very heavy. I looked at Fiumi and thought, "He's the head of Operations and should be ashamed of himself. For the last three months, five of us have been working in one room with two computers and no admin support. He is so lax with his job, how does he sleep at night? Now he is throwing me to this hungry shark because he does not want to take any responsibility. If I could only tell him how angry I was with the UNDP management for making my life miserable and how disappointed I was with him for not knowing what his deputy does under his nose."

Robert was out of reach; anyway Tarik was like his spoilt child, so I couldn't even dream of going to him. I accepted that all paths led to Tarik and that I could not evade this monster. This last attempt to get around him had backfired terribly.

Sheepishly, I followed Tarik. I thought about the circus lion I had encountered in my early research. I would rather be in the ring with the lion than entering Tarik's office. The circus lion would surely have been more "humane".

23. BUILDING TIGHTER BONDS

While I struggled with the UNDP management, Paul left for Mongolia again. He stopped over in China in transit and again sent me a letter from Beijing. Sometimes a letter carries more intense meaning than a face-to-face communication. He wrote that having me as a friend had made him feel alive and happy again. I read his letter over and over.

With my UNDP work slowing down, I longed for a break. I left the contract issue behind and ejected out of my work world. Working hard and then breaking free by traveling to another country was an old pattern. I used to travel to new places and wander around as my heart desired. I made no bookings or plans, but just followed my instincts as I relaxed and enjoyed myself in another country. Travel recharged my batteries. Even as a student in America, I sometimes left my tight schedule for a trip to another country. Where I went depended entirely on my budget. Over the years, I had traveled extensively in Europe, South and North America, much of Asia and some countries in Africa.

This time I took off for Malaysia, a few days in Kuala Lumpur and then onto the jungle villages and mountain caves of Sarawak. I wrote daily to Paul in my notebook. I did not mail those notes because I knew I would be back before he received them. I liked writing to him every day so that I could keep communicating with him in my mind.

I felt that I was still a free spirit. I guess that is why I craved such travel. I was addicted to this feeling. Paul traveled with me in my mind. I talked, joked and had long conversations with him, all in my head. I thought about our relationship more thoroughly than before. The more I considered what we felt, the clearer it became that our relationship was the most natural thing for me. We were soul mates. His personality was so different from mine, yet we were such a good match. Being with him was effortless.

My trips were like meditation. Gradually, my mind cleared of thoughts about the UNDP. A clear mind energized me and I had insights for the future. I took a small plane to see the Mullu caves and ventured around in the jungle. There were caves with millions of bats, caves with beautiful stalactite formations, caves that were dark and some that even had snakes. I lived every moment of the day.

I returned directly to Lahore for some meetings the gender team had scheduled with the Punjab Department of Transportation. I had to switch gears and land in another world, one full of bureaucracies and battles, but I did look forward to seeing Paul.

Paul had returned from Mongolia and was in Lahore with half of the UNDP office, conducting the first international conference on Governance in Asia. Governance people from New York and several Asian countries were attending. Since I was not in the Governance Unit, I was not invited, but UNDP had booked me at the same hotel.

I arrived late in the evening. On the way to my room, I saw Tarik Khan walking towards me, the last person I wanted to see. My return immediately turned into a crash landing. My body

suddenly felt as heavy as if I had stepped out of a pool of mud. Surprised to see me, he smiled broadly. I kept our hellos very short, saying I had meetings in the early morning.

A dinner invitation from Paul was waiting for me in my room. Our friendship was not open to the world yet, so we decided to eat in my room, away from the UN crowd. Paul welcomed me very affectionately. I was so happy to see him that I did not eat much, but talked continuously about the places I had visited and my adventures in Malaysia. Paul gave me a lovely card, which he said was to celebrate one year of knowing each other. He had remembered the date in November 1995 when he had sat next to me at the workshop in Islamabad. It felt very right to be with him.

In Islamabad, I got an update from Sadia. It was gratifying to see her mature and take charge of things. She had kept the team's momentum going. She told me that neither Harumi nor Robert had taken any serious notice of the Gender Programme's funding situation. She showed me the budget and grumbled. Even in the modest budget that included the formation of our Unit, they had charged heavily for the office space rental and overhead for the services of the Operations Division. I looked at her and said, "My god, with this amount of money we could rent a huge villa as our office and have an operations staff of our own."

After Malaysia, my second trip outside the country came rather quickly. Although my work had kept me from taking a break for a long time, I had to manoeuvre a few days off for this occasion. I had always been very actively involved with other social movements, especially related to women's rights and peace. Whenever I felt low about the UNDP, these other forums became my refuge to get re-energized.

Peace in South Asia is one such effort. One of my dreams has always been to see India and Pakistan live in peace and harmony. I am not alone with this dream; thousands of people on both sides of the border want our countries to focus on crucial issues like our economy and governance. We want the two governments to stop fighting like children and stop investing disproportionately in huge armies at the expense of the development of their people.

People from the two countries had formed the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy, a brave initiative to encourage people-to-people dialogue. My brother and I had both been active members and were a part of Pakistan's delegation of about 150 citizens to cross the border on foot taking the message of peace to the other side. The dialogue was held in Calcutta with another group of about 150 citizens from India.

I arranged for some leave from work and said good-bye to Paul, who was quite surprised that I would be gone during the year-end holidays. I apologized because I had never thought of December as a holiday time and it hadn't occurred to me that I should be in Islamabad. Holidays for most Pakistanis mean the two Muslim celebrations of Eid. I felt bad for Paul though, since he had been looking forward to spending some time together when the UN office work was slow.

Crossing into India was very emotional, with a lot of sentiment from people on both sides. We sang songs and chanted peace messages. When we crossed the border, porters on both sides wept. The train rides were great fun. At every stop, food vendors climbed aboard shouting, "Veg, non-veg! Veg, non-veg!", while small children ran through the train selling soft drinks and spicy food. The people, the scenes, the buildings! It was like looking in a crooked mirror. Many of us felt we were still in Pakistan, except for the subtle differences.

The conference lasted for three rich days. We had very fruitful interaction with thinkers, artists, activists, journalists and government people from all parts of India. Senior delegates from

both countries said that people should build such a momentum for peace so that the governments had no other option but to follow this direction.

Most of my friends stayed after the conference to enjoy the opportunity to see more of India. I rushed back to Paul. I wanted to bring him a gift, but could not decide on anything. I always found buying gifts for men difficult and with Paul it was even harder.

When I got home, Paul came over to my house to see me. He was casually dressed, in light brown pants with lots of big pockets on the sides and a brightly colored plaid winter shirt. I was so thrilled to see him that I wanted to throw my arms around him and hug him tightly, but I restrained myself, merely shaking his hand. He winked at me with a smile as our eyes met. When everyone sat down, I sat right next to him. I felt the warmth of our closeness. He kept asking about my trip, but the substance of our conversation did not matter: We were saying how much we had missed each other.

After a while, he asked if I wanted to go for a drive. I was thrilled by the invitation and ran to get a heavy red shawl to cover myself. I did want to spend some time with him alone. Sitting close to Paul, all my tension, anxiety and complaints about the world vanished. He had this calming effect on me. I felt that he had always been a part of my life. We drove through the dark winding roads. Small streetlights lighted up his face from time to time. I softly put my hand on his with love. He held it tightly, expressing his commitment to our relationship, which was becoming ever clearer.

From the dark and deserted roads, he drove towards a more populated area. We ended up near a market and then at a car-repair workshop. I was surprised at this unromantic destination, but even more surprised at seeing my own car there. I quickly got out. Looking more carefully, I realized that the car had been completely redone: engine, body and interior. I just stood there, surprised, not believing my eyes.

Paul opened the door for me, tapped me on my shoulder and said, "Let's take it for a test drive." As I started the car, he whispered in my ear, "Merry Christmas!" My eyes filled with tears. No words could contain my feelings, so I just gazed at him with a look more intense than a thousand kisses. My tears spilled out. Paul pressed my hand. I turned around and started to drive.

24. OPEN CONFRONTATION

I quickly picked up my files and was about to rush out the door to make a presentation in the UNDP meeting room, when Sadia pulled me back into the office. Flustered I looked at her and demanded, "What? Sadia, I'm getting late!"

She quietly took a lipstick and a little mirror from her purse and gave them to me saying, "Please put this on!" Her firm voice made me do as I was instructed, but I was surprised and asked her why. "Don't you see how people are all dressed up?" she answered. "I bet you don't even look in the mirror in the morning." She spoke so lovingly I had to laugh.

She smiled, "Now go. Don't be late, but please pay some attention to yourself." Throwing my head back, I laughed and rushed out of the office.

Seeing me work round the clock and fighting on every front, Sadia had developed a protective attitude toward me. She felt I was giving too much of myself to the UNDP, without taking sufficient care of my health or future. She would sometimes order a snack and a drink for me by herself and force me to take a break. She tried to give me pep talks about taking care of myself and looking nice like other women in the office. At times, she would tell me to be nice with Paul and not be so quick to fight with him in meetings. I was not sure if she sensed something between us or just liked Paul enough to wish that some chemistry would develop.

In general, Sadia remained a quiet and a shy person. Unlike me, she disappeared in a group and no one noticed her. She seldom engaged with other colleagues except those with whom she had to work in the Administration or Finance Sections. It was clear to her colleagues from her behavior that she kept business matters to official limits only and was not in the habit of saying more than needed. Laila, who had applied to work with us after many years in other organizations, on the other hand seemed more assertive. To protect Sadia, I made sure she diverted any issues that required the attention of senior officers to me. I needed to be the sole link between Tarik and my team.

Rana was hired as one of the new gender specialists. She had previously worked with a British development agency. Her father was known in development circles. Rana was in her forties, a divorced mother of two teenagers. I was happy to have her on the team as I was looking for a diversity of strengths. We needed people like her to build contacts with the government and deal with the UNDP bureaucrats.

We had a hard time filling our third position, but we finally found the right candidate - a bright young woman named Nabila, who had a Masters in Women's Studies from America. She was another Pashtun woman, tall and fair. She was a mother of two, with an unhappy relationship with her husband. She had previously been living with him in a rural town where they both worked. She convinced him that he should continue working there, while she moved to Islamabad and maintained a separate household. Her parents and siblings had already migrated to Canada, so she managed to make him agree to send their two children to her mother for their education. He visited her on the weekends, but during the week, she was free to pursue her career. It turned out that this was a transition to leaving a long-abusive relationship, so she received a lot of support from our team over the coming months.

As our team grew, the management finally agreed to expand our space in the UNDP office. We assigned one room to Rana and Laila and the other to Nabila and Masako. Sadia and I stayed in our old office. Sultan, who had worked with me in my old job, got the admin assistant post. I was very pleased with the selections. With Masako as a JPO and Sadia already in action, I felt I had a good team and we all felt strangely happy in our Unit.

Tarik was busy with Robert on various matters, so other than a few visits to clear the equipment and furniture purchases, I did not have to see him often. The lower staff in the Operations tried to help us as much as was possible on their own, without risking their own necks. However, staff contracting was one area where Tarik retained full control. He called me in and told me that he would meet the members of the Gender Unit separately to negotiate each contract. I knew that there would be no negotiation, but I stayed quiet. He kept repeating how happy he was to have so many women around. He wanted to build individual links with each member of our Unit, making sure they knew who the 'boss' was. He arranged their salaries directly and made sure

to tell each of them that he was being very nice by finalizing their contracts. In order to impress them, he also expedited the purchase of computers and furniture for their work.

When Laila came back from her meeting with Tarik, we all were sitting in my room. Although now we had more space available, we still had the habit of sitting in a group to discuss matters. Laila said, "He kept saying that he wanted me to have this opportunity to work for the United Nations and he hopes I am thankful to him for that." She laughed and continued. "He almost interviewed me again. He kept asking me personal questions about my life here in Islamabad, my family and what I like to do." She sat down next to Sadia and continued, "He said he would arrange for anything under the sun I needed and that I should always just go straight to him for anything."

I kept quiet, but Rana picked up on Laila's tone and came to Tarik's defense, saying, "Well, he asked me about my family too, but then he knows my family and was only trying to be friendly. Who in this business doesn't know my father?" The rest of the team exchanged looks. Rana also told us that she knew Tarik's first wife so, in a way, she had a family link with him.

After everyone got busy with their work, Laila came to me and expressed her concern about Tarik. She said, "I have a creepy feeling about him. He asked too many personal questions and the kinds of things he was offering seemed very odd." I told her to be careful and to just avoid him.

Sitting on an interview panel for a driver seemed like a simple task, but it became a major turning point in my relationship with Tarik. Just before we started the interviews, a man came into the room and whispered something to Nawaz, who was the head of transport and general services. I was discussing the marking sheet with the panel to be sure everyone agreed on how we would score the candidates.

We went through the interviews and found one candidate who spoke some English, knew something about computers and was well aware of the driving rules and the vehicles. The others were average and one was quite odd with very bad communication skills. After marking this section, we all went out in a vehicle for the driving test. The man who did not do well on his interview drove rashly. He turned without giving indicators and argued with us when we pointed that out to him. He was a terrible driver and could not keep the vehicle in its lane when taking a turn. The others were adequate, but the one who marked highest in the interview also scored highest on the driving test as well. The decision seemed obvious.

Back in the office to finalize the decision, Nawaz told me that Tarik had sent a recommendation for one candidate-the driver whom all members had scored the lowest in both the tests. I politely explained that in case of a tie we could have to reassess based upon Tarik's comment, but this man was a poor driver with bad communication skills. I asked Nawaz his opinion and he was clear that Tarik's candidate was the worst of all. I was disturbed and wished I had Paul or Harumi on the panel as a buffer to this pressure. Even Nawaz seemed embarrassed to push Tarik's candidate, so I took a stand, not knowing this would turn my relationship with Tarik into a disaster.

When he heard the results of our selection, Tarik was furious. He rushed to confront me in my office, banging the door shut as he entered the room. His face was red and he was bursting with rage. I had never seen him so angry. "What's this I hear?" he hit my table with his fist. "You have no respect for my recommendation?" He threw some papers from my table into the air. Sadia, frightened, rushed from the room.

I responded coolly to his complaint. “Tarik, please sit down. Let’s talk calmly. We’re colleagues and I respect you and your recommendations. Please sit down.” He did not, so I also stood to make my defense, showing him the scoring sheets of all the interview panelists.

He pointed at me and said, “I brought this Benazir Bhutto into our system and now she is showing me her claws. You know the people who put Benazir in power were disappointed in her because she turned around and hit them back.”

I kept my cool and said, “I thought Benazir came with people’s votes, but that’s not the issue here. What I do know is that as a responsible senior person in Operations you wouldn’t want to hire the most incompetent driver for this job, would you?”

He was not in the mood to be professional and said, “Don’t forget who brought you into the UN.”

I wanted to argue with him about this. I did not know him at all when I was hired. Being on the interview panel did not mean that he brought me in. Perhaps that is why he wanted to sit on every interview panel, so that everyone would feel indebted to him for getting the job. Despite my anger at his silly claim, I chose not to argue.

I tried to calm him down. His breathing was heavy and he was moving about like a lion in a small cage. I said, “We’re following the procedures, Tarik. If you wanted this person in the driver’s position so badly, why didn’t you tell your Operations representative to push for him? Look, he also signed the decision sheet. The decision was unanimous.”

Loudly and angrily, in a threatening tone, he shouted, “Once I’m through with you, I’ll deal with him as well.” He looked at me with flaming red eyes, banged my table with his fist again and charged out of my office.

Later that day, another UNDP driver told me that the driver recommended by Tarik had been fired from another UN agency because he had killed a woman pedestrian on the street. Tarik paid her family the equivalent of about \$300 to pressure them to drop the police case. The driver was a Pashtun, the same ethnic group as Tarik, and had begged for help to get this job. Tarik could not keep him from being fired from the other agency, but promised that he would get him the next position that opened up in UNDP.

Gradually, I learned that drivers were important network people; planting persons you trusted in those positions was crucial for maintaining a measure of control on information and the movement of people. Drivers made good information collectors and spies. Tarik was known to keep them as his closest supporters and protected them even if they had killed someone in an accident. Doing favors won him more loyalty. He was very possessive and used them to assist or restrict any staff he wanted to control.

The Gender Unit’s understanding of UN administrative procedures was already making him concerned. He once had a monopoly over procedural decisions. Now decision-making was slipping out of his hands. He saw his hold loosening and he declared war. I kept worrying about his next move, feeling as if a time bomb was ticking outside my door. I had a hard time focusing on my work. Now that things had started moving forward, I did not want him to sabotage anything related to my Unit, but my stress level had become quite high.

The Gender team members had been very concerned about his show of anger that day, but soon forgot about him and moved on with our celebrations for creating a good team. We invited

the whole office to our Unit. People had been missing our celebrations. Section heads from Operations came with a renewed respect for us. Other colleagues from the two Programme Units also came. Everyone gathered in the central area of our cluster of offices, where Sadia and Masako had tastefully done up a table with tea and snacks. The team was in very high spirits, ready to embark on our next challenge of setting up our projects with different ministries.

To my surprise, Tarik also showed up. My whole body reacted and I became extremely tense. I hoped he had returned to normal. He saw me and smiled. Before he reached me, Masako distracted him. She offered him tea and he readily accepted, bowing politely. I noticed that he was in a courteous mode. He greeted Rana and Sadia before coming up to me with a cynical smile and said, "It's just so nice to have so many women around." He looked around the room and took a long breath.

I kept guessing at his ability to get back at people. All kinds of fears rushed through my mind while one part of me kept hoping that perhaps he had decided to take a softer tone since I had brought so many women into the organization. I certainly hoped that was the case. Now that I had a team and a programme of activities, my stakes were higher. I was more afraid of a direct confrontation with him. I did not want to lose what I had worked so hard to achieve.

When the party was almost over, he slipped right behind me and said, "Still flying high, Benazir?" Startled, my heart began pounding. He slipped out the door before I could turn around and respond. I stood there worrying about what he would do to get back at me. I felt very unsafe not knowing when the shark would attack again.

25. TARIK GETS A PROMOTION

One after another we started formulating the projects for our Gender Programme: one on women's micro-finance schemes, one on modifying the stereotypical portrayal of women in the media, one on women's political participation and one on improving women's working conditions. As a team, we were very excited about this, but the process was full of traps, tricks, quicksand...and one great white shark that kept swimming by showing his teeth.

Although we had a general approval for the different programmes, each individual project proposal had to be approved by an in-house committee comprised of the programme staff and a representative of Operations, usually Tarik. Theoretically, this was supposed to be a healthy professional discussion to improve the proposals, but in reality, the meetings became mudslinging matches where people settled scores with each other. Two deeply conservative men from the Poverty Unit usually led the attack against our proposals. They considered it their duty to attack and trivialize anything linked with women.

To help myself feel better, I sometimes discussed the dynamics with Paul. I would be very charged up, but Paul would laugh at our colleagues' childish attitudes. I wished I could laugh at them, but I got too wound up when they belittled everything connected to women's empowerment. However, Paul was right, despite our uphill struggles, our projects began to be approved and we reached the phase of hiring the project staff. Tarik again got himself fully involved. We were in the process of hiring someone to head the project on women's micro-credit which we were going to implement along with the First Women's Bank, a bank set up by Benazir

Bhutto's government to facilitate poor women's access to small loans. The Ministry of Finance was our main partner, with some civic organizations also involved.

A five-member panel conducted the interviews: Nabila from our Unit, Tarik, Paul, a government representative and another UNDP colleague. All the candidates happened to be women. Nabila gave me the details of the dynamics of the interview. She said that during the interview process Tarik kept shuffling in his seat like a naughty child, laughing now and then, enjoying the opportunity of talking to all these new women. With a big smile, he kept looking at the other interviewers trying to share his excitement, but no one responded.

One of the candidates walked in wearing elegant soft pink clothes and high heels, dark brown curls. Paul started by briefly describing the project and asking her why she thought she was an appropriate candidate for this position. She was soft-spoken and careful in her response, describing her background. Before anyone could follow up with a specific question Tarik asked, "Do you live in Islamabad?" She affirmed. "What do you think of this city?" he continued. The others looked at each other, puzzled. The woman fumbled and began to laugh. Her laughter made Tarik blush. He enjoyed catching her by surprise and making her laugh in embarrassment. He moved back and forth in his chair, shuffled and looked at everyone proudly, as if making her laugh was a big achievement. Then he said, "I was only trying to make you comfortable. It's okay, it's okay."

After she answered some other questions from the panelists, Tarik interjected with another very general query: "What do you think of the political situation these days?" She responded as best as she could to this vague question. Then, with a big smile he asked, "Do you like the UN?" Smiling, she said, "I like this job that I have applied for." Tarik scribbled something on the side of the interview score sheet and, grinning, bent over to show it to Nabila. "She is very beautiful," it read. Nabila looked at him seriously and did not return his smile. Tarik ignored her and kept laughing and wiggling in his chair in excitement.

After the interviews were finished, the committee members exchanged notes. When they discussed this young woman, Tarik praised her highly and others also gave her good marks, but the government representative commented, "Her understanding of issues was a bit on the surface. I didn't hear any in-depth insight."

Tarik suddenly threw a tantrum and asked aggressively, "What do you expect from these women? You want professors who have written books? Do you expect her to do more than what your government people have done? What kind of an in-depth understanding do you want from the candidates?" His outburst startled everyone, but he continued, "I don't understand! You don't have a clear job description or criteria. You don't even know what you are hiring for. She knew all the issues, what in-depth understanding are you expecting?" The government member backed off and the Panel members, somewhat embarrassed by this outburst, started discussing other candidates. However, they were all surprised at this show of support for one particular candidate.

In the end, that particular woman turned out to have the highest marks and Tarik said he would contact her to negotiate the contract. We sent a memo to Tarik on the selected candidates and the level of salary we recommended, based on three factors: their experience, their past salary and our budget. We did this in a grid format to ensure that we managed our budget properly and offered what we could afford.

During her interview this candidate had said her expected salary was 60,000 rupees a month. My memo recommended 50,000, which I thought she would accept if Tarik negotiated properly. I do not know the dynamics of their meeting, but at the end, Tarik offered her more than she asked for. I strongly objected to this offer and showed Tarik that it were the senior project managers who received that level of salary, while she lacked a similar experience. He told me this was none of my business; he had the power to negotiate whatever salary he wanted. However, despite this offer she decided not to accept the position. I suspected that she declined because of how he had dealt with her. His extraordinary attention and his attitude that he was doing her a favor probably scared her away.

As a member of the Interviewing Committee, Paul also complained about the offer. He wrote Tarik a memo saying that he could not offer a candidate more than she demanded and more than the Unit's recommendation. Tarik was furious at someone questioning his royal authority. He quickly went to Robert, who agreed that Operations could negotiate contracts independently.

Paul did not think it appropriate to follow up in writing and make a big issue out of the matter, but he did later make the point to Robert that if a candidate says in her interview she is expecting 60,000 rupees and the Unit recommends 50,000, for Tarik to offer 80,000 does not make sense. Robert laughed and agreed with Paul, casually remarking, "The only problem with my friend Tarik is that he likes chasing skirts too much." For a senior UN official to make such an insensitive comment so offhandedly surprised Paul. He had heard my occasional grumbles, although I was never very explicit about what Tarik said and did. Now he started getting a clearer picture of where Tarik Khan stood with the women in the office...and with the boss.

I talked to my brother Kamran about Tarik in more detail. As a psychologist, Kamran gave me a lot of support. He worried about me, but I told him that the Programme I was developing was far too important for me to get involved in any confrontations. I also shared my anger at Robert England, whom I saw as an irresponsible manager and so absorbed in himself that he was blind to the real issues in the office. I confided that, at times, I blamed Robert more than Tarik, just as I blamed dog-owners for letting their dogs loose to chase every passerby. They were responsible for putting their dogs on a leash and for keeping their gates shut. In the same way, Robert was responsible for letting his dog, Tarik, chase whomever he wanted.

Soon, we heard that Mr. Fiumi was moving to another UN position in Iraq. Considering his performance this was not a big loss, but I feared that Tarik might gain more power when he left. Nabila was at Mr. Fiumi's farewell, chatting with a group of colleagues, when Tarik leered at her and said she was looking very fresh. She spoke up for herself, saying she did not appreciate such comments from a colleague. People standing around turned their faces to the wall and laughed while Tarik winked at them. He continued praising Nabila in a way that was obviously meant more for his audience. He said the Gender Unit added a lot of color to UNDP and made his work very pleasant. The onlookers rolled with laughter. Nabila was very offended and left.

Other women in my Unit also began to complain about him. Only Rana defended him, saying he never made rude comments to her. I never talked about my experiences with Tarik in our Unit meetings. We had a common understanding about his behavior, but I never went into details. I felt that as team leader I should protect the space for my colleagues to perform their jobs, although, I did sometimes talk to Nabila about it since we both shared a background in women's

rights work. Rana's defensive attitude bothered her, but I calmed her down and said that the team was diverse and we should be tolerant. Nevertheless, I told all my colleagues to be careful of Tarik.

I continued to meet Paul at home. I was so obsessed with the office dynamics that sometimes I just went on about the senior staff's irresponsible behavior. Paul was quite close to Robert and Harumi and I felt that at times, he was torn. However, he was very calm and would always listen to my point of view without taking sides. Empathy was his usual stance, but after witnessing Tarik's behavior during the interview and Robert's undue pampering of Tarik, he started changing his mind about the office management.

About this time my worst fears came true. After Fiumi's departure, I was devastated to hear that Tarik was appointed as the Officer in Charge of Operations. His loyalty to Robert had paid off handsomely. He was now, officially, Robert's right-hand man. My heart sank. In our Unit meeting, I told my group to follow all procedures properly and not to make any mistakes. I did not know how to prepare for him and I felt very weary.

On one hand, Tarik was very happy about having so many women around; on the other, he saw the Gender Unit as a rival power center, which operated on the fringe of his control. He ruled Operations by portraying his managers as incompetent cabbages. He controlled the Programme section through Robert, making himself the approval authority on every issue. Now he was ready to show me who was the boss.

Tarik's elevation to the ranks of senior management provoked an immediate deterioration in his behavior. His attitude towards women became unbearable, with his sleazy language towards me going beyond bounds. In addition, I heard that he had started a full-fledged propaganda campaign against me in front of Robert, saying that I was very good in my field, but was too chaotic in procedural matters and not cut out for management jobs.

26. EMPTYING MY HARD DRIVE

I was exhausted after a whole year of nonstop work, from the summer of 1996 to the summer of 1997. Constantly fighting an uphill battle to get the Gender Programme and Unit operational had given me dark circles around my eyes. My spirits remained high, however, my body suffered from the continuously mounting tension.

Hiring for the Gender Unit had almost finished. Every member of the team had settled in and understood her task well. We all knew what had to be done next. My situation reminded me of an experience I had several years earlier, during a research trip to the thinly-populated deserts of southern Pakistan.

A group of us stayed at a barren, old, red-brick guesthouse from colonial times. A single guard took care of any guests who came that way, an event that occurred once a year or so. On our first day, two of us saw a five-foot long cobra in one of the rooms. We screamed for the guard. The whole team joined the guard and attempted to kill the snake with anything we could find, but mostly with shoes and sticks. Within seconds, the creature swiftly disappeared. We knew it had not left the building and could be hiding inside the partially broken brick walls.

There was no nearby village where we could look for another place to stay and we refused to return to the city. The four days we stayed in that house were actually comfortable. We had no further mishaps, went out, gathered information, returned, discussed, chatted and even sang songs in the evening, all the while aware of the snake that was hiding somewhere nearby. Our unspoken fear was of a surprise attack when we were not ready. The snake lurked in our minds throughout our waking hours as well as when we slept. When we left, the guard politely asked if our stay had been comfortable. I paused, thinking about the snake, and replied, "Yes".

Similarly, when Paul congratulated me on completing the hiring of my team and finalizing our work plans, asking, 'Are you comfortable now?', I paused, thinking about Tarik, and replied, "Yes!"

Now that I had gotten the Gender Programme off the ground, I thought I should wrap up some of the other activities just to create more space in my life. I needed to relax and gear up for the next challenge of running the Unit.

I was engaged in a research study in Lahore's red-light area, looking at issues faced by women who worked as prostitutes. I had begun this project nine years earlier while working for the Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage. I used to spend a lot of time traveling to Lahore on weekends or combined with official visits. Although I had not done much over the past year, I still maintained my contacts, but now I had to conclude it. My life had been taken over by the Gender Unit. I put away my notes, thinking that I would come back to this topic someday and write it up. I did not know that, later in my life, I would become most readily identified as the author of the book, *Taboo: The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area*.

Bedari was another involvement that was very dear to me, but I felt I had to leave. I had never wanted to be in the embarrassing situation of creating an organization and then clinging to it, hindering the organization's growth. The group of friends, who had started Bedari as a community organization, strongly believed that the community should take it over completely. We did not want a personality-driven organization. As strong proponents of democracy for our country, we wanted the same for Bedari. After five years of running this highly successful organization I was anxious to get myself out of the management and just be a General Body member. My exit from the executive committee was punctuated with garlands of flowers, plaques, music, hugs and many appreciative speeches.

With the gender team in place and the other two commitments wrapped up, I immediately felt lighter and decided I could take a break, but before I could make any plans Tarik dropped a surprise on us. He brought his daughter, an innocent looking university student of about twenty, to the Gender Unit. She had approached her father to arrange for a summer internship at his UN office. Obviously, he could not refuse, since that would mean that he did not have much power within his office. He had to act on his daughter's request, so he brought her to us.

I tried to act normal, but felt like I was absorbing several shocks at once. Firstly, I was shocked that Tarik had a grown-up daughter. Rana later told us she was a child of his first marriage, lavishly praising his first wife and saying that they also had other grown up children. Secondly, I was surprised that he would bring his daughter into an organization where his own reputation was so dubious. I decided that Tarik, like all men who intimidate women, was certain that women would not expose his behavior in order to save their own reputations.

I was also taken aback that Tarik brought his daughter to the Gender Unit. We were not on good terms and I could have poisoned his daughter against him. Why would he take that chance? When he introduced her, he said he could not bear to send her to any office except the Gender Unit. Later he explained that, as a Pashtun, he felt the safest place in the UN system would be an office comprised mostly of women. Concerned that someone might harass his daughter, he had selected the safest office. This whole scenario nauseated me, but I had to think of how best to handle it. I was already in the process of ‘emptying my hard drive’ and did not feel like embarking on any new saga.

I was very ambivalent about having Tarik’s daughter as an intern and asked the team members for their opinions. Masako thought we should follow the same procedure as for other applicants and I considered this sound reasoning. Rana was very vocal in her opinion that “even if the father is an asshole we shouldn’t punish the daughter.” After some debate, we decided that Masako and Nabila would interview her like any other intern and decide if she met our standards. Following the interview, they recommended that she would be suitable for a month in the Unit. I still felt uneasy, but trusting my colleagues, I approved. I explained the work to her and assigned her different tasks. I told Sadia to take care of her. She was intelligent, very humble, a good listener and eager to learn. It was hard to believe that she was actually Tarik’s daughter.

I hoped that this would end Tarik’s harassment. Perhaps being the father of an adult woman and helping her to start working in the outside world might put some sense into him. I hoped agreeing to this request to help his daughter would wrap up my struggle against Tarik’s intimidation, but that was just wishful thinking.

With everything in place, I decided to plan a trip. I badly needed some time out of the system and wanted to go far away. I used to visit Minnesota every year or so, considering it my second home. I had not been back for a while so I decided to make that trip. I yearned to see my old friends who were still very close to my heart.

27. A HORSE WITHOUT REINS

I returned from the trip to America feeling high and always smiling, only to have my reverie shattered when I learned that Tarik had ratcheted up his harassment, becoming a serial offender. My team surrounded me as soon as I walked in the door, complaining about his behavior. His intoxication with his new position as acting Deputy of Operations, coupled with his latest divorce, made him feel he could openly belittle or flirt with anyone he wanted. Everyone except Rana had a story to tell.

Nabila told me she had gone to his office to clear a travel reimbursement. He overheard her asking for his room and came out, furious that she did not know where it was. He yelled at her, wondering what she was doing in UNDP not knowing where the Operations Deputy sat. While he roared in anger, hitting his desk and punching the wall, he winked and smiled at the new head of finance, who had been called in to watch the show.

Sadia told me that he had come to her office once when his daughter had taken a day off. With that big shark-like grin on his face, he told her that he was looking for company. Because of his senior position, she was very nervous and afraid. He bullied her, ordering her to come to his

room on the pretext of fixing some contractual problem. He told her it could not wait until I got back from America. If she did not come to deal with it, her salary could be stopped. She was extremely vulnerable and dependent on her salary to pay her hostel bills. She followed him to his office, where he put a phone in front of her and ordered her to call a certain woman. He said she should repeat exactly what he told her, saying that this woman had a bad character and despite being married had affairs with other men.

Sadia trembled with fear, but refused to dial the number, saying she couldn't do it. He dialed it for her, shoved the receiver in her face and told her to say, "You are a bitch." He used other vulgar swear words and wanted Sadia to repeat them on the phone. She wouldn't. Then he said, "Tell her that you know about the marks on her body you can use as evidence that she sleeps with other men. She is a woman of bad character." He started swearing in Pushto. He got up and said loudly, "Say 'Tarik saw marks on your bare back last night that show you are a woman of a loose character.'" Sadia could not take it any longer and put the phone down with her trembling hands. He shouted at her to dial again. She gathered her courage, explaining that she could not tell the woman anything because she did not know her, adding that he should contact Bedari counselors and get help for himself and the woman. Her response confused him. When he again ordered her to dial the number, she picked up the phone and dialed Bedari, leaving a message for the counselor to call Tarik Khan at the UNDP. Again, he swore in Pushto and she became even more frightened. She ran from his office, went to her room and locked the door. Later, she told Nabila about the incident.

My heart cried for Sadia. I felt extremely sorry about what had happened and immediately suggested that we inform Harumi, but she was too afraid. She said Harumi was weak and would not take any action, but the news would leak to Tarik and she feared his wrath.

Laila followed with a string of comments Tarik had made on various occasions about the Gender Unit's women, which had made her furious. Unlike Sadia, fear was not something Laila was familiar with; anger was her normal response.

To my surprise, Tarik dropped into my office, all smiles. Luckily, Sadia was not in. He said he could not sit, but just wanted to share some "good news," telling me how excited he was to be a bachelor again. He could not contain himself and was disappointed that I was not as excited about the historic event as he was. He came close to me and said, "You'll have to bribe me to get an evening slot. They're filling up fast! I can't tell you how the girls are after me." He then swept out of my office with roar of laughter.

While I tried to come up with effective tactics to deal with him day-to-day, the Gender Unit team thought of conducting gender awareness training for the office staff to highlight gender discrimination and sexual harassment issues. I approached a male colleague for advice. I respected him, never considering him to be a typical UN bureaucrat.

I was candid in our conversation, telling him that all the members of my Unit had problems with Tarik's sexually-charged intimidation. He was not shocked to hear this. He said that everyone knew Tarik had a pattern of harassing women, not just in the UNDP, but in other agencies as well. He told me that Tarik had many affairs and those who did not agree to play, paid a price. I was shocked at the level and frequency of his intimidation and asked how we could deal with such a person. He moved forward and started to whisper. "Be careful! Tarik is very close to Robert." I told him we knew that already and shared my idea of gender training. He gave me some

good advice on conducting the training and suggested how we could confront Tarik, either directly or indirectly, during the session, but he also warned me that we could all lose our jobs.

I developed a proposal for the training and talked to Robert about it. Initially, he liked the idea. Gender is a fashionable aspect of development so international aid agencies sometimes conduct gender activities just to look progressive. Once I put together the training programme, Robert wanted to include representatives of all the UN agencies. I argued fiercely against this, saying that we seriously needed to pay attention to the UNDP's working environment first. I said real issues would only come up if we conducted an in-house session. People are on guard when they are in front of staff from other offices. He would not agree, so I backed off, grumbling to myself that any good manager could have sensed that something was wrong from the way I pushed him to deal with real issues in the UNDP office. He never asked if there was a problem.

Rachel, the British JPO working with Robert, contacted me a few times to discuss plans for the training, but I was no longer interested. For me, it was a possible solution to our problem; for him, it was a showpiece, another glowing report to send by to Headquarters. The gender sensitization training never happened.

Tarik's daughter finished her internship and left. My staff never discussed Tarik in front of her, not wanting to embarrass her. We were, however, surprised that he did not worry that she would find out about him. His confidence amazed me. He was so certain that women would not speak out because of the inherent fear that they would be blamed.

His pressure on me became increasingly unbearable. No longer satisfied with just sleazy jokes and sexual talk, he started asking if he could accompany me on my official travels. He knew my travel plans and frequently called me to ask if he should reserve a room with me on my next trip. Annoyed with my refusals he escalated our personal war by showing his authority to stop my Unit's payments and utilizing any other harassing tactic at his command. In my face, he continued his brand of seductive talk, telling me what good things I was missing by not sleeping with him. At the same time, he made indirect demeaning remarks to poison Robert against me. It was a full-fledged strategy to break down my resistance.

Tarik continued to use his position to shower favors on those who aligned themselves with him. His network of spies was well-rewarded. We heard that Maria had become his full-time intelligence service, keeping tabs on who called whom and what they said. He could simply tell her to focus on a person and she would keep track of all of that person's calls. In return, Maria had false medical bills processed through the UN insurance facility that was overseen by Tarik.

In addition, the head of Communications was ready to resign because he was repeatedly asked to sign performance reports for Kausar that had been written by Tarik. There were standing orders not to mark her attendance and to provide her with a UNDP vehicle whenever she needed it. This section head later told me that Kausar would miss work for days in a row, but they could not mark her absent. He said he tolerated the humiliation only because he was about to retire, but he felt he had no dignity left.

Harumi was not brave enough to stand up for his own staff and never contradicted Tarik. Keeping Tarik on their side had become a necessity for most of the staff, both men and women, because of his control over all the office operations...and over Robert.

At times, Tarik made such serious errors that many people were shocked that Robert never reprimanded him. It took him eight months after we got into the new building to arrange the

furniture, something that should have been completed even before we had moved. The carpets in the new building had to be replaced within a year because of their low quality. He made all the arrangements for that grand Asian Governance conference, but failed to tell Robert that the hotel he picked was in the midst of a major renovation and the entire lobby was an open construction site. Robert had to use all of his UN influence to get the hotel to stop construction work for three days while the conference was going on, yet Tarik received a commendation for his assistance. There were many examples of such faults, but all were ignored. Tarik interpreted regulations as he wished and no one could question him.

Robert continued to praise Tarik lavishly and always taking his side in any dispute. We found out that Robert had given Tarik the highest performance rating possible in the UN system for two years in a row. We also learned that he was seeking to secure an international post for Tarik before he left. We were shocked, completely failing to understand why Tarik was so useful to Robert. For a person of Robert's intelligence and shrewdness it seemed impossible that he did not know how the man operated.

What kept the Gender Unit happy was the success of our Programme. Inside the UNDP, we had to fight at every step, but the initial phases of the projects had shown tangible results. Our projects sparked with catalytic activity. The government was both surprised and pleased with our success. This encouraged the team to redouble its efforts to fight each negative step of the bureaucracy, day and night, if necessary. To our surprise, the UNDP did not seem to appreciate the results and continued to treat their Gender Programme as a stepchild, always less important than other programmes.

28. PAYING THE PRICE

This time when my contract as the head of the Gender Unit came up for renewal, Tarik thought he could finally break me. The intensity of his sleazy tactics increased several-fold since he had the ultimate power over the personnel decision-making. The torturous process continued for two months while he kept delaying discussions on the terms of my contract in order to force me to approach him directly.

I tried to involve Robert in the process by copying my memos to him, but Robert became angry with me for highlighting the issue rather than getting embarrassed that the system had failed and a management-level employee was being forced to work without a contract. Later, I learned that Tarik had told him that I was just making a fuss since I did not agree to the terms of the contract. Robert believed him and when I denied receiving any offer at all, he looked at me as if I was lying. That day, for the first time, I cursed Robert England deeply in my heart.

In frustration, I tried again to push Harumi to act. He told me how significant my role was for the UNDP and how pleased he was with the Gender Programme. I took that opportunity to ask him to write a recommendation letter for me in support of an award from the University of Minnesota. In addition to other recommendations, they wanted a letter from my current supervisor. He wrote: "Dr. Fouzia has proven to be a worker with a rare blend of professional and personal qualities. An indefatigable worker with a sense of mission. Dr. Fouzia has earned the respect of development workers in the United Nations and in the community of various

international aid agencies. I find Dr. Fouzia's contribution to UNDP Pakistan truly remarkable. It has been an inspiring experience for me to be associated with Dr. Fouzia."

After he gave me the letter, I asked him what use was all his praise, if he would not take a stand for me so that I could stay on in the UNDP. He had no answer, but just told me to talk to Tarik, since he was the one with the authority to negotiate contracts. I became increasingly angry with the senior management, who created the enabling environment for Tarik to abuse his authority over other people's lives. At the same time, I began to recognize the unconscious compromises I was making to mitigate this intolerable situation. I felt increasingly guilty about putting up with Tarik's sleazy talk, but considered it a compromise so I could continue working on our projects.

One evening in early fall the weather was particularly pleasant, with wind whistling through the trees around our house. Paul had come over and we were watching a film. Kamran and Paul were enjoying it very much, but it was too violent for my taste. The phone rang and I went downstairs to pick it up. When I heard Tarik's voice on the other end, I immediately got annoyed at answering it. Coldly and formally, I asked him, "What can I do for you?"

Sounding extremely drunk, he begged, "I'm very lonely. I want to put my head in your lap. I won't bother you at all. I just want to hug you and hold you." My heart stopped beating. I felt so embarrassed that I looked around quickly to see if anyone was listening. Then I realized that only I could hear his words. I took several deep breaths to recover. I wanted to end the conversation quickly, but without hanging up on him.

Trying to sound assertive, I said, "I think you should take some medication and go to sleep. You'll feel better in the morning." He continued begging me to see him. In a formal tone, I told him his behavior was completely unprofessional and very disturbing to me. He should talk to me in the office. When he started creating graphic images of what he wanted to do with me, I slammed the phone down. My whole body was trembling.

After that incident, I was not able to go back up to sit with my brother and Paul so I stayed downstairs for a while. Kamran came down looking for me and laughed, "Hey, if you dislike the film that much we'll change it. You don't have to walk out on us!" Seeing how pale and disturbed I looked, he became concerned and asked what had happened. I quickly told him about the call. I did not give all the details, but said Tarik was talking sexual bullshit. Kamran held me and asked what I wanted to do about it.

I said loudly, "Nothing. My contract is on Tarik's table and my damn supervisor does nothing but compliment me on my work. He won't take responsibility for making sure I stay in the organization." Kamran asked if I could go above him and talk to his superior. With tears in my eyes, I almost shouted, "ROBERT IS LIKE A BLIND AND DEAF MAN. He believes Tarik on every issue. Even if I openly tell him what Tarik does, he would NEVER believe me. Tarik is always right and everyone else is wrong."

Kamran persisted, "What's the harm in trying?"

I thought for a moment and said, "Maybe I should make an attempt, but Tarik has already set him against me. I am walking on a tightrope. If Robert doesn't listen and Tarik goes after me, he'll make my life miserable, but maybe I should think about it."

Paul called us from the lounge upstairs, “Hey, what’s happening? Where are you guys?” I quickly wiped my tears and told Kamran I was ok. I told him to go ahead. I wanted to splash some water on my face before going back upstairs.

Tarik knew my travel schedules and would always call me the day before I was going to leave town, “Should I come along?” I was tired of explaining how much his behavior disturbed me, but, at the same time, I began to recover more quickly from the disgust that I felt each time I encountered him. I was shifting the burden to my body and freeing my mind to focus on my work.

Tarik also wanted me to experience his wrath. Every payment request from the Gender Unit was blocked. The list of unreasonable objections on every memo increased. My team reacted and complained to me. Masako brought me one issue in particular where he had made ridiculous objections. I needed to get it resolved. I did not want to send Masako to Tarik so I went myself, taking along many other memos that my staff had passed on to me. They all needed clearance from him...and him alone.

When I went to his office to discuss the matter, he made me sit next to his desk. After some talk about the stack of memos I had brought, Tarik quickly switched to his personal life. He told me that he had found a very beautiful girlfriend and was very happy. I was tired of listening to his stories, but I tried to show only disapproval and not disgust, on my face. He showed me several pages from a notebook that he said were letters she had written. He wanted me to read them as he continued praising her. I did not look at the letters and said, “Tarik, I’m very happy for you that you have a girlfriend, but now can we get back to discussing these memos?”

He told me to wait and continued talking about how much this 19-year old girl loved him. He said he had spent many nights with her, going into explicit detail. When I tried to get up, saying, “Perhaps I should come at another time,” he ordered me to stay. He knew very well that I needed him to review the series of memos exchanged between our Unit and New York concerning some payments. He went on with his story, saying he told his girlfriend’s mother that Harumi was having a one-week workshop and pretended he was hiring the girl on a short-term contract for Harumi. This gave him a good excuse to keep her at his home.

He told me this story with a lot of pride. Then he picked up his mobile phone and called the girl. I got up because I was feeling very upset, but also frightened by his tactics. He made me stay. I felt that if I left he would never give me the assistance I needed. He seemed well aware of that. He started talking romantically to his girlfriend, asking her how much she loved him and how good it was the night before. Then he asked her to call her mother and tell her that Harumi might need her assistance for a few more days.

During this conversation, he slid down in his chair and started rubbing his crotch. I found his gestures disgusting. After some more love-talk with his girlfriend, he hung up the phone and enjoyed watching my facial expressions. Then, he looked at the memos I had brought, pointed at a few and said that he would take care of them. He never resolved things all at once, but, instead, he liked moving in stages so he could keep collecting his ‘tax’. He wanted us to keep going back to him. I had paid the tax for the day.

I felt numb, wishing our system was stronger and we did not have to waste so much time with the Operations chief to get our work done. I experienced a strange nausea. These personalized procedures and Tarik’s tax were a heavy burden on me, on other women and on the organization itself. I knew very well that if I had been willing to pay more of this tax, having a cup

of tea with him while laughing at his pornographic jokes or spending a night with him at Bhurban Pearl Continental, many favors would have been bestowed upon me and my Gender Team. “Why is our management so weak?” I thought, my blood burning.

By September, my contract issue still lay unresolved. Keeping in mind what I had discussed with Kamran I decided to take Harumi into confidence. He was more human than Robert, who was extremely judgmental and robotic and always blindly on Tarik’s side. I went to Harumi’s office and said I needed to talk to him confidentially about a problem that had been going on for a while. He became quite concerned and invited me in. I asked to close the door. Finally, I sat down in front of him and gathered the courage to talk to him honestly, telling him as much as I could. I wanted him to understand why he could not simply send me back to Tarik since these delays and hurdles had a particular motivation. I tried to give a realistic picture of how Tarik had been treating us. I told him about the drunken phone call he made to my home and the sexually-charged filthy language, he had used. I also told him about what happened to Sadia and how badly it affected her. He was shocked and could not believe what he was hearing.

Listening to what I had to say, Harumi seemed drowned in sadness and concerned for our personal safety. He was quiet for a long time and then said, “I wonder, if a man of his personality is confronted or pushed into a corner, how he will react and what harm he can do to you.”

I told him that I had been angry with him and Robert for not intervening and for repeatedly pushing me in front of such a starved shark of a man. My voice broke, but I did not want to cry in front of him so I controlled myself. We sat quietly for a while, with Harumi shaking his head in disbelief. I felt relieved to have at least done my duty by reporting Tarik’s behavior to my supervisor.

Although he now knew of my problems, Harumi did nothing about my contract and I had to approach Robert to intervene. With all of Tarik’s propaganda against me, he mistrusted me, thinking I was trying to give a bad name to his favorite officer. A few days later Robert sent me an offer on my contract, in the form of an email note with the terms. I accepted right away, but the contract was still nowhere in sight.

After two more weeks of hearing nothing about my contract, I barged into Robert’s office. I said, a bit rudely, “I thought I’d let you know that I’m completing a month of working in UNDP without a contract so I won’t be getting a salary payment today.” Looking confused, he asked whether I had checked with Tarik. I smiled sarcastically and left his room, banging the door behind me. All I could ever expect was my millionth referral back to Tarik. “This man calls himself the head of this organization,” I said to myself, “I hope he rots in hell.”

Robert must have asked him to conclude the business, but Tarik did not want to accept defeat so easily and came to my office personally with the contract, asking me to say that I accepted the terms. I told him I had already sent written confirmation of the terms two weeks earlier. Grudgingly, while still standing by my desk, he insisted, “I want to hear it from you.” He made me read the terms and say I accepted them. I did so anxiously, hoping that the process would now be finished. He smiled with vengeance, bent over me and tapped my table with his fingers, saying, “I only came to your room because I wanted the pleasure of hearing your voice.” At that moment, I hated Harumi and Robert for enabling such a monster-Harumi for his lack of backbone and Robert for his love of loyal servants rather than professional managers. I hated them for making me face such humiliation.

During this time, my work experience was a strange mixture of extreme frustrations and fantastic highs. Our projects were doing very well. My team was working hard and our partners were running with us. In Lahore, the traffic police announced a week on women's mobility where they placed booths throughout the city for women to complain if they were intimidated by a driver or a passenger while riding public transport. They reported the license number of the vehicle and the traffic police took action. A community organization was running a parallel campaign to re-establish women's right to mobility. They distributed colorful posters and brief advocacy notes summarizing research on women's mobility and several other booklets. I could see women walking proudly past the booths. For the first time, a government department had acknowledged the women's right to be on the street and to use public transport, just as men. That week, the police had registers full of complaints filed by women against harassment by drivers and their assistants.

The traffic police were happy about the response and the positive comments from women about this service. They decided to establish a permanent complaint cell in their office. They told the women that they could also call in and register their complaints by phone. The Bus Drivers' Association became so energized that they demanded gender sensitivity training for their members. They offered to organize the drivers and the venue, asking us only for the trainers. The city of Lahore was buzzing with activity.

The Chief Minister of Punjab called me urgently to advise him on their new transport plan. I pushed forward women's demand for big buses. They hated the small vans with two front seats designated for women. They wanted big buses with separate doors for men and women, just as Lahore used to have in the past. Women complained that their main problems came while entering a bus. Once inside they did not care if they had a separate section for women or mixed seating nor did they mind standing. However, the shoving and pushing of the crowds at the bus-stop made it very hard to get inside the vehicle. After much discussion with the Minister of Transport and many other senior officials, the Chief Minister understood my point and made the decision to buy new buses.

I kept my team's morale very high. In addition to our frequent office celebrations, I sometimes took everyone out for dinner to commemorate whatever we had achieved in our work. The best thing that we developed in our group was clear and honest communication and a strong solidarity for the mission we had embarked on. We also had a lot of space for sharing personal issues, which ranged from Sadia's problems with transport, Masako's interest in shopping for Pakistani gifts for her family and Rana's issues of parenting her teenagers. Nabila had the team's full support when she faced difficulties with her husband. We had become a very solid team.

In our Gender Unit meetings, however, complaints mounted about how Tarik had categorically told his staff to stop all of our requests. Brainstorming how to handle this, we came up with the idea of developing an office-wide anti-sexual harassment policy. Reporting Tarik to Robert never came up because of their closeness. We were thrilled about this new idea and quickly discussed it with Harumi, who had no objections. I volunteered to write the policy, but asked Nabila and Masako to circulate a memo to all the UNDP offices to find out if anyone else had ever embarked on such an exercise.

We were all energized by the achievements of the Team in such a short period and despite constant procedural harassment within the office. We also knew that linking ourselves to the UN name gave us an advantage that could be used with both the government and other development

organizations. This link was so important that I could bear the price of suffering under five other Tariks, if necessary.

29. BONDS OF ETERNITY

Dating publicly would have undermined our professional influence in the UNDP, so Paul and I took long drives together, usually at night. This was our version of going out. On these drives, we talked about anything and everything. The lush green hills and winding roads supported our secret relationship. We simply enjoyed talking to each other. We explored different roads into the mountains and parked at high points to see the valley views. We were also preparing to reveal our relationship to the public.

In Hollywood love stories, saying, “I love you” is a big milestone, when the relationship transforms suddenly as if these words had magic. Proposing marriage is another milestone. How and where does one pop the classic question, “Will you marry me?” These are considered major steps on the road of love, leading to “living happily ever after.”

Our love story had no such clear-cut milestones, but was more like paths and valleys unfolding as we walked along. We gradually learnt more about each other and through that process, explored ourselves. Our relationship opened untapped areas in our personalities. My life was full of significant things long before I met Paul, but after falling in love with him, life took on new meaning. Every morning and every night had importance. Every breath I took seemed consequential. I never stopped to ask myself, “Do I love him?” I never paused to wonder, “Do I want to spend the rest of my life with him?” All this happened in a flow as if there was no other path, as if Paul came to this part of the world only to meet me, as if I had not married anyone because I had not met Paul, as if all of this was part of our destiny. No one said, “I love you” with a bang. No one proposed. We just ended up standing at a lush green spot at the edge of a magical valley with a promise of a happy life together. We looked at each other, smiled and walked into it.

While our personal interaction was increasingly spontaneous and romantic, our professional lives remained formal. I had no direct contact with Paul in the office except in large meetings. We were very clear about our professional boundaries and were comfortable with each other in that mode. My heart always bloomed when I caught a glimpse of him, but I kept my behavior under control.

In the evenings, when I visited him at his home, I would talk about my childhood, my friends, the highs and lows of my life and my dreams. He did not say much about his childhood, but sometimes I would push him to tell me stories from parts of his world before I was in his life. We were trying to catch up with each other, making up for all the time that had passed before we were together. I was like a bubbling spring, asking questions, loving whatever I could about him. He was like a calm ocean, listening to me as I talked incessantly about events in my life. I knew he was as happy as I was.

Sometimes I grumbled about my office problems. Paul knew about my annoyance with Tarik, but I never told him any details. I also complained a lot about Harumi and Robert. He listened and was supportive, but avoided all gossip. He stayed cool-headed and neutral, never taking sides or running people down to make me happy. He always tried to analyze the situation

and bring out perspectives from both sides. I fully understood why people thought highly of his opinions and I loved him for it.

We both felt we were ready to move forward with our relationship and involve our families. I told him I had to talk to my mother first. I had never kept secrets from her. My family's agreement mattered a great deal to me. In the core of my heart, I knew they would all support me because they had never wanted anything other than my happiness. I was sure they would see happiness in my eyes, in my whole being, in everything I was doing. I just needed to find the time and opportunity to initiate this discussion. Our house was always crowded with people-people of all ages, all economic backgrounds, all sorts and kinds. This made finding time for such a personal conversation difficult, but one night I finally had an opportunity to talk to my mother alone.

She had sensed where my friendship with Paul was going and saw the spark in my eye and the glow on my face. She took our discussion very seriously, asking many questions about Paul. She expressed her concerns and I tried to counter them. Finally, she hugged me and said that she liked him. I was ecstatic and thanked her for making me so happy. After getting a green light from my mother, I talked to Kamran. He was always good at objective feedback and was supportive. He liked Paul and he liked how I had changed with this relationship. The peace and serenity so evident in Paul's face had transferred into my heart.

Since my father had just returned from Germany, I talked to my parents together. My father usually left such big decisions to God, thinking He would do what is best for us. My mother supported me actively. For her, the fact that I had chosen someone to marry was very important. I would have been most unhappy if my family had not agreed to the non-traditional union I was stepping into, but the way my spirit was moving, there was probably no way my family would have imposed any hurdles. Paths seemed to be opening up through the sheer power of our intention.

Now Paul had to come to my house and formally talk to my parents about our marriage. The day he planned to do that, I was going to Lahore with Sadia for a participatory evaluation of the Women's Mobility project. We had invited all our partners to come together and reflect on our achievements and challenges. I asked Paul to come the next day so I would not be at home when he was carrying on his formal discussions with my parents.

Typically, the woman and man whose marriage is being discussed do not participate in the gathering of elders who confer on the matter, but this restriction did not apply to us. Not having any family in Pakistan, Paul had to do the formalities himself. I did not want to be present because I was afraid I would crack up laughing at it all.

I had been so busy that I had not packed earlier and was upstairs in my room, quickly throwing my clothes and necessities in a bag for my trip while Paul was talking to my family, but my whole attention was downstairs. When the UN car came to pick me up, I rushed down, having no idea how far the conversation had gone. I passed through the living room saying goodbye to everyone. My parents, my brother and Paul were sitting there. I smiled tightly, trying hard to control my laughter. Paul and I exchanged a glance. In that one look, we expressed our love, our support and our affection for each other. All the way to my flight I kept smiling and wondering how the 'May I marry your daughter?' session had gone.

That evening, my maternal uncle and aunt came to visit me in my hotel in Lahore. They lived in Lahore with their three sons. Our families had always been very close. Relatives are often so close that it is difficult to delineate one's own family. Our lives intertwine and the network of

relatives, for most, becomes a support system. They were arguing with me for not staying with them instead of an impersonal hotel. Just then, my mother called and congratulated me. Blood rushed through my body as I saw Paul's face in my mind, smiling at me. When my mother heard that my uncle was in the room she immediately asked me to hand him the phone. Sister and brother then exchanged the good news, congratulated each other and quickly started planning for the official announcement.

The room filled with cheers and wishes of congratulations. Sadia, who was also there with me, was thrilled with the news and could not believe it. Everyone hugged and kissed me and my uncle said I had made him the happiest person on earth. I am sure they must have been surprised at my parents approving a non-Pakistani for me, which was highly unusual, but, for my parents, the fact that I had finally agreed to get married was far more important. Paul and I had wanted to talk to Robert before making a public announcement, but my mother insisted that since all our relatives lived in Lahore the news should not be leaked in Islamabad. My mother and my uncle could not wait to tell everyone. My head was floating and I could not concentrate on my work at all that night.

The next day Sadia and I immersed ourselves in the evaluation exercise. All our mobility project partners had come to share their one year of experience with the project's activities. In the meantime, my uncle and his sons made a special order of *laddu*, traditional sweets with almonds, to go with the announcement. My cousins spent two days going all over Lahore to each relative's house personally giving the news. They distributed sixty kilos of *laddu* with the announcement. They also gave me some *laddu* to take back to Islamabad.

I talked to Paul every night. We were both delighted with how things were moving. His face and smiling eyes were always in my mind. In the midst of my work, I would smile thinking about him. I could not wait for the day to be over so I could get to my hotel room and call him. Listening to him was intoxicating.

Sadia was ecstatic, saying this was the perfect match for me. She had always liked Paul a lot and had sensed his affection towards me over the past few months. She had been very concerned that I would not notice and return the feeling appropriately. She had been telling me to wear nice clothes and not be so damn official with him all the time.

Back in Islamabad, I wished I could be present to see Robert's expression when Paul finally told him about us. I insisted on a detailed description, but only got a smile from Paul. This was two months after our Lahore announcement. I had been very busy evaluating my projects while Paul assessed the right time for our news. After telling Robert, he quickly gave me a signal to tell my team. I took a long breath and invited everyone to my room.

Masako, Laila, Sadia, Rana, Nabila, Sultan and our driver Hassan, all came, surprised at the sudden huddle. Some thought that they had made a mistake and I was going to give them a scolding; others thought that the Gender Unit's funds had been slashed again. When I finally spoke, Masako almost fell on the floor. Rana's jaw dropped. A moment of silence came over everyone. I had a radiant smile on my face, unable to contain my excitement any longer. Nabila screamed and rushed to hug me. Rana recovered and commented, "I knew it...well, I suspected it!" Everyone congratulated me and hugged me with delight. More *laddu* were ordered and a huge decorated basket of them went around the two UNDP floors of the Saudi Pak Tower. Colleagues came up to me and Paul, congratulating us. I was ecstatic.

Several days after the announcement, Tarik saw me in a corridor and casually congratulated me, unlike most other colleagues, who immediately came forward with best wishes. He said he was happy for me, but his face indicated something different. He said, "Paul has taken one of ours and that is not fair, but I will settle the score. I've already identified who I will take, you know who?" He laughed and said, "Rachel!" as he walked away. I thought that as a joke, it was in bad taste. Knowing his behavior, however, I feared it was not, yet I was not sure what he meant.

News of our engagement rapidly spread throughout the city. For me to marry an American came as a complete surprise because I was perceived as being more Pakistani than most educated Pakistanis. Although my lifestyle and the focus of my life were, somehow, very non-traditional, in another way I loved Pakistan's folklore and traditional culture and had always embodied it in the way I lived. Although people wondered about how I would be able to live with an American, they were still very happy for me.

The month of Ramadan was coming, a time when wedding celebrations are traditionally not organized, so we decided to wait until after the month of fasting and the festival of *Eid*, scheduling the ceremony for February of the following year. My friends said that they could not wait four long months to celebrate so they announced a *dholki* drum session right away. This is a pre-wedding party with feasting, singing and dancing to the beating of drums. I wore a white *gharara* with gold sequins and Paul dressed in a white *shalwar kamiz*. When the music started we got up to do traditional dancing with our other friends, but after a moment, we seemed to be alone. The crowd disappeared and the loud music had faded. There were only Paul and Fouzia swaying to the tune of life itself.

30. WEDDING PREPARATIONS

I had always strongly opposed the dowry tradition in South Asia. Parents burden themselves with debt trying to fulfill the demands of the groom and his family. I saw no sense in providing so many things for a marriage in addition to giving away one's daughter and thought that the Punjabi society had blown this tradition out of proportion.

I remember the excitement in the house when it was time for my eldest sister, who I always called *baji*, to get married. We knew that our parents would decide on an appropriate match, but we were thrilled to be a part of some of the discussions, an opportunity not usually offered to the younger members of a household.

Baji's main marriage proposal came through my paternal uncle, when she was about to complete her final year in college. My parents agreed to a visit from a certain young man's family. It was not appropriate for the young man himself to visit. The family saw my sister and talked to her for a short while, but mostly interacted with my parents. I remember the potential mother-in-law kept holding my sister's face in both her hands and kissing her, saying, "Maliha is so beautiful, just like her name. She is like the beauty of the east."

My siblings and I huddled in the back room while our parents did the talking, exploring the prospective groom's financial independence, the background of the family and assessing their social status. Finally, my mother left the guests and came into our room, where we were waiting impatiently. *Baji* was very poised. My mother had a black and white passport size photograph of

the young man, the kind photographers touch up manually so the face looks spotless and statue like. We all jumped at it, but Mother hushed us up. My sister was smiling, although she had no clue what the ultimate decision would be. Making a bad face, the photograph did not look impressive. I said, "At least they should have brought a colored picture!" My sister merely glanced at the photo and made no comment.

The guests took a photograph of my sister with them that sat in a frame in our lounge. The prospective groom's mother insisted on taking it to show her relatives. Asking directly for a photograph for their son was not polite. Thus, my sister saw only a black and white photograph and he, in turn, only saw a colored group photo that barely revealed her features.

Like most young couples, that was the extent of the relationship between my sister and her future husband prior to the wedding itself. Things have changed quite a bit in many educated families nowadays, but open dating is still not socially acceptable. Men and women can meet through work or through the larger network of family relationships. Most families, however, still abide by the tradition of arranged marriages and consider it the parents' right to choose a partner for their children.

My sister actually fared better than my parents, who never even saw a photograph of each other before the wedding. My mother was naturally very curious about her husband's looks and kept trying to catch a glimpse when she was going to the groom's house on her wedding day. All she could see was a neck with flower garlands and the back of his head sitting in the front seat of the car. For my sister, to see a photograph was already quite an improvement.

We do not choose our parents and our siblings and marriage is seen as somewhat similar. Girls do not choose their husbands and neither do the husbands usually choose their wives. Although my parents asked my sister openly, it was not really a choice. One needs information to make an informed choice and she had none. Marriage is considered a union of two families, so the elders do their best to make a good match. My sister was engaged before she finished her final year of university, while I was finishing my first year in college.

My mother had started collecting my sister's dowry when she was in third grade. She always put away the best things we ever bought in a huge aluminum trunk. We never had the luxury of using most of the outstanding gifts we received as those were immediately packed away for the future. During every summer vacation, we embroidered mounds of sheets, table covers, trolley sets, napkins, glass holders and anything else we could decorate and all these things would disappear into the huge aluminum trunk.

I took a strong stand against dowry at that time, but my mother was not willing to listen to anyone. She argued that in order to ensure that her daughter received respect in her next home she had to provide all that tradition required. She did not want her daughter to be ill-treated or laughed at by her in-laws. Over the next year, we all focused on finalizing the dowry and other wedding arrangements. Great happiness was in the air. This was the wedding of my parents' first child and for such a perfect daughter they wanted to do everything perfectly.

My mother prepared about a hundred sets of clothes, several sets of gold jewelry, some more of silver, twelve sets of bedding and many other sets of twelve, including bed covers, tea trolley sets, dining table covers, cushions and so on. She put together all the furniture needed for a full house, including electric goods like a fridge, television, sound system, sewing machine and whatever she had collected over the years in terms of household items and decorations. Everything

was packed in two huge containers and several suitcases, a large truckload to be taken to Multan, where my sister was going to live with her husband and her in-laws after her marriage.

The wedding took place in Lahore in the homes of our large paternal families. The pomp and show was unmatched in my experience. My parents were happy, feeling they had fulfilled their responsibility well. However, within a year, my sister's marriage fell apart. The union of the two families did not work at all. The life-styles, values, priorities and, most of all, the morals were quite different in the two homes. My sister faced serious intimidation from her brother-in-law and because of her own up-bringing had a hard time telling her husband about it. Her husband had little power in his family in any case. My family had no idea of what was going on, except that my sister was so sick she could not leave her bed.

In general, young women visit their parents often during the first year of marriage to make the adjustment easier. My mother was surprised that my sister's in-laws would not allow her to visit us even once. Finally, when my mother went to visit and saw her daughter so ill, she brought her back immediately. The fight after that was not between husband and wife, but between the elders of the families. Relationships do not break easily in our society, but when they do, the reaction is volcanic. This incident shook our whole family, affected each one of us very deeply.

Fortunately, all this sadness brought forth a beautiful flower that filled my sister's life and our home with its fragrance. I was in my third year of college when my niece was born. Holding her in my arms, I had never seen such a beautiful baby. My parents selected me to give the gutti to her. This is a tradition of giving a baby her first food, usually honey. The baby is said to take after the person who gives it to her. I am not sure why they chose me for this task, perhaps because I was a fighter and my parents did not want their granddaughter to be as perfect as her mother. They wanted her to survive in this imperfect world and fight for herself.

My mother argued that now that their daughter had returned to stay, the in-laws should return her dowry. My father said that having their daughter back safely was enough. He did not care for material things. My mother insisted that she did not collect all those things for those irresponsible people to enjoy. Her daughter could still use them, especially the gold jewelry, which is seen as a woman's financial security. My mother had spent her life savings on that dowry and it made her blood boil to think people who caused her daughter so much suffering were using it. She had no idea that it would take twenty-five years before a truck full of used items and old-fashioned clothes, but no gold jewelry, would pull up at her house to return the dowry that she had so painstakingly prepared for her daughter.

I was determined that I would not waste my time on marriage, thinking it was just too much of a gamble. I decided to do whatever was necessary to become independent and focus on my career. Not until I had met Paul did I feel comfortable in taking the chance.

The experience of my sister's marriage had a revolutionary effect on my mother. She began to have more faith in bringing out abilities of her daughters rather than investing in things that could not guarantee their happiness. She had hugged me and said, "Never again will I ask my daughters to save every nice thing they get for their dowry. Wear whatever you want and spend our money on yourself. Live it up, my love! Enjoy your life and focus on developing yourself. That is the best investment. When the time for your marriage comes, we will give what we have, but not at the expense of your education."

Now that the time for my wedding had finally come, I made it very clear to my mother that I did not want a traditional dowry and she respected that. Whatever wedding gifts she gave me came solely from her desire for me to be happy in my new house. She gave me only jewelry that she had already made for each of her daughters and clothes for my personal use. My happiness was much more important to her than outdated traditions and norms.

My wedding preparations continued. Rensje wanted to know what she needed to do. Rana volunteered to help and initiated dance practice for a special Gender Unit dance item for the wedding. Nabila went back to her home village to get some fancy clothes, including a glittery sari. She decided to make two *ghagras* out of it, one for me and one for herself. Sadia wanted to take the weekend off to go to Gujranwala to purchase her formal wear. Masako wanted to shop. I was trying to focus the team on the Unit's work, which for me was going on side-by-side with my personal life. My team, however, was rapidly getting out of my control.

My niece, Sadaf, who now lived with us after my sister's move to America, had grown into a beautiful young woman. She took it upon herself to make certain that everyone began preparing what they would wear, how various ceremonies would be arranged and what I needed to buy for the wedding. She was the most organized in our family so we were quite relieved that she was taking charge.

Paul was very embarrassed by all this celebration business. He had not come to terms with all the festivity surrounding the wedding announcement. He wondered why we had to have such public celebrations three to four months in advance. I, on the other hand, was fully into the festivities, enjoying myself with my friends. I had been quite used to living parallel lives so one part of me was handling the office work and tensions and the other was fully enjoying my wonderful personal life. Celebrations continued right up to Ramadan and restarted as soon as it was over. Different groups of friends got together for *dholki* and dancing until late at night. Paul attended some and made excuses for others. Fortunately, for him, he had to leave the country again on an assignment. He could not fathom so much public celebration; all he wanted to do was to sit with me and celebrate alone.

SECTION FOUR: COURAGE AND CONSEQUENCE

31. PROGRAMME SUCCESS, OFFICE FAILURE

One day, Masako and Nabila ran excitedly into my room. I asked what was going on and made them sit down opposite me. Masako cleared her throat and exchanged looks with Nabila about four times before starting. I smiled and waited. Masako moved forward in her chair, “Remember that we were looking for models of a sexual harassment policy for our office? We didn’t get anything from any of the country offices, but we got this from New York.” She put a document on my table. They had not read it, but had quickly printed it out and brought it to me. It seemed official.

“Good, leave it for me and I’ll read it tonight.” They kept sitting and Nabila told me how happy they were that they found at least one model. They were very proud of their success. I smiled and praised them.

Reading the document in my room late that night, after the festivities were over for that evening, I was astonished to see that it was not a model, but an actual UNDP anti-sexual harassment policy that Headquarters had approved in 1993. I sat up in bed and kept looking at the directive attached to it. I could not believe it. This policy was for the entire organization and we had no clue about it. I was tempted to call my whole team right then to share my surprise, but it was almost one in the morning.

The next day I called everyone for a meeting, dying to share this extraordinary news. No one could believe it when I said that the UN already had a sexual harassment policy for many years and, seemingly, no one here knew anything about it. The room suddenly became very noisy with everyone talking at once. Nabila wanted to be sure that it was not a proposal so I showed them the memo dated May 1993, stating that the policy should be implemented in all offices of the United Nations.

I told them that, three years earlier, I had wanted to report a senior officer of the UNDP for sexual harassment and had talked to Tarik about its procedure, asking for a format for writing up a complaint and he had never mentioned any anti-sexual harassment policy. Even Chandni Joshi, the Regional Head of UNIFEM, the UN's agency for women, had not said anything. Perhaps even they did not know about it. Sadia commented it was likely that Harumi did not know about it, otherwise, he should have said something when we reported Tarik’s behavior to him. Masako laughed, reminding them that Harumi had given us a green light to develop our own policy.

We all began laughing uncontrollably. Here we had been writing to all the UNDP country offices like fools asking for a model and not one had responded to tell us that the UNDP had a policy for the past five years. I laughed hysterically and banged my hand on the table. We all were falling off our chairs. I said, “At least Sarah Murison, in New York, knew enough to be able to help us.” We kept laughing, sometimes at the UNDP, sometimes at ourselves.

Over the next week, I must have read each word of that policy ten times. I almost had it memorized. I thought of all the angles that covered our case. Like a film playing on a large cinema screen, all the consequences that could result from reporting played vividly in my mind.

Masako announced that she and her fiancé had finally decided to get married in Japan during the December break. Her happy news blended into my wedding preparation stream. I arranged a *dholki* especially for her, giving everyone a reason to make even more clothes, paint their hands with henna and sing wedding songs.

I had to jolt the group out of the celebration mood by the end of the year. We finalized the selection of the consultants who would review our Gender Programme and intensive preparations had to be made for their visit. I had scheduled this review in November and December, to take stock of how effective our programme had been. We had an experienced expert from UK, a senior UNDP colleague from Sri Lanka and a Pakistani psychologist. All three women were experienced in gender issues and had been working in the field for many years.

We divided responsibilities among the team members for this formal review process as we always did. Masako and Nabila were responsible for their Lahore visit, while Laila took charge of the Islamabad visits with the government offices and the project with the First Women's Bank, while Rana and Sadia covered their visits to the rural areas. I was to accompany them on only a few of their visits. I wanted them to feel free and be alone with the team members and project partners.

I was in Lahore with the team when Harumi, also in Lahore, sent a message that he wanted me to give a short presentation on our Gender Programme in a meeting between the UNDP and the Government of Punjab. I was upset at this last-minute scheduling and at first refused, but the review team said they would use the opportunity to observe the interaction between the UNDP and the Government and to hear a formal presentation on our Programme. We shuffled our tight schedule in Lahore to accommodate the presentation.

For some reason, Harumi had asked Tarik to organize the meeting with the Government. He and several of his Operations staff came to Lahore and stayed at the same hotel as us. This turned out to be helpful because the consultants had the opportunity to witness the way Tarik talked to Nabila and Masako and some other UNDP women staff members. When we all gathered for reflections in Islamabad at the conclusion of the mission, sexual harassment was one of the points they raised with us. The Gender Team members looked at each other in surprise. I gave a diplomatic answer, not knowing if we should confide in them or not. It seemed that the three of them had already discussed the issue at length among themselves and the lead British consultant, Georgina Ashworth, who was an academic and a senior woman's activist, said they had quite easily observed numerous examples of sexual harassment and would like us to talk openly with them. Hesitantly, we started talking, but focused on the general environment, not giving any details. They identified Tarik right away as an experienced abuser of women. We were quite surprised at their observation and thankful for their concern.

Our overall Gender Programme review was a raving success. The consultants said it was strategic, suited to the real needs of Pakistani women and, especially, that we had used very few resources and yet had made significant achievements. If Robert and Harumi had some sense of the process of social change, they would have celebrated the results, but we were content with our own team celebrating these positive comments about our Programme.

Before she left, Georgina arranged to have a private meeting with Robert and to express her concern about the sexual harassment in the UNDP office. We crossed our fingers. When she did finally talk to him and told him directly that there was sexual harassment in his office, he swiftly shifted the focus away from his office, “Oh, I’m not surprised. As a matter of fact, I’d be surprised if you had told me there is no sexual harassment in Pakistan!” Then, in his intellectual tone, he explained that Pakistan has extreme gender discrimination and a high level of gender abuse, so obviously, some of it played out in the office environment as well. Georgina, shocked at his casual attitude, told him that he should be more serious about it and should at least organize gender awareness training for the staff. Like a good bureaucrat, he mechanically agreed, but never followed up. He was not interested in learning more about her observations. He did not care to know who was doing what to whom, whether it was serious enough or was it affecting the work of his staff.

Tarik’s intimidation had taken on another angle now. He was less sleazy and more vengeful. No one could object to his actions and no one could disagree with him. Now, Tarik not only interpreted the policy according to his will, but also created it whenever he wanted. All he had to say was, “This is what the policy says.” He frequently changed his mind, just to give us a hard time. He could give us different responses for the same action and no one could question him.

I had told my group to learn the rules and regulations since that was his source of power. He threw procedures in our faces, rules that we had never seen, rules that had more of a mythical existence, rules that sat on an altar for only priests to interpret. All along, we had been gathering bits and pieces of information together. We were getting good at countering his delaying tactics. I held tightly to the sexual harassment policy. Occasionally, I took it out and read it to get some strength, thanking the people who had thought about it and did all that work for us.

The Gender Unit was on Tarik’s list of those who needed to be taught a lesson. More than the Unit, I was clearly his target. He sometimes came to my office and talked to me in a very friendly manner to see if I had been softened up by his attacks or not, but, generally, he was in an aggressive mode. He had poisoned Robert against me, mostly by insisting that I was not appropriate for a management position because I hated procedures. He repeatedly said I abhorred authority and Robert began parroting this in front of me. I also heard from numerous sources, that although Harumi was very appreciative of my work to my face, when in Robert’s presence he would fully agree with everything that Tarik said.

The first half of December was usually a busy time for everyone, as many payments had to be cleared to conclude our Unit’s annual financial reports. Ramadan was also approaching, so people were more anxious to get their work done quickly. I went to Tarik to clear up some expenditure reports as I did not want any delays to put these bills on the next year’s expenditure statement. Junior finance staff would not touch the matter and told us that according to Mr. Tarik Khan, they were not allowed to take action on our cases any more.

When I approached his desk, he looked at me in the eye and said, “Oh, too bad, you finally had to come for my help.”

I responded firmly and with confidence, “That’s because there are no systems. Even after the Operations Manual that the consultant prepared for you, there is still no consistency.”

“I see you’ve developed a taste for exploring the rules. Didn’t you hear what Robert said, ‘These are living documents and nothing is black and white. These procedural documents will keep evolving.’” He got up from his chair, put his hands in his pant pockets and proudly stretched his back.

“That worries me, Tarik. Procedures and rules should be black and white; otherwise, a living document means everything depends on the flavor of the day. Updating and changing procedures is fine, but there should be some kind of process—a circular or a directive so that everyone knows how the rule has been revised. Open for interpretation all the time means we all have different understandings and there is no standardization. What do we adhere to?” I did not sit on a chair, but kept standing in front of his desk.

“Aren’t you intelligent, Dr. Fouzia?” he said with an overtly artificial smile. I wondered where this would lead as he continued, “Good looking women shouldn’t burden their minds with this policy and procedure debate.” He spoke with such a vengeance that it shook my core. I told myself not to argue with him, but just get down to business. He continued, “Good looking women are here to please us men. Do you want to know? Just yesterday, I met this...”

“No...I don’t, I don’t want to know!” I said abruptly.

He laughed loudly. “Robert is very concerned about your performance. Your team challenges the procedures a bit too much.”

“I’m not worried about Robert’s opinion of me.” I wanted to show him he could not frighten me that way. “Tarik, we are trying our best to work. We do need to get our things done.” I said grudgingly and went on. “If there is any procedural hitch, tell me, otherwise I think our last expenditures of the year should be cleared. Don’t you agree?” I said sternly and turned to leave.

He called me from behind. “Take this.” He scribbled his signature on the memo and handed it to me.

Masako left for her wedding with gifts and prayers for her marriage. Sadia began preparing for her month of fasting. Laila and Nabila, in addition to handling their projects, continued the dance practice for my wedding after work. Rana, a bit disconnected from what was happening around her, undertook a mission to establish a separate women’s bathroom on our floor. The ones that existed were small, with only room for one person at a time, but men are really careless about cleaning up after themselves.

It was December 9, 1997, a cold and cloudy day, when Rensje came into my office in a panic. She was short of breath and fuming with anger. I had never seen her angry with anyone before. “Are you okay?” I asked as I stood.

“You know,” she began, “this whole office is so sick and tired of Tarik and his god-like actions.” She was trembling. I told her to sit down and tell me her problem. She said, “Tarik has fired a senior secretary, Tasneem, who had recently been shifted to work with me.” Rensje was so upset that she could not talk. I got her a glass of water. “The man has become a monster,” she fumed. Seeing her turning red in rage was unprecedented. She was the coolest and nicest person in the whole building. She went on, “Technically, this secretary was moved under me a few weeks ago. Don’t you think my opinion should be sought before firing her just like that?”

She gave me some background on the case and said, “I went to protest and he humiliated me. Is this a UN office or we are all his personal slaves? There should be some office decorum. I

am his colleague. He acted like a mad dog.” She caught her breath. “I asked him why she should be fired if I have no problems with her performance. He was furious that I was objecting to his decision. The only thing he didn’t do was to beat me up; otherwise he attacked me very aggressively.” Rensje took my hand and said, “You’re the head of the Gender Unit. I want you to take on this case. It’s a major gender discrimination issue.” I sighed, trying to understand the whole situation, “Tasneem doesn’t work for him, so how can he fire her?”

Rensje continued, very disturbed. “That’s what I told him. She’s not Robert England’s secretary anymore. Even that had been a way to harass her, but technically, she had already been transferred to my organization, which is separate from the UNDP. Neither Robert nor Tarik have the authority to fire her just like that. He thinks all women are his slaves and he can do as he pleases. I cannot repeat the words he used when he talked to me. No one in my life has ever talked to me like that and only because he doesn’t want me to get in the way of his revenge at Tasneem.” She wanted me to talk to Tasneem and listen to her story. I assured her that I would do whatever I could and told her to send Tasneem to my office anytime. I could not tell her that I had been a victim of this shark for almost four years myself.

32. MY HUMAN RIGHTS!

It was still early in the morning, so there was hardly anyone in the office. Sitting in front of my computer, I was trying hard to get my mind focused on work. I was moving the cursor down the list of my emails; clicking on some random ones just to be sure that my Inbox would not look untouched. The heaviness in my heart was weighing on my head as I sat there preoccupied with the thoughts of my conversation with Tasneem the day before. Tasneem had come to share her personal distress, but her tale had only added to my own anguish. Her story sparked off a flood of resentment, mixed with frustration, helplessness and disgust. As the computer blurred in front of my eyes, I wondered if I would respond to my own inner cries for justice or just shake off the pain and continue putting on an act of a professional woman, oblivious to her own situation, focused on the good she could do in this UN position for women of her country.

I looked at my desk calendar. I had circled today’s date with a red pen several times. I took a blue ballpoint and circled it a few more times. It was the 10th of December, the United Nations' Human Rights Day. This day meant a lot to me. I always considered this day an opportunity to join hands with my friends to raise our voices against human rights violations, but today, I was feeling like a goose that had lost touch with her flock. I knew my friends would be making placards, banners and preparing for the big rally today. I was aware of the plan of activities, but not being a part of the preparations made me feel distant from the day’s significance, especially since I was concerned about violations of my own rights. I kept staring at the date until the number 10 blurred in front of my eyes.

Life started to emerge in our office building. I could hear the cleaning staff making noises outside my office. Soon, I heard Sadia coming in.

“You are certainly here early!” I said lifelessly without a smile on my blank face.

“I use the UN transport so I have no choice but to be here right on time, or a little early.” She replied as she pulled her chair out.

“Were you here all night?” She asked, pressing her lips to avoid smiling. She put her bag away, adjusted her large *dupatta* and sat by her desk opposite mine.

She gave me a naughty look and said, “I am serious, you work so much I was waiting for the day when I would come and you would tell me that you forgot to go home last night.” She then burst into a shy laugh, but suddenly became serious, noticing the expression on my face.

“What is the matter, Fouzia?” she asked with concern.

Her fair color looked even lighter in the sunlight coming through our long, thin vertical window. Her dark brown hair looked reddish in that light.

“What is the matter?” she asked with her voice growing louder with concern.

“Ooooooh...” I moved forward in my chair, set my elbows on the desk and fixed my chin on my palms. “I’ve just been feeling sad about not being able to fully participate in the Human Rights Day activities. It is quite ironic that being in the UN system I am so busy that I have no time to take part in these events as I did when I was just a ‘civilian’. There is no concept of acknowledging this day within our own organization.”

“Why do you care?” she asked, as she turned on her computer.

“I need to draw energy and strength from this day. I need it very badly.”

I suddenly got up, put my hands on my head and said, “I bet that most of my colleagues, including the senior managers in our United Nations' Development Programme office in Islamabad don’t even remember it.” I threw myself back in the chair and closed my eyes.

“Why don’t you take the day off?” Sadia asked without looking at me, wrestling with her old machine.

“You know we have a full day workshop scheduled on ‘Country Office Work Planning’.” I replied.

“Oh, yes! We all have to be there, don’t we? I was getting in the mood to start my work, but I guess I better not,” Sadia responded.

This was a planning exercise to help us restructure our office into something called a ‘Center of Experimentation’ that was supposed to transform our office culture and our procedures so we could work more efficiently. The UN Headquarters selected only eight country offices to be a part of this exercise. There was a pot of funds associated with this exercise to make it attractive.

Since I was the head of my Unit, I was obligated to attend. I was in no mood to spend all day in what seemed to me to be a superficial exercise. I already had problems with the way management had organized the session, turning it into a mere rubber-stamping exercise.

Speaking my mind and being critical had always gotten me into trouble. Raising issues was simply not an acceptable behavior in our office. The way I was feeling that day, I was afraid that I might say things that would elicit a sharp reaction from the management. Despite that premonition, I convinced myself to go.

I saw other colleagues in my Unit, hugging each other, exchanging morning greetings, quickly settling into their offices, taking whatever papers they needed for the workshop and rushing towards the elevator. I did not acknowledge any of the ‘hellos’ directed at me. Sadia and I walked together. My mind was so preoccupied that I just followed my colleagues until I was

standing by an empty chair in a big hall and I heard Sadia's voice saying, "Sit down." I sat and tried to shake myself out of my thoughts.

I tuned in and out of the discussion throughout the morning. During one of my 'tuned-in' moments, I got involved with a small group focused on the office work environment. About seven of us had moved our chairs into one corner. I raised my usual concerns about our office and work culture. I suggested that since the UNDP had good governance as a part of its mandate of engagement with the national governments, we should put it down as a target for our own office as well and put it in our work plan. I got dirty looks from my colleagues, as my suggestion was admission of the fact that there was something wrong with the office culture. Even though many colleagues suffered from the same concern, they had learned to make only positive comments, knowing that anyone who named the problem would be punished.

Robert England wanted to make sure that we said whatever he had planned for the exercise, so he felt free to continually interrupt, re-interpret and infer from comments of the participants. He held a blue board-marker in his hand and kept playing with it, looking intently for things he liked and highlighting them.

When the small groups were presenting their results, one colleague got up to present his group's proposals for our annual plan. Among other things, he mentioned developing a system to check "delays in procedures and management issues". Everyone held their breath and stared at him. I whispered to myself, "Wow! That was brave of him." At least he touched a real issue.

For some reason, another manager, thin, with a high-pitched voice, got up and asked loudly, "Let's be brave, WHAT ISSUES?" This man was not known for taking stands. I was not sure if he really meant to pursue the point or if he was attempting to intimidate him and scoring a point with the big boss.

I had promised myself that I would not say a word, but I could not help it. Seeing the man who raised this point suddenly become so quiet, I got up and started speaking. All eyes turned towards me. I saw Robert give me one of those looks where he makes his beady eyes even smaller and just stares at you.

I said, "The problem is not WHAT issues, the problem is that there is no space for ANY issues." I continued, "I have suffered because I raise issues, suffered to the extent that now I try my best to remain silent on everything. What kind of an office culture is this? We now call our office a Center of Experimentation. We are supposedly going through a "change management process" to streamline our office. The management has gathered the staff together to suggest better ways of managing our work, but the minute anyone makes a critical comment it gets shot down. What we need to debate is whether we will allow ourselves the space to raise issues and listen to them or whether this 'change' business, with all these group discussions, will end up being just another superficial exercise."

Everyone looked at me in surprise. Looking back at all the open mouths and worried faces, I thought I should conclude my outburst so I said, raising my chin high, "I, for one, do not find this space in our system at all."

As I sat down after making my mini-speech, a perceptible current ran through the group. I clenched my fists. After a long moment of silence, the discussion went on without any acknowledgement or response to my comment. I thought about all those who might have taken a note of what I said and what plans they might have to reprimand me. I kept thinking, "Why am I

wasting my time in this suffocating office.” However, I could not think of leaving this organization without taking care of the issue that weighed so heavily on me. My palms started to sweat and my breathing became faster. I felt so heavy that I could not possibly think of starting a new job somewhere else. I could not just ignore it and move on. I could not be so unfair to myself.

I was not able to hear what happened in the meeting after that. There were about fifty people in our conference hall. I stared at the floor. My own sadness fully occupied my thinking. My conversation the day before with Tasneem came back to my thoughts. Her question kept echoing in my mind: “Are you going to do something about it or not?” She had come to my office to share her ordeal, expecting me, as the head of the Gender Unit and a person who works for women’s rights, to listen to her and provide support and some solution. She did not know anything about my own personal struggles. I kept on thinking, ‘How can I help solve her problem when I do not have enough courage to solve my own?’

Tasneem was a compassionate woman and had been a competent senior secretary. She was a tall, heavily-built woman in her late twenties. Her short hair framed her round face and plump cheeks. Her deep eyes were full of tears as she sobbed in front of me. Her plump fingers with long polished nails kept pushing her tearful eyes further in as she dabbed them with tissue.

Tasneem was deeply depressed about losing her job. Coming from a lower middle-class family this was a terrible shock. She had been coping with the tensions of a traditional wife living with her in-laws in a joint family and trying to be a competent professional woman. Even with two children, she had still been able to build a real career in the UN. She needed that job to hold her ground in her domestic life in the face of an abusive husband and oppressive in-laws. She also depended on it to retain her self-esteem and sanity. Losing her job was a shattering experience, especially when she had tried so hard to fulfill all her responsibilities. It was doubly painful for her because she knew that the person who fired her was not even her supervisor. He did that in retaliation, only because she had refused his repeated sexual invitations. Through her sobs, she had asked me, “How can this system be so blind? How can he get away with doing something like this?”

I was quite familiar with Tarik's ability to abuse his authority, but arbitrarily firing someone, this way was beyond all limits. I muttered aloud to myself, “If he is allowed to get away with this and no action is taken against his misuse of powers, then God help us all.”

I was jolted out of my thoughts when a female colleague put her hand on my shoulder to say hello. I quickly smiled back and looked around. The Country Office Planning Workshop had just broken for lunch. With a long sigh, I gathered myself and took the elevator up to the ninth floor. Back in my office, I quickly threw myself in my chair, checking my urgent email messages like a robot.

Sadia and others had gone straight from the conference hall to the cafeteria for lunch, so I was alone in my office. Just then, Tasneem walked in. She was wearing a blue baggy *shalwar kamiz* and a big *dopatta* draping over her front. She wrapped one end of her *dopatta* around her arm and promptly sat in one of the two chairs in front of my desk. Her eyes were swollen from crying and her face was pale from worrying. She started as if she was continuing from where we left yesterday.

“Fouzia, tell me what to do? He continued to push me to go out with him. Fouzia, I am a married woman. We live in Pakistan. This is not Europe. This man has no shame.” Tears started rolling down her cheeks. “If someone in the street says something to me I would slap him, but in

an office I can't do it. He is so powerful. All I did was to avoid him and continue to tell him politely how inappropriate I found his behaviour.”

She lowered her head and put it on the desk. She told me how Tarik humiliated her by his sexually charged comments. Once, when Robert was out of town, he called her into his office. She was too afraid of him to go in alone, so tried to stand in his doorway, but he yelled loudly for her to get inside. Once inside the room he forced her to listen to his latest sexual exploits with some woman she did not know. When Tasneem asked him if he needed something from her related to her work, he made a snide remark that a woman is useless after two childbirths. Tasneem knew that his wife also had two children and Tasneem was pregnant with her second child. She was not sure if he was commenting about his wife or her, but she bolted out of the room.

On several occasions, he told her that she was his special friend and he could only confide in her to share personal information. She said she never gave him the impression that she was flattered to hear that and continued to tell him that she was only interested in work-related issues.

Tasneem broke down again, unable to control her combined anger and sadness at feeling so helpless against a man who thought he was a god. I passed her some tissues. She continued, “What angers me is how he dares to talk to us like this. Fouzia, can you believe it? He thinks he is some feudal landlord and we are his poor tenants working in his fields. He is on such a power trip. He thinks he can get away with anything. He thinks no one will speak up.”

Sadia suddenly came into the room like the wind and planted a big plate of sandwiches in front of me. I looked at her and she nodded her head, instructing me to eat. She did not see me in the cafeteria so she knew that I had not taken time out for lunch. She worried about my food and rest like a little mother. She opened a bottle of coke and put it on my desk and turned to Tasneem, “Do you want me to get something for you?”

Tasneem said, “Just a glass of water, please.”

Sadia quickly brought the water for her. She seemed concerned about Tasneem's problem. Everyone in the Gender Unit knew about it, but I think at that moment, she was more concerned that Tasneem's repetition of the story was making me depressed.

Sadia left the room and Tasneem continued. At some point, I remembered that Sadia came to remind me that the planning workshop had resumed, but I did not register it at the time. Tasneem went on telling me that when she came back from her maternity leave Tarik had changed her assignment from Robert's secretary to a programme secretary with Rensje's unit. He did this on his own without discussing it or informing anyone. Tasneem was angry, but did not object because she needed the job badly and could not afford any confrontation.

His main attack came when she complained about the transport route of the bus that brought her to the office. UNDP managed this shared transport for several UN organizations. Tarik gave instructions that Kausar, his girlfriend, should be dropped first going home in the evening and the last to be picked up in the morning. Tasneem had to spend nearly one hour in the bus each way. This caused difficulties with her in-laws and was doubly burdensome because she was still partially breast-feeding her newly-born son. When her requests to Tarik did not yield any result, she made a formal complaint to the UN Transport Committee. After deliberation, the committee decided in her favor, stating that, to maintain fairness, the one who is picked up the last in the morning would be the last one to be dropped in the afternoon. That news made Tarik

furious. He saw her now not only as a woman who had continuously disregarded his sexual invitations, but also as someone who dared to question his authority.

Tasneem said with trembling voice, "This was the last straw. He called me in his office and humiliated me so badly. He yelled and yelled. He screamed, 'How dare you go to the Transport Committee to appeal MY orders? How dare you question ME?' Fouzia, he yelled so loud I was frightened. This is an office of an international organization, for God's sake."

I shook her hands to snap her out of this cycle of continuously re-telling her story. I said, "Now you have to listen to me. This is very important."

She moved forward and looked at my face as if I would now give her a magic solution and all her problems would go away.

I said, "Tasneem, I am a victim of the same man. I have been harassed by him for the last three years."

Before I said anything more, a look of total shock came over her face as if she had seen a ghost. "YOU! I know he is flirtatious with women, but I cannot believe that he would dare talk to you like that."

"For men like him, all women are the same," I said with a firm voice. "They see us as inferior to them. They think we are creatures who should be available for their pleasure whenever they call. They can flirt with us when they like. And, yes, most importantly, they are certain we will never speak out because of the deep fear inside us of what will happen to our own reputation if we do."

I lowered my eyes, pressed the edge of my desk with my hand and stood up. I told her that it was so difficult to talk about it because it had all been done so subtly, wrapped up in official business and with no witnesses. Although I knew throughout that he had been the one who was wrong, yet I found it so embarrassing to talk about it, as if it were my fault.

Tasneem asked what he had done to me. I took a few deep breaths and told her that this was my biggest fear that people would ask what he did to me because nothing short of rape would be acknowledged as a real problem. I feared that people would not understand the devastation I experienced from his pressure and control over my every action. They might not even understand the fear of sexual assault, the burden you have to carry all the time while performing your job.

I explained to her that, in our region, we fight against men who burn their wives, who kill in the name of honor, men who rape and men who throw acid on the faces of women who reject their advances. In the face of all that, how do I explain to someone that it tears me apart when this superior of mine touches my hand with his finger with a lustful smile on his face as he hands me an official memo. How do I explain that it disgusts the hell out of me when he forces me to listen to his sexual tales about his affairs with his girlfriends? How do I explain that the pressure of the system, which stops me from saying anything, kills me from the inside? I fear that I would not be able to express the depth of my despair at continuing to work in an environment where someone has all the power and can control every action of mine on his terms.

I tried to seek reassurance from Tasneem, but she did not fully understand what I was saying. I told her a story of a friend of mine who decided to get a divorce. Everyone kept asking her what her husband did: Did he drink a lot, gamble, take another woman or was he beating her. It seemed that nothing short of these reasons could justify two adults going their separate ways. My

friend had spent five suffocating years with a husband who completely dominated every aspect of her life. She had never had the opportunity to find any space to be herself, but our society only recognizes overt problems like violence, rape, drugs or alcoholism. The idea that a woman's mental health may be seriously affected by a relationship simply does not register.

Tasneem innocently asked me, "What does your friend's divorce have to do with our problem?"

"Oh, forget it; just forget my friend, ok." I said.

Looking down, Tasneem said in a caring voice, "Three years!"

My voice trembled and I could not speak anymore. I turned back towards the wall and cried.

I controlled my tears, wiped them with a tissue and sat in my chair facing her. I cleared my throat and said, "Now, what I am thinking is that perhaps if we do a joint complaint they might listen to us. I have been thinking about this a lot and I still need to think more, but I feel that if I gather the courage, we both can do it together."

She took a long sigh and started again in a tone we usually use to mourn the dead. "If I would have listened to his filthy jokes and laughed and had tea with him then I would be getting favours from him instead of such punishments. Is Robert blind? This man has such a control over Robert and this office. He does not even leave married women alone. Not even pregnant women."

We both cried. We knew that people can easily recognize physical violence from the wounds, but the scars of the mind and soul are difficult to see. At times, it is far worse. We also cried because we had given someone so much power that he could humiliate us any time he wanted. We were educated, working women, not girls who had no experience. Nevertheless, a manipulative man could build such a strong web of power that we were seemingly unable to help ourselves.

I continued talking to Tasneem and tried to switch her thinking towards our future steps. I started discussing the risks we might face if we decided to complain together.

After Tasneem left my office, I turned back to my computer, opened a new document file and started to write. I wanted to see if I could describe his behaviour on paper. The fear remained that no one would understand the depth of my disgust or my feelings of helplessness.

I reassured myself by saying aloud, "I have to do this for my own human rights. This day is for me to focus on how my rights are being violated and what I am doing about it." Listening to myself, my own voice gave me energy. I looked at the clock on the wall. It was time for the big rally. I took the elevator to the ground floor. By chance, my three other colleagues, who had been attending the workshop joined me as I reached the ground floor. They told me that the workshop was about to finish.

The four of us came out on the front side of the building where many friends had gathered with banners and pickets. A friend of mine hugged me and put a big sign in my hand to carry. It said 'Women Have Human Rights, Too'. There were about 500 people gathered there. In the middle of that noisy rally I got a phone call from Rana, informing me that Tarik had created a fuss with Robert and Harumi about my absence from the Planning workshop. I did not want to think about Tarik's attacks just then, so I continued with our peaceful group that was now singing and marching along the main avenue leading to the Parliament House.

The rally ended in high spirits right in front of the Parliament. I was feeling energized and could sense in my gut what my next steps would be. I knew that I would go for a formal complaint. I went back to my office and worked more on what became the first draft of our complaint against Tarik Khan.

Robert had to give a talk in the evening at the United Nations Information Center in honor of the UN Human Rights Day. This was a modest programme, but the only one hosted by the UN agencies. All the local journalists and dignitaries came to attend. The most vibrant speaker was the famous Pakistani human rights activist, Asma Jahangir. She spoke well and hinted that the UN agencies needed to take stock of their own situation as far as the human rights issues were concerned. I was very happy to hear that comment and hoped that someone made a note of it. Organizations that give the agenda of human rights to the rest of the world should look within themselves also.

I hoped that I could talk to Robert after the Seminar and clarify why I was not there during the second half of the Workshop. I caught his attention when he came out of the hall into the garden, where there were refreshments for the participants. At my first hello, he jumped at me. He actually yelled at me asking me why I did not inform Harumi of my absence or any clash with my Human Rights Days activities before hand.

I said, without getting intimidated, that there was no clash of schedule. The peace march did not even start until four in the afternoon. I said I was just extremely upset about something and was not in a condition to attend. I reassured him that I was inside my office and was not attending any other programme. I explained that I was so upset that I could not have contributed anything in any case. I also quickly told him that my whole team had been there until the end.

He was not in a listening mood at all. Expecting him to make a human response by asking me what had upset me was way beyond what one could expect from Robert. He did not respond to anything I had said, but continued with his own attack. As he went on, he grew more aggravated because I kept looking straight in his eyes with confidence.

After the heated exchange, Robert and I parted. I had planned to go back to the office as I had a lot of work to finish and had not been able to do much during the day, but Robert's lack of empathy upset me, so I went straight home instead. In those days, I usually worked at the office until 10 pm, but that night I asked myself, 'Why should I work for an office that treats me so badly?'

My mother sensed I was upset so she came to my room and sat next to me on my bed. She held my hand as I sobbed through my story of frustration, skipping the humiliating details.

"These people in your office do not understand what you are trying to do in Pakistan. Most of them do it as a job with no compassion. They cannot even begin to understand the level of commitment you have with your work. Do not expect too much from them. They operate on a different plane."

I told her about my decision to report Tarik. She kissed my forehead and said, "Go for it. What is there to fear? Are you afraid you will lose your job? So be it. You will find other opportunities to work for your country. You already are working with too many organizations as it is." That last remark made me laugh.

I said, "Yes, I do want to report this man. I have to work for Pakistani women, but that includes me as well. I have to address my own issues. I need to work for my own rights as well."

Her support was a big relief. I knew it would be very difficult to live in this society after reporting such a case, but having my mother and my close family on my side would be a big help.

After a brief moment of reflection, I understood implicitly that my commitment was not to Robert or this office, but to the goals of the United Nations...and what those goals mean to the women of Pakistan. Suddenly I got up, put on my shoes and jacket and rushed outside with my car keys in my hand. My mother shook her head at my craziness.

The security guard on my floor was all smiles to see me. I got him to turn all the lights on. I started writing about my case from the point where I left it in the afternoon. I worked until midnight. The fear of not having enough tangible evidence to prove the case and the fear of being slandered, or worse, in the process, faded into the background. What I could see very clearly in front of me was that I had to be true to myself and I had to be honest to the working women of Pakistan.

33. COMING TOGETHER TO REPORT

I felt both stronger and relieved after deciding to take a stand. The next day I happily told Tasneem I was ready to go ahead with a formal complaint against Tarik. She smiled in satisfaction.

Nabila, deeply bruised by Tarik's belittling treatment, was the next to join. She had been smouldering over it for months and saw a chance to stand up for herself. She had concerns about how the complaint would affect her roller-coaster-like relationship with her husband, but was confident that she wanted to participate. She strongly believed there had to be accountability for such a shameless person somewhere in the UN system. Laila also wanted to join as she was tired of Tarik's sexual comments.

The news went around in a very hush, hush manner. We told only those of us who we knew had suffered at Tarik's hands. All of the women who joined us in the complaint found out about it separately. Each one thought deeply about it, considering how it would affect her family and job before coming forward.

Sadia wanted to join, but was very hesitant at first, concerned about her family. In her world, the woman was always the one to be blamed. She had to overcome so much resistance from her family when she moved to Islamabad that any problem at the office would be construed as a scandal and they would force her to move back home. She took her time to think it through, discussing it with her hostel-mates and weighing the options. She came back quite confident and wanted to join us. I tried to discourage her because I was not sure if she had considered all the consequences we would face. Tarik could react. The process could be a long drawn out messy saga. I was more concerned for her than she was.

Sadia felt strongly that it was wrong for such a senior man to scare a junior person like herself. She was adamant that she wanted to tell the organization about his behavior. She also surprised me by saying that he had approached her at other times as well and she was extremely uncomfortable and afraid of him.

Sadia asked if she could share the information about our complaint process with Sheeba, who had been an intern in our Unit and with whom Sadia remained close. I told Sadia to be

Careful in talking about this because we did not want things to get out of hand before we had even begun the process.

Sheeba was a very confident, beautiful young Pashtun woman with modern views. Through her connections to Afghanistan, her family values were a blend of royalty and liberalism; however, she had a humble attitude and a sharp mind. Tarik tried, in his usual way, to befriend her, but she did not welcome the advances of a married man with grown-up children. After she rejected his advances, Tarik began putting pressure on her. In those days, he was not as abusive and violent as he later became, but he did what he could to make administrative processes almost impossible for her. She was still very bitter about it and said that she would never forgive him for being so sexually pushy and manipulative. She joined our group of complainants and was happy that finally she would be able to hold him accountable.

Rensje discussed her own case with some of the Gender Unit colleagues. She felt wronged by Tarik when he fired Tasneem without any cause and how he acted when she complained about it. She was furious that he had treated her like a child and scolded her because she was a woman. Rensje discussed the consequences she could face and the evidence she would need to gather. She decided to join us in the complaint.

I took strength from the people who were joining us because I thought this would make our case more solid. At the same time, I felt a new responsibility on my shoulders. People had the courage to join because they were gaining confidence from my guidance, knowing that I had read the policy and would come up with a good strategy. I was not nervous, but could clearly see that the main burden of taking this case forward would be mine. Even so, I told everyone clearly that it would be a joint responsibility and we all needed to be very clear about the consequences right from the beginning.

I called everybody who wanted to join the complaint and told them that we needed to write down in detail what exactly our complaints were. After we finished our sections, I would draft the introduction and we could work together to improve the document.

Two days later Tasneem came and talked to me about two women, Nageen and Ghazala, who had been complaining about Tarik. She wanted me to inform them about our complaint, as well but I felt uncomfortable with expanding the group any further because I was afraid that Tarik might find out about the complaint before we submitted it formally. Besides, I did not want to carry the burden for all of them. Tasneem insisted on talking to them about their issues and at least giving them the option to call me if they wanted to join. I hesitantly agreed.

Nageen was a secretary in the Environment Unit. In her thirties, a mother of two, she came from a conventional family and kept her head covered with a hijab indicating that she was a religious woman. Nageen was angry with Tarik for making derogatory comments about her, first making fun of her hijab and then making sexual comments to her. Every time he went to her Unit, he made sexual jokes about women in hijab. Other people joined him in laughing and she felt humiliated.

As the Head of Operations, she had asked him for a space to say prayers as well as a place where women could comfortably perform their ablutions, since there was no separate women's bathroom. His response was to ridicule her in front of many other staff members and to joke again about women in hijab. What especially infuriated Nageen was Tarik's power over others. Many

UN colleagues saw how he treated her, but no one had the courage or the decency to say anything to him, because they felt obligated to laugh at his jokes.

I asked Nageen to think carefully about reporting, keeping in mind all the consequences it could have for her at a personal and professional level. She was adamant and said she had been thinking about reporting Tarik for many months, but did not have the courage. She could not thank us enough for this opportunity.

I asked everyone to think of witnesses who could strengthen our case, but they were hard to identify. Tarik always saved his ugliest comments for the private sessions in his office and we all felt the people who had heard his sexual jokes would not be willing to stand up against him. I stressed the need to think strategically, to recall dates, times and exactly what he said and other details so we would have accurate accounts of our incidents. I wanted everyone to sit quietly and think through each incident carefully, hoping that they might remember who was present and find some witnesses after all.

Sheeba had talked to Rachel, the assistant to Robert on the interagency work. A polite and shy person who regarded Robert very highly, Rachel was hesitant to go in with us, but did tell Tasneem she was thinking about it. Tasneem knew that Rachel wanted to join, but was ambivalent. She asked me to try to convince her, but I refused. I hardly knew Rachel. Besides, I wanted her to decide for herself.

In a few days, Ghazala came over to my office to join us. I was re-writing my part of the complaint letter, taking out the emotions and making sure it sounded professional. She entered my office swearing at Tarik. She said very sternly, "I'll go to New York at my own expense if I have to. That swine should be put in his place. He thinks he owns all the women in this office."

Tarik had always taken liberties with her, using intimate language and talking as if they were close friends. She always considered him a nuisance. Sometimes he would call her at home very late at night using sexually charged language. He made her promotion look like a personal favor and adamantly demanded his reward. He kept asking her to meet him after office hours for an orientation to this new job. She was trying to dodge him, clearly knowing what he was trying to do. His calls to her home, on one pretext or another, had become a burdensome pattern. "I don't know how I put up with him for so long. I'm so glad someone is doing something. I'm with you all the way," she said before she left my room.

"We are all in this together, okay! Remember that." I quickly corrected her.

The only person I approached to ask if she wanted to join our group was a senior programme officer in the Environment Section. Tasneem had told me she was very unhappy with Tarik's behavior. Since no one in our group knew her well, I was pushed into letting her know about the complaint. I gave her the idea very briefly and she understood what I meant. She told me she found Tarik's behavior unbearable, but she wanted a career in the UN. She did not want to join and warned me that none of us who complained would have a future in the UN. I do not know if it was friendly advice or an expression of her own concern, but I did not pursue the matter with her.

Rachel was the last to join. Tarik had been lurking around her from the time she arrived in the country. According to her modest description, he made comments that were clearly inappropriate for a professional environment. In fact, he had engaged in overt sexual language with her many times in the guise of narrating his marital problems. He assured her she was his

special friend, which enabled him to unload his sorrows on her. Although she was sympathetic to him, she felt extremely uncomfortable, but did not know how to stop him.

Rachel had a hard time writing her part. She had trouble articulating the confusion that Tarik generated between being a helpful colleague and a manipulative man who would take advantage of her naiveté. She shared her confusion with the group. As I had been working on the issue of violence for a long time, her conversation reminded me of children who experience sexual abuse and become somewhat protective of the abuser. At times, they take on part of the blame because the abuser vests a lot of trust in them and acts like a victim to gain their sympathy. I thought she needed to sort out her feelings and was not sure she would actually come through. Because she was still working out in her mind what Tarik was actually doing, she was the weakest link in our group. I was also concerned that she was too close to Robert and feared she might be pressured to tell him about our plans. We did not want him to know about this at all until we were ready to file our complaint.

We all talked to our families to assess their level of support. For some, their husbands' agreement was very important. They finally managed to convince their husbands by talking generally about the case and not telling them too much about what Tarik had been doing to them.

We started meeting with each other as a group. I wanted everyone to participate fully in putting the complaint letter together. I emphasized that we should mention the pattern of harassment to provide justification for a group complaint. We agreed that an important part of the complaint would be to emphasize our concern that Robert was very close to Tarik. This was the main reason why we had not complained against him earlier. It was only after finding the UN's policy against sexual harassment that we had gathered the courage to use it to guide our complaint. I drafted and we all finalized the wording of the complaint letter.

Paul had been out of the country. When he came back, I went to see him at his house. He was delighted to see me, but a worried look crossed his face when I told him about our decision to file a complaint against Tarik. I explained how important this complaint was for me. He put his arm around me and squeezed my shoulder in support. We discussed the structure of my part of the complaint letter and he gave me excellent advice, suggesting I quote the policy or other administrative memos in different places to more clearly highlight the violation of organizational policy.

I had to stay on my toes all the time-looking after the group dynamics of the women who were now all charged up to get Tarik, supporting them without painting any rosy picture of how the process would go forward, thinking of a strategy to counter the Robert/Tarik nexus, pushing the others to think of more details such as relating to dates, verbatim conversations, any possible witnesses; taking care of the writing and doing the homework to uncover all the relevant officials in New York. Sometimes I felt I was keeping myself so absorbed in order not to face my own feelings. At night, however, I could not dodge them; they appeared usually as anger, at other times as renewed self-respect and, sometimes, as nightmares.

I was happily surprised when Rachel joined us. After a lot of soul-searching, she was able to write her piece. That made ten of us altogether. At this point, with our complaint letter ready for submittal, we all felt certain about our action. Even knowing the consequences in the society we lived in, we were very willing to plunge in and take our chances. I admired everyone's courage.

34. REPORTING THE MANAGEMENT TO THE MANAGEMENT

None of us will ever forget that day! On December 22nd, ten women walked together towards the Office of the UN Resident Representative: Eight Pakistani women from different units of the organization: Sadia, Laila, Nageen, Nabila, Ghazala, Tasneem, Sheeba and myself; plus two international colleagues, Rachel and Rensje, neither of whom were associated with the Gender Unit.

Robert's office, in light-blue UN colors, was quite imposing, with a medium-sized conference table in the middle, an impressive office desk at one end and a sofa-set on the other. He invited us to sit around the conference table when he saw how many we were. He seemed surprised as he sat at the head of the table and asked us the purpose of our meeting. One of us handed him our letter of complaint, on which we had all labored the whole of the previous week.

He took his glasses from his pocket, adjusted the distance of the papers to focus and started reading:

“Dear Mr., England,

“It is with regret that after much thought and discussion we, the undersigned, feel that we must bring to your attention the fact that systematic sexual harassment is taking place within UNDP. This has been going on for a long time and has affected the work and the lives of many of the women in UNDP. The situation has now become unbearable for us and we can no longer remain silent.

“Many of the undersigned are members of the UNDP's Gender Unit. As the work of the Unit has progressed, we have all come to realize that it is inappropriate for UNDP to continue promoting gender-sensitive issues outside this office while it permits members of its own staff to act in a highly gender-insensitive manner.

“The UNDP women who have signed this letter feel it is their right and obligation to report a systematic pattern of sexual harassment towards them by Tarik Khan, in charge of the Administration and a senior manager of UNDP Pakistan.”

Reading Tarik's name Robert gulped. He looked up for a second, but did not connect with any one of us. He continued reading. The first section included the definition of sexual harassment that the UN policy uses. We had also copied the part of the policy that makes the senior management responsible for implementing the policy in letter and spirit and ensuring immediate corrective action whenever they become aware of an incident that may constitute unacceptable behavior. The letter continued,

“Fully recognizing the gravity of this letter, we give the following statement as a brief description of Tarik Khan's highly objectionable behavior. Further details of the grievances of this group and possibly others, will be made before an appropriate fact-finding panel. We are confident that such a panel, if unbiased, will support our claim that Tarik Khan

has violated both the letter and the spirit of the UNDP sexual harassment policy. He has created an extremely hostile work environment for many women in UNDP.”

As Robert read each of the ten women’s complaints, he tried his best not to give us any clues to what was going on in his mind. His face remained expressionless and he only stroked his short brown beard. However, when he reached Rachel’s case he could not help raising his eyebrows. He had had no idea that she was also one of Tarik’s victims. Recovering very quickly, he finished reading the statement and put it aside. This smooth-talking man fumbled a little as he prepared to comment on the misbehavior of his favorite subordinate: a colleague whom he considered reliable and to whom he had given considerable authority and power.

He cleared his throat and said, “Actually, if somebody told me there wasn’t any sexual harassment in this office, I would be surprised. The way women are treated in this culture, I cannot imagine not having sexual harassment in the offices.” That was his attempt to trivialize the issue. Then to make sure we agreed with him he threw us a question. “Domestic violence is very common in Pakistan, isn’t it?” We all stared seriously at his face, seeing through him. He looked at me for reassurance, perhaps considering me the gender “expert” of the group. “Isn’t it so?” he asked me.

I looked back very sternly, knowing exactly what he was trying to do. I said, “Right now the issue is that all of us, employees of UNDP, have brought forward a sexual harassment complaint regarding a manager of UNDP to the head of our organization. What happens in the homes of Pakistanis is not an issue here.” I felt like he was saying, “You Pakistani women! You get harassed in the streets; you get beaten up by your husbands, so what if the apple of my eye flirted with you a little?”

One of us mentioned that we would like a response by the 5th of January. We had put this date in our complaint letter to make sure he could not just file it away.

He answered casually, “You must realize that everyone in New York is on leave for Christmas and New Year, so I won’t get anyone until the middle or end of January. I’m going off myself today.”

Nabila immediately commented that the UN was not officially closed except for a day or two for Christmas and then a day for New Year’s.

Rensje, very worried about backlash from Tarik, expressed her concern and told him that we had made a hotline by exchanging each other’s numbers. She said, “We’re afraid that after hearing about this complaint Tarik Khan might react violently.”

Robert joked, “Why don’t you put me on this hot line also, in case you need to get in touch with me.” He laughed in a carefree manner and said, “Oh, but I’ll be on the beaches of Oman!”

We looked at each other, surprised that he did not even feel the need to put on a serious act, just to reassure us that he was taking our complaint seriously. The meeting was brief and we soon left.

Later, we discussed this meeting among ourselves. We had two points of view. Rachel said that she had never seen Robert at a loss for words and reading the complaint letter made an impact on him. Everyone else felt he took it very casually, signaling that since abuse and harassment are common, if it happened to us, it was not a big deal. The issue was not serious

enough for him to bother anyone in New York. The UN offices were not closed for two weeks at the end of the year; the organization continues to operate. Therefore, we had to wait until Robert was ready to share it with his senior colleagues.

We were not even sure about his intention of sharing it with Headquarters in New York. Most of us were very disappointed with his initial reaction, but Rachel wanted to believe that he was sincere.

We had tried our best to articulate the hurdles that we were experiencing in reporting the case. We had ended the statement with these words:

“Mr. England, we understand that the consequences of reporting sexual harassment are severe, especially when the abuser is in a senior position and can make our lives very difficult personally and at work and even make us lose our jobs.

“We realize that the person against whom we are reporting is very close to the head and enjoys his full trust.

“We understand that reporting sexual harassment is not easy as the evidence for it is usually not tangible and the abuser always has alternative explanations for the instances.

“We know that it is easy for management to trivialize the issue by hiding behind procedural harassment that is faced by all.

“However, we are taking this step of reporting this matter with the hope that the senior management of UNDP will take it very seriously. We fully believe that UNDP cannot have a gender programme for Pakistan if its own house is not first put in order.”

We hoped this conclusion would convey our concerns to him. We doubted he would understand how difficult it had been for all of us to come forward.

The next day in the late afternoon, I went to see Harumi and told him about our complaint. I thought that as my supervisor he should know I had filed a formal complaint. He expressed his support for me and the rest of us. He sat with me in his office for about an hour with concern and worry on his face. He kept saying, “I’m very afraid for all of you because when a man of Tarik’s character is cornered he could do anything to get out of that situation.” He told me he was leaving for vacation and would be back by mid-January. He wished me good luck with the case and reiterated his support and his caution in dealing with Tarik.

The office was quiet for the rest of December because many of the international staff took some time off. Robert returned shortly after the New Year, but did not contact us. Unexpectedly, Tarik called me, saying that he and his right hand man, Nawaz, were coming over for a meeting. Suddenly it was as if an electric current was running amongst us. I do not remember how the news spread so quickly; perhaps it was the hot line: “Does he know?” “No, I don't think so.” “Well, why is he coming?” “We are overreacting.” Everyone started talking at once.

Three of us were in my room and three in Rana’s, next door. Two others were outside my office. The air was full of fear, anxiety and concern. Our uncertainty worsened the situation. I wished Robert had gotten in contact with us after his return. At a simple human level, he knew we all were very concerned and wanted to get on with the process.

Someone suggested we record what he said. We regretted not recording any of his earlier conversations. Sadia said she knew a person who could help us. I told them we did not have much time. I sat in my chair and took long deep breaths. I had not spoken to Tarik since submitting our complaint. I told myself to be calm, that there was a good chance he knew nothing. He sounded very cheerful on the phone, which meant something was wrong.

I could sense the tension building outside among the others. Suddenly, Rensje and Sadia rushed in followed by another friend who was holding a small tape recorder wrapped in a cloth. They circled around in my office, ignoring me, turning things upside down looking for a place to plant the tape recorder. I said hello to my friend. He answered quickly and said, "How about this calendar? We'll put it in your desk calendar."

"Are you sure he won't see it?" I asked.

"Keep the calendar at this angle. Push this button when he comes. Let's hope the microphone catches it." My friend sounded very professional.

One of the women ran into my room, "He's coming, we all better move out!" Before I had a chance to recover, Tarik and Nawaz were standing in front of me and everyone else had disappeared. My heart was beating at about 320 beats per minute and I was short of breath. I stood up and said hello. We all sat down. The men sat opposite me on the two chairs that always faced my desk.

Tarik wished me a happy New Year as he sat down. Nawaz had his head lowered and only said salaam in a very low voice. Nawaz, who felt obliged to Tarik for his UNDP job although a panel had made the selection, was extremely loyal and obedient to him. Tarik started talking about arrangements for a Regional Conference that the Gender Unit was planning to organize in the first week of February. Nawaz never raised his eyes. After talking for a moment, Tarik looked at him and said, "You should take notes of all this, Nawaz sahib." He hurriedly took out a pen and a note pad from his pocket and started to write. I had no idea how I was responding. I was so tense I hardly heard what Tarik said.

After about six or seven minutes he concluded the conversation, thanked me and got up. I was puzzled; this did not seem to be an important enough issue for him to come to my office with another staff member for a meeting. My suspicions were correct. As they were leaving, Tarik said to me, "If you don't mind, I have something more to discuss with you." Without giving me a chance to respond, he turned to Nawaz and said, "Would you mind?" Tarik eased him out of my office and closed the door behind him. I thought this was the ideal time to turn on the tape recorder. My legs trembled with worry that he would hear the click and catch me.

Tarik sat in the chair again, this time more comfortably. I had a frozen smile on my face. He said, "Many people have problems with me, but I'm a good guy. I want us to work together on whatever your Unit's problems are."

My mind was racing. "Does he know? What is he getting at? Is he being nice because he's going to threaten me at the end of the meeting?" I wished I did not have to see him during this in-between period. I just wanted the senior management to tell him about our complaint officially. I did not want to be in a position where it seemed that I was lying by not telling him. I felt anger at Robert.

He started complaining about Rana, who was not one of our group-of-ten. He gradually slid down in his chair, becoming more and more comfortable. Sadia, keeping an eye on him by

slightly opening the office door, became extremely concerned, as we were all well familiar with that posture. She wanted to show solidarity with me and let him know that I was not alone in the premises. She barged in saying, "Excuse me, I need some papers from your tray."

My mind was still preoccupied with the tape recorder and not fully following his conversation. I nodded from time to time. Suddenly, I was jolted upright when I heard him ask, "Is your Unit the focal point for complaints of sexual harassment?"

My eyes widened. "What?"

He inquired, "Is Rana the focal point or is there someone in your Unit who hears sexual harassment complaints?"

"No," I said immediately.

"Oh! I was just thinking, you know this woman, Nageen," he laughed. "The one who wraps her head with a scarf," he laughed again. "I was thinking that maybe she has said something."

Oh, god! He knows something, I thought to myself. Does he want to know more from me or he is testing me. He wants to know if I will tell him or not. My thoughts wandered with concern, making it difficult for me to respond. With a serious face I asked, "What about her?"

He quickly backed off and said, "No, no it was just a hunch. You know she asked me for a place to pray." He giggled, "No one has asked me that before. I had to tell her off." He slid deeper in his chair. He was not done yet. The back of my shoulders tensed up. He wanted to explore further. How I wished Robert had taken charge of the process and given him the official news after his return from Oman.

Tarik smiled, "I want to mend fences."

"Was there a fight?" I asked. My mind was off the tape recorder now and I could speak. His hands went into his pant pockets, but this time he did not use vulgar gestures, since he was playing detective and focused on getting some information from the head of the Gender Unit. He was certain I would know if there was a complaint of sexual harassment.

He asked me if Rana had complained about him for any reason. He said she had been requesting a bathroom designated for women for a long time. The other day, she asked him for an update on that issue in front of other people and he reprimanded her. He did not think she should have asked him again. "So, did Rana mention anything about it?" he asked.

"No, I know the issue of the bathroom remains, but I told her just to write a 'Women's Room' sign on a piece of paper and put it up on the one nearest to our unit. Is that okay?" I asked.

"No, I need official notification."

I assumed he must have been rude to her and now suspected that she had reported him. After a while, he wrapped up the conversation and with a big artificial smile left my room.

Seconds later, my group of complainant colleagues gathered around me to find out whether he knew about our complaint letter. I told them he did not. He knew something happened regarding a sexual harassment complaint, but had no details. He had come to explore.

We unwrapped the tape recorder and rewound the tape. To our disappointment, we heard nothing but an unintelligible sound. What an anti-climax! I was not overly disappointed since he had not said much that would have helped our case. I did regret not recording some of the slimy

monologues he used to indulge in while intentionally making me wait for some forms or official papers.

35. THE ELEVENTH COMPLAINANT

The fifth of January had arrived, the date our complaint set as the deadline by when management must get back to us. Since morning, we had been tense, but hopeful that Robert would contact us. This deadline was our safety valve; if Robert did not acknowledge our complaint and send a copy to New York, as the policy required, we had a reason to do so ourselves. It was almost five o'clock and one by one, all the complainants trickled into the Gender Unit. Tension was high, but no one said anything openly, since support staff and some other people were still in the area. Nods and shaking heads conveyed the message that Robert did not have us on his mind.

We had already prepared a backup plan of sending a courtesy copy of our complaint to six people we had identified at Headquarters in New York. I had told the group we had to be twice as good and two steps ahead of our local management in order to do a good job of carrying forward our case. At 5:30, Ghazala looked at me and asked, "Should we?" I said yes. I typed up a polite note to the senior management in New York and copied our complaint letter to those on our list.

A bureaucratic explosion occurred in the UNDP New York offices soon after our complaint reached the Headquarters. They immediately called Robert and told him to activate the investigation process, share the complaint with the accused and ask him to respond. On January 9th, he called us to his office for a meeting with only ten minutes notice. Although we told him that two of the complainants, Sheeba and Tasneem, were no longer at the UNDP and asked for enough notice to contact everyone, in the months to come, he never respected that. Whoever was in the office simply rushed to meet with him whenever he called.

In an overly officious tone, Robert told us that the accused had been given a copy of our complaint. He had a hard time hiding his anger. We had not expected sympathy from him, but we had expected at least a pretense of professionalism. He told us that the process had begun and that it would be very long and messy. We heard no support or concern in his voice. It felt less like a briefing than a warning, verging on a threat. We did not answer back. He had no idea how long we had already waited before handing him our complaint.

Now that Tarik knew about the complaint, we had to act with caution. Ghazala looked pale, Sadia could hardly breathe and Rensje rubbed her hands with concern. I was also afraid of what could happen, but any expression of my fear would quickly become a concern for everyone. I could not stop feeling the burden of everyone looking at me for advice and strategy for the group.

We all sat down and carefully worked out a plan to safeguard ourselves. Everyone was very afraid of Tarik. The men of his region were known to kill for honor. Concerns were shared. Ghazala was suddenly afraid he might try to kidnap her children, so she said she would pick them up from school herself rather than relying on her driver. Sadia had no car so we advised her not to ride alone in a taxi for a while. Those without a cell phone were advised to get one and the Gender Unit team was told not to stay after office hours. Being unmarried and living without a family in a hostel made Sadia especially vulnerable. So the rest of us, especially Rensje, made sure that she took all the precautions. We discussed in detail how to react in case we saw Tarik face to face: no

comment on the case and no response if he initiated any discussion of it. This was a group agreement.

Just as sprinkling oil on a fire spreads the flames, stories about Tarik's past filtering in from various sources made our group members more nervous and afraid of him. People close to us told stories about how Pashtun men can never take an insult from a woman. They always take revenge by subjecting her to public humiliation. I encouraged the group not to fear these stereotypes. Then we discovered that Tarik had recently attempted to murder his wife's lawyer. The lawyer wrote Robert, saying that Tarik was a violent man who came into his office and shot at him. Robert responded coldly, saying that the UNDP does not involve itself in the personal lives of its staff. I quickly checked on these facts before our team became frantic. Sure enough, we found a police report charging Tarik with "attempt to murder". This made everyone frantic.

The spell of fear and tension was broken by Masako's return to the Gender Unit from her long leave. Her wedding photographs were an excellent distraction. We gathered around and listened to her stories and impressions of married life. This dreamy talk did not last for long though, because when Masako found out about our complaint against Tarik, she immediately talked to me in her poised and graceful manner about joining us. I was surprised since she had never talked about being intimidated by him. I was not sure if her case could go with ours or would be considered as a stand-alone.

Masako sat down and wrote out her complaint letter. She had joined the UNDP in January, a year earlier. At the beginning, she had been in frequent contact with Tarik. All new international staff members had to deal with him for information on cars, housing, security and any other issues related to settling into the office or house. She quickly noticed that he liked to pay special attention to young women, making them feel privileged by his special concern.

The pattern of harassment was similar to the others. Masako started getting phone calls from Tarik at home on various pretexts, initially to show his concern about her settling in and then to talk about his personal life. When he was going through his divorce, he called her at least five times on her cell phone, once asking what people do in Japan when they are depressed. She asked him to call someone else. She felt that by unloading his sorrows on her he was expecting her to ask him out for a meal or be friendly and console him. Tarik told Masako that he shared his problems with her because she was his only friend in the UNDP. She had been very burdened by all this.

Our group connected quickly with the Headquarters in New York. Learning that the focal point for sexual harassment in the Office of Human Resources was Steve Frankel, we arranged a conference call with him. We told him that Masako wanted to join the group complaint and he promised to get back to us on that issue.

I asked the group to make notes of every call we made to New York and Masako took charge of that. We decided to have regular group meetings to keep sharing our feelings, fears and concerns. I was adamant about everyone knowing everything and taking every action with full consensus. We made notes after every group meeting and recorded every event in relation to the case to be filed away. I wanted our group to be organized and geared up for a long haul.

In mid-January, we met in my office. We sat in a circle on the floor, shutting the door, as usual. We started our discussion in whispers. Sadia informed us that Nawaz and his men had started hovering around the Gender Unit whenever we shut our door. She said they had been

coming for no reason, looking around and smiling strangely. I suspected that such intimidation might increase. All I could think of was for us to be very organized and professional. We took notes of the salient points discussed at the meeting and asked one person to be responsible for briefing those who could not attend. Ghazala agreed to notify people about the meetings and we asked those who could not come to inform her so the group always knew where everyone was.

As a group norm, I stressed that everyone should share her feelings, concerns and any second thoughts if she began getting nervous about the case. I also said that if Tarik's team or the management contacted anyone, or if anyone received new information about our case, she should share this within the group immediately. I said, "We are in this together and we will stay together."

Several calls to New York were required before we got some response on Masako's case. We insisted that she be included in our joint complaint rather than starting a new one. New York finally agreed and said she should give her detailed complaint to the Investigation Panel when it was formed for this case. We were greatly relieved and Masako became the eleventh member of our group.

36. REACTIONS TO OUR COMPLAINT

We were shocked by the flood of rumours about our character that mysteriously started to circulate. I was the main target and the attacks clearly came from Tarik, particularly the comments about my "loose character".

We called Stephen Frankel in New York and informed him of this sudden attack. We also told him we had asked Robert for an official announcement that a case of sexual harassment had been filed in the organization, but that he had not done so. In such a vacuum, people could believe anything. Once they knew there were two parties and a case in process, the rumours would be easier to place in context. He noted our request for a formal announcement and told us to keep reporting anything, even gossip, to Robert.

Nageen was the first one to be punished. Although her supervisor was quite satisfied with her performance, the UNDP did not extend her contract. She protested, but her boss clearly told her he could not take a stand against Tarik. She left bravely, taking this as a consequence of an act she had chosen to undertake and remained very much a part of the case afterwards.

Ironically, women pushed out of UNDP in the name of incompetence found even better jobs soon. Nageen was immediately hired by the World Bank and Tasneem also found a good job in another international agency.

On January 22, 1998, Robert called a meeting. We were already planning to meet that day, so we only changed the time and informed everyone. All of the complainants gathered in my office. Despite our concerns, we also felt the strength we gained from one another before we marched off to Robert's office.

Robert was cold and slightly irritated. He seemed to have a one-point agenda: "Confidentiality!" He bent forward on his table, looking at all of us through narrowed eyes. "We all have to keep a lid on this issue."

"That hurts us," I said immediately.

Rensje agreed, “The other side is conducting rumour campaigns to ruin our reputation.”

Nabila interjected, “What’s the harm in telling our own staff there is a report of sexual harassment? If you do not want to say who has complained and against whom, that is okay, but people need to know that these rumours are being churned out in reaction to a complaint. It’s very difficult to clarify such stories in our society.”

I finished her thought, “This isn’t fair to us. It’s better if people know we have pressed charges of sexual harassment against a staff member and the case is being dealt with.”

We tried to explain that if someone asked us about the issue we could not say that nothing had happened. We could give minimum information and hide the identities of the parties, but we had to say something. We said we were already hearing jokes and rumours. I told him I heard a comment in another UN agency describing our case and saying, “women in UNDP were raped.”

We insisted that he make an official announcement and he kept resisting. Finally, at the end of a long discussion he took a breath and said casually, without looking at me, “Maybe we will inform a few people in the office at a senior level.” With that, he got up rudely and said, “Thank you very much ladies. That will be all.” We all looked at each other and left his office feeling very dissatisfied. He did not understand our situation one bit. He had put the burden of confidentiality on us.

The initial stream of rumours subsided and we thought that was the end of it. We all were very busy with our professional work, but our minds were constantly on this case. We kept calling each other, wanting to know if everyone was okay. We brought the rest of our Unit team into the picture; Sadia and I told Rana, Sultan and Hasan about our case so they could understand all the activity happening around them.

In late January, Masako received a call from a friend in another UN agency who told her that two women had come into her office and pushed her to sign a petition stating that Tarik was a decent man. She said she refused to sign. Masako was shocked and quickly told whoever was around. Nabila got so angry she started swearing about Robert. She faced his office and said loudly, “Either Robert forgot to give the other party a sermon on confidentiality or it was meant for one side only.” His office was quite far, so there was no chance of him hearing, but Masako and Sadia told her to calm down and speak quietly. They all tried to find out the details of this campaign.

We learned that Tarik had gathered some people and put them on this campaign. The group included his girlfriend, Kausar, who was now assistant supervisor for the Communications Unit; Maria, the Telephone Operator; Nawaz, his right-hand man as the General Services Officer; his secretary, Ali and Akbar, president of the Staff association, who had taken favors from him time and again. He also invited Shahida, a Pashtun woman from UN's World Food Programme. These people became his core team, waging a war of rumours and intimidation against us.

From her strategic position as one of the two UN phone operators, Maria used the exchange as her tool. She started making calls to women in the building, which housed more than seven UN agencies. She asked whether Tarik had ever misbehaved with them. Then she told them about some “crazy women” who had filed a report against him and convinced them to sign a petition in his support. When someone agreed, she informed Kausar and Shahida to go to the woman for her signature.

Nabila suddenly thought that Robert might not even know about this. She ran to his office, assuming he would support us. Instead, he said in a disgruntled manner that both sides were acting in the same way. Nabila reported to the group, saying, “Can you imagine us campaigning as openly about our case as Tarik is? Robert would roast us!”

After a few days, Kausar arranged to take a big group of women from the UN out for dinner. In Pakistan, treating people in a restaurant is a luxury and entails a major expenditure. She arranged transportation in big vans, the way political leaders do to bring their voters to the polling booths. After dinner, she spoke about Tarik’s victimization and sought more support in his defense, convincing more women to sign the petition. Using her media contacts, she had a group photograph of the women published in an Urdu paper with a caption, “Kausar Mazar honoring women of the UN system at a dinner.”

The petition was completed and presented to Robert. This was used as evidence for Tarik’s good behavior with women and actually was considered by the Panel that came later to conduct the initial investigation. We got a copy of it several months later. The petition was signed by twenty-one women, mostly with jobs as secretaries and receptionists. It read as follows:

“Dear Mr. England,

“We, the undersigned female staff members, would like to draw your attention to a matter that concerns us very much. Since the last few days, it has been reported to us that some female staff members have been contacted directly and indirectly and pressurized to join a group of female staff, to substantiate their harassment allegations against Mr. Tarik Khan, acting Deputy Representative for Operations, UNDP Pakistan.

“We wish to make a strong protest for two reasons. First that who has given these female staff the free hand to make such serious allegations and do character assassinations of Mr. Khan, who is not only helpful, but extremely courteous with all staff including female staff. What is happening? We wish to record that Mr. Khan is a very fair manager and the attempts to pressurize some of our colleagues in turning against him in the name of “the women’s cause” is extremely disturbing. Secondly, why are they subverting and misinforming us when we are a witness to the very proper behavior of Mr. Khan and they should allow us our own views. We see this as a conspiracy against a very effective manager with an extremely balanced behavior.”

Tasneem started receiving threatening calls at home from officers of the UNDP Staff Association. She was soon bombarded with threats: “You have not done a wise thing by filing a complaint against Tarik. Rest assured that Tarik will never let you enter any UN agency ever again.” “You need a job; you are not rich like some of the other women who you are following. If you withdraw your name from the case, we can request Mr. Tarik to forgive you and take you back. Otherwise, who knows what he might do in a rage!” “Withdraw your name from the joint complaint and we will reward you.” “Mr. Tarik doesn’t forgive those who betray him.”

Tasneem was terrified. Her position with her in-laws was very weak. She had only told her husband of the inappropriate firing, not about Tarik’s inappropriate behavior. What if he found

out? Her in-laws did not know anything about the case. What if they found out? These threats made her very afraid. She was risking a divorce and thus separation from her children. She knew her husband and in-laws would never let her take her children with her. Every time she felt threatened she would sit with her children and hug them. Her daughter was six and her son only a few months old.

Tasneem remembered that we had agreed in our group to call each other if ever we felt afraid or weak. She called me. We talked for a while and I supported her fully. No matter how down she was, I could hear a strand of confidence in her voice. Even in her concern, I could feel her commitment to hold accountable the man who had been so unfair to her.

The mostly male secretarial staff in Pakistan's UN offices has a sub-culture of gossip. Omar, Tarik's secretary, activated that network to push half-baked information about this case, which then spread into all UN agencies and through them into the city. Islamabad is not large. Many colleagues reacted insensitively. One man, who was generally very polite, told some of us, on different occasions, "Now we are all afraid to even come to the Gender Unit. We don't want to be accused of sexual harassment." The silence of some of my colleagues whom I considered friends was also killing me. I knew they were aware of our case. With some, I had even discussed it before, but they never came to offer even one word of support. In fact, I noticed that they started to avoid us in official meetings.

Tarik used the entire Operations Division to intimidate us. He began stopping all our payments. He instructed his staff to block our administrative tasks. The drivers were instructed to keep track of our movements. Maria started to keep a tab on our calls. Even the cleaners were told to check the papers in our wastepaper baskets.

Sandra, Robert's wife, was quoted as saying in a gathering at the UN Club that Tarik was one of the most decent men she had ever met. Robert did not miss any opportunity to praise Tarik on his good work in larger meetings. They were seen together a lot and he continued to take Tarik's suggestions very seriously. His anger and coldness towards us conflicted with the instructions he was giving to the staff about not mentioning the case. The staff clearly knew whose side the boss was on and aligned themselves accordingly.

When Harumi returned from vacation, I went to give him a full briefing of our Unit's work. I ended by telling him that on top of all the work we did we were experiencing very high levels of stress because of the sexual harassment case. He immediately looked the other way and said I should not talk to him about it. I was upset and asked how I could avoid mentioning the case when four of his Unit team members were part of it. To confirm my hunch that he was acting on Robert's instructions, I asked whether Robert had already briefed him on the case. He nodded his head and simply refused to say more. I was deeply hurt. Robert, I knew, was a cold-blooded bureaucrat who was more interested in managing the issue than finding out whether women were harassed or not, but I had thought Harumi at least had a heart.

I returned to my office and sat down by my desk quietly, putting my head down. With a full load of work, the complex time table for the month of fasting, a lot of activity at home with preparations for my wedding, including renovation of the house where Paul and I were going to move after we got married and all the stress generated around our complaint, my nerves were very tense.

The complainants had several different supervisors, who were now instructed to make sure we did not use office time for our meetings. We began meeting after work. This actually helped us to escape criticism and made it more convenient to include the three members, Sheeba, Tasneem and Nageen, who were no longer a part of the UNDP. Although I strongly felt that our issue was very much part of our work, we chose not to confront anyone's supervisor. We could clearly see that everyone was teaming up against us, seeing us as the witches of the UN.

Despite all the pressure, we met as a group every few days to maintain our sanity and to start preparing ourselves for the bigger investigation. I asked everyone to work on detailed statements in anticipation of some investigation panel that we expected in the near future.

37. CIRCLING THE WAGONS

I hardly had time to prepare for the Eid celebrations; I had too much on my plate. I was preparing for a large Regional Gender Mainstreaming Conference that had been scheduled right after *Eid*. On Harumi's recommendation, the Gender Unit was hosting the UNDP gender experts from all over Asia. Regardless of the fact that my wedding dates were coming close, I wanted to work hard to highlight our Gender Programme and make a good impression, so my whole team was busy preparing for it.

Handling the group of complainants in our sexual harassment case and dealing with constant retaliation from the management, especially from Tarik's team, was keeping me physically, mentally and emotionally very occupied. We had to strategize daily to avoid him and get our work through.

With all this activity at its peak, close relatives started arriving to help with preparations for my wedding, which was scheduled to be a series of events held for four successive nights from the 12th to the 15th of February. The enormously high activity level and juggling so many things made my days exasperating. Taking time out to be sad, angry or even happy was difficult. I was on the go all the time. Tension from the sexual harassment case was rising and the attitude of colleagues who now would hardly talk to us had become painful. I felt I needed to give strength to our 'Group of 11' at the UNDP, calm down Harumi to keep him from creating more nervousness, pacify my Gender team in the face of Tarik's roadblocks and be cheerful and happy with the wedding guests. All these emotions were genuine, but somehow the process was taxing.

I suppressed the part of me that was hurt by the behavior of my colleagues, including Robert and Harumi. In the years to come, I was able to handle the anger I felt against Tarik, but the pain inflicted by the management and some of the other staff remained with me for a very long time.

In the midst of all this craziness, we heard that Tarik's response had been submitted and Robert would be giving us a copy. Rachel confirmed the news and we all froze with tension. We called each other and decided that we would read the response together at Ghazala's house.

Tarik's response was sixty-eight pages long, a twenty-three page statement and forty-five pages of annexes, all numbered and well-organized. I had read the whole thing except for the attachments in a very short time right after I received it. After reading it, I had felt surprisingly relieved. We knew about all the legal help he had received as well as the counsel from senior UN advisors recommended by Robert. We had expected that he would come up with arguments that

could destroy us. However, my first impression when I read the statement was that his lies were so absurd and so obvious that uncovering them would not be difficult. I had yet to learn that scandalous lies carry more weight than the truth, and support from the management provides firmer ground than evidence.

First, he established that by attacking him we were attacking the UN system and, specifically, attacking Robert England's management. According to him, our claim meant that Robert had no idea of what was happening in his office and no control over his manager's abuse of his position to intimidate women. With this strategy, he ensured that he held hands tightly with the senior management, making them a party in his defense.

Second, he argued that the "false allegation of sexual harassment" was my creation because I was upset at him for criticizing me over procedural matters. I was taking my revenge out on him by mobilizing other women and creating a sexual harassment case. He included a long list of incidents to show how I had been deviating from the agency's procedures and how I became angry whenever he pointed these out to me. In addition, he expressed his shock that other women had joined me regardless of the fact that some of them were his special friends.

I asked myself who in their proper senses could believe that I convinced ten responsible women, employees of the UNDP to make up detailed accounts of harassment and to sign the complaint with me. I felt confident that countering these blatant lies would not be difficult. He had built his whole response around me, ignoring any details of the other cases. Thus, once we proved that the other women were complainants of their own free will his whole scenario would collapse like a house of cards. Concluding our meeting, we set up the next meeting to discuss our future strategy the following evening. I volunteered to make an analysis of his response and bring it to the meeting so we could shed light on the key points that had to be countered in our response.

I went home and straight to my room. I did not have the heart to be with the wedding guests, who had started arriving. My mother and brother followed me to find out what was in the response. They were very concerned about me and it felt good to let the steam out with them and grumble together. Their support meant a lot to me.

A few members of the group came by soon after and we sat on the carpet in my room and started looking at the response. We dug out the key points. Tarik had stated that he and I had been very close friends until he became the Head of Operations. He claimed that after that I started becoming irritated when he had to check me on procedural issues. Then he attempted to enumerate all the times that he had to control my actions, a process that he said I had found 'abhorrent'. He argued that I was a defiant person who rebelled at any attempt to manage me and retaliated whenever someone tried to control my actions. He created the impression that my complaint of sexual harassment was just another attempt to retaliate against a person who was only doing his duty to uphold the principles of the organization.

Some of the incidents that he listed were pure fabrications, but in others, he had twisted the context and misrepresented my reactions. The simpler ones to counter were that my office did not know my whereabouts or I did not take proper authorization for travel. These were easy to answer and I could get documentary proof. However, other examples came from twisting the real situations to look like something completely different. For instance, he stated that on the 10th of December I had walked out of an office-meeting with my team. This was far from the truth. He stated that he had asked me after the workshop why had I left and that I had not given him a

plausible answer. In fact, I had left during the lunch-break and never came back since I had been talking to Tasneem in my office. Anyway, there was no organized ‘walk out’ and he never spoke to me about it. It appeared that he had already lined up witnesses who would corroborate his tales so his exaggerations and twisted stories would be difficult to counter.

In addition, he had implied that I was a bit crazy and in the past had complained about Bill Dickens and another man at a medical center. Therefore, I was the one with psychological problems. We laughed at the concluding paragraphs, which read:

“This entire episode in fact makes me feel (and surely others will feel the same) harassed, since fulfilling responsibilities in a fair and equitable manner and having professional disagreements, could be targeted under a serious allegation such as sexual harassment.

“Notwithstanding the hurt that they have caused to my soul and misconstrued my interaction with them (only when an official procedure/decision went against them), I feel that they have been emotionally led to this action. I have been and will continue to be a strong proponent of gender sensitivity and gender balance.”

When my friends left, I sat down and quietly read his sentences about me again:

“Without hesitation I would like to state that Ms. Fouzia Saeed, UNDP Pakistan Gender Team Leader, is the marshaling force for emotionally influencing the other female staff having perceived procedural grievances, to sign off collectively on an alleged pattern of sexual harassment. Her antagonism started in May and prior to that she was not only a colleague but also a close personal friend. Thus the lines were drawn since Fouzia, as the Gender Team Leader, saw me as a hindrance to her way of working.”

A strange melancholy came over me. I hoped this kind of shallow response would not deceive the Investigation Panel. I closed my eyes and asked God for strength to fight this demon. Suddenly, the door of my room swung open and I was surrounded by the noise of wedding guests. This reminder of the happiness in my life jolted me out of my depressed mood. I could feel the excitement of my upcoming wedding in the air again.

38. POLITICIZING MY CELEBRATIONS

I asked Paul to accompany us to the market on *chand raat*, the night before *Eid*. A group of about fifteen relatives and friends were going out to do our last-minute shopping. We were mainly going to have fun; the market was a meeting place and we planned to eat spicy snacks, buy glass bangles matching our clothes for the next day and have our hands painted with henna. I wanted Paul to buy some bangles for Sadia and me. By tradition, brothers or close relatives buy painted glass bangles for the women in their family. He was surprised at how many beautiful bangles we got for only a dollar. I smiled, nudged him with my elbow and told him the ritual is what matters, not the price.

In a group-oriented culture like ours, Paul and I had few opportunities to be alone, so we communicated our affection by exchanging looks and soft touches. I saw his discomfort at times, both at the tradition-filled celebrations for *Eid* as well as our wedding preparations. Despite trying to look like he was enjoying himself, I knew he was putting up with the crowds of my friends around him at every significant occasion only for me, though, I loved every minute of it and he knew that.

At my house, the *Eid* celebrations were bigger than ever. Many members of my extended family trickled in for *Eid*, planning to stay until after the wedding. *Eid* and the wedding celebrations merged. The singing and dancing, typical of our wedding festivities, started on the evening of *Eid* and continued nightly for two weeks.

Meanwhile at work, Tarik was doing his best to use each member of his Operations staff to stall every task of the Gender Unit, right under Robert's nose. The weaker side of Harumi's personality pushed him to join the "Tarik-Robert team," accentuating any crisis that Tarik initiated to harass us further. Perhaps he enjoyed being comrades with his boss and the sense of belonging to the management group.

Although we had prepared ourselves well, we were still startled when Tarik decided to wage a new war on us and this time with the full backing of the senior management. Nawaz caught a simple typographical mistake in a request for printing four Gender Unit reports. We had sought quotations from several printing presses and, as was our usual practice, had proposed issuing a purchase order to the press with the lowest quotation. We sent the papers to Operations for review and a decision. This was actually their job, but we did the groundwork to expedite the process. One small typo in the date of an internal memo became the basis of a huge case of "mismanagement and forgery".

Nawaz could have resolved this minor issue with a phone call to Sadia, but instead he shared it with Tarik to win some points. Tarik had been looking for any excuse to build a parallel inquiry. He built a whole case on nothing and wrote to Robert and Harumi, suggesting punishments under the UNDP rules. Harumi warned Sadia and others in the Gender Unit that "someone will be fired". Although I told the group that this was just a scare tactic, I failed to calm them down.

The printers then called us and said Tarik's staff had come to visit each one of them, pushing for lower quotations than they had given earlier, in exchange for a promise that they would be selected for the next printing job. Tarik wanted to get lower quotations than what we had received from the same printers to show Robert that there was something fishy about how we were doing this task. The printing companies were confused. Tarik kept feeding Robert false details, but rather than reprimanding him, Robert acted as if he was providing him with good ammunition to scare us into dropping the case. The entire Gender Unit was extremely tense, with Sadia in particular fearing for her job, while Robert and Harumi used Tarik's memos to create havoc.

Despite all this tension, we kept preparing for the conference of gender officers from all the UNDP offices in the Asia region. I was in the office even on the day of the *Eid*, to finish some things with my team. Suddenly, just one day before the conference, Harumi broke the news that it would be postponed. All the participants had already made their travel plans and we were getting their arrival information, but we had to tell them to stop and check with their management about

the postponement notice. He said Robert did not want the conference to take place with all this “MESS” going on. A mess was all that our case appeared to them. I was very upset and told him that they should have decided earlier rather than make my team waste so much time on the preparations. I asked him why they had to make this case a matter of their reputation and feel so ashamed about it. The existence of sexual harassment in the office is what management should be ashamed of, not that it had been reported.

Paul and I had decided not to go ahead with our plan to invite a hundred people from the UNDP to our wedding, but to be selective and invite only about forty of those whom we knew well. The wedding invitations were a beautifully designed packet of four cards for four days of official celebrations. We did not realize what a big issue they would turn into at work.

Tarik and his team chased the invitations to find out who had received them, taking this as an indicator of who was “on my side”. They pressured the staff, saying that whoever attended my wedding would bear the “consequences”. One UN driver, who came to see me, said he was very happy for both Paul and me and would attend the wedding even if his life at the office turned into hell. This was when I realized the seriousness of Tarik's pressure on his staff.

Many people came to congratulate me in my office and apologized that they could not attend because of the office situation. Tarik gave a few people from Operations special permission to come as his spies, to report on who abided by his orders and who defied him. Paul was quite upset that our wedding had been turned into a battleground.

39. OUR WEDDING

The days before a wedding are designed with specific rituals to remove the bride and groom from their ordinary world and routine stresses: Close relatives arrive and the customs involve a sustained air of celebration, seclusion from public activity and a relaxed and celebratory environment. This set of rituals is called *Maion*. For several days, the bride and the groom are not supposed to leave their respective houses in order to avoid all worldly influences. The day when the *Maion* begins is marked with a big party. The process used to last for a month. By the end of this series of extraordinary events that have been designed to create a space for transition, the newly-married couple is able to start their life together.

Because of my work responsibilities, I could not enjoy more than five days of this pampering phase. I put on yellow clothes that I was not supposed to take off until the main wedding day, when I changed into my wedding dress. Paul seemed pleased that I was able to benefit from at least a few days' break from my normal routine, but it was too much to expect him to participate fully in rituals that were so new to him, so he kept most of his leave for time after the marriage.

My brother and I coordinated flight times and pickups as friends and family arrived from America, Turkey, England, as well as other cities in Pakistan. Paul's father was not well enough to travel so his Mother had to stay and take care of him, but his sister Deb arrived from America. My mother had prepared Pakistani clothes for her for each day of the celebration. Having at least his sister nearby was very special for him. Other members of his family sent wishes by phone. Some friends of mine came from Minnesota, making this special occasion even more so. I felt very proud of having friends who made so much effort to share in my happiness.

The first formal day of the wedding arrived-600 people gathered for hours of singing and dancing. Music from my ethnic region of Punjab echoed as my friends, female and male, in bright glittery traditional Pakistani clothes danced *bhangra* to the drumbeats. Tents were erected in a huge garden and the whole space was decorated with strings of red roses and red fairy lights. The set-up was traditional with only floor seating, but we had a few chairs on one side for those who could not sit on the floor.

I wore a yellow *shalwar kamiz*, with a yellow *dopatta* over my head. It was covered with beautiful hand embroidery and liberally sprinkled with sequins. Typically, brides do not talk to anyone on this day. They are brought out among the guests for the rituals, keeping their heads down and sitting quietly on a decorated stool before being taken away again. They are not supposed to take part in the excitement, dancing and preparing for their own wedding. I approached this custom differently. I had always blended tradition and emancipation. In that traditional environment, wearing what tradition demanded, I walked around and talked to all my friends. From time to time, I passed by Paul and we exchanged some affectionate words. For Paul, the attention of so many people over such a long period was, I think, a good deal beyond his comfort zone, but he did his best and looked genuinely happy.

A folk-singer was performing on the stage and everyone else was dancing. At one point when the party heated up, the singer came down amongst the people and sang a special song for Paul: "The sister takes away the evil eye from the brother on this happy occasion." This usually meant that the sister should get up and put some money on the head of the groom to take all evil shadows away. The money goes to the singer and the musicians. The minute he started that song, Sadia put some money on Paul's head, followed by all of our friends, while the singer kept taking it away. Deb was also initiated into the ritual as several of my relatives started putting money on Paul's head.

My memories of my wedding will forever be marred by intrusions from the people and circumstances of our sexual harassment case. The most distinct one was that on the day of my *nikah*, the actual wedding ceremony, Robert finally decided to announce to the staff that a complaint had been filed and was being tackled by the management. I was furious at him for not doing it during all those weeks when I had asked him and for finally choosing that particular day to hold a staff meeting. I knew I had to be there to make sure that I knew exactly how it was being handled.

It was around 8:30 in the morning on the 13th of February and the 7th floor conference room was packed with all our office staff, about one hundred people, some sitting on chairs and many standing in a semi-circle along the walls. Robert came into the room looking very much in control, with Harumi and Tarik on each side.

When the Gender team entered the room, a couple of hundred eyes followed their entry. I was not with them. The gaze of Tarik and his loyalist supporters bothered them. Others, who supported them in their hearts, watched them with sympathy. Laila and Rachel were already in the room. Seeing Sadia, Ghazala, Nabila, Rensje and Masako walk in, they moved to sit with them. They felt more comfortable being all together.

Robert was about to start when Paul walked into the conference hall. Although he was on leave and was busy with the wedding arrangements, he had decided to attend in order to show support for the Gender Unit and the others in the group of eleven. A big "Ahh!" was heard in the

room because he had not been expected, especially during the official celebration days of the wedding. He sat in the front row, delighting our group with his gesture. They needed at least one friend in the audience when Robert spoke. Although they knew that many were praying for Tarik's downfall, Paul's position was different. Even Robert would be cautious about what he said with Paul in the audience.

Robert took a deep breath and got up to charm his audience. He was introducing the purpose of the meeting when I walked into the hall with my yellow outfit covered with a glittery yellow *dopatta*. A bigger "AHHH!" went through the room. A female colleague said loudly, "What is happening, first the groom shows up and now the bride. What is going on here?" I walked in with full confidence. I looked into Robert's eyes as I entered and then made eye contact with Tarik and Harumi. Next, I looked at the audience, who were all staring at me in surprise. I went straight to my group, now full of enthusiasm, as if their team was complete. We exchanged looks and smiled mildly, making sure no one noticed. Our eyes revealed how much support we got from each other, even as we felt like prey being circled by sharks.

I could not miss this meeting. I was there to show that our whole group was together and I would stand by them no matter what. I also wanted to note each word Robert used as he talked about the case. While he talked, his eyes quickly moved to look at me. I stared right at him throughout his speech. I am sure he would have spoken longer if I had not been there. He had to weigh each word since I was taking notes and made sure he noticed that I was.

He said, "I am aware that everyone knows about the PROBLEM our office is facing right now. I would be surprised if anyone did not know."

I wondered whether the "problem" was Tarik's behavior, our reporting of such behavior or Robert having to deal with our report.

He continued, "There are a lot of rumours going around. I do not want that. I want to let you know that a group of people has lodged a complaint against another person." He intentionally avoided the words "sexual harassment" or even "harassment," although I thought there was nothing wrong with calling a spade a spade. Everyone knew the charge in any case, but he had to show some loyalty to his friend, Tarik Khan. He did not mention his or our names. He said he wanted everyone to concentrate on their work and not be a part of this case at all. He went on, "I do not want you to take sides. Very few people know any details, so if someone is talking about details be aware that this person could be spreading rumours."

I wondered how we could find any witnesses if Robert did not want people to be a part of the case. He made no mention of "justice" or co-operation in finding the truth or anything similar. He announced that there would be a Panel to investigate the matter and that was it. The meeting adjourned. I left the room before anyone moved.

No one at my house other than my own family knew about my absence. The meeting was early in the morning and most of the guests were still sleeping when I returned. The official wedding ceremony of exchanging vows was scheduled for later in the morning. This is the religious part of the wedding and the simplest. The rest is ceremonial, absorbing the many layers of Pakistan's cultural traditions.

Later that morning, my mother and my maternal uncle were busy preparing sweets to be distributed right after the *nikah*. My brother had gone to pick up the clergy. I was still in my yellow clothes, but now with a bright red glittering *dopatta*. About sixty close family members and friends

were assembled. At about 11 o'clock, the doorbell rang, but no one noticed. It rang again. In the noise of songs and sixty people talking in a closed room, not even a police siren could have attracted attention. A UN driver was at the door. He asked several people who were going in and out to send for me. One person passed the message to another and it was lost somewhere. I had gone to my room for a while. The driver asked again. Finally, I was told that a UN driver was looking for me. Making my way down a very crowded staircase and through the hall, I reached our entrance door.

It was Robert's driver. He handed me a letter and I signed the receipt in my wedding clothes with my henna-painted hands. I could see his embarrassment at being ordered to deliver this letter to a bride in the middle of her wedding ceremony. The letter was in relation to the printing press case. Furthering the line of intimidation initiated by Iftikhar, Robert had sent me a letter with the subject "allegations of irregularities". It informed me that he had appointed a senior manager to inquire into that case and the report would be sent to the Investigation Panel in New York.

My blood boiled with rage. After allowing Tarik to manipulate the situation, use staff time and vehicles to fabricate a case against us, he had put an official stamp on all his (Tariq's) allegations and cleverly joined it with our sexual harassment inquiry. The cases had nothing in common. Robert was also violating professional protocols and decorum. This letter should have been delivered to my office where an acting team leader was in place or to Harumi. He chose instead to have it hand-delivered just before I took my marriage vows. I knew he was just trying to create panic, as if something major had been discovered that would damage my credibility in front of the Panel from New York.

When Kamran came back with the religious official, he noticed my disturbed face and ran to ask what had happened. I quickly shared Robert's wedding gift with him and said, "Don't worry, I'm made of steel. They cannot suppress me with such cheap and shoddy tactics. Let's go; we have a wedding to attend." We both laughed. He put his arm around me and held me tightly. Seeing Paul also calmed me down and I got back into the wedding spirit, but I told myself that I would never forgive Robert for his insensitivity towards me and for siding so blindly with Tarik.

Paul came over with Deb and his best man, Roman. My brother, father and sister sat close to me. My uncles were the witnesses. I tried my best to have my sister and a very close female friend as my witnesses as well. My brother argued on my behalf, but the cleric refused. Religious people interpret the Quran and the Prophet's sayings in their own way and rarely allow a woman to be a witness. Nevertheless, I wanted my *nikah* to be signed by a woman witness and even had a lawyer friend present to convince the cleric that the law of the country and the religion both fully allow this. In the end, family and friends advised me to let it go and while I felt strongly about my position, I took their thoughtful advice. Paul looked at me with a smile, perhaps thinking that his fighter-wife-to-be would continue to struggle for her space at each step in her life.

We took our vows and signed the papers. Paul and I looked at each other and smiled. We were husband and wife now. With one signature, our lives were intertwined and we were joined for the rest of our lives. In our culture, we have no custom of "you may now kiss the bride." We were not even sitting on the same couch, but on the opposite sides of the room. We were lucky to be in the same room; usually bride and groom sit in different rooms and the cleric goes to one and then the other for their agreement.

My father gave a short sermon on good ethics for husband and wife. Passing around a special sweet made of dried dates marks the end of the *nikah*. In our case, we had so many musicians from different places throughout the country that there had to be music at this moment. They started their drumbeats in our garden and the room was suddenly filled with congratulations and people hugging each other.

In the evening, the cultural side of the wedding rituals continued. It was still not time for me to dress up in my full bridal attire and go with Paul. Relatives and friends brought beautifully decorated platters of henna for the *Mehndi* ceremony in the evening. The gathering was big and the traditional music and dancing were at their peak. Yellow was the color of the day. We had yellow tents and yellow floor coverings decorated with yellow strings of flowers and gold fairy lights. Typically, seven married women from both families do the ritual of putting henna on the hand of the bride and the groom, but again I felt compelled to transform the tradition and put my own touch to it. So, in my wedding, this ritual was performed by not only the married women, but also by my divorced friends, and any men who wanted could join in.

Paul, who by now had gotten used to all the attention, was enjoying himself. When the ritual started, he and I sat on a small stage covered with yellow flowers and a canapé of strings of yellow flowers hanging all around. As my friends came up to put henna on our hands, oil in our hair and something sweet in our mouths taking from a lavishly decorated platter, they whispered wishes of happiness for our married life.

Kamran and my cousins performed vibrant folk dances. My Gender team was anxious to do the dance they had prepared. Sadia had never before danced in her life and it was Masako's first time to try a Pakistani dance. Watching them was great fun. Colorful and smiling, they filled my heart with warmth. At the end of the programme when everyone started dancing, Paul and I joined in. This is highly unusual for a Pakistani wedding. The groom is sometimes pulled in by his friends, but rarely the bride. We, however, enjoyed dancing together with hundreds of people around us. It was ironic that although we were husband and wife, technically we could not even hold hands. The dancing continued and another day of our wedding was over.

The next day, I was prepared for the main event when the bride and groom go off together to their new home. A series of rituals take place that day. In the late morning, I took my bath. According to our tradition, my maternal uncle carried me from the bathroom to my bed without letting my feet touch the ground. Then he held money in his hand and circled it over my head to ward off evil spirits, later giving it to the poor.

I dressed up in my bridal gown, bright red, the traditional color and full of gold work. I wore gold jewelry and red glass bangles. Paul wore the traditional Pakistani clothes typically worn by grooms, with a big off-white turban. We sat together on a heavily decorated stage as the centre of attraction. Many rituals were conducted to keep the evil spirits away, to ward off the evil eye, to bring us closer in life, to multiply our love several fold, to keep us in the protective shadow of God and to keep our parents' prayers with us. There were rituals of drinking milk from the same cup, receiving gifts of money, wearing special bracelets, having almost everyone encircle our heads with money and then give it to the poor. Finally, I was sent off with Paul to his house under the shadow of the Quran.

Our main wedding day ended with several small groups of traditional dancers, dancing in full vigour in brightly coloured clothes. They had come from different rural areas, dancing non-

stop in front of us when we were about to leave, Paul in his big white turban and me in my red bridal outfit. Covering the distance from the stage to our decorated car seemed to take forever. The dancers gave way an inch at a time as we made our way out of the hotel. Outside, they danced in front of the car, in the pouring rain, until my uncles finally pushed them away to let us pass. These were all village dancers who performed as professional groups throughout the country. They had all come because they felt a strong connection to me and my earlier work at Lok Virsa. I loved folk dancing. Regardless of the restriction in our society on women performing professionally, I had performed with them at one time or another to show them my respect for the performing arts. They considered performing at my wedding an honor.

Paul and I went to our new home to start our life together with a lot of love and respect for each other, very happy and confident that whatever the future held for us would be exciting and beautiful. Sadia came with me to make sure everything was fine in the new house. Some other friends who were closer to Paul also came. Paul kept politely letting them know that they should go home and leave us alone, but it still took a while before everyone left.

From then on until the next evening's celebration, the UNDP case was out of my mind. That was the longest I was free from it in many weeks. My Gender Unit colleagues respected my time and did not come to see me the next day at my new home. The fact that it was a Sunday also helped as no new attack was churned out by the office. According to tradition, however, my family did arrive in the morning with breakfast. Paul had not been informed about this custom and was cold to them to the point of being rude. The group of siblings and cousins laughed and could not believe that he was not thrilled to see his in-laws the next morning. He just wanted people to leave us alone. I laughed a lot when I finally heard what was going on and went down to let them in.

Robert had shown up at the wedding with his wife Sandra. Friends and relatives were coming onto the stage to meet us and wish us the best in our future life together. Robert came to say hello to us. First, he said, "There was some confusion about the earlier two wedding days. Some people thought that I simply did not attend, but I want to make it clear that the invitation I got was for the last two days only." We both looked at him. He continued, "I have come specifically to show my neutral stance." With that he moved his hands and body from side to side as if to show his presence to those UNDP colleagues who were attending.

This was a disgusting moment and I felt like saying, "Now that you have shown your neutral stance by coming, you may leave." This was our wedding, but for him it was just more office politics. When he stepped down from the stage, I grumbled to Paul, "So, he came to show his neutral stance!" He responded with a smile, "Don't worry about anything." This remained a pattern of our communication for years to come. I would get all charged up, angry or excited about something and Paul would remain poised and calm me down, making me see other perspectives or bringing a rational touch to my thoughts.

The last day of the wedding celebrations, the *walima*, brought 800 relatives and friends together to share our happiness. They swayed to the melodious singing of a famous singer, Hamid Ali Khan, who did a concert to add to our celebrations. Many of the UNDP programme colleagues were there, but only a few from the Operations Division were brave enough to come. My Bedari friends were there in full force and were very active in the whole ceremony, in which Paul and I played hosts

The day after our final wedding event, Paul and I left for a honeymoon. Paul had kept the location secret from everyone, even me and my parents. His fear was that the Gender Unit or the UNDP would find me and send official faxes to continue the panic. After hearing the announcement of the date for the Investigation Panel to begin, I wanted to cancel the trip so I could prepare with our group and be available for the investigation of the printing press case. Paul convinced me that we should not let these people control our lives. Before leaving, I instructed the group that they should not become absorbed with the inquiry of the phony printing case, but should also pay attention to completing their personal statements in the sexual harassment case. I kept telling them think of specific events. Give all details. Think of witnesses. Sadia looked at me and simply said, "Fouzia, we will. You just go now."

The next day, I found myself utterly relaxed, walking on a beautiful beach holding hands with Paul, splashing water with our feet. Paul looked in my eyes and said, "I still can't believe that we've left all those people behind and are finally alone. I was having nightmares that some ritual would be left and a group of people would follow us here or your UNDP group would make calls to get your advice." I laughed in embarrassment. We were at a beautiful resort on the island of Boracay in the Philippines. We celebrated this turning point in our lives and our union there, in another world, surrounded by beautiful green palm trees, white sandy beaches, thatched huts and turquoise blue waters. The beauty of that place was more than one could absorb with two eyes...and the taste of the high we both experienced on that trip has continued throughout our life together.

SECTION FIVE: SEEKING JUSTICE

40. THE INVESTIGATION BEGINS

When I returned to Islamabad, I learned that the inquiry into the printing case had become a full campaign by the management to look for any small issue in the Gender Unit's records to discredit the complainants. I was furious at this institutionalized harassment from the senior-most level. The inquiry officer said he had instructions to examine all our files, even from the previous year, in order to identify any irregularities. He also visited the three printing presses and saw the original letters in their files. He sheepishly admitted that he had to do as Robert told him, but found nothing irregular. He added that he could not imagine any other Unit's files being better organized.

After this inquiry was over, I insisted on getting a copy of the report. I could not fully understand the bureaucratic language, so I rushed to a senior Operations officer I knew in another UN agency to ask whether we had been cleared or not. He read the report and quickly said that the officer had cleared our Unit. He was astonished at the minor issue that had been conflated into an alleged corruption scandal. He repeated what I had been telling my team: No contract was involved; this was only an internal memo. Even if there was something wrong with it, the organization suffered no consequences at all.

Although Tarik had made the allegations in writing, Robert did not clear us in writing, even when I insisted. Therefore, Tarik and his team continued to spread rumours of major financial problems in the Gender Unit...and Robert never stopped him.

The UN Headquarters set March 9 as the date for the arrival of the Investigation Panel. We pulled our minds out of the printing inquiry and started paying attention to our main case. We quickly went back to finalizing our personal statements and the overall response to Tarik's statement.

I was very mindful of the cracks that could appear within the group under such pressure. Rachel objected to the comments about Robert in our written response to Tarik's statement. She wanted us to focus exclusively on Tarik and leave Robert out. I explained to her that Tarik's response started and ended with Robert. Nabila also told her that if she could not see through the printing press case and the way Robert viciously tried to victimize us, she would not understand anything. I felt she was still in awe of Robert. She admitted that Robert talked to her a lot about the case and swore that he had nothing to do with it. He also tried to convince her that while he did not support Tarik, he felt sorry for him since Tarik did not have any life other than his work. The group jointly tried their best to convince her to accept our statement, but I insisted that we all had to agree to the response, even if we had to dilute it for Rachel's sake. Consensus-building in our group was very important for me.

Paul had to travel out of the country in the days before the Panel arrived, so my friends took turns to help me with the response. We made full use of Paul's computer at home and hardly slept. At that time, none of us had a personal computer to do our statements. On the weekend, we

decided to have lunch at our house. The group took food out and sat in our garden, enjoying the beautiful flowers so typical of Islamabad in the spring. Once they had eaten, everyone went back to work reviewing what we had done. Tasneem had brought her laptop from work. We brought Paul's computer out on the dining table.

I worked on a statement describing the overall environment. I knew it would be easy for someone to ask, "If you were experiencing this for so long why didn't you make a report earlier?" I wanted the Panel to understand this spider's web of complex power dynamics surrounding the incidents we were reporting. Masako stayed back and helped me out by giving feedback on what I had written. We both worked until three in the morning.

Tarik made his preparations in a very different manner. Like a military general arranging his troops for a battle, he placed his agents in strategic positions. His front man, Nawaz, proposed that he would make all the arrangements for the Panel. We hoped that Robert would use some sense and not appoint Tarik's right-hand man to handle all the Panel's logistical arrangements, but he did. We were incensed.

Maria and the other operator in charge of the telephone exchange were to keep a tab on all of the Gender Unit's phone calls and to make follow-up calls to all witnesses. Two of Tarik's Operations staff had been deputed to keep watch on the Gender Unit and report activity in our vicinity. Tarik himself stayed close to Robert, showing his cooperation and helping handle this whole matter as the Chief of Operations. The contradiction between him being the object of the inquiry and his staff handling the logistics was absurd, yet apparently unnoticed by Robert and the New York office.

Suddenly, a wave of panic and fear swept through the office building. Two venues had been established for meeting the witnesses: one in the hotel where they were staying and the second in the fourth-floor conference room of World Food Programme in our UN building. Kausar and a few other supporters of Tarik from different UN agencies started to create the fear that Tarik was planting recording devices in the interviewing venues. That way he would know what everyone said to the Panel. We felt that the main purpose of the rumour about recording devices in the interview rooms was to ensure that people who Tarik was sending to testify in his favor would not dare to change their statements once they were alone with the Panel inside the room. At the same time, no one would dare to take our side and say anything that would help our stance. The tension in the office was becoming unbearable.

Robert could have asked another UN agency to handle the arrangements, which would have been more neutral. When we approached him about this, he offhandedly dismissed our concerns. The fact remained that Nawaz made all the arrangements, including the Panel members' hotel rooms and interview sites.

Rachel came running to our office in a state of panic. One of her email folders had disappeared. Sadia complained that some of her important emails had vanished. A junior IT staff member confirmed that someone with access to the LAN system had tampered with our computers. We were also not able to access our own records from the Personnel Unit. The junior staff there told us that all our files had been removed for 'safe keeping'. Sheeba tried, but failed to get copies of travel claims she wanted to use as evidence with her statement. Friends told us that Maria put calls going in or out of the Gender Unit on a speaker in the telephone exchange office.

We realized that we were operating deep inside the enemy's territory. We could not use the office phones freely and when we did, we used code words. Sometimes, for an important message, we would use another person's phone to dodge the operator. We could not communicate freely by email. Any advice we sought from other colleagues in New York or in Islamabad had to be done on our personal phones. We had already begun using public phones and faxes, but, to do that, we had to wait until after work. During office hours, we could not communicate much with outsiders because of Tarik's intelligence system.

The long-awaited Panel finally arrived. Mr. Josef Toochn, an American man of medium-build and curly brown hair, was the team leader. He seemed to be in his sixties and we were told he was the retired head of the UNDP's Legal Section in New York. The second person was Christine Roth, a slender, modest looking African-American woman, who at the time worked in the UNDP New York. The third member was a Latin American woman from the UN Refugee office in Pakistan. With short dark hair, a fair complexion and bright colored clothes, she seemed intelligent and more relaxed than the others.

Robert introduced the case to the Panel during their first meeting. Their subsequent attitude toward us made it very evident that Robert had made dismissive statements about us and had built up Tarik's image. The Panel seemed extremely impressed by Tarik's professional abilities, as was obvious later from their report.

I went to see Harumi before they met with him and said, "Harumi, I want to include your name as my witness. You remember I told you about Tarik's behavior in September." He cut me short and said, "Yes, yes, yes, of course, I remember. It's ok with me!"

We were supposed to have a group briefing on the Panel's procedures and then get on to the individual testimonies. The group had all gathered in my office. Rana, Sultan and Hassan gave us their wishes and did their best to support us. After waiting for several hours for this meeting to begin, we suddenly heard that it had been cancelled. We also learned that the Panel members had decided to take each case separately and not look at the charges of harassment as a group complaint. We were very upset since this benefited Tarik. We felt that they were trying to break us apart. We wanted them to see the similar patterns in all the cases. We argued that if they were taking the eleven cases separately they should let us be witnesses for each other. Most of us had told other members about at least one harassment incident immediately after it occurred. For example, when Tarik was very aggressive with Tasneem, she went crying to Rachel. Sadia, when faced with Tarik's intimidation, shared everything with Laila and later reported to me. Regardless of the logic of our point, the Panel refused to consider us as witnesses for each other.

The next three days of our lives were unforgettable. Ghazala gave each of us small pieces of paper with a Quranic sura written on them. She said, "I have photocopied it for everyone. Keep it in your hand or tuck it in your bra, close to your heart. God will be with us." Sadia said she had started reciting a Quranic verse a hundred times in the morning and another special prayer every day. She told Ghazala, "Yes, God is with us and the liar will reach the destination he deserves." Then she looked at me, "I have a firm faith in it. I know we are on the right path and will succeed."

When the first one went in to give her testimony, the rest counted each minute until her return. As soon as she came back from the testimony room, we all huddled together. The Panel told the members not to share the details of the testimony with others and we did not, but we were

curious about other details. Did they record the testimony? Did they take notes? Were there any people sitting close to the entrance of the testimony room? Did they believe you? Did they ask many questions? Did they seem supportive?

Politically, the constitution of the Panel was correct, with two women and one man. However, Mr. Josef Toochin took the lead and remained in charge until the end. Everyone said that he asked 90% of the questions. At the end of each interview, he would ask the women on the Panel if they wanted to ask something else. We wished that the women were more actively involved in asking questions and drawing conclusions. Later, we realized how spotty the Inquiry had been. For example, Tasneem told us she asked Mr. Toochin to check if she had ever received a negative comment from her supervisor or any warning regarding her “incompetence” before Tarik summarily fired her. We, later, found out that they never followed up on this.

I sensed they were already biased against me because Tarik's whole line of defense was directed at me. His main argument was that I had created this whole problem. I felt that Tarik and Robert had focused on me to sway the Panel's opinion. The Panel was not willing to listen to anything about Robert England. Mr. Toochin would literally interrupt me and ask his next question. I thought it was a good thing that I had written most of what I wanted to say in my personal statement and had given it to them. He would not give me an opportunity to say it all in my verbal testimony, especially about the management's role.

I met the Panel at their hotel room, choosing that venue to avoid being watched by Tarik's monitors in the UN building. After my testimony, Mr. Toochin came down in the hotel elevator to see me off. In the lobby, I was surprised to see Tarik with his younger child in his lap walking around by the elevator. He said hello to Mr. Toochin. My jaw dropped as I could not believe the image he was trying to paint to psych the Panel. Now he was projecting himself as a “loving father”. When I told the group, they all were shocked at his tricks. Masako said he should not have been allowed to hang out at the interview venue in any case.

A day before the Panel arrived a computer consultant, who had been working in the office, discovered pornographic websites saved on the computers of very senior people. He also handed me a stack of printouts of pornographic jokes that the head of the IT Unit had circulated regularly to a group of office colleagues, including Tarik. The print outs had an official UNDP email header on the top and some had very recent dates. Disturbed, the consultant pointed out that these men were not the slightest bit affected by the fact that they had such a big sexual harassment case in their office.

I showed these pages to my group. Disgusted and shocked, we decided to hand them to Mr. Toochin and point out that Tarik was included on the list and had never objected to such material being circulated under the UNDP's official banner.

When I finished my testimony, Mr. Toochin asked me if there was anything else I wanted to say. I stayed silent for a while and then extended this envelope of printouts. Embarrassed and my eyes filled with tears, I felt very ashamed on behalf of my colleagues. After all, Toochin was an outsider and I was showing him the dirt of my own office. However, his casual and dismissive response shocked me. He told me that this happens a lot in our offices and it is very difficult to catch people. He put the envelope aside and as far as I know, did not even inform the local management about it.

As far as witnesses for my case were concerned, I could not get anyone from the UNDP to disprove some of the minor allegations about me regarding deviating from office regulations, not attending certain meetings, etc. Although those testimonies would have been very simple-just a colleague saying that I was at a certain meeting-no one had the courage to become a witness. My brother did talk to Mr. Toochnin to testify to the calls he received from Tarik at home and my mother signed a similar statement. In addition, two people, who had left the UNDP some time earlier, contacted me. They said they had nothing to lose and would tell the Panel what kind of a person Tarik was, how he made the Resident Representative eat out of his hand and then took over the office and functioned like a feudal lord. After giving their testimony to the Panel, they both received threats from Maria, the minute they reached home.

The Panel called me again. I knew that they had talked to many members of our group twice and had gone back to Tarik and Robert at least two times. Although I was already disappointed with Mr. Toochnin's attitude, feeling his bias against me, this time he really surprised me. He talked to me like a criminal being pushed to make a confession. He banged his fist on the table, pointed his finger in my face and yelled at me, shouting, "You have to come clean with me now!" "Tell me the truth RIGHT NOW!"

He shouted that many people had testified that I had an affair with Tarik. I was very angry and offended. I looked straight in his eyes and told him this was a lie. I said that at first I thought Tarik was a friendly man, but nothing more and, after April 1995, I never trusted him again. I explained that in our culture for an unmarried woman, as I was at the time, to be seen openly with a man who had been married twice would be social suicide. In addition, I said that reporting Tarik was a choice I had made and if I had ever had an affair with him, why would I open up scandals about myself, especially just when I was getting married.

At the end, Christine Roth moved forward in her chair and said, "Can you think of anything that you may have done to make him think that you were his close friend?"

I could not believe what I was hearing. I turned towards her and asked, "Are you saying I encouraged him? This is 1998 for god's sake! I thought we got rid of such ideas a long time ago."

She backed off and said, "I don't mean to say that I don't believe you, ok! Just think back and try to remember any behavior that could have unintentionally made him believe that he could take liberties with you or think of you as someone more than a friend."

"No, I cannot!" I replied feeling upset.

The Panel left Islamabad, saying clearly that none of the parties could now submit any new evidence or pieces of information. The case would proceed with whatever materials had been submitted before the 20th of March, the day they departed. I had a bad taste in my mouth. I felt the Panel had been very insensitive. We learned that they would submit their report within one month. Thus, our first wait began.

41. SPILL OVER IN THE PRESS

The Investigation Panel's two-week visit was a major happening in Islamabad as well as in the UN building. The city has a population of only about 500,000 people. Social circles are tight

and, within their own circles, everyone knows everybody else. The news about the investigation travelled fast, creating big vibrations in the diplomatic community and the social development circles.

Working in the capital city, Islamabad's journalists look either for government news coming from the Parliament and the politicians or for diplomatic news coming from the embassies and agencies like the UN. Journalists hover around the diplomatic circles, attending receptions at embassies almost every night.

The story of our case was a catchy one. We did not know if the sizzling news found its way into the papers of New York or Islamabad first, but it certainly shook the UN building when the newspapers splashed the headline, "UN Official Accused of Harassment". The story said only that eleven complainants had filed a case against a UN official and ended by stating that the United Nations would not release any details. As information on the investigation spilled over into the newspapers, the news took on a momentum of its own. The first article was covered nationally and some members of our group reacted with panic and great nervousness. The next one, despite all my confidence and cool attitude, hit me quite hard.

It arrived on a Sunday morning. I went out to pick up the newspaper and was shocked to see a half page article on our case. As I quickly read column after column, I did not know what to feel. I stood in the entrance of the house like a statue with my eyes fixed on the paper. I reached a section about us, the complainants. Although the article did not put us down, I did not appreciate how the writer summarized the counter-allegations Tarik had made about me. I was afraid that people would remember it only as scandalous information and forget about the article's bottom line, which went in our favor. I was very upset and tears rolled down my cheeks. Going upstairs, I saw that Paul was still asleep, so I quickly changed, took my car keys, went back down and drove straight to my mother's house.

My mother was busy in her morning routine, insisting that everyone eat breakfast before leaving the house. My brother was almost ready to go out and was busy making excuses not to eat. I arrived in the middle of that argument. She saw my face and asked, "What's wrong?"

I ran to the living room and sat on the carpet. She and Kamran rushed in after me. I opened the paper without saying anything and pointed to the article, which they both quickly read. When they reached the part about me, I said, "Can you believe it! Tarik made those counter-allegations in his statement and now they are telling the whole world that I have a problematic personality and think everyone is harassing me. It says I also complained about another senior manager before."

Kamran said, "Actually, the story isn't against you. Overall, it seems to focus on Tarik." They both hugged me. My niece heard my voice and ran out of her room. She got caught up on what was going on and hugged me too.

Somewhat reassured, I went back home and woke Paul. He read the article and was quiet. I could see from his face that he was worried. The article mentioned two of us. I was so upset that I started to cry again. Paul consoled me, saying, "At least only two of you are named. You are the brave ones. Can you imagine how the others would have taken it if everyone had been named?"

Paul was right. However, although the article did not mention the others, its effect was like an earthquake that shook everyone terribly. Surprisingly, Ghazala was the first to feel threatened. She thought that she might have to leave the UN before it got out of hand. She was very

concerned about her husband and her family. I think her husband also wanted his wife out of this whole thing, fearing the case would take a long time to resolve and possibly become a scandal.

Sadia was even more afraid. She had not informed her family at all; if they found out from the newspapers, it could turn into a big disaster for her. Tasneem said that she had told her husband about the case though not much and would not want her name in the newspapers because he would have an excuse to pressure her to pull out. She assured us, however, that she would stay. Rensje, Masako and Rachel had no families nearby, but they were very worried about the rest of the women. I wanted us to keep meeting frequently so that we could vent our fears together.

The day after the article appeared I must have received a hundred phone calls. Friends, relatives and acquaintances from different cities called to ask about the case. I never knew how much to say. By afternoon, Paul told me to stop answering the phones; I was wearing myself down.

Harumi called me the next day about some other business, but did not mention the newspaper article. Throughout that week, he never asked how I was holding up. I almost felt that he had stopped being human. He appeared to be on a mission to create more work for me and the group to keep us off-balance.

A volatile time followed over the next two months with journalists chasing the UNDP management for news. During March and April, almost all the newspapers, especially in Islamabad, covered the issue. In general, Pakistan's English newspaper journalists are very responsible. The days were gone when they described what a woman was wearing when she was raped. Most of the coverage was done without humiliating the complainants, focusing instead on discussing the issue of sexual harassment.

Robert, however, became a target for some newspapers since he angered them with his arrogant attitude. In addition, the stories from the office kept confirming that he had always been protective of Tarik. The reporters and Robert were playing cat and mouse. He was usually able to dodge them and when they surprised him, he said only the minimum, without revealing any details. This irritated the journalists and they accused him of covering up the information.

The papers attacked the UN system, questioning their sincerity on various social issues they were working on, especially women's empowerment. We felt this kind of publicity undermined the results we were producing in our Gender Programme. They accused the UN of being hypocritical and unable to keep its own house in order. The fact that the alleged harasser of women was a senior manager of the UNDP and that other senior managers were being so tight-lipped about the case annoyed the journalists.

Personally, I think that the senior management's emphasis on confidentiality backfired. I wish the UNDP had been reasonable about providing information to people, thus curbing the amount of rumour mongering that we had to face. Our group kept meeting in my office or one of our homes to discuss every new article. With all the news coverage, I strongly felt that it was important to keep airing our concerns with each other as a group.

One reporter from Karachi, named Mohsin Saeed, wrote a series of articles on the UNDP case in a national English newspaper, The News. His articles became the talk of the town, as every Sunday morning people opened the paper looking for his article. These articles made him into a kind of a hero in several Islamabad circles. In whispers, people asked each other, "Who is this brave person?" It seemed that people in our office who had lacked the courage before to report

Tarik for wrongdoing were now leaking information to the press giving specific names of contractors and financial details. Robert gave special instructions to his secretary to avoid Mohsin Saeed at all costs.

Amidst all of these difficulties, there were occasional moments of laughter. A reporter talking to Tarik's girlfriend, Kausar, quoted her as saying, "All I know is that Mr. Khan is a very nice fellow. He has never misbehaved with me." She went on defending him and talking about his good family background. She said, "So what if he married twice? Islam allows a man to marry four times. So what if he has a past record of alleged involvement with a woman and a court martial order for that? The UN hired him and he measured up to the UN standards." A few sympathetic colleagues came over to my house that evening and we all laughed over her comments to lighten our mood.

Finally, New York sent a new Deputy of Operations to fill the post that had been vacant since Fiumi's departure. Richard Dictus took over the post in which Tarik Khan had been playing god for nearly a year and Tarik returned to his original position as the head of administration. This meant that he was now two steps away from Robert since he reported to Richard, who was answerable to Robert.

For people in the office, Richard Dictus was a ray of hope, but Tarik still seemed very much in control. No one dared to think of developing a direct communication channel with Richard. Tarik's message was being circulated throughout the corridors: "These internationals keep coming and going. They don't matter; we are here to stay!" At first, people thought Richard was smart enough to put Tarik in his place, but soon things turned around in a very interesting manner.

In Pakistan, we have specific terms to describe different kinds of manipulative behavior. One such behavior is called '*kana karna*', which means blinding someone in one eye. When someone is new in a job or a situation and, therefore, is vulnerable, that is the best time to do him a big favor and thus make him feel extremely obligated. Later, if you make a mistake, intentionally or unintentionally, that person has a hard time holding you accountable.

The concept is ancient. Feudal landlords used to extend loans to their workers as a favor and in that way buy them for life. In the management arena, it is common when people give bribes so others will bend rules for them. Once you have accepted the favor you, figuratively, go blind in one eye.

People used to joke about Robert and Tarik, saying that Tarik had showered so many favors and gave such VIP treatment to Robert that he went blind in both eyes. Tarik tried giving the red-carpet treatment to Richard also, but he was smart enough to see through that and did not respond favorably. Richard had already started reviewing procedures and files. Tarik had to tame Richard before he separated Robert from him completely.

When a person is not interested in favors, a situation could be created whereby he would be forced to seek help and then feel obligated. In Pakistani movies, the hero sometimes asks his friends to pretend to be gangsters and frighten his girlfriend. Faking a fight with them to impress her, he wins her affections. Likewise, an influential community member can have someone arrested through his contacts in the police and later go to the police station and bail the person out himself in front of the whole community, thus winning its favor, while saving the 'face' of the interned person as well.

A similar plan was hatched quickly in the UNDP. It seemed that the Staff Association had always been in Tarik's back pocket. Some staff members brought up an occasion where Richard had given them a talk to encourage them to improve their behavior in the office. At a staff meeting, they attacked him viciously in front of everyone, including Robert, saying he was insensitive to their cultural values and was very rude. The reaction was so serious and out of proportion, that Richard had to apologize. This embarrassed him. In an office environment where people never questioned their managers, this violent attack was visibly felt. The players spoke in very loud and angry voices. Richard's situation became quite awkward, showing his boss that he had made a mistake and could not control his staff. Eventually, Tarik stepped in and stopped the elaborate reaction, saving him from this difficulty. We could see that Richard was pretty shaken up.

Richard's behavior changed markedly after that. It seemed he had realized that he could not clean up this office by putting his own systems in place, but would have to align himself with the personality-based power system that was already well-entrenched. He learned that controlling Tarik would not be easy and that he needed to join the Tarik-Robert team to survive. I do not think he realized Tarik's link to this dramatic incident, but his open criticism of Operations for not having a structure and systems quickly toned down. He seemed to realize that, in this office's intricate and manipulative management system, loyalty to a boss provided greater chances for survival than any rule or regulation.

As time passed, I came to see how the UNDP Islamabad's systems and Robert England's management could turn any man into another Tarik. After Richard showed his loyalty to Robert by unreasonably slowing the processing of the Gender Unit's requests, he enjoyed a similar kind of freedom as Tarik. By giving in to the feudal system, he gained freedom for himself and, eventually, started enjoying a free hand to make decisions as he pleased.

He threw the manuals out of the window and began interpreting procedures the way he wanted. Everything depended on his mood and the person raising the question. Robert never criticized him for deviating from the new Office Manual we now had in place. He negotiated contracts single-handedly, with each member of the Gender Unit staff. He allowed no input from either Harumi or me. He extended or denied contracts regardless of the Gender Unit's wishes. Once, he gave an 80% raise to someone he liked. Richard did not sexually harass anyone, but Robert had given him enough room to wreck havoc with his powers.

In line with Robert's strategy and wishes, he cut me off completely from any communication and was embarrassingly brief whenever I went to see him. The senior management continued to do everything to obstruct our work. New Deputy or old Deputy, it made little difference. It was no longer Tarik who was taking his anger out on us...now, it was Robert.

42. MY PARTIAL SOLUTION

Ghazala told us she could not put up with seeing Tarik around every day and fearing what he might do at any moment. When she told us her decision, her voice shook. She said, "Someone told me that Tarik is threatening to throw each of us off the eleventh floor of the building." When I told her he was only boasting to keep his team's spirits high, everyone looked at me strangely and

reminded me that this was a man who had beaten his wife, had been charged with attempted murder and, seemingly, could not be made accountable to anyone. They reminded me that this was Pakistan and high connections could get you anything. Not wanting to fuel their fears, I shifted the conversation to Ghazala's plans for the future.

I was surprised at Ghazala's decision because she was a strong woman with many years of experience in the UNDP, and had dealt with Tarik for even longer than I had. Her manner that day didn't match the strong woman I had come to know. I felt her decision had been influenced by her husband's concerns. She looked at us with an uncharacteristically pale face, saying, "I don't want Tarik to spoil my marriage. My husband and my family are very important to me. My husband is a very good man and I don't want to create any social embarrassment for him. I won't disappear from the case, but I want to leave the UNDP." We all looked at her quietly, feeling sad. She looked down at her hands, flicked her nails and said quietly, "I don't think I can handle the pressure from my family." She broke down and lowered her head, "I don't want to see Tarik looking at me with vengeance in his eyes every day. I can't take that anymore." Before she left the UNDP, she pointedly made very positive comments about the office and her colleagues. She seemed concerned to fully pacify the management. She wanted them to leave her alone.

I was planning to visit America for two weeks. My university had selected me as the most-distinguished international alumni for my contributions over the past ten years and had invited me for a formal ceremony on the campus. The timing coincided with a reunion of Paul's family for his parents' fiftieth wedding anniversary. He wanted me to meet the rest of his family on this occasion, so we were going to Minnesota and then to Florida, where his parents lived.

I met with my Gender team and put Nabila in charge of the Unit. I wanted the staff to start taking charge and learning the management aspects of the job on a regular, rotation basis, over the next few months. It was important to me that they get that experience. I left for America thinking that by the time I returned, the Investigation Panel's report would be finished. We expected it by the end of April.

Visiting Minnesota was always a wonderful experience. I felt very much at home with the people, the streets, the buildings, in fact with the whole environment. My friends had arranged a wedding reception for us. Everyone was very curious to see the man I had eventually married. They were delighted to meet Paul and could feel how happy I was with him. All of this was enjoyable, but my mind remained in Pakistan.

People asked about how my UN career was going but I was not sure what to say. Should I brag about all the good work I had done and the projects I had developed to empower the Pakistani women or should I tell them about the suffocation I was facing as a woman in the UN system because I had dared to report my humiliation? Having Paul as a friend and a husband, who was fully aware of the whole situation, was very helpful. He understood my mental state and was very supportive.

The award ceremony took place in an art museum building on campus. Some of my very dear professors and advisors were sitting in front of me. In my speech, after receiving the award, I thanked them for their contributions to my thinking processes and the development of my personality. I was touched by their recognition of my abilities. I wished, however, that my own organization would also recognize those abilities and consider me an asset. I was tired of being trashed by the senior management on a daily basis.

In Florida, Paul's parents were thrilled to receive us. I felt fortunate to have such an affectionate family. Both his parents were very caring, with a lovely sense of humour. I met my new family and relatives. Paul noticed how quickly I understood the relationships. He laughed and said he could not compete with me, a South Asian, in keeping track of who is related to whom.

Back in Islamabad, the crisis continued. This time Richard Dictus was the front man. He created the impression that he, along with Robert and Tarik, were one team, with the rest of the staff on their side, while we, the women, were the "bad guys". Nabila and Masako were keeping me informed. I was shocked to learn that Richard had offered Tasneem, money-about \$5000-in exchange for a written statement that she would not press charges regarding her job termination and would say that it was an agreed separation. I also heard that Akbar, the President of the Staff Association, had been calling her at her home to pressure her into signing the statement that Richard had proposed. All of us in the group were very upset at Richard, Robert and Akbar, for ganging up on her to break us apart, one by one.

Richard seemed to be following Robert's approach by becoming increasingly friendly with Rachel. The group's assessment was that he was trying to give her the impression that she was in with the senior managers and that they trusted her. The managers kept discussing our case with her and the group was becoming fearful about confidentiality issues. Some thought that Robert had indirectly been using her to get information from our side without making it too obvious to her. Richard also attempted to befriend Rensje, using their Dutch nationality as a commonality. They were trying hard to cause divisions, either through pressure or favors.

The big anniversary party for my parents-in-law was very grand. Everyone dressed in formal attire and there was plenty of food, lovely speeches and dancing. Paul talked about how his parents transferred a set of sound ethics to their children. I could vouch for that because Paul was one of the finest persons I had ever met, with no hang-ups. It was lovely to take a break from the tensions of work, although I was not sure how much of a break it was. My mind kept pulling me back to Islamabad, but the ten-hour time difference made frequent telephoning impossible.

When I got back to Islamabad, I found out that Tasneem refused the deal Richard had offered her. She assured the group that she would stay as part of it. Both Robert and Tarik insisted that I was the leader of the group. Initially, Tarik created this story to rebut the bald fact that eleven women had complained about him. Later, they actually started believing it themselves. Perhaps they wanted to accept this lie to deny all that had happened. During one heated discussion, Robert got up, pointed at me and said, "You're the leader of the gang. You're a bolt of lightning, things happen around you." He fully believed that if he could remove me from the case everyone else would drop out. So, just like Tarik, he focused his vengeance primarily on me. I did take a major role in developing the strategy for moving the case forward, but each individual member had her own reasons for complaining and they were all strongly committed to the strategy, otherwise, they would not have tolerated the pressure Robert exerted to get each one to back off.

One evening Paul and I tried to watch a movie on television, but we had to turn it off because I could not stop complaining about what the management was doing to my Gender Programme. "They want to scare us away, they want us to back out and give up, they want to tell us we cannot take a stand against them. , they want to tell us they will crush anyone who dares to

raise an issue against them.” I told Paul how angry I was at Richard for bullying Tasneem. He tried not to let her leave the room without signing the paper. She felt very intimidated.

I continued, “It’s amazing how shamelessly they’re using the entire system to work against us. As if continuing to work with the man we complained against was not bad enough, the whole office treats us like lepers.” Paul had heard this story many times, but he kept listening as if I was telling him for the first time. “They’ve brought my programme to a standstill. They’re so shameless that they don’t even keep a professional facade. They know they are free to torture us because nobody will hold them accountable. Richard Dictus is making ridiculous objections to everything we send to the Operations Unit.”

Paul did not say much as I went on. I told him how Robert had quietly arranged to hire an international Gender Advisor to undermine me. This was Ann Keeling, a British woman who was already working with their Embassy in Islamabad. She knew me well. Although she also knew about the harassment case, she seemingly allied herself with Robert and did not even contact me. I managed to get the job description and wrote some comments for Harumi and Robert on how it could be improved. They did not respond, but they did make sure I never saw any paper work related to that position again.

Paul was surprised as she seemed to be a good professional with some integrity. He wondered how she could play along with all this dirty politics. “I only found out by chance,” I said desperately. “They have already pushed three of us out and are torturing the rest. The worst is that they are killing my Gender Programme. It’s just too important to me. I don’t want them to ruin it.”

Paul asked me lovingly, “What if you resign now? Your contract is up in September anyway.”

I went quiet for a moment. Then suddenly I felt a heavy burden lift off my shoulders.

I looked at him and said, “Why didn’t I think of that? They’ll kill the Gender Programme in their effort to destroy me, why should I let them? I’m sure if I leave, they won’t bash the Unit like they’re doing right now.”

Telling my team about my decision was very difficult. We met in my office and I explained the current situation to them. I said that instead of saving my job and my Programme and abandoning the sexual harassment complaint, which management wanted me to do, I would rather let go of my job and continue pursuing the case. I hoped that when I was out of the way they would stop sabotaging the Programme in their effort to hurt me. This was a major shock for the Gender team. They tried hard to convince me that my resignation would be seen as management’s victory. I explained that if by resigning I could save the Programme and continue pursuing the case as well, that would be the best deal in the current scenario.

The next morning Robert called me in for a meeting to inquire about the delays in our work. I had to laugh. Not only was he stopping our work and allowing Richard to do anything he could to put up obstacles, now he was questioning me about why the work was not moving ahead. I smiled broadly, “UNDP doesn’t seem to want me to move anything forward. Nothing I send out from my Unit is processed. No matter what we do, new rules are created to stop our work. And now you are criticizing me for not producing results!”

At one point Robert asked me how we could “take the healing process forward.” I felt that he was softening his tone, but did not know whether he was giving me a chance to back off from

the case and compromise or whether he meant to build bridges after the Inquiry report was out. I answered that the healing process could not even begin unless the case was decided. Then I told him that I had decided to resign. He fumbled and asked me to repeat what I said because it was clear that he had decided I would be the most difficult one for them to break. I said I hoped that after I left, the work of Gender Unit would move forward quickly and that the new adviser would be able to take care of it.

Those who were using the UN system to stigmatize and torture us in an effort to push us all out took my resignation as a major success. They had won this battle and I am sure they celebrated it, but for us this was just part of a longer struggle for justice.

43. ATTEMPTS AT COMPROMISE

One day, I was at my mother's when I got a call from a woman who identified herself as Sumaira, Tarik's wife. My jaw dropped. As I recovered and responded with a polite hello, my hands signaled to attract my mother's attention. I pointed at the phone and mouthed the words "Tarik's wife," without speaking. She did not understand so I covered the receiver with my hand and said, "This is Tarik's wife. Tell Sadaf to bring her tape recorder quickly."

Busy instructing my niece how to set up the tape recorder, I hardly listened to Sumaira at first. I feared Tarik's next trick and wanted to be prepared for it. What I understood from the first five minutes of the call was that she wanted me to meet with her and Tarik and discuss the harassment case. I asked if they were not divorced and she said that this crisis in their life had brought them together again. To buy time I told her I could not say anything without discussing it with my group. That was true in any case since we always took our strategic steps together. I told her to call back the next day.

I asked Sadaf and Paul to help me set up a recording system for the call. I regretted not recording several earlier calls. Part of me also feared that Tarik might use his wife to initiate the conversation and later take the phone from her and threaten me. I wanted to be very prepared. When Sumaira called, the conversation seemed odd to me, but for her it may have been a sincere attempt of a wife to patch up the differences between Tarik and us. She began by assuring me that she was calling me out of all the women because she thought I was the most sensible of the group and would understand what she wanted to say. Her basic approach was that we should let go of our anger and move on with life. When people run out of logical arguments, they often turn to loaded religious language to add pressure and she did the same. "Even God lets his people make mistakes," she said. "He lets them fall down to teach them a lesson and then He forgives them." She assured me that Tarik had learned his lesson and that I should forgive him. I tried hard to figure out what she wanted me to agree to. I wondered whether she wanted me to assure her that I had forgiven him and would not pursue this case anymore.

Then she remarked that if someone flirts or teases a woman in the market, an uneducated woman will make noise and attract more attention to herself, while an educated woman will stay quiet because she understands that, by complaining, she will be the one to be blamed.

"So, are you saying that we should not have complained?" I asked. She quickly changed her point and said she was afraid that the process would lash back at us also.

I had no reason to talk to her, but I felt a woman-to-woman connection. In the past, I had empathized with her, without knowing her. We were both victims of abuse by the same man, one at home and the other at the workplace. She, of course, had suffered much more than I had and the irony was that now she was stepping up to defend her abuser. Without thinking much or weighing my words, I abruptly asked, “Do you believe us?”

She answered immediately, “Yes, I do believe you! In your place, I would have done the same. I am not saying that you should take your complaint back and say you were wrong, no! You should go through all the steps in the process. He should get the punishment prescribed for him, but God says a man should be given just enough of a jolt so that he still has a chance to regain his balance.”

Long after the phone call ended, I kept sitting and thinking, trying to make sense of what was going on: Robert’s comments about starting a healing process, Sumaira’s request to not pursue the case further after the decision of the Panel, her pleading with us to forgive Tarik and move on. I tried to predict what was coming. Are they expecting a clean report from the Panel? Are they trying to pacify us in advance so we will not push for further action? I knew something was cooking. I felt cramps in my stomach.

When I played the recording for the group later, we thought it would not be useful as evidence since it was not Tarik but his wife, who was admitting to his actions. Thus, we simply put it away.

Paul had decided that it was time to move on to new territories with me. We indulged in planning for our future and discussing our move to the Philippines. I had a sense of the place from our honeymoon and knew it would be quite different from Pakistan. The rental contract on our house was expiring at the end of April. With plans for our move in the making, we did not want to extend it for another year. Although the house we were renovating was not finished, we decided to move there for this short transition period. After the move, Paul and I found ourselves in one room, surrounded with boxes. Only our bedroom was finished; all the other rooms still required a lot of work. We could neither open the boxes we were taking to Philippines nor the ones designated for the new house. I made sure my files related to the case were separate so I could carry them by hand from one place to the other. I already had the sense that this would remain the focus of my life for untold months to come.

Meanwhile, Robert and Richard worried that they did not have my formal resignation. Robert could not maintain his pretense of showing concern at the loss. In desperation, he wrote to remind me that he needed my resignation in writing. Richard also called to make sure I had not changed my mind. Neither could wait for me to leave.

My Gender Team wanted to organize a farewell party for me. I told them I felt very negative about management's attitude towards me and did not want any situation where they were obliged to say nice things. With all that was going on, such hypocrisy was the last thing I needed. I suggested that whatever farewell gatherings they wanted to plan should be limited to personal events at homes and not in the office. I said that Robert had told me he wanted to have a big gathering, inviting all our government and project partners, in order to show that I was leaving in good faith and wanted them to continue their partnership with the UNDP in the same spirit. I

asked my team not to initiate this. I wanted to see if Robert would actually contact me about a strategic farewell.

Rana gave a nice farewell dinner for me at the Islamabad Club and invited her parents. After all the tension at work, relaxing and joking with my Gender Team friends was quite pleasant. Nabila had a dinner at her house. We sang songs until late at night and many of us stayed over. Staff from the various projects we had created could not bear to hear that I was leaving and also started giving me farewells. I went to Lahore where all our mobility project partners gathered at the Village Restaurant for a meal together. Each one made a personal commitment that, regardless of where they might move in their career, they would always pursue their commitment to women's mobility. In general, my team tried to enjoy our last month together at the office.

The Gender team was very upset that neither the Staff Association nor the management had planned an official farewell. No one from other Units had even mentioned that I was leaving, although this was the hottest news around the UNDP. In my last week, the team insisted against my will and announced a special tea at our Unit where everyone was welcome to come and say good-bye to me. People were reluctant to take the chance of attending my farewell. They did not want to be tagged as my friends in the eyes of Robert and Tarik. Some people from the Operations and the Programme sections did come. We stood in the open space in front of my office with tea and snacks by our round meeting table. My whole team was there. Sadia pressed my arm and looked at me in full support. Rana was doing the social relations and welcoming everyone. Rensje was helping Sultan and Hassan give final touches to our refreshments and setting of the area. Nabila and Masako could not believe that our office colleagues could be so mean as to stay away. I put up a nice and friendly façade, mostly for my team.

Rana looked at me and signaled that she would start. She announced the occasion and said some nice things about me. Several members of our team spoke. Despite efforts not to become emotional, we could not control our tears. Nabila said how much she had always admired me as a Gender professional when she was working in other areas of Pakistan and that the biggest attraction of working at the UNDP was to have an opportunity to work with me. Masako talked about how she had grown because of working with me. She said her whole perspective on social issues and the role of a professional had changed because of it. She could not stop crying. I hugged her. Sadia wanted to say many things, but could not. She only looked at me with tear-filled eyes. Hearing about these statements from his informants, Tarik later used them against me during the final hearing on our case, saying that the Gender Unit staff was overly impressed with me and thus had joined the case only because I had asked them to play a part.

The group pushed me to speak. I could not simply say something nice and superficial. I spoke bluntly, objecting to the use of the phrase, "UNDP family". I said, families in Pakistan are usually very close and supportive and I felt referring to our office that way was an insult. I said a workplace should be efficient, productive and dignified; we should not strive to replicate a family, as this is a very different institution.

To our surprise, Tarik showed up at the end of the party and even came up to me and made a few supportive remarks. He said his sister was in Manila and I should get in touch with her if I needed anything. Later, we were told that his lawyer had advised him to come to score some brownie points with the Legal Office by proving that he was trying to normalize the situation with us and was ready to move on.

The two people the team was waiting to arrive—Robert and Harumi—never appeared, nor even sent messages to say they could not make it. Had they come, I was certain it would have been only for show, but it would have mattered to my team. They were tired of being treated as the witches of the UN.

44. 'NOT SEVERE ENOUGH'

My birthdays are always a special time for me. A time to assess myself, a time to fine tune the direction in my life and a time to celebrate myself, my family and my friends. Realizing the tension I had been experiencing at work, Paul wanted to make this occasion very special. He wanted me to take a break. Between wrapping up my UNDP work, trying to finish off the construction work in our house, sorting out things for the packers to take to the Philippines and meetings with my group of complainants, I hardly had any time. Paul, who always expressed his concern, his care and his affection more with actions rather than mere words, planned a short trip to Nepal. He wanted to take me away from everything and just help me relax for a few days.

We flew to Nepal on the evening of my last working day at the UNDP. Kathmandu is a beautiful city where ancient traditions live side by side with contemporary developments, a city filled with temples, old palaces and people in traditional clothes. Being there made me feel like I was in another time. We stayed with Paul's friends, an intelligent and compassionate Indian couple, Kiran and Anupam, who lived there with their two beautiful children. Paul had lived in Nepal, working for the UN, for five years before moving to Pakistan, so Kathmandu was like a second home to him.

Although we only had a short time, the intensity made it seem like several weeks. We visited Paul's old friends, walked in the narrow streets, ate at traditional restaurants, saw beautiful traditional dances, went out of Kathmandu to see the beautiful countryside and enjoyed the people.

When we visited Paul's old friends from the UNDP, they all asked about Harumi. The Nepali team went into the details about how he had manipulated the staff and wanted to know how he was doing in Pakistan. One person told me that towards the end, the situation with Harumi had gotten so bad that all the UNDP work had come to a halt. A team from the head office had to investigate the accusations and counter-accusations. People remembered his time as a very troublesome period.

Paul and I escaped from the tales of UNDP to the beautiful and crowded, winding streets, of the old city of Kathmandu. The concentration of temples was quite high. We found a young boy looking for tourists to guide around the neighborhood temples. We decided to give his entrepreneurship a chance and enjoyed his tour. He took us into very narrow streets and through small arched doors opening up into compounds surrounded with houses. We were introduced to a large stupa, with Buddha images and small temples with Krishna statues. People were busy preparing their offerings, burning incense or painting colorful patterns in front of the temples. These places of worship were as close to their homes as they were to their hearts.

I have found in my life that when I am clear about what I want and pursue it with full honesty and dedication paths open up by themselves in front of me. I find a deep sense of calm. I

had a similar experience in Kathmandu. I was drawn to a small temple and noticed that it was a temple of Kali, a goddess who embodies both a gentle mother and fierce warrior. I chose a spot where I could get a clear view of Kali and stood there. While the boy explained things to Paul, I stood staring intensely at the statue. I wondered how I could gather the strength to stand against men who think of themselves as gods. Tears filled my eyes as a strange sense touched my heart. I stood there for a long time. These were not tears of sadness, but of strength.

That day was topped by yet another touching experience. Early the next morning, before my eyes were fully open, Paul took me on an air safari especially offered by the Royal Nepal Airlines. The long flight provides passengers the luxury of viewing the Himalayan range. I held Paul's hand tightly as one after the other the peaks spoke of the glory and majesty of the world we live in. The high mountains covered with snow looked magical against the soft morning light. We finally reached Everest, which the Nepalese call Sagarmatha-Mother of the Ocean. Her royal highness rarely comes out of her cover of clouds, but she peeped out for a while to say hello to us. It was a phenomenal sight. Paul whispered in my ear, "Happy birthday!" I was ecstatic. All the vile managers in the UNDP seemed like tiny ants crawling on the dirt. The world is so beautiful, yet we humans try to turn it into such a petty, squabbling place.

Coming back from Nepal, we left the clear air of the high mountains behind and arrived in the dense and sick atmosphere of the UNDP in Islamabad. Although I was not going to the office anymore, I heard all about Robert's hypocrisy and high-handedness. They had stacks of irrelevant files they wanted me to work on and various other non-issues they claimed demanded my comments. I did not understand why they were still chasing me after I had wrapped things up professionally and left the office. It was clearly a harassment tactic. I soon discovered that they were shocked to realize that I had resigned from my job, but not from the case!

At home, we landed in the midst of the on-going renovation work on our house, which seemed never-ending. Piles of books were staring at us, waiting to be sorted and packed away. I wished that all these things would disappear and let me retain the peace I had found in the mountains and temples of Nepal for a moment longer.

During this hectic time, Paul and I got our bookings for Manila. We were scheduled to leave on the 13th of June. The day before leaving Pakistan, by chance, I called a friend in New York and learned that the report of the Investigation Panel had been out for some time and was already being discussed in their office. I was shocked since we had kept asking Robert about it and he never said anything. We finally managed to phone Steve Frankel in the evening who confirmed the news. We were all quite disturbed at how they had kept information from us.

The group felt strongly that I should not go to the Philippines, as they were feeling weak because so many of them had already left the UN. Those who remained felt vulnerable to open attacks. It was still hard for them to accept that I was no longer in the UN. It made them even more nervous imagining that I would be gone from Islamabad at such a critical stage. Paul and I had to reconsider the situation.

Paul had to begin his new job as the head of a large USAID project in the Philippines. A full travel plan for him within the country had already been arranged, so he could not postpone his departure. Thus, we decided that I would stay in Islamabad and join him as soon as possible.

The wait for the report began. We still thought the report would determine the eventual outcome of our case. We had no idea that it would only be an initial step in a long drawn out process.

Three days passed, but still no word on the report. Not only had Tarik seen it, but a small group within the UNDP was already strategizing on it as well. News was leaking out in bits and pieces. One newspaper even reported that the Investigation Panel report was out, but the UNDP office had yet to make it public. Nabila called Robert, but he denied knowing anything about it and said he would call a group meeting soon. Informally, he told Rachel that he did not expect us to be happy with the report. That comment worried us a lot. He was very good at sending such messages through Rachel to create panic within our group.

Finally, Robert called a meeting of the group. He was startled to see my face when I entered with the others. He had timed the meeting to make sure I had left for the Philippines. Just as with the staff meeting, he had scheduled on my wedding day, he again misjudged the intensity of my commitment to this case. He quickly recovered and said sternly, "I have called you here to inform you that I have received the Investigation Panel report. Relevant sections from the report have been sent for each of you in separate envelopes, so I will not hand these over to you right now. They will be delivered to your homes this evening." This insensitive proclamation outraged everyone.

Each one of us protested. Nabila asked whether Tarik had seen the report and Robert said yes. "Why treat us differently?" she argued. He responded that this was for security reasons. I was not sure what he meant. It was strange that the abuser, who had intimidated all of us, and had previously attempted murder, was not a security risk, but we, the victims, were. To me it was just another way of showing us that Tarik was the insider and we were the outsiders, another way of saying that we were wrong to have reported his actions and just another way of making the work environment more hostile.

Masako stood up and said, "Whatever your reason, I am leaving the office right now and would like to take the report with me."

Robert said, "If I agree, will you go straight home?" When he saw some of us getting very emotional, he said, "Okay, you...and you," pointing to Masako and Rensje. "You will be given your envelopes in the parking lot, outside the office building and you will go straight home." I wondered what he feared.

I did not work there anymore so he had no excuse to refuse me my envelope, but he did and said it would be sent to my house in the evening. I did not argue with him anymore, but in my heart I said, "I hope you rot in hell Robert England for treating us like this." What Robert did was unforgivable. No law, no UN procedure would justify this display of discrimination and inhumane behavior. We were the ones who had been violated, yet he treated us as criminals. After all, he was our supervisor and should have shown some care and compassion. That day his bias against us was so blatant. I prayed that someday the senior people in the UN would realize the kind of unethical people they had in their system.

Only Robert and Tarik received full reports, the rest of us only got the parts relevant to our own cases. By eight o'clock in the evening, we had all gathered to join the pieces together so we could read the full report.

The report concluded that out of eleven cases the Panel found sufficient evidence of sexual harassment in four cases: Ghazala, Rachel, Sadia and me. For Masako and Nageen, the report stated that while there was not enough evidence of sexual harassment as defined in the UNDP policy, the behavior of the accused had been inappropriate. In a few cases, the report stated that the intimidation was neither severe nor frequent enough. This included Tasneem's case, which I always thought was the strongest of all. We were partially happy and partially disappointed. We later learned that a finding of sexual harassment in even a single case would have been sufficient grounds to take severe action against the accused. In our case, since the whole system was rooting for the accused, it had not yet arrived at such a conclusion.

The report listed five general findings. First, they reduced the period of our complaints to only one year and emphasized that during this time Tarik was having severe marital problems. Second, they said that he had reached out to women to share his marital problems and that he had also contacted male colleagues for this purpose. Third, they mentioned that he had called up female colleagues at home, but said this was "to confide" in them. Fourth, they noted his remarkable performance record and said he fully enjoyed the support of the Resident Representative. Fifth, they hesitantly and briefly stated, that in examining the eleven complainants, the Panel found elements constituting sexual harassment, as defined in the Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedures for UNDP Staff, in four cases.

The findings not only justified his behavior, but also painted a very sympathetic picture of Tarik, highlighting his family problems at the beginning and then noting his excellent performance record to justify that his unusual behavior was a result of these personal problems. To describe his interaction with us they used the words "discussed," "confided," and "reached out". We wondered how the Panel viewed his vulgar body gestures, asking women to stay with him overnight and telling them about sexual encounters with his girlfriends. The report disregarded the pattern we had brought to light, treating our complaints as individual cases. The detailed report focused completely on Tarik, with no mention of who we were or how we had been affected by his behavior.

Nabila was devastated. Suddenly she asked, "What do 'not severe enough' and 'not frequent enough' mean?" We all started to laugh, sensing a need to release the unbearable tension.

Tasneem said, "If a woman is seduced by her boss she should be seduced at least twenty times before she reports him, if she wants to have a real case."

Rachel joked, "They are telling these women they were wrong to report. They say the behavior was 'inappropriate', so they should have waited to experience worse and then report it!" We all laughed.

Rensje recalled her predecessor, Mary Lou. She had experienced an attempted rape by a waiter in her guesthouse. When she reported it to Tarik and William Dickens, she said they harassed her in return. According to her, she felt they thought she was a woman of easy virtue and started to make passes at her. Rensje said, "Well, in Mary Lou's case attempted rape was not considered anything at all. She is still distraught from that experience, even after so many years." The pain she carried from Mary Lou's incident was evident from her face whenever she talked about it.

I went quiet and everyone looked at me. I pointed to a paragraph in the report that said that neither Robert England nor Harumi Sakaguchi had indicated that any of the complainants

had come forward informally to complain of sexual harassment. All along I thought that Harumi had told them about my conversation with him in September, where I detailed the intimidation I had been experiencing and told him about Sadia's experience with Tarik. "He lied! How could he do that?" I asked, desperately. "I asked him specifically if he remembered what I told him and he said, 'Yes, yes'." I spoke in despair. Everyone tried to console me, but I was so disappointed in Harumi that my whole body ached. I felt as if tons of weight had fallen on me. "Can we trust anyone on anything anymore?" My voice trembled. I returned home late. I felt bad about the report, but Harumi's lying disappointed me most of all.

The next three weeks were very heavy for me. I was so disappointed with Harumi that it was very difficult for me to operate. I was not so much angry as hurt. I had at times seen him as inefficient and weak in decision-making, but I had always respected him for his humanity. There was a human being in him, something that I never saw in Robert. At times, he acted like a child. Sometimes he was as happy as a five year-old with our success. I reflected on all the good times Harumi and our team had experienced in the last two years. How can a person harden his heart and lie just to be obedient to his boss? If there was one person other than Tarik in the UNDP Pakistan who knew the truth, it was Harumi...and he had lied. Later, I learned that many other people knew the truth about Tarik, but no one wanted to put his neck on the line. What they did not know at that time was that even this extremely biased report had the potential to shake the system.

45. OUR RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

A brief news item on our case in the morning paper attracted my attention. To my surprise, it said that Tarik had been sent on leave with full pay. Even more surprising, it said he had been ordered home several days earlier and none of us knew about it. I rushed to tell the others. Those still working in the office had not heard anything either. When Rachel went to Robert to confirm the news he casually said, "Oh, didn't I mention it?"

Headquarters had sent Tarik on leave with full pay, but without prejudice, because of the Investigation Panel's report. Obviously, this had been undertaken very quietly. Soon, Robert had a computer, printer, phone and fax quietly moved to his home to make it convenient for him to communicate with his lawyer and UN vehicles were made available whenever he needed them.

We arranged a conference call to the Legal Section in New York. We talked to a man named Loriot, whose attitude seemed cold. We complained about being out of the information loop all the time, but he did not even acknowledge our complaint. He told us that Tarik had been asked to respond to the report. We were surprised and asked if we should also respond. This question seemed unexpected, but he hesitantly agreed.

Regardless of whether the Legal Section wanted us to respond or not, we jointly drafted our response to the report. I was exhausted after meeting with the group every day and working with Nabila and Masako in the late evenings. However, my problem was not just the workload, but also the anger I carried. Those were the worst weeks of my life because I was so hurt and angry with Harumi for lying that I could not get myself to operate normally.

In addition, as a group of eleven, even sending a short note to Headquarters took several days since we wanted each group member to be fully satisfied with the contents of the letter. Consensus-building with eleven members at times was quite difficult because of our differing opinions. Rachel was always our final test. Anything slightly critical of Robert was a sticking point for her. She would argue and delay signing the note and the whole group would have to discuss and discuss until she accepted the language. Each time, the group would agree to change some wording so Rachel could accept it. The rest of us were quite clear about how the management was deceiving us. I think Rachel also saw how Robert was manipulating us and could not justify his behavior, but still felt as if signing a critical letter would be betraying him.

Some employees from UNDP Operations came to see me at home and confessed that they could not go public with the information they had on Tarik's wrongdoing, but were praying for our success. They said we women were brave to take on a Rasputin like Tarik and even braver to do it in the presence of Rasputin's czar, Robert England. Nevertheless, they feared that if we lost the case Tarik would become invincible.

Finally, we completed our response to the Investigation Panel report, putting in all our last-minute changes. We had taken over my mother's living room for our group meeting and felt very proud of ourselves for achieving this task. The rain outside had also lifted our spirits. I took a long breath when it was all finished and Rachel volunteered to read it to the group.

We began by expressing appreciation for the work of the Investigation Panel and said we wanted to raise some concerns that we had on the report. We wrote:

“Sexual harassment is a complicated phenomenon to prove. In most of the cases, it is one person's word against the other. However, in our case the fact that did not get highlighted was that it is one person's word against eleven. The panel should have referred to the fact that the respondent's perception of events or a relationship was different from the complainants. But the important point, which should be drawn out of all the cases, is that the respondent misjudged eleven relationships out of a total of sixteen relationships with female colleagues in UNDP. Obviously, all those in which he “confided” were so offended that they had to resort to a written complaint against that person. Looking at individual cases separately can be misleading. Therefore, it is extremely important to look at the patterns common to all the complaints.”

Then we highlighted the commonalities in our cases, like making late night calls to our homes, calling a girlfriend and having a sexual conversation with her in our presence, being drunk, using vulgar language, expressing his loneliness and making sexual advances. Punishing women who did not comply with his demands was also a pattern with five of us.

Among other things, we objected to highlighting Tarik's performance ratings, which implied that his behavior was being justified. As there was nothing about the respondents in the Report, we suggested that the following paragraph on the complainants should be included:

“The eleven complainants include eight Pakistani and three international staff members. The age group ranges from 28 to 50 years of age. They are not from one Unit nor work under one supervisor. They are from various Programme Units as well as from the

administration. Their supervisors range from the Resident Representative to Programme Officers. They are commonly assessed as hard working and competent women. They stated that they have gone through a lot of stress because of the sexual harassment they have been submitted to and then because of the experience of reporting sexual harassment.”

At the end, we stressed again that we had taken a great risk by reporting someone who was seen to be very close to the Resident Representative. We concluded by stating:

“We continue to struggle and experience pressures as reporting sexual harassment is not common. We trust that the process will be just. If possible, we would like to make a presentation in person to the relevant Committee/authority.”

“Sounds damn good to me,” I said loudly as Rachel finished reading. I saw a smile of satisfaction on everyone’s face.

We all signed the letter. I had suggested to the group that New York could cut us apart if they felt like it, but we had made a joint complaint, so every letter that we sent out would have all our names. If someone were not physically present to sign, we would get her consent and include her name.

46. OPERATING FROM A DISTANCE

Now that the response to the Investigation Panel’s report had been sent off to New York, I wanted to do nothing else except join Paul in Manila. He had already been there by himself for a month. We had kept in daily contact via email, but I missed being with him. I went straight to my travel agent and got the first available flight in July. My family was surprised at my sudden departure plans since they had hardly seen me during the past month. However, they were supportive and helped me get ready to leave. I just wanted to get on the plane to Paul.

I was relieved to arrive in the Philippines. Paul had been staying at a hotel in the heart of Manila for the past month. I had told myself not to talk about the UN case, but every time I opened my mouth, the stories just came rushing out.

Soon after I arrived, Paul took me along on his first official trip to Mindanao, in the southern part of the Philippines. We stayed one night with his old friends from Nepal, Jock and Micheline Baker, who were living near the City of General Santos. Jock worked for the UN, but rented a house on a Dole pineapple plantation in a community built for their senior managers. I was still very tense about all that was going on with the Gender Unit and counted on Paul's laptop and email for contact with my world in Pakistan. I had some news from the Gender Unit regarding the difficulties people at the UN were still creating for the team. I was disappointed because I had thought that after my departure their antagonism towards the Gender Unit would lessen.

Sunday was a quiet day, so Paul and I took long walks among the green pine trees high above the residential area and, of course, talked about the UN case. I could not stop talking about

it, but Paul was always ready to listen. In the late afternoon, I received a message from Sadia who was trying to deal with the issues related to the UNDP case. She wanted me to contact Masako and Nabila. They were in Bangladesh for a Gender Mainstreaming Conference, the same one that had earlier been scheduled for Islamabad but had been cancelled right before my wedding. I tried, but could not reach them.

The next day we were back in General Santos City. After some meetings that Paul had scheduled in the city, we were planning to drive with some of his colleagues to the capital of the next province. Before we left, I finally connected with Masako and Nabila. People at the conference in Dhaka had asked them unofficially about our case. They had been asked to lead a special session on the topic with a small group. They wanted me to write a synopsis and discuss it with them.

After receiving this message, I spent the entire drive to Kidapawan trying to figure out the best framework for their presentation. Paul's colleagues noticed that his wife was not a very talkative person, but he covered for me. He knew I was absorbed in my thoughts. Looking out of the window, I kept thinking about what our next step should be. In those days, I focused my mind on our case and worked quite fast on all aspects of it. I was obsessed with being strategic in fighting this huge bureaucracy.

When we reached our hotel, I prepared a fax with my notes, walked to a nearby market and without speaking any Tagalog, found a public telephone center with international lines and a fax machine. I luckily caught Masako and Nabila in their room. We were happy to hear each other's voices. They switched the phone receiver between them and told me all about what had been going on, talking in whispers as if Tarik or Robert could listen to them. We were all glad for the opportunity to make a point about our case. After I hung up, I immediately faxed them the outline for the presentation.

I heard back from them the next day. They were excited to tell me that the outline and talking points enabled them to make an impact on the audience. It felt good to have some support and be able to present our case to others working within the organization. Until then, we had felt cut off and sidelined within the UN system. We had decided that we should speak out about the case because Robert had been so brutal in his retaliation against us. Anyway, we figured the issue was open for discussion since the Investigation Panel's report was already out. Masako and Nabila also learned in Dhaka that there had been a major complaint of sexual harassment while Robert was head of the UNDP office in Sri Lanka, but he had not allowed it to go forward. We were very surprised to get this information about Robert's pattern of suppressing harassment cases.

All the time we were in Kidapawan, I was either on email or in the telephone office. Paul kept asking me if I could join him and his colleagues for dinner or lunch and he also invited me to attend part of the workshop, but I was too pre-occupied. I joined him whenever I could, but my mind was far away. I was not with him in his activities, but he was with me on my issues all the time and kept checking to learn about any significant developments.

Throughout the trip to Mindanao, I made sure I maintained contact with everyone in my Gender team. I kept up with the latest news from Nabila and Masako in Dhaka and Rana, who was now holding the fort as the team leader of the Unit in Islamabad awaiting Ann Keeling's expected arrival.

After Paul and I returned to Manila, I focused on completing a more detailed personal statement about my UNDP case. I became more organized and contacted people who could give me statements of support. I wrote to Georgina, the lead consultant who had reviewed our Gender Programme during the previous year, to testify for us on Tarik's behavior and her discussion with Robert about her personal observations on his behavior in the office.

News came from New York that Tarik had submitted his response to the Investigation Panel's Report and we would be getting a copy soon. That night I was very upset and could not sleep. Suddenly, Paul sat up in bed. It was dark and I was surprised to see him sit up like that. I sat up myself and asked what was wrong. He asked whether I wanted to go to Islamabad to take care of my issues there myself. I was happy at his offer and at the same time, felt embarrassed since I had only been in Manila for a month. I said, "Are you tired of me being absorbed with all this?" He put his arm around me and said, "No, I want you to feel free to deal with what you are worried about and not think you have to be here with me to set up the new house. I can do that by myself and you can finish what is left over in Islamabad."

I thought about it for a while, but decided not to go. The UN issue was not going to be resolved in a mere month or so. I had already been away from Paul for a month dealing with the case. I told myself that I needed to pay some attention to my married life. Paul was not at all resentful, but I felt guilty for remaining glued to the computer all the time. I started organizing my work so that I would write emails, draft letters, make notes of points for our future strategies during the day, so that when Paul came back from work I could be with him.

Paul's predecessor was about to leave in a week's time. We had arranged to take his house. It was in a quiet, walled, residential area, but still very close to the hustle and bustle of the downtown district surrounded by shopping malls, movie theaters, banks and the world famous traffic jams. We moved from our hotel suite in late July.

By early August, Paul and I had set up our new house. Other than a big living and dining area and several spacious rooms, the best feature was a large pool ~ a big incentive for me to learn swimming. In Pakistan, women do not get much chance to learn water sports. Even in the poor communities, men and boys get to play into the local canals, but not the girls...and certainly not older women, like me. Here was my chance to find a diversion from all the tensions related to the UNDP.

47. BACK TO SQUARE ONE

In late summer, Paul and I came back to Islamabad together for a short visit. The tension level at the UNDP was sky-rocketing. I heard many complaints from Laila, Masako and Sadia. Even I felt very intimidated when I went to meet my group at the UN office. The guards asked me many questions at the entrance. Both my body and my bag were searched, although this was long before women were being searched routinely. I was not allowed to enter the office unescorted. None of this was routine procedure for visitors.

Amir confronted me as I entered the UNDP floor. Pretending to be my friend, he said I should not come to the UNDP because people were "concerned". This educated man was never concerned when eleven of his colleagues were being humiliated. He was not concerned, when,

despite our complaint, Tarik had continued to work in the same office and continued tormenting us. However, he was concerned about my coming in to see the other complainants. When I asked him what he meant, he replied, "Actually, Richard (Dictus) was very concerned." In order to get permission to meet with my colleagues, I had to go to Robert and clarify with him that my visits would be strictly about the case. When he did not object, I told him he needed to notify his senior management so they would stop intimidating me.

The rising tensions in the UNDP together with the wait for Tarik's response and the need to answer immediately forced me to stay in Pakistan. I apologized to Paul for not accompanying him back, but he understood my situation, although it was clear that he hoped his wife would be able to finish the UNDP case and return to a normal life.

Once again, Robert had been waiting for me to leave the country. The day after my expected departure from Islamabad our group received a copy of Tarik's response to the Investigation Panel's report and a request to us for a response to it. We were relieved, but only for a short time. It was less of a response to the Panel's report than a reiteration of his original response to our complaint, only with many more lies, preposterous explanations and a new line of argument. The reference to the Panel's report itself was minimal. We were all shocked.

We met together at Masako's house. Laila could not sit still and was pacing back and forth like a tigress, "How can they let him change his story? Remember what Mr. Toochin said, 'Not even a single piece of paper can be submitted to UNDP after the Panel leaves.' How can Tarik submit a whole new story with fabricated evidence?"

No one replied. Everybody was immersed in making some sense of his response. Rensje said, "Tarik is implying that, in one way or another, all four women whose cases were accepted by the Panel were in love with him." Sadia trembled at this thought and left the room in embarrassment. She wanted to say something, but could not find the courage to acknowledge his line of argument.

"You're right," Rachel answered. "He calls us his special friends." She kept looking at his statement and continued in her heavy British accent, "He is implying that I wanted to marry him," she laughed cynically and blushed. "Look at this bastard. He is saying that I felt disappointed when he got back together with his wife." She shook her head and looked at us, turning red with embarrassment. "But he gives most of the credit to Fouzia, saying that when he refused her love and broke her heart she mobilized all the other women to complain against him." She teased me, laughing loudly, "Most of the response is still about you, Fouzia!"

Tarik had stated that contrary to what the Panel had concluded, there was enough evidence to prove that I was his "close personal friend" until the end of 1996. The argument about me "abhorring procedures" had vanished. None of those previous examples was relevant now because he had provided six new incidents to prove that I had a "close romantic personal friendship" with him. Curiously, all the examples were back in 1995, but I had waited until the end of 1997 to report him.

He said I invited him to my house several times. This was partially true. Shortly after I had joined the UNDP, I had invited him to a dinner party and later to a farewell for my supervisor, Nicholas. Then he said I had borrowed his car many times. I did use his car once, but it was his girlfriend, Kausar, who borrowed it. I was merely a driver. As evidence of how close we were, he also stated that he had helped retrieve my UN identity card from a man posing as a police officer.

In fact, he was hardly in the picture...and I never did get my ID card back. He mentioned some activities that had taken place, but where he had not been involved. He twisted whatever scant fragments of stories he could imagine. I turned to the group and asked, "With such flimsy evidence how can someone believe that I had an affair with him?"

"Well, this only makes sense if you believe that someone is really anxious to let him get off the hook," said Rachel leaning on Masako's shoulder. They both laughed.

Masako smiled, "I don't think New York is letting Tarik build a new argument just to help him. I think they are doing it because Robert had already painted the picture that Tarik was innocent and these women were simply being vindictive for other reasons. Now, if Tarik gets punished, then Robert stands to lose a lot of credibility...and he is one of their stars"

"I disagree. Robert only feels pity for him." Rachel raised her eyes from Tarik's statement and looked at all of us. The whole group pounced on her at once and I had to calm them down.

We had already sent our comments on the report so we wondered why they were now demanding that we respond to Tarik's response to the report. Who exactly did they consider as the guilty party: Tarik or us?

A few days later, we were able to arrange a conference call to Mr. Loriot at the Legal Section in New York from Masako's house. As usual, we had the tape recorder set up to record the conversation for our records. We all gathered around her speakerphone. This call was a strange experience. Loriot talked as if he had already decided the case in Tarik's favor and he was just proceeding for the sake of the due process. He told us that Tarik had provided them with enough evidence and unless we were able to counter what he had given, the case might not be taken any further. Shocked to hear this, I asked him if the results of the Panel's report would have any bearing on their decision. He said if the accused provided them with a convincing alibi, they would not charge him. He pointed out that this was still an initial stage of the investigation, but so far, he had not found enough reason to charge him.

I bent forward on the speaker and told him in a firm voice that he could not do that even if he wanted to. I told him that the Investigation Panel report had found Tarik culpable in four cases and that even if there was only one offense he could not let go without charging the man. I repeated my point again in a loud voice: "YOU HAVE NO OPTION, BUT TO TAKE THE CASE FORWARD!" Loriot seemed stunned by my confidence. Perhaps his stereotype of Pakistani women was breaking down. He was slowly realizing that he could not just tell us anything to get us off his back.

We asked him what materials he had reviewed that brought him to the conclusion that Tarik's response was solid. He said he had our original complaint and the Investigation Panel's report. We all were shocked. The Panel report only gave us a few lines. He claimed not to have the statements that we had handed to the Panel, nor did he have the supporting documents, the witness testimonies or the transcript of Panel's hearing when they had counter-examined us on the accusations Tarik made against us.

When I heard this, I could not breathe. Everyone in our group went pale and fell silent, too shocked to say anything. He did not have any of the materials we had provided five months earlier and he was telling us that Tarik had made a strong presentation and they were about to dismiss our case!

After listening to our loud and detailed complaints, Lorient finally said he would consider whatever we could send him within two weeks. We then told him we needed some kind of legal help in re-formulating our statements, but only got a vague response. When we pushed him, he said we could consider him our lawyer. We all gasped and insisted that we needed someone who could work with us on our statements, which we thought should be more comprehensive than what we had given the Panel. Now we had to counter a completely new line of arguments by Tarik. We also reminded him that Tarik had access to two lawyers.

Getting a lawyer for us had turned out to be another tedious task. We hardly had any support. We had received kind words in the past from the head of the Panel of Counsels in New York. She had been supportive about looking for a suitable counsel to help us, but then suddenly stopped replying to our emails and faxes.

The work environment for those still working in the UNDP office was getting worse by the day. Although Tarik was out of the office, on leave with pay, his presence was felt more than ever before. His loyal workers, whom he had amply rewarded with favors, were using this opportunity to save their boss and secure high positions in the future. He had a network of spies collecting any information they could about every one of us. Each of his agents competed with the others to bring new information to their evening meetings at his home.

Meanwhile, I found out that a well-known women's rights activist had submitted a volatile letter against me to Robert. She was a staff lawyer for a famous women's organization and was linked to a power struggle within Bedari that had re-emerged recently. She was trying to settle scores with me for showing solidarity with some of the Bedari members as they sorted out a messy situation they had faced at the hands of some of her friends. I was surprised at this underhanded attack and the subsequent stigmatizing campaign she led within my circle.

The letter had been intercepted by Robert's lower staff and a copy was quietly given to me. There were still a few people in the administrative staff that saw us struggling against a tyrant and helped out in little ways without having to openly show their support.

Nawaz, Kausar and Akbar went around like hound dogs sniffing every room in the office. Maria monitored telephone calls and there was no getting around her. Maria had programmed the phone numbers of Sadia, Nabila and Masako. If they dialed even an internal extension, the call would connect directly to the operator. Cell phones were not yet common in those days. The Gender Unit had one direct line with an international connection that the group members had used as a relatively secure line for local calls and fax. Suddenly, even that line was taken away allegedly because another unit had complained that they didn't have one. Thus, they managed to cut down our communication abilities to almost zero during the working day.

Next, Richard announced that staff needed prior approval from their supervisors for each international call or letter. This forced our team to start making international calls and sending faxes from commercial facilities at their personal expense.

In addition to everything else, the supervisors of the complainants who were still in the UNDP were playing havoc with their workloads. Harumi was driving Masako, Nabila and Sadia crazy with a sudden increase in unnecessary work assignments. Robert was also insensitive to Rachel's need to address the critical stages of the case. The increasing workload of the Inter Agency Unit put considerable stress on her, making it difficult to compile her materials to send to the Legal Office.

While the senior management of the office intentionally overburdened the complainants who remained in the UNDP, Tarik could now work full time on his case and continue receiving his full salary as well. He had access to two lawyers and, in addition, received free international phone and fax lines, a photocopier and a computer at his home. He even managed to get his girlfriend, Kausar, installed as Richard's secretary so he could get detailed reports on everyone who met with either Richard or Robert. Richard Dictus was now the front man charged with making life hell for those from our group who were still in the UNDP.

One day we had to send a document seeking advice from a UN officer in another country. We thought the most efficient way would be to use the UN Diplomatic pouch. According to the new rules, we had to get permission from our supervisor so Sadia went to Harumi's office and asked to send a confidential packet regarding our case. He looked at her with a naughty smile and asked her to bring it over. She was nervous because she did not want him to know whom we were contacting, but he read the name and made a note of it. When he moved to open the envelope, however, Sadia stepped forward and snatched it from him. He looked at her with a silly grin on his face and said, "I want to see what is in this envelope."

Sadia answered, "I told you this is about our case and it is confidential."

As amused as a naughty child with his intimidating style, Harumi insisted, "I want to look at it."

Sadia clutched the package tightly to her chest and left the room. Harumi burst into laughter. He seemed to be greatly enjoying the game of "tormenting the witches".

Tasneem was very angry. She was worried whether she was in the case or out. I stressed that even if the UNDP came down to one case we all would keep meeting and working on the documents together. That one person would be representing all the cases for us. Everyone felt very comfortable and empowered by this decision.

We were trying to convince Ghazala to send some response on her case to New York and she was considering it. In any case, we made certain to keep her informed about our activities. We remained eleven.

48. 'HIS CASE IS VERY CONVINCING'

After I returned from Pakistan, Paul helped me feel at home in Manila and tried to shift my focus from the case, at least a bit. He started giving me swimming lessons and decided to teach me summersaults in the pool to get me to relax and be playful in the water. It took a lot of coaxing because I preferred to stay in the shallow end of the pool, holding tightly to the mask and snorkel he had bought for me. However, no matter what he tried, unless I was underwater, he could not keep me from talking about the case.

I asked him, "The Legal section is not supposed to be swayed by emotions, but only evidence, right!"

Paul laughed and said, "I guess so!"

“Then why is Mr. Lorient so convinced by Tarik's case? I don't see any evidence or any explanation of the key accusations in his statement. What I can't figure out is why he is so receptive to Tarik's lies? He just says the same thing over and over without any basis.”

To temper my anger, Paul did a summersault under water. I clapped and said, “Oh, I don't think I can do that!”

“Well, then come here.” He smiled and signaled me to come where he was.

“Okay, but first listen: Tarik creates this story that I am outraged because he dumped me and then says I am accusing him of sexual harassment to get back at him and have mobilized the whole world to do it with me. Why would I wait for over two years to get my revenge? He says nothing to make his false story complete. He has some phone records from 1995, which he wants to use to fabricate an affair and then he wants to stretch that evidence to explain my action in late 1997. Isn't that a bit too much?”

Paul said, “Okay, now you try it. Put your feet like this on the bottom and keep your head forward.”

I took a long breath and tried. I did not even make half a circle and gulped some water, something I really hated. Coughing hard, I regained my balance and continued talking, “He doesn't give any good reason to explain why all the women went along with me.”

Paul agreed, “Yes, you're right. He keeps talking about Sadia and her link to Bedari, but he says nothing, for example, about why Rachel would join in getting back at him. He tells a story, but doesn't back it up with evidence or even a plausible explanation.”

I agreed. “And Masako and Nabila...well, in a way he mentioned the Gender Unit and that they were all very fond of me and impressed by me.”

Positioning my feet and body for another try, Paul continued, “What about the others? They weren't in the Gender Unit. Why would they just follow you as a leader and make a fictitious complaint against their colleague?”

“Yes, he doesn't even mention their motive. As if he created this story in a rush, but didn't think about the details to fill in the major gaps.” I answered while I positioned myself the way Paul was showing me.

“Okay, stop talking, otherwise you'll gulp water again,” said Paul, as he adjusted my head. “Your body will not go by itself; you have to push it in that direction and let your body follow your head. Tuck your chin in.”

I made another half-hearted try with a big splash. I whipped my eyes and said proudly, “Getting close!” Paul smiled and hugged me. I quickly added, “Paul, he should be required to give some explanation to back up his story, right?”

Paul said, “Well, these are certainly the things that the Panel or the Legal Section or whoever makes the final recommendation, should consider.”

Bouncing slowly in the water, I said, “This is what surprises me. Things that are so full of contradictions have somehow impressed the Legal Section so much that they are already treating us like liars. They are so convinced that they are very hesitant to take the case forward and keep looking for reasons to drop it. Lorient even said to us, ‘His case is VERY convincing!’”

“Now try it again, ok. Look at me closely, see how I do it.” Paul got into position in slow motion so that I could see every detail and, whoop, went into a summersault. As he came up he said, “Kids learn this when they are three.”

“Hey, that's not very encouraging!” I complained.

Paul laughed loudly, “Okay, keep trying.”

“First, listen to me,” I demanded.

“I’m listening,” Paul said as he stretched into a back float to relax.

“You and I had a beautiful relationship. How does that fit into his story?”

Paul swam close; snorting as he tickled me, “HAD a beautiful relationship...excuse me!”

I laughed, “No, no, I mean in the years that he keeps talking about. I’ve given them your letters and...” I got close to him and said in a low voice, “You know what? I told the panel that even if a woman had a relationship she would never bring it out in the open right before her marriage. What would be my motivation to take up a fight with my ‘ex boyfriend’ in between my wedding announcement and the wedding ceremony? They don’t think about his argument logically. The gaps are so evident.”

“Okay, now can we concentrate here just for a minute?” Paul held me in the right position for a summersault, “Take a deep breath and go.”

I went all the way around under the water and came up slightly off balance, crying loudly, “I DID IT. I DID IT!”

Paul hugged me and said, “That’s it, see it is simple and fun! There is a life beyond this case you know.”

There was no way I could think of applying for a full time job in Manila or start working at anything else. The amount of time I worked on the case was double that of a full-time job. Day or night, our topic of conversation was the same. Paul would try his best to get me to swim or do something different to get this issue off my mind. All day I was busy writing and communicating with my group in Pakistan. Our communication level was so intense that I would inform them by email if I had to leave home for even one hour.

In the beginning, the main hub of my communication had been the Gender Unit as the fear of leakage of information was minimal there, but after Ann Keeling, the British Gender Adviser, joined and took charge of our Programme we lost that also. Everyone was on alert, not sure whether to trust her or not. She was close to Robert, so Nabila, Masako and Sadia felt unwilling to quickly open up to her. The communication among them about the case switched to home phones and careful use of email at the office. I suggested they keep the specifics of the harassment case to themselves, but to be neutral about the Unit’s work. I was hoping that Ann would be able to get the Unit back into full swing. It had been stuck like a boat on a sand bar at low tide. We wanted her to get it back into the deep water.

I had carved out three tasks for the group. First, we all needed to write our comprehensive statements again in view of Tarik’s additional responses. Second, they had to re-collect any statements from our witnesses to add to our case, since all the witness testimonies that the Panel took during their interviews, had somehow been “lost” by the UNDP administration. Third, they had to keep pursuing Loriot to give us a time extension and a lawyer. I had two additional tasks for myself. Regardless of our distance, my primary task was to keep the group together by maintaining

close and frequent communication with them, sometimes on an hourly basis. My second job was to maintain contact with a few sympathetic friends in the UN system to get some feedback on our statements and progress of the overall case.

To write my comprehensive statement, I started all over again. Eighty percent of Tarik's responses were about me, providing many examples of our 'special relationship' and I had to counter each one of them.

Tarik submitted yet more additions to his statement. I received some of the attachments to his statement. These included some of his phone bills that he submitted as evidence of our phone calls in mid-1995. I wrote to NY immediately asking them to send me a full set of the annexes to his second and third responses, but never got an answer. I felt very frustrated because it seemed I had incomplete information. I read all of Tarik's statements over again. Although my blood pressure rose every time, the process was helpful for noticing contradictions in his various responses. Our library room at home was full of stacks of paper on the floor and on my desk. In the end, I prepared twenty-four attachments to my 26-page statement.

We had no news from New York regarding the appointment of a lawyer and the wait was becoming torturous. Lorient was as vague as ever about everything. He must have been having problems with our Pakistani English because his responses never matched our questions. We were desperately, though unsuccessfully, trying to contact Claxton in New York, the woman who was responsible for assigning a counsel to us.

The 16th of October arrived, the last day for us to submit the response. We had decided to wait until the end of Islamabad's working day for either an extension notice or a notice about getting a lawyer. When no news arrived by that date, we went into action. In Manila, since I was three hours ahead of Islamabad time, I had to rush to a courier office before it closed to make sure our packet was properly postmarked. Unfortunately, the courier office near my house closed early that day. Paul had to drive me to the other end of the town to find the only one open until midnight. With Manila traffic, it took us about three hours to get there. All the way, I complained about the insensitivity of the people in New York. They should have informed us properly rather than hinting around and playing games. Although I didn't know it, another game was just about to start.

The next day, Rachel told Masako and Nabila that a fax message had finally come from Lorient assigning a lawyer for us. Although the fax was dated several days earlier, it had been withheld from us by our local office. The message had not mentioned an extension of the deadline or advice on the next steps, but did inform us that a lawyer had been arranged for us. We were furious at the office in Pakistan for playing with us like this.

We had been working on our own for nearly a year and the idea of having some professional help was very attractive. So, we decided that we would write to Lorient and say that if the envelopes of our responses were given to our counsel unopened and a clear time extension was provided, then we would like to use the lawyer's services.

Claxton wrote, finally, to tell me that the lawyer who they had engaged for us was very competent and would be contacting us soon. Lorient never answered our messages about giving our packages to the lawyer. After that, we had a hard time figuring out what happened to our deadline issue because the communication started taking place between the lawyer and the Legal Section and we were again out of the loop. We could not get a straight answer about what was going on.

My parents were coming to visit me in Manila and I was looking forward to it, but I wanted to be sure that I had taken care of whatever needed to be done with the UNDP case in its next stage. We were planning to visit a resort on a small island off the province of Palawan. Our friends Jock and Micheline were going to join us with their children. Paul was making all the arrangements and keeping an eye on me to make sure that I was comfortable leaving Manila—meaning leaving my computer, phone and email, for a week.

Unfortunately, my initial impression of our lawyer, Marco Carmignani, was not good. When he talked to me, he was brief and I felt, in my gut, that he did not believe me. I was shattered. It was not until my group in Islamabad had telephone conversations with him and assured me that he was a very reasonable and a genuine person that I started feeling comfortable about him. Nevertheless, I remained doubtful and shared my views with the group.

Meanwhile, we found out that after we had revised our comprehensive statements, Tarik would again be asked to respond to them. I just could not believe that. It was like a nightmare. How could the Legal Section not know its own inquiry procedures? Lorient had told us that they would make their decision after we had submitted our statements, so this news left me unnerved. I felt like I was in a badly produced soap opera that would never end.

Marco travelled to Islamabad and was supposed to stay for two days, but his British Airways flight was delayed for almost twelve hours. He arrived in the early hours of the morning and the group was surprised to see him already in the office when they came to work that day. Masako and Nabila quickly welcomed him. He only wanted to focus on the case. He told them he had just twenty-four hours in Islamabad to assess the situation and needed to get started right away. Nabila and Sadia rushed in to say hello to him. He asked for some coffee to keep him awake.

He quickly had meetings with Robert and Harumi and got the information that he wanted from them. He spent most of his time with Nabila, Masako, Sadia and Rachel. For the other complainants he set up a meeting in the evening. I heard that he kept a cup of coffee in one hand and he talked to all the relevant people at one stretch, without taking a break. He kept taking notes and probably made his own assessment about the facts of the case. I had asked Masako to tell him about her case also because the Panel had not rejected it, but only said the evidence was insufficient.

He asked Rachel and Sadia many questions, going through their last statements and asking for details. He asked questions about how they knew each other, how they learned about each other's problems and why they decided to file a joint complaint. He wanted to understand the entire situation. The group quickly developed an excellent rapport with him and talked very openly. In the evening, he met with all the women who had complained against Tarik. Only I was missing.

After he left, they called me. I heard everyone's version. Nabila was very hyped up, "He was good Fouzia, believe me, he worked like a robot. I mean it in a good way. I mean a normal human would have fallen asleep on the meeting table. We could see how tired he was." Rachel pulled the receiver from her and added, "I feel very good about this exercise. Although he had little time, he didn't rush. He went in depth and asked very good questions."

They could hear the skepticism in my voice so Sadia decided to reassure me. She took the phone and talked to me with all her personal power. She said, "Fouzia, you trust me, don't you." I assured her that I did. "Then take it from me that you have made an incorrect judgment about

Marco. He is a GOOD man. You know when I say 'good', I mean a person who is good in his heart. We met him. You didn't."

My eyes became wet. I wanted to believe her. We were so much in need of any support we could get. I said, "Okay, I'll take your word. I do want so badly for him to be 'good'."

Masako then gave me a full run down of what happened. I almost felt that I was with the others meeting Marco. At the end of the conversation, I felt satisfied and relaxed.

In a few days, Marco consolidated his notes and sent us a rough format of how we should structure our responses. I took every word of advice he gave us religiously. After so many months, we were finally getting professional help. I did not mind doing my statement again and worked according to his guidelines. The day my parents arrived, I completed my rewritten statement and sent it for Marco's comments.

Parents, I think, are the most precious gift one has in life. I have always enjoyed a very intimate bond with mine. I knew they had come to Manila only to let me know that they cared about me and wanted to see me in my house, with my husband and in my new life. Paul also had a wonderful relationship with them. Soon our friends also arrived. I was relaxed and very excited about this trip together.

We went to an exotic resort called el Nido, an entire island with nothing but lovely thatched huts set right on the edge of deep, blue ocean, backed by high cliffs of gray limestone. In front of the island was a beautiful reef, excellent for snorkeling. Paul and my father went out many times, but even after getting into my gear, I did not dare try it. My mother and I just enjoyed sitting at the edge of the water feeding the colorful parrotfish. Later, Paul and I went kayaking in a deep green lagoon. As we paddled deeper into it, we saw a cave on the far side. Paul wanted to go inside. We almost had to lie back in our boat to get inside the narrow cave opening, but once we were in, it was a large cavity with beautiful gray rock formations. Paul held my hand as we sat there silently marveling at the wonders of nature. Only during brief moments like these did I forget my case.

49. DISSOLVING MY TENSION IN SEA WATER

I kept looking at my computer screen waiting for an email message the same way a poor Pakistani farmer looks at the sky with hopeful eyes, searching for rain-clouds. Time passed and my restlessness increased. I kept following up with Marco and anyone else I could think of to collect bits of information. After a few weeks, I got a call from Masako. I had never heard her so frantic. She told me that the management had offered Tarik a backhanded deal to resign rather than face a trial. I had to sit down to keep from falling on the floor. I could not believe it. After all our pain and suffering, the UN would do the same as the military had done: Simply disown him and let him go free to create more mischief elsewhere. This news stirred up a storm in our group. Phone calls, faxes and emails went every ten minutes. Masako, Rensje and Sadia ran around getting more information. Tasneem, Nageen and Sheeba called the Gender Unit to confirm the news. A heavy feeling of sadness came over me, but I knew I had to shake myself out of it. I could not let this happen.

I called Rachel and asked her to get more information from Robert. She reported that Robert merely acknowledged it as a part of the process. None of us could understand this “process”. We had launched a complaint that needed to be investigated. Our expectation was that eventually the UN would say whether the investigation supported the complaint. We wondered where an option to resign fit in.

We quickly calmed down when Masako broke the news that Tarik had refused to take the offer because he was very confident of winning the case. I wished that at least once UNDP would give us the news properly, formally and professionally, acknowledging us as legitimate participants in their 'process'.

Nevertheless, we could feel a clear shift in the scenario. More than just a few individuals in New York seemed to be involved now; the case had become bigger. It seemed that others from Headquarters had been brought into the loop and we felt these new people had tipped the scales in our favor. Our lawyer must have been doing things on our behalf, but he did not tell us anything.

Suddenly, we were shocked to learn that we no longer had our counsel. For “personal and professional reasons,” Marco Carmignani was not available to us anymore. We did not know what that meant. Later, we found out that he had originally only agreed to help us with our statements, but, of course, no one had bothered to tell us that piece of the story.

In this state of confusion and frustration, Paul was doing his best to be supportive and relieve my stress. He found information on the internet about cases of sexual harassment that had been reported elsewhere in the world. I studied them meticulously to get some idea of the procedures. Reading the outcomes of most of these cases was quite disappointing because they often did not result in convictions. A friend gave me a book called *Walking Out on the Boys*, about the sexual harassment of a female neurosurgeon in a university hospital. I read it very carefully, twice. I was eager to learn from any source about how to equip myself and improve my understanding of the dynamics and the process of the inquiry.

To get me involved in things other than this case, Paul encouraged me to finish the manuscript I had been working on earlier for my book, *Taboo*. I had conducted the research in Pakistan over a period of several years, but still needed to write it up. I also started giving graduate seminars on Gender and Development at a near-by university. These things helped me unglue myself from my computer and cut the internet umbilical cord that attached me to my group. Getting out of the house and engaging with the outside world felt good.

Paul had made some more attempts to teach me how to swim in our pool, but I still relied on my mask, snorkel and fins. I liked the feel of being in the water, but quickly got nervous in the deeper end of the pool. Paul had shown me the underwater reefs at el Nido with my mask and got me interested in scuba diving to experience the world beneath the sea. This was obviously more attractive to me than swimming in a pool, but also far more daunting. Paul was an experienced diver and very knowledgeable about underwater life. He started talking to me about fish and the excitement of exploring the rich life within the reefs. When I showed some interest, he got me the textbooks and instructional videos for a formal training course in scuba diving. I was happy to study them and comfortably passed my written tests with an instructor. Although thoughts of the case never faded during my waking hours and sometimes even in my sleep, these activities did help me regain some balance in life.

My first diving lesson in the pool was a bit challenging since I did not yet know how to swim, but I managed to go through a full session without my instructor realizing this serious limitation. For diving lessons, I had to wear my snorkel, mask and fins, so I felt fine. One after the other, I successfully passed through all my pool-based lessons. I had read in the manual that a ten-minute float and a 200-meter swim were prerequisites for the course, but my instructor never mentioned it. Usually, anyone who asks for scuba diving lessons can swim and the pre-requisite is only a formality. I am sure the instructor could not imagine that someone would be in his class without being able to swim.

My niece Sadaf came to visit and raised my spirits. She was like a little sister, a daughter and a very close friend all combined in one. I gladly made travel plans with Paul so we could take her around to see different places in the Philippines. When I was in Pakistan, I hardly had time for my family so I wanted to catch up with her.

As part of my diving course, I had to do five instructional dives in the ocean and both Sadaf and Paul encouraged me to do this during her visit. Paul was pleased to see me relaxed and thought this would be a good time for us to get away from Manila and the UN case, for a while. I think somewhere deep down he was very worried about me losing my mind over this case.

On the weekend of our first wedding anniversary, Paul, Sadaf and I travelled to a place called Puerto Gallera. A long drive, followed by a couple of boat rides, took us to a lovely cluster of tourist resorts with many places to dive. We stayed at a hotel close to the dive company that supervised my instruction. Sadaf and Paul laughed at me for being afraid of five feet of water in our backyard pool, but so anxious to swim in the deep ocean.

Sadaf and I enjoyed each other's company immensely. We had our hair braided and relaxed on the beach. We talked a lot about life, women's issues and, of course, my case. I was pleased to have someone other than Paul to talk to about it. Paul was also happy for Sadaf to become my listener for a few days. I would do one instructional dive and then come back to our room and complain to Sadaf about how the UNDP had not included us in any of its 'process'. After a few hours, I would go for another dive. While we were there, Paul decided to do a special course for rescue divers. With me as a new diver, I guess he wanted to be prepared for emergencies. I was also busy with Sadaf so he felt he could do something on his own for a while.

Every dive opened a completely new world to me. I was very much in control and felt quite relaxed with my cylinder of air and diving gear. Next we did a wreck dive, which was fascinating. On another instructional dive, the instructor shoved sticks in the sandy ocean bottom and asked me to swim through them and then to balance myself in one place using my breathing. I giggled with excitement when he shut off my air 30 feet under water and sent me swimming up to the surface, continuously exhaling while ascending so my lungs would not burst from the air expanding inside me.

When I finished my fifth dive and surfaced, we swam to the dock. My instructor casually said to take off my diving gear and float for some time. I got very nervous. Paul had taught me how to float, but I was quite uptight about it. I told him I would do it later, but he insisted I go into a float right away. Paul had told me to float if he asked me since seawater makes floating easier. Feeling extremely nervous, I put my gear on the dock and went into a float. Those ten minutes were like ten hours. When my mind was idle it immediately filled with thoughts of my case, but I

feared the case would make me so tense I might sink like a stone. Instead, I sang nursery rhymes to keep out every thought of Tarik or Robert while I stayed afloat.

When I finished floating, he pointed to a boat that seemed very far away and said, “OK, now, why don’t you swim to that ship and back?” I got even more anxious and told him hesitantly that I was learning to swim and would come back later to do that part of the course. He thought I was just nervous because I might not be used to swimming in the open sea. I hung on to the dock telling him that I couldn’t do it, but he kept pushing me, until I finally climbed on the dock and started walking back. He was left speechless. In the evening, I told Paul to go and tell him that after learning to swim I would come back to complete the course.

Paul and Sadaf rolled on the floor laughing when I told them the story in great detail, using all my theater skills to show my instructor’s expressions and my nervousness. Sadaf had tears in her eyes. Paul laughed, “What do I say to him? Every evening he told me how you were so relaxed in the water and doing so well.” Paul explained everything to him and the company gave me a permit that said I could only dive with another diver. They said that as soon as I cleared my 200-meter swimming pre-requisite I would get a regular card. I was the first Pakistani the company had trained, so they were happy about that part, at least.

The minute I arrived home in Manila, I ran to my computer to see if there were any disasters waiting for me. I was used to coming back every few hours to find new developments to upset me. This time, after three days, my Inbox was as empty as a leaky bucket.

Nearly a month had gone by with hardly any information about our case, but news about what was happening at the Gender Unit was extremely painful. Nabila became fed up with the way Ann and the management had treated her and quit. She also left the country and moved to the USA. On the home front, she had taken some sort of a formal separation status from her husband and had brought her children from Canada to live with her. She did not have a job, but had given up on the UNDP and Pakistan.

Ann Keeling seemed to be into her prescribed “Mission Clean Up” and the dynamics were quickly turning very sour. Like Richard Dictus, Ann followed Robert's instructions to use whatever tactics were necessary to get rid of us. The focus of the programme changed. How badly I wished that the UNDP could see how strategic our projects were for the women in our country, but they were too busy either closing down the projects or transforming them into typical, and very dull, UNDP Pakistan-style tools for doling out money and favors.

Sadia called and told me that, initially, Ann had talked as though she understood our point of view, but the group members soon discovered that she was siding with Robert and was playing a double game with them. This process of how my Gender Programme was being broken up was extremely painful. We heard that not only did she start closing our best projects, but also started eliminating staff. Robert had clearly told Ann that he wanted her to get rid of all the troublemakers. We remembered Rachel telling us what Robert had said to her, “The Gender Unit is a mess that needs to be cleaned out.”

I shared the pain with Sadaf of seeing each complainant pushed out and our projects destroyed. She consoled me and said that the strategic nature of the projects had already made their mark. I asked her to help me get started on the manuscript for Taboo. She gave me comments as I wrote, but after every fifteen minutes I found myself deep in conversation with her about the UN case, my projects, my team and how it had all been undermined because of Robert’s

anger at what we had done to his image...and his ego. We both laughed at my inability to get the UNDP out of my head.

50. 'SERIOUS CONCERNS PERSIST'

Finally, in mid-March 1999, we heard that our case would be presented to a Disciplinary Committee. The hearings were to be held in Islamabad in the first week of April. There was no lawyer in sight and no access to information on what exactly would happen. The brutalization of the Gender Unit had left the group exhausted. Masako and Sadia were fighting the discrimination, struggling everyday on the front line. Masako had already told me that she would not ask for a contract extension. She was tired of the brutal victimization in the office and wanted to return to Japan. Sadia was hanging on, not knowing when she would be kicked out.

Our group faced increasing difficulty in meeting with each other, the way we had once done. Although I kept in touch with everyone and those in the UNDP office met among themselves, the group meetings for rejuvenating our spirits were becoming fewer. I had not been back for almost six months and thought that under the circumstances, I should get to Islamabad ahead of time and help our group be well prepared. Paul knew how important this step was for me and agreed.

We all met at my house the evening I arrived back in Pakistan. Our first challenge was to discover exactly what charges had been filed against Tarik. Without that, we felt we could not prepare ourselves. We had requested both Robert and Loriot for a copy of the charges, but had no response. We felt estranged from the process and wished we had someone in the higher levels of the UNDP on our side to tell us what was going on. After all, we were the complainants who had initiated this process. We were sure that Robert and Tarik knew the full details of the situation.

I strongly suggested to the group that we take a stand and refuse to submit to the way things were going. Everyone agreed and we decided we would not participate in the hearing without counsel. We sent a letter to the Legal Section in New York conveying our firm decision. A few days later, we heard that Loriot and some others had arranged for Marco to be relieved of his official duties so he could again assist us on our case. The news was a big relief and, in our hearts, we thanked whoever pushed for that.

Shortly after learning that Marco would be coming back, Loriot told us we would receive two folders of information that had already been passed on to the Committee Members. I was sitting on the carpet in my mother's living room when the UNDP driver dropped off a large package. I screamed loudly, scaring my mother. Kamran came running and watched me rip the package apart like a wild monkey. I just could not wait to get my hands on the next installment of Tarik's lies. I scattered whatever I found in the package on the floor and sat down to look for the things I wanted to see very badly. Kamran offered to help. I said, "Sure, but let me just get one paper I have been dying to see. I know it must be here somewhere." He sat down next to me.

One thick file was full of papers: our statements, his statements and, sure enough, the official memo charging Tarik, signed by a Mr. Bruce Franks. I pulled it out and jumped to my feet in excitement. Seeing Kamran's confusion, I explained the document's significance.

Surprised, he replied, “This is dated February 5 and the complainants got it today, on April 19, tucked away in this pile of materials distributed to the Disciplinary Committee Members! Shouldn’t they have sent it to you with pride, saying, ‘In response to your complaint, we have actually charged the perpetrator?’ ”

“Who knows? They might think that as the head of the Pakistan programme, Robert is keeping us briefed. The senior people in Headquarters might not even know that Robert is Tarik’s man.” I said and put the paper on the carpet. Kamran sat with me and we started reading it.

“The charges are for all eleven, not just four! YES, YES! Someone there has some sense.” I leapt up and danced around. “UNDP has some wise and sensible people at the top, after all.” Kamran smiled and I hugged him.

I continued reading, “...despite the additional explanations and responses provided by you in recent months, serious concerns persist about your conduct. The Office of Human Resources has now concluded from its review of the whole matter, that the following charges against you remain to be answered: A) Harassment: You are found in breach of paragraph d) of Administrative circular ADM/97/17, for the harassment of eleven work colleagues, as described in their respective complaints of December 22, 1997. Such harassment was characterized by repetitious unwelcomed remarks on their personal appearance, conduct or beliefs, unsolicited telephone calls to their residences, conversations of an intimate nature with or before them and unjustified rudeness in verbal expressions.”

“Uh-oh, they dropped the word sexual...you see, but I am so glad it is for eleven women! YES! YES! YES! YES!” I held Kamran by the shoulders to get his full attention and said, “I tell you this is not Loriot’s doing. For him, Tarik’s responses were too convincing and he was not going to take this case forward. Other people have gotten involved and thank God for it.”

“Let’s read the rest.” Kamran said anxiously.

I read on. “B) Hostile work Environment: As a result of the above harassment incidents, you are accountable for fostering a hostile work environment in the Pakistan Country Office, by undermining staff morale and showing bias by targeting junior female staff members. Such conduct is in breach of Articles 8 and 101 of United Nations Charter, against gender bias and contrary to the highest standards of integrity, efficiency and competence, required in the execution of your duties, in particular in your relation with subordinates.” My voice got louder as I read.

“Very good, they brought in the UN charter also,” commented Kamran happily.

I finished reading very quickly. “C) Conduct Unbecoming of a Senior UNDP official. In connection with the above, you are charged with gross negligence in your management of and communication with staff, with unauthorized use of UNDP equipment to harass junior work colleagues; with inordinate consumption of intoxicating substances and with an overall pattern of discourteous, abrasive and intimidating behavior.”

Kamran said, “Wow, this is pretty good! Whoever wrote it did a good job, someone with a balanced mind and not a biased one like the people you have been dealing with.” He laughed and said, “I guess now you’ll run off to your group again and we won’t see you until much later.”

I said, “I’m so excited I have to. I’ll at least share this with them on the phone and then we’ll see about setting a time for all of us to meet.”

Soon we were all together. During working hours, we had no choice but to meet on the eleventh-floor terrace of the Saudi Pak Tower. We read the charges aloud. Rensje was furious that they had dropped the word “sexual” and kept only “harassment”. The group felt the charges were too diluted, not as strong as we wanted them to be. Rensje pointed out that when they quoted the different disciplinary policies in the statement of charges they did not mention the sexual harassment policy. Tasneem said she did not care how they framed the charge; she just wanted them to get Tarik. I personally was very happy that the charges were for eleven and not just four.

Rachel came up and told us that the Disciplinary Committee Meeting had been postponed without a clear-cut date on the horizon. Robert had told her this informally, with no formal communication to us. This frustrated the group even more. I said to myself that poor Paul would be without his wife again for who knows how long.

Looking away from the group Rachel, walked over to the edge of the terrace and looked down, staring into the air while the others kept talking. Then she turned around and charged back, “We’re all discussing this so seriously. Does our word matter at all? They seem to be going ahead with the case the way it was already laid out. They haven’t asked us for our opinion. Why are we even talking about it?”

“Yes, it matters!” I said loudly in an authoritative tone.

“It matters! If we think it matters, it will matter.” Everyone became quiet and I continued firmly, “There have been many times where we had to educate the people we were dealing with first, when we had to tell them our rights and then make them change their behavior or their decision. We shouldn’t act in a disempowered way. I know the process has gone on for a long time and we can choose to be helpless, but let’s look at our options.”

“What are our options?” asked Tasneem in a low voice.

“If we all strongly believe that we want the charge to be ‘sexual harassment’, then we can say to the UNDP that our concerns and complaints have not been reflected although we have one another as witnesses. We DO NOT wish to participate in this process anymore,” I announced, leaving everyone with their mouths open.

They all looked at each other. I said, “Why not? It will at least highlight the way they have been treating us. They will get some egg in their face for not communicating to us at all. But we should only take this step if we decide it is important for us to have the charge framed as sexual harassment,” I stressed. The group got my point and the tension released. I asked Rachel to write the memo. We all gave her solid arguments. We thought we should write first to Marco for his opinion on our decision. Then we could send the letter to the Legal Section.

Rachel felt very strongly about this and did a good job on the memo. We sent the letter to Marco for his opinion and he intervened beautifully. Based on our letter and with his legal expertise, he wrote to the chair of the Disciplinary Committee that the first charge of Harassment should also include Sexual Harassment and reference should be made to the UNDP’s sexual harassment policy and other relevant policies for the committee to test the evidence. He also clearly reinforced that the seven cases, in addition to the four, for which we had already submitted the consolidated statement, should be entered in this case with all their evidence. We all were very pleased by this acknowledgement and congratulated ourselves for not giving in.

SECTION SIX: THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

51. PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

Finally, the date of the hearing was announced for early June and this time it was scheduled to be held in New York. I had already returned to Manila after a month of uncertainty about the place and date and, most importantly, our role in the proceedings. Now, at least we were clearer about our role. We were told that two parties were involved: the UNDP and Tarik. The UNDP had invited Rachel, Sadia and me, as witnesses. Because Ghazala delayed sending her last response, they had dropped her name from the witness list.

Our group of complainants was still bound together in its desire to get justice, but we were seriously disillusioned by the retaliation meted out by the local UNDP management. We all seemed to be moving in separate directions. Masako had resigned and was leaving for Japan, very disappointed with the pressure she was facing. She was busy packing and job-hunting in Japan. Rensje had left for a visit to Peru. Nabila had a temporary job in New York. She was living with a cousin's family in New Jersey and struggling to settle her children in American society. Soon we would be spread out in Lima, New York, Islamabad, Manila and Tokyo.

In Manila, my mind was always on New York or Islamabad time. I was about twelve hours ahead of NY time, so during the evening in the Philippines, it was daytime in New York and I would check my email at intervals so I could respond immediately to Marco. Most of his questions concerned the calls Tarik had presented as evidence of his relationship with me. He also asked me to explain more concerning Tarik's claims of being my 'special' friend. Whenever Marco asked me a question, I felt it was my responsibility to provide a full and immediate response. This was the least I could do. He was the one person who had helped us and he could never realize how precious we felt that every moment of his help had been to us. Sometimes Marco asked something in only a two-line email. In response, I would write a long, elaborate answer, explaining everything. Sometimes I wrote these emails in the middle of the night because I could not sleep. Before sending them, I would wake Paul up to read them so I would be sure my logic did not have any major snags. Fortunately, Paul never got irritated.

Marco had told me we should focus on the accused and not bring Robert in too much. He said the story of Robert's retaliation did not have a place at this hearing. We needed to focus on Tarik and the allegations we had submitted on 22 December. Therefore, most of the time, I tried to keep the anger and frustration I felt against Robert, to myself.

We tried to get some additional bits of evidence in Islamabad. Kamran had completed the defense of his PhD dissertation in America and had come back to Islamabad. He and my mother had tried to get copies of my telephone bills, but failed. We did succeed in getting a copy of the police report filed after Tarik had tried to shoot his wife's lawyer. We also got a copy of the lawyer's letter to Robert and his response, playing down this attempted murder case.

Meanwhile Tarik continued to push people to write false statements against me and continued to terrorize anyone he suspected of helping us. I heard he was even chasing the

convicted policeman whom I had helped incarcerate. One of Tarik's junior colleagues in Operations, who was now a big admirer of our courage, called me in Manila and said Tarik was promising this man that he would get him released from prison in exchange for a signed statement against me. I was shocked at Tarik's continued ability to manipulate the system for his personal advantage.

Our trusted counsel insisted that there should be no surprises as far as the production of evidence was concerned. Both parties were required to put whatever they had on the table, so we all had enough time to prepare counter-arguments. As a result, the Legal Section faxed me a whole package of new evidence five days before we left for the hearing in New York. With these, I received several old annexes to Tarik's earlier responses that the Legal Section had received over six months earlier.

Reading this set of statements written by different people, I felt as if I was being pelted with stones. Tarik's wife, Sumaira, had signed a statement implying that my affair with Tarik had caused their divorce. I could not believe she could churn out such lies against me, after being so 'truthful' and open in saying that her husband had made a mistake and begging our forgiveness. A statement from Nawaz claimed that he had often seen me going out with Tarik, after work. Another friend of his wrote that he had seen me drunk with Tarik, many times, at parties. There was a statement from Maria saying I had tried to force her to sign a false group sexual harassment complaint, but she had refused.

Spying, putting hurdles in our path and not giving us our files was one thing, but creating such a pack of lies, deeply wounded me, especially when it was done by people that I had once counted among my friends. I felt a deep pain. Paul had a hard time seeing me in such agony. Maria's face appeared before my eyes and I remembered all the times we spent together, singing songs and laughing at silly jokes.

I was shocked to see a hand-written character certificate by a known woman's rights activist, stating that Tarik is of good character and is always polite with women. This was written to undermine our claims and was attached with Tarik's statement submitted to the New York office. She was based in Islamabad and at the time was working for a UN agency working on the reproductive rights for women. Seeing this note partially explained her attitude I had noticed, treating me as if I had been tarnished by this case.

I sat down among those papers, scattered on the floor of our study and cried. My whole body ached. Paul held me as I talked to him and sniffled. I told him that one statement said I was drunk at a party hugging and kissing Bill Dickens. I asked how any Pakistani woman could do that, let alone me who had never touched alcohol in my life and who had gained a high level of credibility in our society for my work on women's rights. I told Paul how hurt I felt at what Tarik's wife had written about me. I said I would never forgive her for lying and stooping so low. I was also angry with myself for allowing all these things to get to me, for letting these lies hit me so hard. I was a fighter. Why was I getting tired just before reaching the final round?

Paul reassured me that I was only human and should not be so hard on myself. He hugged me and said, "I don't want you to worry about these right now. You are almost done with this." Trying to control my tears and holding him tight, in a low voice, I apologized that our telephone bill would be quite high that month because I had used the phone more than the email. Paul burst

into laughter and said, “Honey, with all that you have on your mind, our phone bills should be the least of your worries!”

I sat with those papers for a long time. I consoled myself by thinking that my destiny was still ahead of me and the road was long and uphill. I could not afford to be distracted by chasing every wild dog that barked at me. I needed to focus on where I wanted to go and follow that path.

Considering how to counter the false statements, I thought of Sumaira’s phone call to me. I called Marco to find out if the recording of that call would be useful to discredit her written statement. He told me to send a translation to him. I found the tape in the box where I had kept it. Sadia transcribed the tape and together we translated it and sent it off to Marco.

I had a long chat with Sadia that night. She was upset with me for feeling so down. She told me that anyone else could feel sad, nervous or angry, but I was their strong support and they counted on me to take the lead, so they could not afford to have me shaken. She, on the other hand, was quite anxious about leaving Pakistan for the first time and made me promise that I would be in New York to receive her. She wanted to travel with me, but obviously could not. As her second-best option, she had arranged to go with Rachel. I assured her that I would meet her at the airport.

That night I worked late. I went back to our study to look at the new material I had received. I saw that to support his claim of our telephone calls Tarik had annexed both his and my bills as evidence. I suddenly realized that, because of his ability to get the system to work for him and obtain all my old phone bills, I could get the information I needed to counter his arguments from his own evidence. Sure enough my calls, the dates and duration, were all there. They just needed to be pulled out.

I worked day and night to figure out each call that he and I had made. My old research methods came in very handy because I had been taught how to see patterns in data. On the back of a big, brown envelope, I wrote down all the calls and their duration and figured out how many times he had called and how many times had I. I noted all the dates, the months when he had called more, remembered what had been happening during the periods when he did not call and so on.

By midnight, my eyes were puffy and I was struggling to stay awake. I showed Paul my work and asked whether he thought I had managed to get some patterns out. He looked at them for a while. “Pretty good!” he said happily, “I’m impressed that you’re effectively using his 'evidence' to your advantage.” I smiled with pride and Paul continued, “Why don’t you leave this stuff with me for a while and go to bed. It’s late.” I ran to my computer to check my Inbox one last time. He smiled as he shook his head.

I woke up very early in the morning and rushed to the study to check my emails. I saw a whole set of graphs and bar charts on my table. Paul also got up and followed me to the study. He put his hand around my shoulder and smiled, “I worked on your data and have several options for presenting it graphically.”

I was thrilled, “Oh Paul! This looks so clear and understandable.” I looked at all the options. “Did you stay up all night?” I asked.

“No, not all night,” he said politely, “just until four.”

“Oh, my god!” I hugged him. “Thank you, Paul. This is great ammunition for me to counter him.” He winked at me.

Paul stayed up with me the last few nights, knowing how tense I was. He said how much he loved me for standing up for the truth and told me that he would be with me in spirit during the hearing. One night he looked into my eyes and said, “Can you imagine our life after this case is over?” We looked at each other and burst into laughter. He knew me so well that he could make me laugh, help me calm down or quickly make me feel good. I used to have nerves of steel, but this case had gone on for so long that its mere mention made me tense. Paul was there for me as I packed and organized my files and papers. I was carrying every important thing in my hand. He kept smiling at my conscientiousness.

52. HELLO, AMERICA! : DAY ONE IN NEW YORK

I arrived at the JFK Airport in New York, went through the immigration, picked up my bag and dragged it around to the British Airlines arrival lounge. I could not go into the city without teaming up with Sadia and Rachel. I looked around and spotted a corner with vending machines. Using the small bills Paul had put in my bag for this very purpose, I punched out a cold drink and gulped almost half of it down in the first sip. I looked around for an empty seat, dragged my bag over and sat down. I feared it would be a long wait.

Sadia had been very nervous about this journey and I was sorry I could not accompany her. She and Rachel were planning to come from Pakistan on British Airways so Rachel could stop overnight in London to see her friends. Sadia was hesitant to spend time with people she did not know in London, but she was more scared of missing her connection at some airport transfer if she went alone. British Airways is known for making long flights even longer. As luck would have it, their flight from Islamabad was delayed for twenty-four hours and they were sent home from the airport. The option of an overnight stop vanished. Now, they would have to catch the next available flight at London to reach New York in time. Rachel was disappointed, but Sadia was ecstatic.

Sadia made me repeat my promise to meet her at the airport and had refused to agree to the possibility of meeting at our hotel in Manhattan. I had not felt so tired from the 21-hour journey from Manila to New York, but learning about the delay and the uncertainty of their connecting flight weighed me down. With no way to communicate with them, I decided to make myself comfortable and feel at home in this lounge. I knew I would have to check every British Airways flight from London that day. After all, I had to keep my promise to Sadia.

I had slept through most of my flight from Manila since I had stayed up for many nights during the past several days, but I still felt sleepy, probably as a defense against all the angry thoughts I was having. How badly I wanted this trip to be the last stage in a long and painful process. Three days of preparation, two days of hearings and one last day for fun...we hoped.

The allegations, the crude lies people had made about us crawled around in my weary brain. “How am I going to defend myself?” A mixture of anger, sadness and exhaustion, shut my eyes slowly. Robert’s face swam in front of my eyes. It was the time when we all had taken our complaint to him. I could see his every expression. He was so insensitive. What if his daughter

were in our place? What if she had come home and told him that Tarik had done the same thing to her? How would he have reacted? His neck was so stiff, his words so insensitive. He was trying hard to hide his annoyance about such a complaint, especially against his favorite and most obedient subordinate.

I thought about how he had immediately arranged a counsel—a senior UN manager—for Tarik and called him personally to make sure Tarik had all the support he needed to prepare his response. Probably, he had thought that his strategy of tormenting us would shake us off within a few weeks. I partially dozed off. I could see Robert's face clearly and hear his voice bellowing at me: "You are like a bolt of lightning!" He spoke with so much disgust and hatred. Robert kept saying things to me but I could not understand the words. All I could see was his angry face and his finger pointing at me.

"The British Airways flight from London has arrived." said the piercing voice that interrupted my nightmarish vision. The mind seems to have a good mechanism for only letting in relevant information, even from a very noisy environment. I looked around, checked my watch and saw it was the right time. I lugged my bags to the receiving area, searching for a scared and nervous young Pakistani in shalwar kamiz and a slender, young British blonde, more confident, but still a stranger to New York. Many people passed by pushing stacked trolleys. Family or close friends met some with big hugs. Some looked around with blank faces. Others anxiously searched for a sign with their name or a hotel plaque. The flow of passengers gradually thinned out and then stopped. I was very disappointed that my friends had not arrived.

I told myself I should be mentally prepared to sit in the receiving area until late at night so I had better make myself comfortable. I needed to exercise my legs and walked a bit. The mix of people was interesting—all colors, all heights. New York is famous for its variety of people. Pulling my bags to a vending machine, I bought a Coke and looked in vain for another seat. At last I found a corner and sat down on the floor stretching my legs straight out in front of me. I took a folder from my big cloth shoulder bag. At the expense of making my hand-luggage quite heavy, I took no chances with the possibility of losing my case-related documents in my checked baggage. I opened a yellow folder and thought I would re-read the old statements I had submitted on the case, just to pass the time. This way, I would also be preparing for the hearing.

After another five-hour wait, the next BA flight brought my two companions to New York. Amidst the scores of trolleys, loaded with boxes and bags, being pushed out the door, I saw Sadia. A huge smile spread over her face when she saw me on the other side of the glass wall. She waved at me as she pulled herself together with her hand bag and baggage tags. Rachel walked confidently behind her, with her straight back and straight hair flowing down her shoulders.

Hugs and kisses and quick exchanges of "are you okay?" got us balanced and prepared for the challenge ahead. They told me they had only their carry-on baggage. Their checked bags were lost. Sadia was not too concerned and told me, "I lugged all the case-related folders in my heavy hand bag. I wouldn't part with them at any cost." I put her at ease and said I had enough clothes to share. Rachel looked worried. The video of Ghazala's testimony was in her suitcase. We crossed our fingers as Rachel went to make sure the baggage office had our hotel address.

We took a cab into the city. I had been to New York a few times and was somewhat familiar with the streets of Manhattan. In general, I felt familiar with American culture, but I was not sure if spending eight years in the Midwest counted for much in New York City. Rachel had

been at the UN Headquarters in New York for her initial orientation when she joined the organization two years earlier, but she claimed she knew nothing about the city. She and I kept shouting: “Sadia, look at that building!” “Look at these people!” “Sadia, you’re in New York City!”

We checked into our medium-priced hotel, conveniently located on the 42nd Street in Manhattan, about six avenue blocks from the UN building. Sadia and I decided to share a room and Rachel took a single.

We quickly informed Marco of our arrival. He was brief and told us how to reach his office the next morning. Knowing the city a bit, I suggested we go to Times Square for our first New York dinner. Rachel and Sadia agreed. I am not sure whether we ever reached Times Square, but we did get to an area with big, bright, moving signs, on the walls of the buildings. Considering where we came from, the fancy streetlights alone were enough to dazzle us. We found a fast-food joint and enjoyed our dinner. Not knowing what the future would bring, we felt brave that we had travelled from different parts of the world across several seas for our big hearing with the Disciplinary Committee.

53. MEETING MARCO: DAY TWO

The next day turned out to be nice, a sunny New York spring morning! Sadia, Rachel and I trotted down the street with our arms full of the fat case-files we had brought with us. We enthusiastically said good morning to the city. All three of us felt good about getting started with our final preparations for the inquiry. Sadia and I were wearing colorful Pakistani summer clothes with our dopattas fluttering behind us in a pleasant breeze. Rachel wore her sober western dress from the day before, hoping to get her luggage soon. We saw many different kinds of people in the street. At this early hour, it was less crowded than we had expected and later we found out that this was a holiday, Memorial Day, so most offices and businesses were closed.

We walked straight down the street for several blocks. As we approached the First Avenue, we lifted our chins to admire the majestic UN building. We made our way into the lobby, where, as expected, we met our lawyer. It was my first face-to-face meeting with him. He was polite, but brief in exchanging greetings. Marco Carmignani was a young man of medium build, fair complexion and dark hair. An Italian-Brazilian, he was not only a competent UN career bureaucrat, but also a lawyer by training and had taken up our sexual harassment case voluntarily, over and above his job. We were seriously indebted to him.

Marco took us up in the elevator to his floor, where we used a common office area for the day. It was a large space with desks and an adjoining photocopying room. The holiday was very useful because we could work with Marco for a full day without interruption. He laid out his plan for our preparations and warned us that we would be working long hours. He explained that he needed to reduce the volume of information on our case to a manageable size for the Committee members to read. We were to go over our files and extract only important information on each case, while he summarized and prepared other sections. He also planned to work with us individually and collectively to prepare for the hearings. We listened diligently.

After Marco’s business-like instructions, the three of us turned into industrious workers ready to jump at his slightest indication. He would ask for a paper and all three of us would

quickly take it from our files. Our gratitude towards Marco grew throughout the next week as we realized that he worked more than fifteen hours a day on our case.

He sometimes had us practice answering questions:

“For the records can you please state your name?”

“Fouzia Saeed”

“Your age?”

“39, but I will be...”

“Are you married?”

“Yes.”

“When did you get married?”

“February 1998, a little over one year ago.”

“When did you join the UN system?”

“In October 1994.”

“Did you know the defendant before you joined the United Nations?”

“No.”

“That is all for now,” Marco said. “I have to make you comfortable with how lawyers ask questions. We will work on more questions later.” He told us it was a luxury to have the whole office to ourselves and asked us to make sure to finish most of our photocopying that day. We nodded our heads continuously and vigorously, indebted to him for being our counsel and appreciating that he was working on an official holiday. Sadia and I quickly got the hang of using the office computers and the photocopier. Marco kept returning to my case and asking me more questions. At the same time, the three of us carried on with re-synthesizing the piles of information we had generated over the last year and a half.

Marco brought an audio tape and asked me to follow him. This was the recording of the telephone call Tarik’s wife had made to me. He took me to a high-tech editing room and played the tape. He handed me the translation and asked me to move my pencil on the corresponding words so he could fully understand her stresses and pauses. He asked me to stop and explain certain phrases. When Sumaira repeated, “My husband made a mistake, but he has learned his lesson and you should forgive him because even God forgives his people,” Marco held his head in his hands, astonished that she was admitting her husband’s wrong doings. He asked if this was the same wife who had submitted a signed statement which had claimed that I was the cause of their divorce. I nodded affirmatively.

Marco said that this evidence was enough to tear Tarik’s case to shreds. The tape alone could show that Tarik’s witnesses were not credible. He said that once he gave the tape to the Legal Section they might not even take the case to the hearing. I smiled and said nothing. I knew that there was no way the Legal Section would conclude the case based on this tape. If the Legal Section was after the truth, we had enough truth in the very first investigation. I appreciated Marco’s sincerity, but I knew the UNDP would not easily let their star Resident Representative get egg in his face by discrediting Tarik. They would defend Robert's image until the last possible minute.

By afternoon Sadia looked pale, sleepy and hungry and Rachel was also struggling with jet lag. I was in good shape since Paul had told me how to use melatonin on the plane and get myself onto New York time beforehand. It was my one o'clock at night and New York's one o'clock in the afternoon. Marco announced a lunch break, quickly saying it would be a working lunch. He wanted to start working to get the information on each of our cases in the final form.

Because of the holiday, most restaurants were closed, but we eventually found one that Marco said had good representative American food. Waiting for our table, Marco started asking me questions about my case.

“Did you go out for dinner with Tarik?”

“Never.”

“He says you used his car occasionally to entertain your guests.”

“No, I had my own car. Once I drove his car but his girl friend had asked him for it. I only drove.”

“During these years did you ever call him?”

“Only for work. And only in late summer of 1995.”

Someone showed us to a table. Black and white posters of old New York City decorated the walls. Marco warned us that soon we would have an overly cheerful waitress. He said people in the area are always cheerful and friendly. Soon a young waitress came and said in a high-pitched voice, “Hi, my name is Sally. How are you today?” She was all smiles and very cheerful. We looked at each other and controlled our laughter. We ordered soft drinks and struggled with the menu, trying to guess what the dishes would taste like. Sadia was concerned about the meat not being halal so she ordered a potato dish. I ordered fried fish and Rachel went for a salad. After finishing this difficult stage, we returned to our conversation.

Marco then turned to Rachel, asking her to explain why she had decided to join this group complaint. I knew the idea that I mobilized everyone was quite important for Tarik so Marco wanted to be very clear about each person’s individual decision. Even I had never heard Rachel talk about this and listened with interest.

Rachel began by giving a long description of where she sat in the UNDP office, which was exactly at the opposite end of the floor from our Unit. She explained that the way the office operated nobody crossed the floor except for meetings. Her point was that she hardly interacted with us. Rachel said, that at first, she thought she was the only one Tarik flirted with. Then, in late 1997, she overheard a young Pakistani woman talking about some “weird guy” in the UNDP who was drooling all over her. This was Sheeba. When Rachel pressed her for more information, Sheeba related that he had told her he had a very unhappy life, his wife did not satisfy him and he was looking for company. Rachel was shocked to hear that Tarik acted the same way with other women, even Pakistani women. She then confided in her friends that he had made passes at her as well.

Later, Ghazala and Tasneem told her Tarik was making passes at them. When he fired Tasneem, she panicked and went straight to Rachel’s office to cry. Then, one day, Ghazala told Rachel that he came close to her in the hallway, turned to look at Rachel and said, “I get a hard-on just looking at her.” Rachel was shocked to hear that from Ghazala and it took her a while to get

over this humiliation. She could not believe a man would talk like that about professional colleagues.

Marco tried to get her focused on his specific question, “So, when was it that you decided to join the complaint?”

She took a long breath and said, “Sheeba told me that she was still mad at him and would not let go of this opportunity to report him. Later, I asked her to connect me with the women who were making the complaint so I could talk to them. I was sure surprised when Sheeba gave me Fouzia’s name. I had always seen her as confident and very well respected among her colleagues.” Rachel paused and Marco encouraged her to continue. “After talking to Fouzia, I kept thinking about it. Working in that office was very difficult. I could see the patterns more clearly. I gathered my courage and finally decided to join them. Tasneem’s losing her job was the last straw for me.”

Sadia could not eat her meal and just sat listening, joined the conversation hesitantly. Marco encouraged her to speak. She said, “I would also say that things were getting out of hand. Being the Officer in Charge of Operations had made Tarik think he was a god and he started attacking our Unit more and more. The momentum was building. We all felt strongly that what we experienced was wrong and humiliating, but having Fouzia as one of the complainants made others more confident. I am glad I decided to report him. Moreover, I can tell you that I did it for myself and I did the right thing, but it would have been difficult to continue to pursue our complaint without her. They attacked us so severely, not only Tarik, but the whole management.” Her voice trembled with emotion as she concluded in an innocent voice. She struggled to speak so much English at one time.

Later, while splitting the cost of the lunch on a paper napkin, Marco said, without looking at us, “In front of the Committee members you will have to be brief with your answers. Those people will not have a lot of time so we will stick to essential information.” With that, he announced the share of money everyone had to chip in.

Sadia looked at me, shocked at this impolite gesture. In Pakistan, we could not imagine doing this. One person takes the bill, while the others insist that they should pay. Next time the other one pays and so it does become equivalent of splitting the bill, perhaps not so precisely. She was also shocked at the amount and whispered, “Twenty dollars for this junk!”

In terms of hard evidence, it seemed my ideas did not match Marco’s and he had me remove some of the witnesses’ statements, although I felt they were important. I had the letters Paul sent me with their dated envelopes to show our steady long-term relationship during the time Tarik had claimed to be having an affair with me, but Marco disregarded this information and said the Committee wouldn’t give much weight to statements by close relations.

I argued in frustration, “They don’t consider the complainants as witnesses for each other, although many of us had grumbled about Tarik before we filed the formal complaint. They do not consider family members or close friends as sound witnesses. Do they think that when a woman is harassed she should go talk to total strangers and later bring them in as her witnesses?” Marco ignored my comment. I knew he was only trying to help and did not mean to offend me, so I trusted his judgment and went along with his approach for presenting evidence.

We spent the afternoon making photocopies of the essential papers and having individual discussions with Marco. When we got back to our hotel that night, the receptionist told us that

Sadia and Rachel's lost bags had been delivered. We were all quite relieved. Now we could give Marco the video with Ghazala's testimony.

54. GHAZALA COMES THROUGH – DAY THREE

Getting up the next morning was difficult. I had made the mistake of not taking a melatonin before I went to sleep, thinking I was over my jet lag. I woke up at 3 a.m. and never really got back to sleep. Sadia was silently lying in her bed looking at me to motivate her by getting up first. We both literally dragged ourselves out of our beds. While I used the bathroom, she tried calling a friend in Pakistan. With no email access, we were at a loss for easy and inexpensive communication. Not getting any answer, she called Nabila in New Jersey. The minute she got her on the phone she blurted out the story about sharing the bill at lunchtime and told her how much she hated the food. I rushed out of the bathroom, my mouth full of toothpaste, "Is it Nabila? I want to talk to her." I reached for the phone. Sadia had to surrender the receiver.

I said, "Nabila, listen to me carefully." I swallowed half the toothpaste and collected the rest on one side of my mouth. "We have no access to internet. We don't even have a laptop, so you will have to do this for us. Write a message to the whole group right now saying we are all fine. We will be very busy these days. Marco IS VERY GOOD. He is taking this case very seriously. Are you writing these points?"

"Should I?" Nabila asked in panic.

"Please!" I continued with my instructions. "Yes, Marco is working very hard. We worked from nine in the morning until eleven at night. I am afraid that this might be our schedule every day. I want all of those in Islamabad to keep praying and please stand by in case we need anything from them. Tell them not to worry. We are in high spirits. Okay, you got all that?" I asked.

"Yes, Fouzia," she replied seriously.

"Do it right NOW. They all must be wondering where we have disappeared." She assured me that she would send it right away. I put the phone down and turned to the bathroom to get rid of all that toothpaste only to find the door locked and the sound of the shower running. It served me right for being so impatient, I thought.

As we both got ready, I wished all eleven of us could have been here. It would have been so nice. We would have gained strength from each other. I imagined them around us. A knock and Rachel walked in with her eyes half-shut. She was all dressed up with the guidebook in her hand. She was hoping that today we would finish our work by five and have a chance to see some of the city. Just then, the phone rang. It was Masako from Japan! We jumped with excitement. She said it was the second day and she had not heard anything from us so she called Nabila to get our number. Everyone wanted to talk to her. The receiver changed hands every five seconds. She spoke to me seriously. "I want to thank all three of you for being there on behalf of all of us." We got a tremendous boost of strength from her.

Marco again came down to meet us at the entrance of the UN building. Today was a working day and it was very crowded. We saw the area where we had worked the day before. At least twenty people squeezed in there, buzzing like bees. We reached Marco's room and he shut the

door behind us. His small room was stuffed with a desk and two chairs. It seemed impossible for all of us to sit there and work all day. We knew that Marco had a high position in the UN and were a bit surprised that his office was so small. We wondered how we would move around and work in such a small space, but the view of Chrysler Tower did impress us.

Marco smiled as Rachel gave him the video of Ghazala's testimony. He said she was always a little late submitting her things. She would have been among the four cases selected for presentation in New York if her response had been on time. Now her video statement had also come very late. The date for submitting new evidence had passed.

As we worked on other things, I showed Marco the graphs that Paul had made on my data related to the telephone calls. I explained the bar charts. "These show the frequency of his calls during July, August and September 1995. It shows the drop of calls in October. This other one shows his calls by the month and year and the third set shows my calls to him in comparison to his calls to me." Marco jumped out of his chair with excitement. I told him proudly that my husband had made these graphs. He told me to congratulate Paul and tell him he had solved a major riddle that had been worrying him.

Marco was preparing for a meeting with Lorient. He had not been able to talk to him for the last four days. The long holiday weekend had not helped. Many new developments had to be addressed. Would Ghazala's tape be accepted in the hearing? Would they reconsider the whole case based on Sumaira's telephone conversation with me?

We had a quick lunch at the UN cafeteria, which dazzled us with its majestic view of the East River. We found food that was bearable and, most importantly, Sadia could get her tea.

Marco had asked for a room in another building a few blocks away from the main UN building, where the Disciplinary Committee would hold its meeting. After lunch, we moved there with all our files. Marco stopped in front of Lorient's office, also in that building. We all were anxious to see what he looked like. I imagined he would have two short horns, pointed ears, tail and smoke coming out of his nostrils. In fact, he did not look like that at all and even had a smile on his face. In a heavy French accent, he welcomed us and said we should let him know if we needed anything. We met his assistant, another French lawyer, a woman named Natalie who was even more pleasant.

We went to the room they had reserved for us. Thinking that we were in the United States of America, it was a huge disappointment. A large, battered conference table and twelve chairs filled the room, leaving barely enough space to walk. There was no computer and only one broken phone. I quickly requested a computer, one we could even use after working hours. I was quite sure we would be working until late at night and would need at least some computer access in the evening. The offices were full of computers, but no one responded to our request. We asked for a phone that worked and were told that someone would try to get the broken one fixed. Rachel asked where we could get some coffee. They said she should go down, outside the building and across the street to some coffee stalls.

Marco arranged for us to view Ghazala's tape in a modern conference room with a screen as big as a cinema hall. Natalie decided to join us. I was anxious to know what Ghazala had said. First, she introduced herself and explained her concerns and fears about reporting Tarik. Mentioning her anxiety for her family's reputation, she said that the tape should be considered as

her testimony for Rachel's case. She explained why she had not sent her consolidated statement. She said this was her second marriage and she could not take any risks. She had to work hard on her husband to convince him to agree to let her become a part of the complaint in the first place. Later, when the case came out in the press, her husband became very concerned and did not want her to have anything more to do with it. She said, "I have children and family. My siblings have children. Pakistani society does not forgive you if you are involved in something like this. The stigma is very strong. I have to spend my life here and my children have to spend their lives in this society." She reiterated her apprehensions in order to explain her position.

She said that first Bill Dickens and, later, Tarik, acted in the same way. Bill Dickens used to tell her that she must be like a tiger in bed. Back when she had long hair, Bill Dickens often told her that he wanted to run his fingers through it. I looked at Marco, as I was the only one who had complaints against Bill Dickens. Ghazala narrated several incidents after she had joined the Inter-Agency Unit when Tarik called her when he was drunk and used sexually-charged language. He addressed her with very intimate words. She was disgusted by his behavior and told him many times how uncomfortable she was with such remarks. She said that Tarik continued using sexual language with her and enjoyed her embarrassment. He not only made passes at her, but also talked about other women in a sexual manner in front of her. He told her the sexual details of his relationships with other women. She often had to get up and leave his office in the middle of the conversation since he did not listen to her requests to stop talking like that.

Ghazala then shifted to Rachel's case. She took a long breath and talked in detail about how Rachel as well as Tasneem came and told her about Tarik's behavior. She mentioned Tarik's comment that he got an erection every time he saw Rachel.

I looked at Rachel and Sadia and we exchanged smiles, feeling proud of Ghazala. She came through, despite her fears and hesitations. I prayed that the Committee would accept her testimony although it was late, because she was coming in as a witness, just like us. I knew that even if they did not accept it, I would still feel proud of her for coming out and speaking in front of a video camera and sending the tape to New York. She asked that the tape not be copied because she was afraid Tarik would use it against her.

She concluded her statement by saying that she, Rachel, Tasneem and Nageen had discussed and debated whether to join in the complaint. She said, "We sat together many nights. We talked, cried and generally felt scared, but finally we all decided to speak out. I did it of my own free will."

Marco got up to shut the system down. We all remained quiet. Natalie was visibly moved. It was quite different from reading reports to actually hear a person talk about the harassment and her fears. It seemed that Natalie had finally begun to believe us. We three had mixed feelings. We were happy that Ghazala's tape had arrived and might be submitted, but listening to more stories about Tarik made us sad and frustrated. I was very upset that she had to leave the UNDP.

We returned to our ugly room and started spreading our papers on different corners of the table. Marco told Sadia it would be her turn to work with him soon. Natalie joined us, still apparently under the influence of the tape. Marco looked at her and said, "The patterns are very similar. The fear they have of Tarik is palpable."

Marco told Sadia to take her folders out and they sat in one corner. Natalie returned to her office and Rachel sat by the window reading her guidebook, our only source of information on

New York. She was determined to find an Indian or Pakistani restaurant for tonight's dinner. She wanted Sadia to have at least one recognizable meal.

After a while, Sadia came back and sat next to me. She nearly broke down as she told me how terrible her session had gone. She had not been able to answer any of Marco's questions. Rachel had overheard their discussion and moved to sit with us. She asked whether the English was getting in the way.

Sadia answered, "No, I know I will be fine. I did explain everything to the Panel, didn't I! And they believed me. I can do it, but not like this. I cannot answer questions as if I am playing 'kasoti.'" Kasoti was a television show in Pakistan where people had to guess the name of a certain personality by asking twenty questions. They could only ask short questions with 'yes' or 'no' answers. She was referring to Marco's quick style of questioning.

Rachel asked her if she was having problems with understanding Marco's English. "I will manage it, but not like this," answered Sadia. "I need time after he asks the question to first repeat it in my head in Urdu and understand it and think of the answer and then think of the English words and then say it. I can't run as if I'm a horse." She was very flustered.

We convinced her to talk to Marco openly. To calm her down, we asked if she wanted to go out for tea. This quickly led to another complaint. She said many people here had coffee and tea makers, but no one offered to let us use them, always telling us to go outside and buy our own. She was also very upset that even Marco and Natalie had brought food only for them and then sat in front of her and ate. Sadia was so embarrassed that she could not even look at them. "I wonder if their parents taught them anything at all?" she asked. "They didn't even ask me once to join them." She jerked her head in annoyance.

I knew she was angry about her session, missing Islamabad and upset at a culture so different from her own. I laughed and hugged her. I told her that they were not rude but just had different customs. We went out. On the street, a small shop of souvenirs caught Sadia's attention. She stopped and looked at the display. I wanted her to feel better and asked if she wanted to shop for souvenirs. She told me she did not need anything for herself, but her hostel friends expected some gifts from New York. She said they would not believe her if she said that in seven days she did not get a minute to go shopping. We all laughed and I suggested to Sadia that she look around the block at the small souvenir shops, while Rachel and I went back to see if Marco needed any papers for his meeting. She agreed hesitantly.

Sadia soon returned with a worried look. She had hardly looked at anything because she suddenly thought Tarik and his lawyer might be coming soon. What if they were on the street and saw her there all by herself? With this thought building in her mind, she panicked and got lost as she walked towards the office building. By chance, she saw Nabila going into a building; and thinking it must be the UNDP building, she rushed to it.

We all were happy to see Nabila and quickly briefed her. My major concern was to write an email for the group back in Pakistan. I made her promise to mail them an update when she got home. I confirmed again, because it would be their morning and I did not want them to wait a full day to hear from us. How I wished we had email access!

Marco returned from his meeting with Loriot. We looked at each other and then at his face, waiting for a comment. He said Loriot was not sure about accepting Ghazala's tape and the transcript of the phone call, but Marco convinced him to let the Committee decide. We had

brought him some coffee and he happily took a few sips before telling Sadia he wanted to finish her case before moving on.

I asked Sadia with my eyes whether I should talk to him, but she indicated no. When Marco was about to start she said she wanted us to leave the room so she could talk to him alone. He was surprised and looked at us for a reaction. We smiled and assured him it was fine with us. Sadia said with us around she felt like she was under observation.

We went to a nearby photocopy room. There was no place to sit, but we found a carpeted area next to it and in the Pakistani way just sat on the floor. I decided to make copies of the transcript of my phone conversation with Sumaira for the Committee. I asked Nabila and Rachel to highlight the important parts, as I had already done on one copy.

Meanwhile Sadia, as she told me later, was more confident this time. She convinced Marco to let her speak first and talk about the incidents in her own way. Only later should he ask questions about whatever she had left out. She explained that it was an emotional matter and she could not cut it into bits and answer many little questions. After the first few introductory questions, she began describing the incidents she had experienced with Tarik.

When Sadia finished explaining her case, Marco took a long sigh and asked, "Why did you decide to report with the others?" Sadia answered that, at first, she never thought she would. However, it was not just one incident, Tarik repeatedly kept coming back to her. She felt he was disregarding her messages that she was not interested in him and she needed to find a way to make him stop.

Listening to Sadia's highly emotional testimony exhausted Marco and he did not want to ask her any more questions. He left the room and signaled Nabila, Rachel and me to go in. I saw Sadia's red eyes and hugged her, telling her that I knew how difficult it was going over and over the same story. I assured her it would be over some day. She smiled at me. Marco was speechless and said he was going out for a coffee. We gathered around the table.

Sadia went to the washroom to splash some cold water on her face. Coming back, she saw Mr. Toochin, the leader of our initial Investigation Panel. She was surprised and very pleased. With a big smile and excitement, she took a step towards him, but when he noticed her, he quickly turned his face away as if he wanted to avoid any contact. Sadia stopped. She did not understand his behavior, but dropped the idea of greeting him. She seemed very disappointed when she told us about it.

I told her that Marco was trying to contact him (Toochin) for his testimony and he must have come for that. Sadia could not understand why he would not say hello to her, especially since he was so supportive during her testimony in Pakistan.

"Forget it, Sadia," I said carelessly. "Everyone here is into their own games. Who knows whether he is trying to maintain a confidential façade or just wants to avoid any contact so he can say he remained neutral? I'm sure he has a reason." Everyone around the table looked at me doubtfully. "I don't know. Ok? All I know is he did not support my complaint. He didn't believe me." Rachel pointed out that he had considered my case as sexual harassment. "Yes," I said, "but I had a lot more evidence than he acknowledged." I made a face and turned away from the others. I walked up to the window and looked outside. Sadia said she had some transparencies to prepare. She picked up her folder and started towards the photocopying room while Rachel and Nabila followed to help her.

I sat down and looked at the Investigation Panel Report. I was angry with the Panel for not considering my three years of suffering and mentioning only a few incidents. I thought that perhaps my friends were right. I should at least give them credit for acknowledging sexual harassment in four cases. They could have brushed everything under the carpet, but they did not. Maybe Mr. Too chin was from the old school of thought, but he did recognize that something needed to be investigated further. I put away the papers, but could not get up from my chair. My whole body felt heavy with the burden of things I had left unsaid towards all those who had disappointed us, all those who did not believe us.

When everyone returned, we went out for a short dinner break, although no one except Marco was hungry. After dinner, we returned to the ugly conference room for Rachel's turn. Everyone was tired and Sadia was swaying as if she were on drugs. I suggested she go to the room for a while and come back in two hours. She was not sure, but looking at her condition, I convinced her. She asked if there was any chance of Tarik showing up on the street. Rachel and I both laughed and told her he was not coming until the next day. We confirmed the directions to the hotel and I sent her off on her adventure.

Rachel sat by the table, looking exhausted. Unstoppable, Marco opened his laptop. Sometimes when his eyes got tired, he would close them tightly a few times and then continue working. I could not imagine how he left the city at ten every night and handled two hours on the train. His wife would pick him up from the train station and he would reach home at around one in the morning, leaving again at seven for the office.

Once he mentioned that his wife had told him to never again volunteer for something like this because it ate up all his family time. This just slipped out of his mouth. All of the days we were there, the man was on his toes, full of energy and commitment, with no complaints. We could get tired, but not Marco. Nor did he make us feel that he was doing us some big favor. He just did it because it was the right thing to do. If I could give a Nobel Prize for Professionalism, I would give it to Marco. He was the one person who was fulfilling the UN's obligations and commitment to humanity, social justice and human rights.

Rachel and Marco began with the basic questions and Nabila and I went to the photocopying room to finish my transparencies. I asked her how she was handling her family situation in New Jersey and she said she was surviving. Living in New Jersey, she commuted back and forth on the train like Marco. We tried hard to get her to be our witness in the hearings, but the Legal Section had not agreed.

Soon Sadia walked in. Surprised, I asked why she came back so soon. Without saying much, she came and sat quietly next to me. After a while she said, "Actually, I never reached the hotel. I got lost."

My mouth opened. I said, "The way was straight..."

She said, "Shhh! Yes, I know, but I got lost and, at first, was afraid to ask because it did not seem safe. Finally, I did ask several people along the way and reached 45th Street. There are so many people that it gets confusing! I asked for the UN office. When I came close by I recognized this building."

I laughed and Nabila asked what was so funny. When I saw Sadia's embarrassed face staring at me with her chin lowered, I stopped laughing and said, "Nothing." We went back to our

room. Rachel was still talking to Marco. We planted ourselves like vegetables around the table and waited for them to finish.

Marco asked Rachel “Why did you report this harassment?”

She thought a lot and said, “I saw that it was happening to everyone, not just me.”

“Is that your reason for reporting?”

“Well, I knew he was doing something wrong. He made me feel very uncomfortable, but it was when I found out that others felt the same that I decided to act.”

“And why didn't you tell Robert?”

Rachel thought about it. “I guess, when I thought I was the only one he treated that way, I was too embarrassed to tell him and, later, when I knew about the others. I am not sure.”

He told her to search her soul and come up with the real answers to these questions. He wanted her to find the truth within herself. With that he got up and hit the table with a heavy file, saying, “That’s all for today.” Sadia, almost asleep, was startled and grabbed my hand.

Nabila told Marco she would take the train with him. He replied that he was planning to work on the way home so she should not expect any small talk. Not sure whether he was joking or serious, Nabila agreed not to disturb him.

After they left, we realized we were too tired to carry the big stacks of files back to the hotel. We looked around and noticed four big cardboard boxes with cloth, torn papers, old reports and other stuff dumped in them. No wonder the room looked so cluttered. We decided to hide our files in there and covered them up with torn papers. We carried our small folders with us.

It was late and we were all very tired, but Rachel wanted us to go to an Indian restaurant she had identified. I did not want to disappoint her. Her guidebook should be of some use. We took a cab and had a tasty, but expensive, South Asian meal before going back to our hotel.

55. RUNNING INTO TARIK – DAY FOUR

This was the last day before the disciplinary hearing. Natalie told us that Tarik and his lawyer, Salman, had finally arrived from Pakistan and were with Lorient, getting their initial briefing. My breathing stopped. Surprised at myself, I looked at Rachel and she had also turned pale. I worried about Sadia, who had just gone downstairs to the reception to bring Nabila up. She had arranged to be with us for a couple of hours.

Just then, they both entered the room looking as if they had just seen a ghost. Rachel and I looked at each other, knowing what had happened. Sadia kept gasping, while Nabila said in a scandalous high pitch, “Guess who we saw?” She quickly put her things on the table and clasped her hands. Rachel told her that Natalie had just announced his arrival. Nabila pulled out a chair and said, “We saw him, we saw him! He looks so old. He is all suited and booted, with a tie!” She sniggered as she sat down. Sadia, getting some control of herself, gave full details of where they saw him, how they passed by him and how his lawyer looked at them. She was still upset.

Marco rushed in with the same news and as a good lawyer, added some precautions for us. He said we should not communicate with Tarik if we see him and should not respond if he

initiates a conversation. We agreed; we could not imagine talking with him in any case. Marco told us Tarik had been given an office on this floor and we should avoid that corridor. I had seen that particular office in an attempt to use a phone. I protested because it was fully equipped with computer, internet and telephone. I said we were three and did not even get a computer in our room. Marco did not answer.

Now that Tarik had arrived, they urgently needed to talk about the new evidence. Marco wanted to make sure that the issue of the audio tape recording of Tarik's wife as well as Ghazala's video tape was discussed. Lorient, Tarik, his lawyer and Marco went into a long meeting, leaving Rachel, Sadia, Nabila and me curious to learn how Tarik reacted to the audio tape of his wife's telephone conversation. We tried to concentrate on our preparations before Nabila had to leave.

Marco returned without any concrete information. He wanted to complete his session with Rachel. He started concentrating as he sat down in front of his laptop, "Tarik only has two things. One, that you asked him a favor and, two, why did you not tell Robert, who supervised both of you? I need to know the truth behind this." Rachel gave a funny smile as she moved to sit in a chair close to Marco's. He continued, "So, let's talk about it. Why did you ask him for this favor?"

Rachel took a long sigh and said, "My grandfather had been in the British Army and my father was born in Quetta, a city in Pakistan. He left as an infant and had never returned. Now my parents were coming for a visit and I wanted to do my best to make their trip memorable, especially to Quetta. Tarik had told me soon after I joined UNDP that if my parents ever came to visit me he could conveniently arrange for a trip to the Staff College in Quetta."

"Did he know that your father was born in Quetta?"

"Yes, I told him and with Tarik's military background and his connections, he made that offer to me. I want to tell you that when I asked him to arrange this I never imagined he would turn it into such a big issue. I did not think I was asking him a big favor. Anyway, he only sent one fax."

Tarik had made a graph of all the time he had spent arranging this special trip for her parents and saying that all the calls he had made to her were related to this event. Tarik loved making diagrams with boxes and plotting different events on a time line. These were always oversimplified and distorted, but convincing for those who wanted to let him off the hook. Thus, this arrangement for her parents to go to Quetta to visit the Staff College became the focal point of his personal interaction with her. Going by the logic of "it has to be her fault," the discussion turned on why she asked him for a favor in the first place. Tarik's argument was that obviously she thought of herself as a close friend and that is why she asked for such a big favor.

"This drawing shows that he spent the whole month doing that," said Marco, hitting the paper with his hand.

"I was out of the country during the days he has marked here," Rachel continued. "I returned to Pakistan just a few days before my parents arrived. Actually, I didn't even know they were coming until a couple of days before I went on vacation. So, I quickly asked Tarik to make this request to the military to assist their trip. He said he would need their passport details, which I gave him and he faxed Quetta passing on the details and a request for their visit. Maybe, all together, it would have taken half a day."

Marco interrupted, "Look how deceptive his drawing is! Rachel, we should have this on a transparency. Remember that. Now what about the phone calls?"

Rachel shuffled through her papers and passed on some phone bills to him. With a smile, she reclined in her chair and proudly said, "The phone calls he made are after my parents had already left. They had nothing to do with planning that trip."

"Ha!" Marco gave a hearty smile. Quickly returning the bills to Rachel, he said, "Make a copy of this also. We'll show the dates clearly and that will discredit him. This guy doesn't seem to get tired of lying."

I said, "In my case, he keeps changing the whole argument and entire nature and the timing of our relationship. God, he is something!"

Marco stood up to stretch his back and legs. He said, "Well, at least I can say one thing. Mr. Tarik is very consistent at being inconsistent." We all enjoyed his comment.

Sadia and I were sitting on one side on our big table. As Marco and Rachel continued, Sadia whispered, "I'm very sleepy." I was tired too and so we decided to slip down from our chairs and sit on the carpet to relax. Marco and Rachel did not even notice that we had disappeared. We pushed the chairs to one side, stretched our legs out and reclined. Actually, there was a nice open space under that huge table. It seemed much less crowded than when we were standing. We got comfortable and I started talking about Pakistan. I knew Sadia was missing home.

She said, "I could not have imagined being a part of something like this a few years ago. I have grown a lot in the last two years." I asked her how old she was when she came to Islamabad. She laughed, "Who knows? This age thing is strange. Who knows how old I am?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

She leaned back comfortably and said in a carefree manner, "No one in our family knows their real birth date. They never registered any of us at the time of birth. My parents only thought about it when their children needed to be admitted to school." I could not help laughing. "I'm telling you the truth," she laughed. "When they filled out the school admission forms, they just put in a date that matched the required age for admission. We all joined school at a very young age, but they would put in a date making us at least two years older. Nobody remembered when a child had been born in any case."

"Well," I said, "In my family, nobody went for registering the new born right away either. They would do it a year or two later."

"Dates are never important." Sadia laughed some more, continuing, "My siblings complained to my parents. They said it was okay to make us all older, but at least they should have made good reasonable guesses." She giggled, "Two of my siblings have birth dates that are only three months apart!" We broke into laughter and could not control ourselves for a while.

We kept talking about our families. We were both tired and did not want to talk about the case. I asked Sadia, "Since this is your first time in America, why don't you stay over for the weekend? You haven't seen anything other than 45th Street. I can show you around a little."

She replied promptly, "No way! I'll leave right after the hearing. I want to go home. At least I will sleep peacefully, eat good food and go to the toilet comfortably. I don't want to stay here a day more than necessary and never want to come back. These people are so alone. They eat alone. They drink coffee alone. I feel so sorry for them."

I could not stop laughing, "No! It's a very nice place. It's just...different."

I laughed so much that my eyes got watery, I said, "This is a nation of individuals. They take pride in doing things for themselves and taking decisions for themselves. It is just the opposite of our culture, but once you get to understand them you wouldn't find it strange."

"It seems like a curse to me," She insisted. "It's better to die than be so rude and selfish and so alone."

When Sadia and I got back up, Marco and Rachel were on the topic of why she did not report Tarik's behavior to Robert. We both quietly slipped into chairs at the far end of the room.

Marco asked, "Did you search for the real answer?"

Rachel said, "Yes. You see I was a young, western woman who had accepted an assignment in Pakistan. I was told what to expect in Asia or any place where there are not many white women working. I mean, we were told that there could be problems. Somehow, I didn't want Robert to have the impression that I was not capable of handling my own issues."

Marco, "I hear you, now you are talking from your heart."

Rachel continued, "I wanted to prove myself to him. I wanted to show him that although I was a young, foreign woman in a country like Pakistan, I was as good as any other professional and did not need special considerations or help. I just wanted to prove myself in my job. I didn't want Robert to think of me as a young girl who couldn't handle her own problems. Do you understand what I am saying?"

"Yes, clearly and I am sure the Committee will also understand." Marco replied.

I just sat there and looked at Rachel. I felt proud of her. In my heart, I said to her, "You came through Rachel, you came through and I am very proud of you. In the future, I am sure you will be a very strong professional woman."

Rachel looked at me and continued. "It was amazing for me to listen to others talking about their experiences. Many things have been clarified for me in just the last two days. The other day Fouzia was talking to you and describing how she had to listen to him because she needed his assistance...and he knew it. I felt her comments reflected my own feelings."

Marco asked quietly, "And what was that?"

Rachel replied, "At those times when I had to sit and listen to his vulgar talk only because I needed his help. I used to wonder whether I was using him...no...not exactly that, but I used to feel that because I needed his assistance I was putting up with him, so I couldn't complain. Do you understand? I felt as if it was my fault that I was putting up with him."

"Did his behavior made you uncomfortable?" Marco asked.

"Oh, yes, very uncomfortable and at times I stopped him and said I didn't want to listen to the details of his personal life. I knew what he was doing was wrong, but I felt that listening to him also wasn't right. Because I wanted to maintain a working relationship with him, I couldn't confront him and, because I didn't confront him, I felt guilty about putting up with him." She looked at me, smiled and continued, "Later, I realized that it was not my problem for trying to make it a working relationship, but it was he who was abusing my need to maintain a working relationship. He knew very well what he was doing. He played on our need to maintain a professional link with him. He knew that we would not confront him, so he abused the situation. He knew I would not tell Robert, so he kept making advances. Every time I asked him for something official, he made it look like I was asking for a favor and whenever he did something for

me related to security or administration he made sure to tell me it was a special favor. It may sound petty, but it sure was burdensome.” She covered her face with both of her hands and sat there for a while.

After Rachel's session was over, she looked exhausted. She walked up to the window and looked outside. Marco went to see Tarik's lawyer about some things. Sadia had slipped into the photocopying room. I walked over and gave Rachel a hug. Her eyes overflowed as she said, “Each one of us goes through some low moments.”

I held her tight and said, “The need to remember and repeat it all over and over again will be over soon.” Staying with the issue twenty-four hours a day was taking its toll. All those thoughts that kept flooding back in my mind about the hard times we had experienced were tiring me out.

Late that night, back in our hotel room, I threw myself on the bed and called Pakistan. I wanted to tell my mother what was happening. My mother answered the phone and showered happy birthday wishes on me. I heard the other telephone extension picked up and more voices of my family members came on, wishing me well and praying for me. I was thrilled. It was midnight. In New York, my birthday was just starting, but Pakistan was ten hours ahead of me. They had been trying to call, but no one was in the room. My whole day's heavy thoughts about Tarik and Robert were quickly swept away, at least for a moment.

Everyone wished me luck and my niece Sadaf said she was very proud of me for standing up for my principles. They also told me that they had sent birthday cards with Sadia for me. I turned around and looked at her. She smiled and handed me a big envelope full of many birthday cards. I was surprised she had kept it such a secret. I happily opened the cards, while my mother talked to Sadia.

Throughout the night, I kept waking up with scary dreams. Every time I woke up, I looked around to make sure I was in my room and not in a strange land full of snake pits. Each time I woke, I found Sadia awake as well, staring at the ceiling. “Sadia, go to sleep,” I would say and she would look at me and reply, “You also get some sleep, we have a long day tomorrow.”

56. THE HEARING BEGINS – DAY FIVE

I woke in the morning to the telephone ringing. Paul called to wish me happy birthday. I was thrilled to hear his voice and clung to the telephone receiver while we talked. I felt very close to him. He wished me well for the hearing, saying, “You all will do well because you're telling the truth. Tarik is the one who has been changing his story, so he has to worry about how to justify all his contradictions.”

I commented, “Marco says the only thing Tarik is consistent about is being inconsistent.” We both laughed. Paul was such a support for me, my closest friend.

Rachel, Sadia and I picked up drinks and pastries from the deli as a light breakfast and marched down 45th street towards our destiny. I could hear the drum beats of a military band in my head. We were full of strength, not only ours, but that of our eight other colleagues as well. We walked as women on a mission.

The hearing was on the tenth floor. We first went into our room and waited for Marco. We took long breaths and smiled at each other to make sure we stayed afloat. I was wearing a pink and white shalwar kamiz and Sadia had on a brown one. With our big starched cotton dopattas, we looked Pakistani. Rachel wore a muted skirt and blouse and looked somehow shy.

The Committee took a while to get organized. Marco wanted me to be the first one because he said there was more ground to cover. At about 9:30 they said they were ready and Marco and I prepared to go. I was pacing my breathing. We had the three big folders of files that the Committee had received from the Legal Section, my individual case file, a box with our evidence and transparencies for the presentation. In addition to all this, I was carrying one thin folder with Paul's letters and a few letters on Tarik's divorce case with his wife. I carried Paul's letters for my own support. I felt him close by when I looked at them.

Marco walked crisply in front. Sadia hugged me and wished me success. Rachel gave me a hug and held my hands for a moment, her eyes gleaming with hope. She pressed my hands and let go. We exchanged smiles to communicate our solidarity. I turned around and hurried to follow Marco one floor down. Rachel and Sadia stayed behind in our ugly room as their long wait began.

There was a small hallway in front of the Hearing Room with a few office desks, a big photocopying machine and a couple of chairs. Many offices opened in this hallway, so there was a lot of traffic. Colorful UN posters hung on the walls. I sat on one of the two chairs close to the Hearing Room door. I felt awkward sitting there and hoped that they would not keep me waiting for too long.

The Committee was discussing some ground rules and procedural issues. Marco and the Chairperson came out and said they would start in half an hour. The Chair was a charming Indian woman. From her American accent, I could tell that she had been living in America for quite some time. I was pleased to see her, thinking she would at least understand the South Asian cultural context of our case. I asked Marco with my eyes and hand gestures if I should wait in this lobby or go back upstairs. He told me to leave the files and go upstairs if I wanted to. I definitely preferred to wait with Sadia and Rachel. Our ugly room seemed very safe and private at this point. I straightened my dopatta, left the files, except the one with Paul's letters and walked back.

Rachel and Sadia were sitting by the window in our room. They were so surprised to see me that their jaws dropped. I said quickly, "Everything is ok. No worries; it's just that they're taking more time on the initial discussions. I couldn't wait down there. It's like sitting in the middle of a market."

Rachel said, "It's difficult to wait here too. I hope it's over soon." She smiled, "I was just telling Sadia that when you had your practice session with Marco, you answered his questions so confidently that I envied you."

"Come on, Rachel" I patted her shoulder, "You also answered his questions confidently. And we all will be very confident when his lawyer cross-examines us. Remember that."

"Are you afraid?" She asked me.

"No, he is the one who should be afraid!"

Rachel started laughing. "You are something. Yes, you're right, he should be afraid. Nabila said he looked very tense."

We all smiled. We felt strong being with each other. I missed Ghazala. We had worked on this so closely. I wish they had allowed her to come. I carried each of them in my heart. After a while, I thought I should go down to see if they were ready for me yet. The door of the room was open and people were going in and out. After a few minutes, Marco called me over and ushered me inside.

It was a medium-sized room with no windows. There was a nice oval meeting table, with cushioned chairs all around. As you entered the room there was a row of heavy sofas by the wall. Five Committee Members sat around one end of the oval table, near the entrance. At the opposite end was a big screen. Tarik and his lawyer were sitting opposite the Committee. There was a big overhead projector sitting on the table. There were a few vacant chairs by the projector, not too far from Tarik and his lawyer, where I assumed we would sit once the Hearing started. I sat down confidently on a sofa and Marco sat next to me.

I noticed that Tarik was not looking at Marco or me. He kept whispering to his lawyer as if he needed an excuse to look somewhere else or do something. He looked extremely uncomfortable.

The hearing started. Lorient, as the head of the Legal Section, made an introduction. I wanted Marco to do everything for the case—the introduction, the conclusion, the presentation and the discussion. I did not trust anyone else. I was confident about our preparation, but worried about the intentions and the politics of the other players.

Despite my misgivings, Lorient's introduction was clear and set the context of the inquiry nicely. As he read the charges, my eyes blurred. I kept looking at Tarik. This is the guy who used to rule the UNDP, whose ego was so huge that he could not tolerate anyone connected to the UN not knowing who he was. This is the demon who ordered the destruction of people's livelihoods on a whim. This playboy considered it his birthright to claim every woman in the office. This is the organizational climber who considered his professional status the most important facet of his personality because that was the source of his power. Now he was sitting in front of some of the most senior people of the UN with his head lowered, listening to the strongly worded charges that were being leveled against him.

Lorient read the charges of sexually harassing eleven colleagues, fostering a hostile environment, misuse of authority and gross negligence in his management. At the end he read, "The above are in breach with the standard of conduct the organization requires from supervisors."

At that moment, I felt proud of the UN for setting standards of conduct for its supervisors and staff. I felt proud because the organization was finally holding this senior manager accountable for what he had done. I also felt proud because the UN had finally recognized the issue as an important one and very senior people from different UN agencies were sitting on this high level Disciplinary Committee. I did not yet know how our story would end, but I was happy that at least we had come this far.

I wondered what Tarik was feeling. On the outside, he was clearly pretending to be untouched. For a brief moment, hearing those charges, even I felt embarrassed for him. I was not sure if he was sad or only focusing on how to be smart enough to get out of all this.

The Chairperson asked Tarik's side if they were ready for the opening statement. His lawyer stood up. He looked at me and suddenly attacked my presence in the room. He spoke

rudely, “Who is that person sitting on the sofa. I don’t know her. She’s not with the UN. She has no business being here in the Committee Meeting.” Tarik must have come up with this idea that I was not a UN staff member anymore.

I wanted the hearing to begin so badly. I opened the file in my hand just a bit and touched Paul’s letters with my finger. I wanted strength. I wanted patience. I did not fully understand what the lawyer was getting at. The Committee Members also had question marks on their faces. Marco sat patiently for the Chair to say something.

Finally, she held her hand up to silence the lawyer and said, “She can come in when her lawyer calls her.” I immediately got up and walked quickly to the door of the room. On my way out, I looked at the Chairperson’s face and she said, “Would you mind?” I replied quickly, but firmly, “No, no, I will be outside when you need me.”

I sat outside on the chair in the open area. People passed by me in a blur. My thoughts were in the room, wondering what was going on. How could his lawyer take up such a basic issue at this stage? Is he trying to waste time or to postpone the hearing on some small procedural point?

I closed my eyes and imagined Robert sitting in Tarik’s place. I imagined Loriot reading a list of charges to Robert: “This organization charges you for intimidating these eleven women; for covering up the truth about their sexual harassment case; for covering up Tarik’s abuses; for siding with him, for retaliating by opening phony inquiries against the complainants; for pressuring and tormenting them until they left the UN; for turning them into witches and signally that it was fine if the staff wanted to hunt them down; for misusing your power by attempting to stop them from pursuing this case. Lastly, you are charged with personally tormenting Fouzia Saeed by sending her an official letter of complaint to her home to torment her on her wedding day.” That thought made a smile spread over my face. As Tarik’s partner, he should have been sharing the charges with him, or better, facing charges of his own, but I am sure he must be sleeping comfortably in his bed.

I could not bear sitting in that hallway. My shalwar kamiz was already attracting attention and sitting in a passageway always draws curious looks. I felt people must be wondering why I was there. I wanted to let Rachel and Sadia know where I was. I wanted them to come down so I could be available to the Committee and at the same time be with them. I looked for the extension number of the broken phone in our ugly room that could only sometimes receive calls and then only on speaker. I could not find the number. One helpful person even looked in the building directory, but also failed to find it. I told a woman working nearby that I was running upstairs for five minutes and asked her to tell Marco that I would be back right away if I were called.

I ran through the hallways, up the stairs and again through the two long corridors to our room. My legs were so tight that each step was an effort and added to my tension. I opened the door and both Rachel and Sadia jumped up from their chairs with worried expressions.

“What happened?” asked Rachel.

“They’re not ready for us yet.” I answered quickly.

“Oh! What’s going on?” Rachel yelled in frustration.

“Tarik’s lawyer is raising some strange objections. I don’t know what game they are trying to play,” I answered.

“Were you inside the room?” she asked.

Stiff with tension, I sat on the edge of a chair and hurriedly started to describe the room and the people. I wanted Rachel and Sadia to become familiar with the environment inside the room. I asked them to come down and sit with me outside the Committee Room until they were ready for us. We all went down. They had not called for me yet. There were only two chairs, so Rachel and I sat down while Sadia stood by us.

We were all quiet, feeling every passing moment heavily. I thought how relaxed I had been earlier and how tense all this delay was making me. After a while, Marco came out of the hearing room. All three of us jumped up, mouths open, holding our breath and looking at him intensely, waiting for him to say something.

All he said was, "You can relax. It will be a while. There are issues to be sorted out."

"Anything to worry about?" I asked quickly.

"No, no, nothing. It's just that they only came yesterday. They should have brought these issues up earlier and not now, but anyway, there's nothing to worry about. I just came to say that if you want to get coffee or something, go ahead."

Marco went back inside. We looked at each other. None of us believed there was nothing to worry about. We walked up to our room without saying a word, worried whether the hearing would take place or not, whether Tarik's gimmicks would work in New York as effectively as they had worked in Pakistan.

No one wanted to go out. We did not want to move. No one could relax. I looked at Rachel and raised my eyebrows. Sadia held her head in her hands. Rachel looked out the window. We had nothing to keep us busy as we waited. Rachel had given up on her guidebook. Full of yellow stick-ons, it was sitting on half filled rubbish boxes on one side of the room. We could think of nothing but the case. We were tired of flipping through our files. We knew each document by heart. We had only the thoughts that kept coming back to us like disconnected parts of a long film. I could see Tarik's sleazy smiles, his angry face, his superficial politeness; it all appeared like flashes from the last three years of my memory bank.

"I can't stand this waiting!" Rachel yelled as she got up from her chair. She pulled her hair back with both hands. "This is ridiculous! They only have two days for the hearings and Tarik is making them waste all the time. Do you think he wants them to postpone the hearing?"

"Who knows? I just know that he is playing with them, just the same as he did back home. Why couldn't they have had a meeting on the procedural stuff before the tribunal started?" I mumbled.

"No, no, no! I can't imagine that the proceedings could be postponed," Rachel said as she sat down and reflected. "We can't possibly go through this again. No way! Going through it once is torture enough."

I said, "The only confidence I have is that Marco is in there. He won't let Tarik manipulate the procedure. The Committee Members seemed good and responsible. The Chair seems very intelligent and professional. She spoke with a lot of confidence and a sense of justice. I don't think these people will let us down. What do you think?"

"I hope not!" answered Rachel.

Sadia came out of her quiet spell and said simply, "There is no way we could come back for another hearing."

“Let’s not think about that right now. We would lose our focus. We should just look over our notes and think about doing our best with whatever time we get. At the end of the process, if we feel that we didn’t get enough time to present our side, then we should make sure our concern is heard at whatever level. How does that sound?” I asked.

After waiting for more than two hours, Marco finally came for us. We jumped up from our chairs. He said, “We will have a short lunch break and then the hearing will start.”

We sighed with relief, but were still full of doubts. None of us was hungry. We did not want to look at food. Marco said nothing about the discussion that had gone on for the past three hours in the Hearing Room. He just walked away and we ran after him. We did not want lunch, but we desperately wanted to be with him to get more information and guidance for the upcoming session. We followed him closely through the streets to a sandwich joint. We all asked him the same thing in different words. We wanted to know how Tarik could keep the hearing process tied up for so long. What were his objections? I do not know whether it was an issue of confidentiality or whether Marco simply did not want us to think about those things, but all we got out of him was that Tarik had raised certain procedural issues and the Panel had dealt with them.

We brought the sandwiches back to our ugly room, but only Marco ate. He needed the energy to speak for all of us. I had a drink so I would have some energy too. Nothing seemed appetizing.

Finally, around two o'clock, I was called into the room. Marco sat on the chair next to the projector and I sat next to him. Now Tarik and his lawyer were in front of me and the whole Committee sat in a semi-circle to my left. Two of the members could hardly see my face and the Chairperson could only see me in profile unless I turned around and looked at her. The Committee Members seemed supportive. Once I finished looking around the room at everyone's face, I felt my confidence return.

Marco started with my witness testimony. “For the sake of the record, can you please state your full name?”

“Fouzia Saeed.”

“What is your age?”

“I am 40 years old.”

“Are you married?”

“Yes”

“When did you get married?”

“February 1998.”

He went on with other questions about how I knew Tarik and when I started to notice his advances. He showed the relevant slides on the projector. Then he talked about his calls and the patterns.

Tarik sat there avoiding any eye contact with me. He was serious and from time to time whispered something in his lawyer’s ear. Marco was in full action. He let me talk, made his arguments, showed transparencies and then moved on to another point.

Marco pulled out the call duration analysis graph that Paul had made. He put the transparency up on the screen. “Mr. Khan claims that Dr. Saeed pursued him, but look at the number of minutes each called the other. Look at the four months in which the bulk of the calls were made. In July, Dr. Saeed called him for a total of 28 minutes whereas he called her for 118 minutes. In August, she called for 5 minutes and he called for 111 minutes. In September, she did not call him at all and he called for 116 minutes. In October, she did not call at all and he called her for 152 minutes.” The Committee Members nodded at the clarity of our analysis. They could clearly see either his one-sided attempt at friendship or overt exploitation.

After the surge of calls in the fall, however, Tarik’s calls became occasional with gaps of several months.

The pattern of the calls did not support his argument that we had any sort of a relationship. After that initial period, I made hardly any calls to him again, yet he had stretched this alleged relationship over three years, finally claiming a break-up in 1997.

Marco explained it very nicely. He said, “You can only get out of something if you are in it first. If Dr. Saeed never got into a romantic relationship, how could she get out of it? Other than his statement, there is nothing here that supports his contention of a romantic relationship. Whereas, in addition to Dr. Saeed's denial, we have evidence of a calling pattern that clearly shows there was no personal relationship.”

Marco then went on with his questions about the nature of my interaction with Tarik. I told him that his attitude did not change. He would make very intimate remarks and address me in sexual terms, upsetting me greatly. I continued to work with him, but tried my best to avoid him.

“In March 1996, did you go out of town on an official trip?” asked Marco.

“Yes, this was a management workshop for most of the staff of UNDP,” I answered. “Almost all the programme staff and most of the senior Operations staff attended. We all went to Bhurban.” I told them about the incident where he pushed himself into my room and begged me to let him stay. “He cried and said, ‘I am a broken man.’ I was so scared looking at his red face. He was drunk and was determined to be with me in my hotel room. I didn’t know what he would do the next minute, but I pretended to be very strong and finally made him leave.”

Neither Marco nor the Committee members interrupted me during my description of this event. I am not sure how much I told them. It was like an old film running before my eyes. When I finished, I was trembling. I didn’t know how Tarik took it, sitting right in front of me like that. I was totally absorbed in my own thoughts.

Earlier, when Marco and I were preparing the case for presentation, he said to me, “Let’s forget about this incident since we have no corroborating evidence. I want to use the time most efficiently and present what we can prove and what we are sure the Panel will accept. I say leave this one.”

I stopped him right there. “I am leaving out many things since we lack corroborating evidence,” I said, “but not this incident. Even if you think it will be a waste of time and the Committee won’t fully accept it for lack of evidence, I have to do it for myself. If I put all of Tarik’s harassment on one side and this incident on the other, this weighs more than all the rest. I owe this to myself. I have to report this incident.” I am glad he agreed, but I would have told the

Committee this story in any case, evidence or no evidence. Tarik acted that way and I wanted them to know about it.

Marco quickly moved to the next question. “Did you have an incident with the police in the middle of 1996?”

“Yes, a policeman from another city dressed in civilian clothes tried to intimidate me. This is a common form of harassment in my country...”

Suddenly I lost my words, because my mind and my body were still in the Bhurban Hotel room. I could see Tarik's face and how red it had become from all the alcohol he had drunk. I could see the red blood vessels in his eyes. I could smell the alcohol and I was watching his body swaying back and forth. He was into his act of feeling shattered and begging for company.

It seemed that one of the Committee Members asked me something about the police case, but I could not hear them. The smell of alcohol was too strong and Tarik's crying in my hotel room was too loud for me to hear anything. I raised my hand and said, “Please stop. I can't switch that fast. Just give me a minute.” I wanted the uproar Tarik made in my Bhurban room to subside. My whole body started shaking and I could not control the tears streaming from my eyes. I asked for some water. Someone gave me a box of tissues and someone brought water. The image of Tarik in my room was still too vivid.

I apologized, “I'm sorry, but my mind is still in the hotel room. That was one of the most terrifying moments in my life. Talking about it is not easy. Mentally, I was very ready to defend myself physically because I was sure he would attack me. At first, I was completely intimidated, but then I gathered up my strength and prepared myself mentally to hit him back if he attacked me. Every cell in my body was ready to react to any physical attempt on his part.”

Saying that to the Committee members made my whole body tremble. “Perhaps he left because he sensed that I would put up too much of a fight.” I do not know if the Committee Members understood what I was saying through my sniffles, but I saw support on their faces. It was strange that Tarik's presence in the same room had no effect on what I was saying or feeling. I was just talking to the Committee. I sat there quietly for some time and then asked Marco to go ahead with his questions. He repeated the question about the policeman.

“Tarik did not help me in this case, nor did he hinder anything.” I briefly explained my actions and those of Tarik and Nawaz. “Two men from the UNDP administration, including Nawaz, accompanied the police to my office, but that was their job and, by the way, I never recovered the ID card he claims to have ‘personally retrieved’ for me.”

I was very proud of myself for taking the policeman to task, but for the sake of my testimony, I could not say that. I was supposed to describe it briefly, giving only the facts, to counter Tarik's claim that as my special friend he got me out of an “embarrassing situation” when the police caught me with a male friend in the wooded area of Islamabad one evening. I just needed to explain that there had been neither an embarrassing situation nor any help from him.

Tarik's defense was actually comparable to the situation I had experienced in that incident. When the policeman was caught extorting money from me, the guy churned out lies to save his skin and said that he had seen me in a compromising position with a man and when made our complaint against Tarik, he also came up with lies about me having an affair with him. They both attacked my morality. Labeling a woman as “immoral” is a well-established strategy for discrediting any woman.

The last stack of evidence included a statement by Nawaz that Tarik had asked him to sign as evidence. Marco showed the statement quickly on a transparency as it dealt with this police case and pointed out two things in response. “The statement, supposedly written by Nawaz, addresses himself in the third person.” He read from the statement, “‘and the extraordinary effort put in by Nawaz.’ It is clear that Mr. Khan wrote the statement for him.” The Committee Members laughed.

The second point Marco made, looking at me, was that these were very tense days for me during the police case. There was a fear of repercussions from the man and his friends during the period starting from the date of the incident on May 18th until he was arrested on June 5th, and for several days afterwards. He displayed the records of Tarik's calls made to me during May and June showing that he did not call me at all during that time. This, he said, further discredited his claims that he had helped me and that he had a close relationship with me.

I also pointed out to the Committee that I chose to act and had filed a formal police report. If I had felt guilty or embarrassed, I would not have done that. I told the Committee that Paul was the one who helped me. He immediately bought me a cellular phone and told me to keep it with me all the time. He was concerned that the relatives of the policeman might try to use violence to frighten me into withdrawing the case.

Marco moved on and asked me about Bedari briefly. He wanted to counter Tarik's claim that Sadia joined in this complaint only because she knew me through Bedari before she actually joined the UNDP. The Committee Members asked me a few questions. I explained that I had not been part of Bedari's management for several years, but had been one of the founders and a member of the first executive committee.

The year 1996 was also discussed as my friendship with Paul was developing at that time. I mentioned the letters Paul had written from Beijing. Marco did not dwell on it. I also briefly described Tarik making sexually explicit remarks about other women. In the midst of all of these questions and answers, I lifted the top of my file, which was sitting in my lap and put my hand on Paul's letters. This simple act made me feel calm and strong.

Marco asked me, “Dr. Saeed, would you tell us why you did not tell your supervisor about this harassment?”

I said I was afraid that the senior management, especially Robert England, would side with Tarik and that would only make things worse for me. I did not think they would hold him accountable. He was too close to Robert. I told them that whenever anyone said anything against Tarik, Robert made a personal effort to defend him.

My second point was that I did try to express my concern in other ways. I tried to bring about some kind of gender sensitivity through structured initiatives. When this failed, I finally told my supervisor, Harumi Sakaguchi. Marco asked many questions about this, since he wanted to build a base for it, although Harumi denied I ever spoke to him. Marco wanted the Committee to hear my side.

“Can you tell us in detail what exactly you said to your supervisor, Mr. Harumi Sakaguchi?”

I gave a full explanation.

“How did he respond?”

“He was very concerned. He was surprised and said he had difficulty believing it. After listening to the whole story, he became very quiet and said he was worried for our safety. He told me to be careful.”

One by one, Marco had brought out all the points he needed to counter Tarik's claims. He ended my case with the details on Harumi. I took a long sigh and looked at him. He did not show any expression. I gradually got up feeling quite good about the opportunity I had been given to tell the truth to the Committee.

My mind was a bit dazed from going back and forth into the past, but I felt fine.

When my testimony finished, the Chair announced that the cross-examination would be held the next day. Tarik immediately created an uproar! Waving his hand in the air, he said indignantly and in a loud voice, “We want the cross-examination to be conducted today.” She reminded him that some Committee Members had other engagements, so the session needed to be concluded by 5:30 today.

Tarik would not be silenced so easily and stubbornly repeated his demand in his usual loud, commanding voice, “No, we want the cross-examination to be conducted right now, right after the testimony.” The Chair looked at him with annoyance and said, assertively, “I have noted the request and I am informing you that your request has been denied. The cross-examination will be held tomorrow.”

Tarik waved his finger at the Committee Member who was taking notes and said loudly, “Please note that I made a request and it was denied.” Everyone looked at him strangely. I felt relieved as I rose from my chair. I helped Marco gather our papers and files and pile them together. Despite my anxiety about facing Tarik, his presence had not affected my testimony at all.

With our hands full of files, Marco and I walked back to the room on the eleventh floor where Sadia and Rachel had done nothing but wait all day long. The time they had spent in that room stretched twenty fold, as all their thoughts were on trying to guess what was happening downstairs. Their faces were pale and their eyes looked tired. They looked at us anxiously. I started putting things down on the big table and said quickly, “It went well. It did. There was SO MUCH that got covered.”

Marco smiled at them, “Remember, her case was the most complicated. That’s why it took so long. Your testimonies will be shorter; I don't have to cover so much.”

“Did he do the cross-examination or his lawyer?” Rachel asked.

“This was just the testimony! The cross-examination is tomorrow.” Rachel and Sadia looked at each other with surprise.

I told them about his loud objection to leaving the cross-examination for tomorrow. Rachel asked, “Do you think he's lost it?”

“Who knows? Maybe, but I think he is preparing for an appeal. Remember, he is in Operations. He thinks if he does not win on substance, he can still win by picking out errors on procedural grounds. By objecting at each step he is collecting ammunition in case the decision turns out against him and he has to appeal.”

Marco left to discuss some issues about the next day with Loriot and Natalie.

I looked at my watch and said. “We still have some daylight. Should we go somewhere nice today? For the first time, we have a free evening.” Sadia looked excited. She wanted to celebrate my

birthday. Rachel jumped for her guidebook. We were delighted by the thought of having the whole evening to ourselves. However, we felt we should wait for Marco to ask him whether we could take our stuff to the hotel now.

Marco soon returned with Natalie and announced, "We'll take a dinner break and then work right afterwards. We will try to finish by 10." The three of us looked at each other in utter disappointment.

"Ooops!" I whispered to myself. Sadia made a sad face and Rachel smiled wryly at the loss of our wishful plans. Marco left the room. I took a deep breath and said, "I salute Marco for doing more than we are doing and still not wanting to take one evening off. That's good for us. Let's go. This dinner will be my birthday celebration." Sadia and Rachel shrugged their shoulders and we hurried after Marco.

We went to a Mexican restaurant and, after we settled down, I announced my birthday. Marco and Natalie congratulated me while Rachel and Sadia gave me hugs. I smiled, thinking of all those that were not there with me, especially Paul. We had a toast of coke, sprite, two glasses of wine and a juice. My friends did their best to create a festive spirit. I was reminded of all the celebrations I have had every year around my birthday-music, food and festivity. I remembered the view of Mt. Everest, Paul's gift to me last year. I remember holding his hand tightly as he whispered happy birthday in my ear. One year had passed so quickly, entirely wrapped around this case.

After dinner, we returned to our ugly little room. Marco wanted to go over the transparencies for Sadia and Rachel's testimonies. I sat around with my thoughts as they both worked with him until after ten. I looked out the window at the wonderfully-lit buildings, but my mind kept moving back to Robert England. I was happy I had the opportunity to tell the Committee what Tarik did, but I felt so strongly that I needed to tell someone what Robert had done as well.

When Rachel and Sadia finished working with Marco, we walked back to our hotel. I immediately dialed Paul's number, wanting to tell him how the day went, but I could not find him. I talked to my mother and gave her a brief report on what had happened. I asked her to pass on the message to my father and the others. I also asked her to call Paul later and give him the details.

We were ready to go to bed when Sadia looked at me and asked, "Is it midnight yet?"

"No, it's quarter to twelve."

"We still have fifteen minutes, she said. "Let's go out. If nothing else we can at least have a coke together." She jumped up from the bed in excitement.

"Why?" I asked with a surprise.

"It's your birthday, but we didn't do anything special!" she pleaded.

"We had dinner," I responded.

No, I mean just us. Rachel has probably gone to sleep. Let's go out."

She pulled me by my arm, put on her shoes and dragged me out of the room. We walked a couple of blocks to Times Square and grabbed two cokes from a small stall. We looked at the bright lights all around and sipped our drinks. After an entire day of tension, we got these fifteen minutes to laugh and relax.

57. CROSS-EXAMINATION: DAY SIX

I woke up quite early the next morning. I had been dreaming about having an argument with Tarik. Sadia was also awake, lying in bed with one hand tucked under her head. We kept looking at the ceiling. She told me I had been talking in my sleep.

“Was I swearing at Robert?” I comically replied.

We both laughed. I pulled the sheet up to my chin, turned towards her and said sadly, “Do you know, Sadia, a rumour leaked out of Robert's office that Tarik can even describe physical marks on my body to prove that we had a sexual relationship.

Sadia grimaced and said, “Please don't say that. He used those words when he asked me to talk to that woman on the phone. He said, ‘You tell that woman that I could describe physical marks on her body to prove that she had been sleeping with other men.’ It must be his standard method of blackmail. Don't even think about such comments. Just don't talk like that.”

I spoke again in a low, sad voice, “I heard that Tarik's lawyer mentioned it to the people at the Legal Section that Tarik would give physical marks on my body as evidence of our affair. I knew he was bluffing, but the point is what if he fakes it?

“Fouzia! Please don't worry about it. You know he's lying.”

“I'm not worrying about it. I'm just surprised at the kind of lies he can create. I discussed it with Paul and he said I don't have any marks on my body and besides he said in Pakistan you don't have locker rooms where women take showers together and can see each other, so no one could even give him that kind of information.”

“He's right!” Sadia said forcefully.

I changed the subject, “I agree with what Nabila said, Tarik looks very old.”

“Well, he had to work so hard to come up with so many lies,” Sadia giggled.

As we were getting up, Paul called to wish me well for the cross-examination. I spoke with concern, “Tarik seems pushed to his limits. He will probably come up with something filthy in his counterattack. He's being quite offensive towards the Committee. I think he is at the end of his rope. He appears to be having a hard time coping with the idea that, despite all the help from his powerful friends, he still has to answer for his actions.”

Paul cheered me up and said, “Will you do one thing for me? Keep smiling all day. He might try to provoke you. No matter what he says; DO NOT GET ANGRY! Just smile and say, ‘No, that's not true. No, that's not true.’ ”

I laughed and said, “Thanks for the advice. I do get emotional when I hear his lies, but I won't let him make me angry.”

“Remember, you only have to answer him, not argue with him,” Paul continued. “Trust the Committee members to do their own analysis. Do not conclude for them. Just answer his questions truthfully.”

“Thanks, Paul. I'm already smiling,” I said happily. He told me to wish Rachel and Sadia good luck for him also. His call fully energized me.

Unlike the previous days, both Sadia and I were ready too early. Sadia confidently volunteered to venture out and get breakfast for us from the deli. Rachel was surprised to see us so active, but it was just that the anxiety from the day before had left our nerves jangled.

By the time Marco got in, we were already in our ugly room trying to boost each other up for the day. We were not sure who would go after me. Marco said the Committee would decide, but his idea was to take Rachel next. He went to see if the Committee was ready to begin.

Sadia said she had to go to the toilet, but did not want to miss sending me off to the Committee room with a hug. She did not know when Marco would come to get me. I told her she had better go because I did not want any mess in our ugly room. She blushed and looked at Rachel with embarrassment. Then she got close to me and said, "It's okay now. I found a small water bottle and hid it in the washroom. I am okay now."

I could not believe what I was hearing, "Sorry, I missed that part. I didn't realize you were having trouble with the toilet paper."

"Shush!" She looked at me with annoyance and pulled me to one side so that Rachel could not hear her.

"How can they do it without water?" she whispered.

"But Sadia they all use tissue paper."

"Yuk!" she made a bad face. "These people are so dirty; they wipe themselves with paper...oooh!" A shiver of disgust ran through her shoulders and I burst into laughter.

Rachel looked at me and I quickly covered it up, "Don't worry, I'm only convincing her to go to the washroom. Who knows what other procedural objections Tarik might invent? Priorities should be priorities, no?"

Marco came back to get me. Rachel and Sadia hugged me for support. I picked up my things and quickly followed Marco. He went into the Committee room while I waited outside, becoming increasingly nervous as time passed. I wondered whether Tarik was going to throw another tantrum. Finally, the suspense ended and they called me in. I took a deep breath to relax and told myself to stay calm. I held my personal file tightly in my hand and walked in very confidently. I noticed that someone had changed the direction of my chair so I was facing the Committee and at an angle to Tarik. Marco was almost behind me so I had to turn about a hundred degrees to see him.

Tarik's lawyer asked the first question. It was so long and drawn out that I could not understand it. It was more like a statement about my relationship with Tarik. I tried twice, but could not understand what he was asking. I looked at the Chair and asked, "What is the question?" She intervened and told him to ask me one thing at a time.

Tarik, who probably had written the questions himself, became very restless. He pushed his lawyer with his elbow, shuffled forward in his chair. "Let me explain!" he said and asked me another very long question. He seemed to be asking why I invited him to my house if I felt harassed by him. I said, "I only invited you when I also invited other UNDP staff."

From then on, Tarik asked all the questions himself. The first half of the cross-examination focused on my first three months at the UN. That was when he had briefly attended that Halloween party at my house and when I had been invited by him and Bill Dickens to another party. I guess he wanted to build his cross-examination on that. I answered in simple words. "Yes, I

invited you to my Halloween party. I invited several other UNDP colleagues as well. There were about seventy people at the party.”

He was repetitive and kept making the same points. Gradually, he moved to other issues. Most of his questions started with, “Did I not...?” So my answers began with, “No, you did not...”

He asked me questions about Bedari and then about Sadia. He swung back to our allegedly personal relationship and asked, “Did you not invite me to your house when there was no one else at home.” I said that was not true. He asked, “Do you think I could describe your room and bathroom from the inside?” I told him to go ahead, but Marco intervened and said there was no need.

At one point, he asked, “Did I not help you recover your ID from the police?” I answered, “No, you were not even nearby when the police came to arrest the culprit and he never returned my ID card.” It was getting quite boring, but I kept my cool.

He talked about a trip I had made to Peshawar. He had mentioned this incident repeatedly in almost every statement he submitted. On this occasion, Robert and many other colleagues also went to Peshawar and stayed at the same hotel. Suddenly, his face turned red and his eyes bulged. He wriggled in his chair and moved forward. He looked at the Committee Members to ensure their attention and then asked me, “Is it not true that in Peshawar I came to your room after dinner?”

“No, that is not true.”

“Is it not true that you were sitting on a sofa and I was sitting at your feet?”

Without expression, I answered, “No, you were not in my room.”

He was trembling as he asked these questions in a loud voice. I remained calm, although surprised.

He said, “Is it not true that we had sex in your room?”

I felt I would burst like a volcano at this insult, but I answered calmly. “No, that is not true.”

He said, “Is it not true that at that time I realized that you were a virgin?”

I held my file with Paul’s letters tightly and said in a calm voice, “This whole thing is not true.”

I could sense that everyone in the room was affected by these questions, but I was not sure how. I felt angry, yet confident. Tarik was visibly shaking. I wished I could look at Marco occasionally for some nonverbal feedback to be sure I was doing okay, but I could not because of the way the room had been arranged. Nevertheless, my heart told me this was the time to do my best.

My cross-examination lasted for four and a half hours. When it ended, I was more than a little surprised. I thought my bedroom, bathroom and body marks would have all been described to the Committee. The Chair asked Tarik if he was done. I turned around and told Marco I had been waiting for at least the color of my bathroom tile. Marco asked the Committee whether the defendant had presented everything in the case of Dr. Saeed. He repeated his question to make sure that Tarik did not come up with more information later.

One of the Committee Members mentioned the plan of my room. Marco said, "If he wants to describe it he could do so now."

Tarik was caught unprepared. He gulped and said it is on the far side of the house. He tried to be as vague as possible, saying, "There is a bathroom sink and a mirror on top and a toilet on the side. I looked at Marco, saying with my eyes that his description would match 95% of the bathrooms in the city. He did the same thing with the room, describing a bed on one side and a wardrobe on the other, waving his hands, looking here and there, seemingly not sure what else to say. I shook my head no, hoping someone would ask me to confirm, since I do not have a wardrobe inside my room, but nobody pursued the point. I bent to Marco and said even his vague description is wrong. I wanted him to ask for the color of my bathroom tile at least. However, Marco did not pursue his description at all.

Tarik closed from his side and Marco closed from our side. Tarik immediately demanded loudly that Sadia should be the next witness. Marco requested Rachel, but Tarik turned it into an issue and created a commotion, so Marco gave in.

We got up and left the room. I followed Marco closely and kept repeating, "His description was wrong. Ask him about the color of my bathroom." But Marco didn't respond.

Sadia and Rachel were sitting right outside the room. They had grown tired of waiting upstairs. I ran up to them, stood very close and started talking at a thousand words per second. I told them Tarik had nothing to say at all, but just repeated the same things. No surprises! I also told them how vulgarly he had brought up a sexual relationship. I proudly told them that his explicit language did not visibly shake me. I had the strength to look in his eyes and answer confidently. He was the one who was shaking throughout.

I described his questions about the Peshawar trip to warn them how low he had been willing to stoop. I had not considered that Sadia was about to start her session. This story affected her badly. She looked as if she would throw up and kept clearing her throat. Her eyes watered and her face became pale. She quickly sat down. These allegations shocked her, but there was hardly any time to backtrack. I felt very bad for upsetting her and told her that nothing he said would affect us. She had to go inside. I quickly hugged her twice, held her face in my hands and said firmly, "YOU WILL DO FINE!"

Rachel and I retreated into our ugly room, which was now our sanctuary. Rachel was still shocked at his questions. I was desperate to call home and talk to Paul. How I wished we had access to a phone in that office! I told Rachel I would run over to the hotel and make a quick call. She stopped me because it would be about two at night in Manila. I did not mind waking Paul up to share what happened, but she insisted that I wait until later.

Nonetheless, a heavy weight had been lifted from my chest. I reminded Rachel how Tarik had made such a big deal about being able to rake up all manner of terrible incidents from my past, but it was all just talk. He had been bluffing and everybody in the UNDP had been dancing to his tune. He had no intelligent strategy and his arguments lacked any substance. He just kept repeating his silly allegations, yet had nothing to back them up. Rachel laughed. We both kept talking about Tarik and our local UNDP management.

The Committee took a break after Sadia's testimony. Sadia and Marco finally came upstairs. I jumped forward and hugged her, "How did it go?" I could see her eyes were red and swollen.

Marco said, "Beautiful!"

When Sadia spoke to us, she seemed ok. She said, "I told them everything...everything."

As he stepped out of the room, Marco looked back and said, "Yes, Sadia, you did tell them everything."

She came close to me and said, "I feel sorry for Marco. I feel so embarrassed."

"Why?" I asked.

"He prepared so hard and wrote out the questions so professionally for me to follow and I wasted his hard work. When I got in there I just wanted to tell them everything that was in my mind. I didn't listen to Marco's questions, but just said whatever my mind focused on. I was only thinking of how to explain what happened. At one point, I noticed that he asked me something, but I could not hear him. I feel I let him down. He worked so hard for us."

"Sadia, didn't you see his face? He seemed very pleased. He worked on those questions only to help us."

Sadia's testimony had gone very well. What I gathered from her recollection later, supplemented by Marco and Natalie's comments, was that as Sadia started talking about her interaction with Tarik, the whole Committee listened as if they were under a spell. It was not just her story that intrigued them, but also the way she told it. They were able to see who she was in her Pakistani cultural context. How talk about sex never occurs among women unless they are married and even then very privately. They glimpsed how decent people in families like Sadia's never talk about sex or hold hands in public, even in their homes when others are present, even when they are married.

When she described her family, she said many things she had not told Marco. With English as her third language, she clearly made her best effort to explain to the Committee what she had come across the oceans to tell them. She took her time and told them how obscenely this man had behaved with her and how she could not cope with it. She had never been exposed to that kind of language or behavior.

She told them that she was the youngest in her family and still unmarried. As the youngest, she was overly protected as the baby of the family. The Committee Members were surprised to learn that she needed her parents' permission to move to Islamabad. She was surprised at their surprise. How could anyone take such a big step without their parents' approval? If they had not approved, she told them she would have been unhappy, but would have looked for other options in the same city. She was lucky that they allowed her to make the move.

She told the Committee how Tarik had called her to his office and told her to phone some woman she did not know. Then he said nasty things to her and told her to repeat them to that woman. She described how exposed she felt. She did not even understand everything he was saying, but she knew it was some kind of sexual talk. No one had ever talked to her like that before. All her siblings were married, but they never ever mentioned anything about physical relations. Then, suddenly, she was confronted with a very senior official, a man whose position demanded respect, talking to her about sex, adulterous relationships, marks on a woman's body and some woman sleeping with other men. She cried her heart out. She wanted to tell them everything and did not care if her grammar was correct or not. She did not care if Tarik was sitting right in front of her. She did not care if Marco was asking her about something else or not. She

had to tell the Committee what happened and how deeply it had affected her. Her eyes were swollen red. Suddenly, she had felt a tap on her shoulder. Marco was trying to ask her something, but she could neither see nor hear him.

Sadia explained to the Committee that she was so tense that she had to reach out to someone. Bedari had a counseling programme located in many places where women congregate. One of those places was in the women's hostel where Sadia lived. Tarik had argued in one of his statements that her psychologist and I were both from Bedari so we had colluded on her story. She clarified that, at the time, she could not even dream of reporting Tarik's behavior, but had contacted the psychologist only to help herself, not as a strategy to create a witness.

Rachel asked whether she felt relieved. She smiled and gradually her expression relaxed. Her eyes were still red from crying during her testimony. We had bought some food and drinks for her, but she did not touch a thing. I told her she would need energy for her cross-examination. She lowered her head and sat down. Tears poured from her eyes. She said she was glad it was over. I quickly opened a can of juice and passed it to her, "You need this Sadia. Increasing your sugar level will help. You have to be brave." She took a sip and put the can down.

"I feel ok," she said. "In the beginning I was very disturbed because of what he said to you. Then I told myself, 'Let him churn out whatever he wants. At least I should tell my complete truth.' I did say what I wanted to say. I didn't feel that I was pushed or pressured to speak fast or to wrap up quickly. And, yes, you were right, I am not afraid of him anymore. He was sitting right in front of me and it didn't matter."

"Hooray!" I yelled. We all laughed. Marco came in and said Sadia should prepare to go back for her cross-examination. She got up, straightened her clothes and said she was ready. Both Rachel and I hugged her and gave her all the strength we could. Now it was her turn for Tarik's cross-examination.

I was split between going to my hotel room to call Paul or staying at the office. I knew I was no longer needed, but could not leave the room. On the other hand, not talking to Paul was making my experience incomplete. What Tarik had said to me hours earlier was affecting me. I felt it in my stomach. I had been on a confident high from my session and it was beginning to wear off. I became sad. I asked around about making an international call from somewhere and paying for it, but had no success.

At about six o'clock Rachel began getting worried about her turn. "Sadia's cross-examination is so long. Do you think they'll call me today? It's so difficult to sit and wait."

"Yes, I can imagine. This is your second day of waiting." I tried to reassure her. "I'm sure they'll at least hear your testimony today. Yesterday, they said they had to close at 5:30 in the evening. Today, I didn't hear them give a closing time." We wondered what Tarik could ask that was taking so long.

Soon, Sadia and Marco came in. Sadia looked radiant. She obviously had done very well on the cross-examination, even though it had lasted for three hours. She said Tarik had nothing intelligent to say, but went into great detail and wasted a lot of time. Rachel and I were thrilled that she had done well. Marco was also smiling, giving us the 'thumbs up' signal. We sat in a corner of the room and Sadia started sharing the details with us.

"He demanded to know why I had not reported my complaint about him earlier and I answered, 'I didn't think of reporting it at all since you were so senior, but when it started

happening more and more I got worried.” Her eyes were shining and she had the look of someone who had proven herself. She said she was not afraid to face Tarik, not afraid to look in his eyes and not afraid to answer his questions.

She continued, “He went on and on about Bedari and the psychologist. He asked the Committee for permission to cross-examine the psychologist. One of the Committee Members asked him firmly why this was necessary. He couldn’t clearly answer, but the Chair said they would see if it was possible.”

“What?” I spluttered. “Tarik wants to cross-examine her! What if Marco wanted to cross-examine all the people who wrote false statements for Tarik? If they are willing to talk to anyone else we would have wanted them to cross-examine the other eight of us.”

Marco came back in. Seeing us talking to Sadia he said, “She was great. At one point Tarik was arguing about some date and she said, with a lot of authority, ‘Dates are not important. What I experienced is important!’ Right on, Sadia!” He laughed as he walked out again after picking up his diskette.

Sadia suddenly exclaimed, “At one point I really got him!” Both Rachel and I looked at her with our eyes wide open. She smiled proudly and continued, “He said, ‘In your statement you say that you stopped me three times.’ At first, I did not understand what he meant, but then I thought about it. You know when someone asks a question I have to think about the question, then I think about the answer and then I speak. So, I thought about it and then I said, ‘The first time was when you called me to your office and told me to make that call, but I DIDN’T.’” She raised one finger with a lot of power. “Then I added, ‘The second time was when you asked me for company and I said, NO.’ ” Her second finger shot up. “And then I almost yelled at him, ‘The third time was in front of the elevator when you asked for my company I asked, WHY DON’T YOU ASK YOUR DAUGHTER FOR COMPANY?’ I added, ‘That was three!’ ”

I hugged her. What a nice perspective. Not accepting his invitation and verbally refusing was a very valid way of signaling her disapproval. “Good, Sadia, good.” said Rachel.

Natalie and Marco came in, “Let’s go for a quick bite before they take Rachel in.”

I asked, “Will there be a discussion while we eat? I want to go to my hotel room for a while to make a call. Perhaps I could meet you there in a bit.”

Marco said that it was important for me to be there, as they would be discussing the last session. I could imagine Paul getting ready and leaving for his office. I knew it would be difficult for me to reach him at work later. I was dying to talk to him, but I told myself that during this fight I had always been responsible and diligent and should not leave anything hanging at this last stage. If Marco said it was important for me to be there, that was enough.

Marco told Sadia to get the psychologist's phone number. Sadia looked at me and whispered that she did not have the number with her. I said, “Don’t worry. We’ll call Pakistan and get it somehow.”

While we were sitting at the restaurant, Natalie looked at me and said, “Your session was very good. You spoke with a lot of credibility. The evidence that Marco presented was also excellent. But I wish this affair thing would somehow get out of the way.” I asked what she meant, so she continued, “There seems to be some doubt about it. How could you keep talking to him on

the phone for so long?” She was referring to the calls Tarik made. “Couldn't you have put the phone down?”

“I did!” I said loudly. “I put the phone down many times. Didn't you see the record? Out of 144 calls he made, 56 are one-minute calls, seventy percent are less than three minutes and almost ninety percent are less than ten minutes. There were very few times when he got away with talking for a long time and that was when he was doing a victim play...crying that he had been shattered. If I could have dealt with him on my own by simply putting the phone down, I wouldn't have had to lodge a complaint about him. You've seen how he evades reality. It's not that easy to get someone like that off your back. You cannot make me responsible for the calls he made to my phone. I'm the one complaining about that. Remember, I'm the victim!”

She saw that I was getting angry, but I suppose she was trying to give me friendly advice. She continued, “Is there any way you could prove you didn't have an affair by revealing you have a mark on your body?”

“Why should I have to prove or disprove it? I only have to bring evidence for what I said. I said his behavior was hostile and intimidating. I am responsible for evidence supporting my claim. He's the one who countered it by saying that it was a break-up in a romantic relationship. Fine! Let him prove the relationship and the break-up. He hasn't presented any solid evidence for either. Even his generic description of my bedroom was wrong. If he cannot convince the Committee, his argument should be thrown out of the window!”

She was surprised at my outraged response. She made a face, shrugged her shoulders and said, “It's your case, but proving his allegations wrong would be helpful.” Marco did not participate in this discussion. The others listened with concern about my growing anger.

Her response made me angrier. I wanted to throw my food in her face, but I restrained myself. I said, “I think I've given enough. I have letters written by Paul in 1996 when Tarik says he had a relationship with me. He says I was very angry with him in 1997 and would not even talk to him. Then why would he bring his daughter for me to hire as an intern in the Gender Unit? If he had been my boyfriend, why in the world would I lodge this complaint against him two months before my wedding? When I had a long-term relationship, which did culminate in a marriage, why would I ask him to marry me, as he claimed? I have given all these solid arguments in my statements. He changes the dates of the relationship every time he speaks. Isn't that enough to prove he's lying?”

I took a long breath and said, “Sorry, Natalie. I'm under a lot of pressure, but I strongly feel your attitude is unfair. I know that the burden of proof for my complaint is on me, but I am not willing to take on the burden of disproving his bogus claims.” I wanted to back off, but deep down I was furious with her. I thought that if the UN Legal Section had this attitude, I could not expect much better from ordinary people. They thought I had to disprove everything Tarik said. All he had to do was to churn out a new story and these people looked at me to prove it wrong.

I swallowed my resentment and pretended to eat my food. I kept quiet. I was angry because I could not call Paul, I was angry at Tarik for hitting me below the belt once again in such a vulgar manner and I was angry at people like Natalie who thought they were so progressive, but could not see their own socialized biases and conservative thinking. Rachel and Sadia clearly sensed my anger. They looked at each other, not knowing how to support me. Evidently, Tarik's cross-examination had started eating me up from the inside.

The group kept discussing the past session and predicting the dynamics of the next one. At one point, when they talked about my session, I intervened. "I think that the first excuse a man uses against a sexual harassment complaint is that the woman had an affair or sexual relations with him." Marco agreed that it is a common response. I continued, "The man uses this because of the scandalous aspect. People want to believe it. It makes the case juicy and fun to talk about." Marco looked at me, trying to understand my point.

I tried to explain. "What I mean is that not only do the accused men want to create a distraction, but I think other people want to believe these stories without any evidence. If it is only a case of 'she says, he says' and nothing more, her story is boring and his story is juicy. Even in cases like mine where I have evidence of harassment and he has nothing to back up his tale of the affair, people still want to believe him because their mind says, 'SHE MUST HAVE DONE SOMETHING!' His story reinforces all the stereotyped images: 'It's my fault he harassed me.' 'Why didn't I stop him earlier?' 'Why didn't I report it earlier?'"

I left my food and pushed myself back in my chair, "What do you think is happening now? At least I reported him. Why don't people say, 'If what she is saying is correct, then his behavior was inappropriate?' People just reinforce their own biases and prejudices. That's why they want to believe there must have been an affair."

Marco said, "I think you're right, people want to believe there was something else going on."

I was taken aback by his confirmation. I was not sure if he said it just to calm me down or if he meant it. In any case, I was noticeably upset about the persistence of this affair business hanging over my case. I was also trying to tell Natalie indirectly that she was feeding her own biases. Rachel and Sadia were quiet, finding the refuge in their food. I had been such a support for the group and now they were wondering how to support me. On the way back, they both put their hands on my shoulders. We let Marco and Natalie walk a bit ahead of us.

Rachel said, "Natalie was only trying to help. She doesn't think like this. She was saying that it would be good if others...."

I interrupted her. "No, she's still not sure. She still believes there has to be something more," I whispered to them. "Just like Loriot's attitude always showed that he believed we were all having affairs with Tarik. These people are biased."

Sadia pleaded, "Please don't be angry."

I responded abruptly, "I've taken so much from people in general during this case, it pisses me off that I get the same attitude from the Legal Section in UNDP."

When we got back to our sanctuary, Rachel prepared for her turn. We gave her hugs and wished her the best. I held her hand and said, "Go get him!" On that day, I got a taste of waiting. I was completely stressed out. Looking at my watch every five minutes definitely did not help me relax. Only when I became absorbed in the maze of thoughts could I spend some time not worrying about when it would be over.

During her testimony, not only did Marco ask Rachel to explain why she had reported against Tarik, but also the Committee members were very curious to learn her point of view on many other aspects of the case. Sadia and I were both from the Gender Unit and Tarik had attacked Sadia for being under my influence. In view of that, the Committee wanted to take

advantage of the opportunity to question someone who was not in the Gender Unit and not previously connected with me at all. They asked her details about how we came together and how we decided to file a joint complaint.

They also asked her about Robert's connection with Tarik. According to what she told us, I sensed that she had been truthful, but at the same time probably protected Robert a little. When asked whether Robert trusted Tarik a lot, she had responded, "What Resident Representative wouldn't? He cannot work without trusting his Deputies." When she told me this after her testimony, I just smiled and didn't say anything.

Exploring the Quetta trip, one of the Committee Members asked whether she felt uncomfortable requesting Tarik for this favor. Rachel answered quickly, "Not at all. It meant a lot to my father. Family is family you know. If I had to do it again, I would."

Rachel and Marco did a wonderful job of discrediting Tarik's charts on how much he had helped her with the trip. She made her points clearly and threw his claims of a 'special relationship' out of the window.

Rachel also succeeded at convincing the Committee why she could not tell Robert about her problems with Tarik. The work that Marco had done with her proved very useful. She explained how complicated the experience was for her. She said that over time she had created a way of dealing with Tarik that involved a mix of assertiveness and deference, in order to maintain a cordial, working relationship with him, despite the intimidating situation. This enabled her to continue her work without compromise. However, she explained that her interaction with Tarik drained a substantial amount of her energy and she compared her situation to someone walking on thin ice. She did not know when her next encounter with him would break the tenuous line of professional conduct she was struggling to maintain.

The Chairperson announced a short break before Rachel's cross-examination. Rachel was very relaxed when she came to our room. She quickly told us what happened. We were happy to see Rachel relaxed. She also felt the Committee created a comfortable and supportive environment in the Hearing Room and she had no problems with Tarik's presence. We sent her back for cross-examination with all our positive energies and those of the rest of our group. We knew they were there for us. She described her cross-examination to me later. To start the process, Tarik cleared his throat and shuffled his papers to emphasize his preparation. Unfortunately, he was about to learn that the Rachel he had once intimidated was now a much stronger woman. Rachel had grown up through the pains and frustrations of the last year and a half. She was not scared of him anymore and not affected by his intimidation. She no longer had to compromise with him to keep her working relationship going. Rachel could now see through his antics and stood up for herself. She had told the Committee about things that thousands of women experience, but lack the courage to report.

Rachel sat in the Hearing Room as Tarik threw question after question at her. She responded with confidence, never losing her grace and poise, but his over-confidence was his undoing on his next move. Suddenly, he asked a question that briefly threw her off. He was still trying to prove that she was a close and intimate friend. He said that only close friends shared personal information. He pursued the point, saying that, as a very close friend, he knew a secret about her body that hardly anyone else in Islamabad knew. Rachel felt a wave of panic, wondering

what in the world it could be. Suddenly, she had a flash and said, "I hope you're not referring to the fact that I told you I am blind in one eye."

Everyone in the room looked at him. Tarik's face turned yellow as she stole his punch line. He quickly recovered and asked snidely, "And why might you tell me that?" She snapped back, "Because you were in charge of Operations and I was applying for a driver's license." The whole Committee smiled and Tarik, who was counting on this information as his secret weapon, suddenly looked like a run-down old man. He had not held his ground on a single point during all three cross-examinations.

The session concluded at about nine. We gathered in our sanctuary and Marco asked Natalie to help him with the closing paperwork. We collected our papers and moved to Natalie's office where Marco could use her computer to write the closing. On the way, Natalie again said to me, "If you could just disprove Tarik's claim of having an affair with you, this tiny shadow of doubt would vanish from your case."

Sadia pulled my arm and dragged me to one side. "Fouzia, you're angry at what Natalie said and it's showing. Please! She's trying to help us. She is not aware of the bias in her argument, but all through this process we've dealt with people who have been overtly biased. What's new for us? You always told us we have to educate people at every level and deal with them through this case itself. You always said we should be patient and persistent, so why are you reacting like this?"

I smiled, winked at her and said, "Okay, I'll back off." I added, "Actually, I might try to take her offer of help."

I said to Natalie, "I don't like this business of body marks. First, I don't have any spider tattoos or birthmarks and I feel humiliated even thinking about such things. How about asking him the color of my bathroom tile? He claims to have come to my bedroom and used my bathroom. Besides, the description that he gave of my room was wrong. How about asking him to draw the plan of my bedroom?"

Marco interrupted me as he typed, "I didn't pursue that because descriptions of rooms don't mean anything. People can change the look of a room or the other party can claim that they changed it later."

I suggested asking Tarik something personal about my family, something he would know if we had an affair, but Marco did not want to pursue this line. He said, "I will not take a chance on anything unless I am one hundred percent sure that Tarik does not know the information. He could have learned things about your family. I don't want to take any chances."

I continued trying to give ideas to Marco and Natalie. I wanted to use Natalie's suggestions positively rather than getting irritated at her. As Sadia said, she was only trying to help.

Marco and Natalie finished working. We got our folders together to go back to our hotel. We dragged our files, our bags and our feet out of the building and caught a taxi. We asked the driver, who seemed to be Bangladeshi, to wait at our hotel. We quickly unloaded our baggage and asked him to take us to any nearby pizza place.

Sadia's appetite had not come back. Rachel and I ordered some food and found a table. We were not hungry, but needed to be together. We talked for a long time. Laughing and crying, we talked about the rest of our group, who stayed with us like a shadow. We patted ourselves on the back and we prayed for Marco and the Committee members. We prayed for them and their

families, for their good health and good life. They had shown us the ultimate standard of the UN. Regardless of the conclusion, we felt they had heard us in a safe and supportive environment, without any bias.

Once in our hotel we cheered up by talking to friends and families. At last, I was able to talk to Paul. I told him everything except the stories Tarik had created about me in Peshawar. I did not have the courage to repeat those words. At the time, I felt I could never tell that to anyone. Later, I only told Paul about it after I returned from New York.

We called Laila and Sadia's other friends. We reported our progress and at the same time tried to trace the psychologist's home phone number. Sadia had her office number, but it was Saturday morning in Pakistan and most offices in Islamabad were closed. We finally got her home number, but Sadia felt very hesitant to call her residence. She said she first contacted this psychologist to be a witness for the Investigation Panel, then to give a statement and now she would be calling her at home to be a witness again. I calmed her down and said I was sure she would understand.

Rachel left for her room and Sadia and I lay down. We slept in peace, although we did not know what was coming our way the next day.

58. THE MOMENT OF TRUTH - DAY SEVEN

Sadia and I again woke up early and she got ready quickly. She tried to call the psychologist's home, but somehow could not connect.

Before Sadia left Pakistan, Rana had given her the contact of a friend in New York who could take us around sightseeing. She had even sent a gift to pass on to him. We had hoped to have Saturday free, but not knowing when the hearing would end, Sadia had asked him to come by and at least pick up his gift early in the morning. We were both ready when he called from the reception. Sadia ran down with the gift and was surprised to learn that she knew him from her hometown, Gujranwala. When he heard that Sadia had yet not seen anything in New York City, he insisted on taking her for a ride.

Sadia came up and told me about the invitation, enticed by the opportunity. I checked with Rachel, but she was not up yet. I decided to go with Sadia, thinking I could take some photos of her in front of tourist sites, because she would likely never come to New York again. We left a note for Rachel that we would meet her at our UNDP office.

We did a quick spin and saw the World Trade Towers, the Statue of Liberty from across the water, Wall Street and the Brooklyn Bridge before returning to the UNDP building. Although it was only forty minutes, I was happy and took some good shots of her. The UN building was closed, as it was Saturday and even the security guard was not there. We had to wait for someone coming to work on a weekend to let us in.

The Committee had decided to do a session of telephone testimony that morning. We were hoping to finish by noon so we could have a good debriefing session with Marco before Rachel and Sadia could catch their flight home, but our plans did not turn out as we had anticipated. Today was the day for the UNDP Pakistan local management to testify. The

Committee had contacted Harumi and Robert and informed them that they would receive calls for their testimony around 10 o'clock on Saturday evening. Marco had not discussed his strategy with us. He always gave us minimal information, only what he felt was relevant to our role in the process.

I was very curious to learn what kind of a façade our management in Pakistan would go for. I thought, at some point in my life, I might be able to forgive Tarik for what he had done, but I doubted if I could ever forgive Robert or Harumi for their roles. These thoughts made me quite tense. Rachel was sitting by the window in our sanctuary, while Sadia and I sat by the door. Rachel had wanted to meet up with some other people who had attended that initial UN training together and I had wanted to say hello to colleagues in the Gender Unit of UNDP NY. We decided to stay put in case Marco needed anything. We were so anxious we could not bear to leave our nest. We just sat there for the next three hours.

We were trying to predict whether Robert and Harumi would tell the truth or would continue to lie and protect Tarik when, suddenly, Marco rushed in. All three of us jumped up from our chairs, looking at him with wide-open eyes for any instructions or news. He hurriedly asked for the psychologist's number.

Sadia gave it to him hesitantly and said, "I couldn't reach her last night or this morning so whoever calls should explain the circumstances to her, please." As Marco ran out of the room, she hurried after him and said, "And please, please let a woman make the connection. This is her home phone and I don't want her parents to be concerned." Marco nodded and told her not to worry. Later, he told us that the Chairperson herself dialed the number and asked for her.

We were left in the room wondering what was going on. What did Robert say? What did Harumi say? "God, this suspense is killing me," I said loudly. Rachel threw her hands up and demanded, "When will this be over!" Sadia put her head down on the table groaning, "Can't wait."

This was Nabila's day off so she came over to be with us and we all waited together. After a while, we decided that the hearing was going on too long and that it might continue into the afternoon. We wanted to prepare to say thank you to dear Marco. We had planned a dinner. Paul had told me about Lidia's Restaurant, an upscale Italian place. We wanted to invite him and his wife to dinner. Paul had even sent me a street map from the Internet so I would not have any problem taking everyone there. However, the extension of the hearings had left us precious little time to celebrate its conclusion and to say a formal thanks to Marco. Sadia and Nabila volunteered to go to our hotel to get some flowers and the modest Pakistani gifts we had brought for Marco and his wife. Rachel and I made a thank you card for Marco using some stationary we had.

Later we learned that Robert had behaved himself in the interview. He clearly told the Committee that Tarik's opinion carried weight on hiring and other significant matters. When asked about the Peshawar trip that was so important to Tarik, he said he did not remember anything. Robert's testimony had shown the Committee how important Tarik was to him. Robert admitted that Tarik could influence his decisions.

Harumi was very slippery and difficult to pin down. The Committee immediately realized that he was not giving them straight answers. At last, he admitted that I had talked to him about some problems I was having with Tarik.

Marco focused on my case in the closing remarks. He put all the evidence on the projector one after the other: the data analysis of my phone calls, Tarik's contradictory statements, contradictions in his witnesses' statements and so on. Then Marco presented a chart of calls that Tarik made in 1996. It looked like a calendar with his calls marked as dots on the dates they were made. He had made two calls on June 21st and then called again in October. Marco circled the 3rd of June and asked, "Does this date ring a bell?"

Tarik thought hard and answered, "No".

Marco put up a call chart for 1997. There was a mark for a call in February and another in July. Again he circled June 3 and asked, "Do you remember this date?"

Again, Tarik thought a lot before replying, "No".

Marco put up the calendars for 1995, 1996 and 1997, pointing repeatedly to that date, but Tarik still had no answer.

Finally, Marco announced, "This, Panel members, is Dr. Saeed's birth date, which we celebrated two days ago in a Mexican restaurant."

The Committee members finally realized that Tarik's claim of a personal friendship and a romantic relationship with me was all a hoax. Marco continued, briskly, "Anniversaries and birthdays are dates that people remember in intimate relationships." Someone on the Committee stopped him and said, "Point taken." The spell had been broken.

By the end of Marco's closing remarks, Tarik knew his game was over. He sat through Marco's closing comments thinking of what to do next. Then he did what he had done to all of us—put on his melodramatic act of a man falling apart. After Marco finished with him, Tarik stood. Then he screamed and fell on the floor, trembling and begging for mercy. He held his left side as if he were having a heart attack. He begged the Committee that his life was at stake. They should try to understand that his whole life would be ruined.

Marco could not believe that Tarik was going to such an extent. In a loud crisp voice, he said, "Get an ambulance!" Hearing that, Tarik pretended to recover quickly and said he did not need one. He did not want a doctor to tell people nothing was wrong with him. The Committee called an ambulance in any case, but Tarik's recovery speeded up and by the time the ambulance arrived, it was not needed.

The Chair asked Tarik if he felt well enough to carry on with his closing. To avoid a medical checkup, he said he would go ahead. His statement carried absolutely no weight.

We were in the copying room putting away files we were to take back with us when Marco ran in, his face red and seemingly panicked. "Where is Sadia? I want all three of you together...right NOW." I asked what was going on, but he dashed out without saying much.

Marco rushed in again. "I want all three of you down in that room right now!" He left and I went to look for Sadia. I dashed up 45th Street towards our hotel and found Nabila and Sadia carrying flowers and the gifts, talking and laughing, two blocks from the office. I hustled Sadia back to the building and we were both exhausted by the time we reached the floor of the Hearing room.

As we went towards the Hearing room, we saw a cleaner who was working in the hall. He asked if we were part of the ruckus. When he saw our blank faces, he told us there had been an

emergency and an ambulance had come. He said some man had a heart problem. I asked if he was a Pakistani, but he had not seen him, just heard that he was a visitor. We looked at each other in shock, but with knowing smiles. We knew immediately he was trying to outsmart them.

We still had no idea what was going on. When we caught up with him, Marco only whispered that the Chairperson wanted to say something to us and he wanted all of us to be there with him. When we entered the room, the Hearing was still going on. All the chairs around the table were taken so we sat with Marco on the row of sofas by one wall. The Hearing was ending and the Chairperson was preparing to make her final comments. I raised my eyes and looked at Tarik. He looked run down.

After hearing the closing from both sides, the Chairperson was ready to make her remarks. That was when Marco wanted all of us in the room. He wanted the Committee to remember us, and others like us, whose lives had been badly affected by this man. He realized that Tarik had always gotten away with his act of crying and pleading that his life had been shattered. We had told Marco enough about his acts for him to recognize the tactic immediately. Tarik was probably trying to play on the sympathies of the women on the Committee.

Tarik's lawyer had already left, saying he had a flight to catch. As the three of us sat next to Marco waiting for the Chairperson's comment, I asked whether they would announce their decision. He shook his head indicating a 'no' and reminded me that they had to write a report and give their decision in that. I wished they were announcing the decision. I badly wanted this to end.

In her closing remarks, the Chairperson thanked both sides for having the courage to report and defend the allegations. She noted that the Committee had decided not to include Ghazala's video testimony or Sumaira's audio tape as a part of the evidence. Moving to the conclusion of the inquiry, she said, "Let me clarify that we are only a Committee designated by the UN to deal with job-related issues. What happened here is all about EMPLOYMENT and the conditions related to employment. We are not here to make decisions about people's lives. Lives should go on because we believe lives are more than employment." She made no comments about the case or its merits.

In our hearts, we all knew that we had won, but still had to wait for the official word. We appreciated and trusted the Disciplinary Committee, but we were not sure about the rest of the process. Some doubt remained in our minds; doubt not about the Committee's decision, but about Tarik's devious ways of working and his powerful network that could influence the decision.

We came out of the Hearing Room and went straight up to our sanctuary. We felt that we had won the case. Marco was also very happy. "I'm certain the Committee has seen through all his lies," he said. Rachel, Sadia, Nabila and I hugged each other for a long time, and then hugged again for all the others who were not with us. We experienced a strange euphoria with highs and lows mixed together. That ugly room looked very beautiful to us and we loved being there, together.

I wanted to sit for a while, but we did not have time. We started picking up our last documents, while Marco and Natalie got their papers together. We decided to go out for our last dinner. It was after five and Sadia and Rachel had to leave for the airport by seven. We asked Marco and Natalie to choose a nearby restaurant.

At dinner, Marco relaxed for the first time. We felt that Natalie finally believed us and she was very happy for Marco. Marco thanked her formally for being helpful and supportive. I looked

at Sadia and we exchanged smiles. I was glad she was happy for us. She said that the slight shadow of doubt in my case was certainly gone with this last powerful point about my birth date. I smiled and kept quiet.

Marco and Natalie ordered wine. This was the first time we saw him laugh and talk in a loud voice. He was proposing toasts in high spirits. I asked when he thought the formal decision would be out. He replied, "They have a time limit of about three months to document their assessment and recommendations. After that the relevant authorities will make the decision." He turned to Natalie and thanked her again while the three of us looked at each other in dismay-three months and after that God knows how long before a final decision! I quickly urged them to just celebrate what we had achieved so far. We could worry about the future tomorrow.

I asked Marco why he thought of using my birth date, since he had said before that he could not take chances with such questions. He said he used it because it had a back up. If Tarik had recognized the date, he would have asked him why in all those years he never called to wish me "Happy Birthday". Marco's intelligence and competence were outstanding.

We gave Marco the flowers and the card we had made for him. It expressed our gratitude. I wished his wife could have joined us, but with the way the Hearing schedule kept changing, we had not been able to make any firm plans.

With a heavy heart, I said to Marco, "Although we have all suffered, I was the one who took most of the flak after we reported the case. Throughout this process both Tarik and Robert focused on me. They attacked me through rumours about my character, demeaned my professional abilities, criticized my temperament and scandalized anything they could find from my past. They also used direct punitive actions, like the harassing, parallel investigations in the office, the destruction of the Gender Programme and efforts to turn my friends into enemies. They hit me so much during these past two years that I hurt everywhere. I feel I have been beaten to a pulp." My voice trembled.

Marco looked at me very seriously and said, "I don't agree with you. What I see in front of me now is a courageous woman with great integrity."

59. GOOD, BAD AND UGLY

Sadia and Rachel had a flight to catch so they left our dinner early to get ready. After about half an hour, Nabila and I also said good-bye to Marco and Natalie. We wanted to help Sadia and Rachel and to bid them a proper good bye. This time I ended the dinner in the Pakistani way by taking care of the bill for everyone. Although Marco insisted that I should not, but in my South Asian way, my insistence proved stronger. We did not have enough words to thank Marco, but we tried our best to tell him how much we appreciated his commitment to justice and to the principles of the UN.

Nabila and I reached the hotel to find Sadia in an intense argument with the hotel staff. They had charged our room for every time she attempted to call Pakistan and the phone bill was over three hundred dollars. She was already shocked at how expensive everything had been and seeing a bill of that amount in her name had brought tears to her eyes. I stepped in and argued with the manager. They told me that the system was computerized and charged the room whether

or not the call connected. After I had put up a fight for her, they agreed to cut half off the phone bill. In all this confusion, we could not even say goodbye properly. We just hugged each other again while running out with the bags and again after they were inside the taxi.

After they left, Nabila and I took a while sorting through the papers. I prepared some more envelopes for her to mail back to us. We finished at about nine-thirty and finally said goodbye.

Paul had made me promise not to stay alone after everyone had gone. He told me to get reservations for a Broadway show. He had insisted on this, but the way things went during the day I did not even think about arranging anything. At that late hour, I walked up to Times Square and realized it was too late to get into any show. Although I was not the least bit hungry, I decided to go to a restaurant instead. I wanted to reflect and complete the hearing for myself. I ordered some food and closed my eyes as I relaxed in my booth.

I was still not sure whether Tarik would be dismissed from the UN. The Committee had to prepare a report with their recommendations that would then go to the Administrator for his decision. I wished it were like a jury trial, with a decision of guilty or not guilty. Even if he does get dismissed, what happens to all those who had supported his actions? What happens next? Everybody returns to their lives and that's it? How could I go on with my life like that? I had not completed my job yet. I had not held each person who was a party to this wrongdoing accountable. Robert's face appeared before me, pointing his finger at me declaring, "I consider you the leader of the gang."

My mind rolled out a whole list of things that Robert had done to retaliate overtly against the others and me. Sadia had whispered in my ear before she left that she had also been told to look for another job. She said they were finishing off the Gender Unit. He had been quoted saying, "The Gender Unit is rotten to its core and I will clean it out before I go." No, it was very clear to me that this was a real issue and not just anger I was carrying because of my bruised ego.

What could I do about it? I found myself again thinking about my own integrity and human rights. I was considering how to report a management that had intimidated us in a systematic manner over the past eighteen months. Robert England, Harumi Sakaguchi, Anne Keeling and Richard Dictus were partners in Tarik's misconduct and actually offenders against the UNDP policies. Managers like them are the worst kind; they not only prevented the organization from being cleaned up, but also hindered the process of justice and actively protected the accused by intimidating the victims. How could I let them go? I gave myself until the end of that night to decide. Would I conclude the story right here and return home leaving all of it behind or would I go after the other culprits?

My food arrived, a big hamburger and a huge plate of French fries. The waitress put the food on my table, smiled at me and left. My head swirled with heavy thoughts. I saw flashes of people's faces, embarrassing situations, hurtful comments, joys with my group, tears, anger...I shut my eyes hard and thought, "I have to move forward. What can I say to those colleagues who hurt us by showing their loyalty to the boss or who did nothing at all? What do I need to do about them to make my own process complete?"

I thought of some good colleagues who were friendly and even respected me, but who said nothing about this case. I do not know if they kept their silence on the pretext of confidentiality or just to avoid aggravating the boss. Even when the whole country found out through the newspapers, they never asked how I was doing. They did not realize how hurtful it could be to say

nothing and pretend that everything was normal. Most people acted like that. The silence was so thick in our office that it was difficult to breathe. Like a family with a dark secret, the UNDP office continued to function, pretending everything was all right, hoping that if everybody could continue to avoid talking about it, they would not have to deal with it. I wanted to tell them they were cowards who had put the educated people in our country to shame.

Then there were colleagues who looked for opportunities to advance and not concern themselves with issues of principle. Their range of vision only showed them their own career path and not the objectives of the organization they worked for, the goals of the field they were in or the effect their behavior had on others. I wanted to tell them that, in the end, they would lose. Making collective positive changes for everyone is what eventually helps individuals. Feeling safe as long as something is happening to others is not a very noble perspective. I need to tell them they cannot hide. The way forward is to deal with problems collectively.

I wanted to confront the Staff Association of the UNDP Pakistan and tell them that they should be ashamed to call themselves workers' representatives. They had no concern for the staff. What did they do when eleven women out of a total of sixteen were humiliated and tormented by the senior management for a year and a half? The president of federation of staff associations of the UN in Pakistan wrote letters on Tarik's behalf! I wanted to say to them, "Shame on you!" Everyone in the UNDP and other agencies knew how badly the management was treating us. No one spoke up in our defense.

Many people from the social movement were helpful, but two, well-known, staunch feminists, from Islamabad, sent separate letters to undermine our case. To them and others like them, I wanted to say that the test of your principled thinking is in your actions and not the fuss you make in seminars...or the tears you shed on the TV. You never tire of giving lectures on accountability and equality, but you never hesitated for a second to play foul, casting all your principles aside to defend your friends, whether right or wrong.

All the comments my "progressive" friends made, before knowing I was a part of the case, came to my mind:

Women themselves encourage men and then they complain!

Why were they going out with him?

Why are they washing their dirty linen in public?

Look at the bad name they got. No one will dare to report such things again.

Discussing such matters in public should be beneath their dignity!

I always noticed that people who made such comments rarely knew any details about the case, but simply let their assumptions fill in all the gaps. They always "knew" the fault lay with the women.

My food had gotten cold. I was not hungry, but I took a big bite of my burger in any case and a long sip of Coke. I felt some energy coming back to me. I took another long sip and made myself more comfortable.

I stopped focusing on those who did not support us because there were many other people who did. Our families were our biggest support. For those of us who were married, our husbands had stood by us through it all. I decided to give big golden stars to those who helped us. I made a big star with French fries and put it in front of me on the table. That was for our families. I made a

separate one for Paul right next to it. I made another big star for Marco Carmignani, the man of the hour.

I started a second row with more stars. I put one for a senior UNICEF colleague, Marie-Pierre Poirier, who served as my sounding board and gave feedback on our statements. Even when she was on vacation, I could write to her, day or night.

I made a star for some other friends in New York who helped us get information on our case. I made a group of little stars for the brave UNDP colleagues who had helped us out behind the scenes. These were people with small jobs and big risks to face. I was having fun thanking all these good people in my heart.

I made another big star for the Disciplinary Committee. Regardless of the final decision, I felt they were honestly interested in finding the truth. That is how the UN senior people should be. With a big smile on my face, I made a star for the people who wrote the sexual harassment policy. I consider them people with vision. Without that policy, we could not have gone far. Then I turned to the side of my table that was still empty and made another star for Bruce Franks. I had no idea who he was. I saw his name just once: on the memo of February 5, 1999, the memo that stated the charges against Tarik. I wanted to thank him for keeping this a case of eleven women and not reducing it to four. I also wanted to thank the person who had extracted the “admissions” from Tarik's statements and the material we presented and prepared them for the Disciplinary Committee. I do not know who this person was, but he did a damn honest job.

I made another group of stars for my friends who remained supportive and helped us throughout. I took one away for the few civil society leaders who tried to undermine our cause. I put that star back in for the psychologist who remained honest to her work and testified on Sadia's behalf. I thanked her with love. Then there was Mohsin Saeed, the journalist who wrote so much about our case that he became a hero for all who believed in truth and justice. I made a star for him.

I was immersed in this game when the waitress came and saw my artwork on the table. Her eyebrows shot up and her eyes widened, but she asked, professionally, if I needed anything else. I smiled and replied, “I'm running out of fries, I'd like another order, please!”

Thinking about all I had gone through, I asked myself, “Where to from here?” I took a deep breath and asked myself again. Paul would love it if I closed the case and went home to a wonderful life with him. He was getting tired of scheduling our lives around the case and, to be honest, this part of the case was finished.

After searching my soul, I acknowledged that people like Tarik would always be around. Out on the street someone like him would try to brush against me and run away. Tarik, of course, was a more sophisticated harasser. He did not grab women's butts in the market-place. Instead, he pushed them to surrender themselves because of his organizational pressure. Such people are everywhere in the world and organizational controls must be made strong enough to hold them accountable. When the system fails and reporting such an incident becomes difficult and risky, something is wrong. Our group had decided to stand up for ourselves and brought Tarik to task, but this process made me fear that if another case occurred in the UNDP Pakistan, no one would dare to report it. People saw the power of the institutionalized support for the harasser. Our case might look like a success to some, but to others it would be a lesson on why one should not report. In the end, none of us remained with the UNDP.

My heart told me something was wrong with this picture. Yes, our voices were finally heard, but I still felt very incomplete. I was not satisfied. I refused to say, "This is it". I needed to keep going. If I did not let Tarik get away with humiliating us, why should I let Robert get away with it? I had checked with Marco a few days earlier on the possibility of filing a formal complaint against Robert England for his intimidating behavior, but he strongly discouraged me, saying they would never go after him, for the evidence was much more tenuous than in the case of Tarik. I thought pressing formal charges would be difficult because the UN sexual harassment policy did not elaborate on management accountability. This meant that the policy needed to be amended for the management to be held accountable.

I sat in the restaurant for another half-hour, smiling inwardly at those who had contributed to our struggle. With all the pain and satisfaction, I knew that this fight was not finished for me. The insight I gained from fighting for my own rights would not go in vain. The path I had to take would open up by itself and my struggle would not stop. I knew after this stage, my fight would not be to make the thieves stop stealing, but to make the police more efficient. I knew in my heart that the solution lay in creating stronger rules and more effective ways for implementing them.

60. TESTING OUR PATIENCE

From the day the hearing finished, our group started counting the days for the Disciplinary Committee report to come out. We wanted a conclusion in this case. We felt like we were carrying around a dead body and were anxious to bury it so we could move on with our lives. At the same time, the local management of the UNDP Pakistan continued bearing down on the women who remained within the organization. Robert kept Rachel somewhat under his wing, but pursued his clean-up mission of the rest. Meanwhile, his promotion to a higher-grade came through, which surprised us given all that had happened under his nose. The general organizational culture in the UNDP Pakistan became quite tense and even more conservative. Some women did not want to take jobs there because of what they had heard. Others spoke out about the office harassment, but were told to shut up or lose their jobs. Nevertheless, several cases did come up, showing the depth of the rot within the UNDP Pakistan office and its projects. The saga continued.

Laila was the next target. She had been intimidated for months, but had clung on because of her commitment to the case and the Gender Programme. Robert arranged to have strongly negative comments written on her annual progress report. One day, he called her into his office and gave her two options. He said she could resign, in which case the comments on her appraisal would be revised so she could leave with a clean record. If she refused to resign, the comments would be made even harsher and she would be dismissed. He gave her the weekend to think about it. Laila was tired of fighting and felt very frustrated, but she did not give in and refused to resign. She said she was committed to the case and the time was not right for her to leave the Gender Programme because hardly anyone was left to carry the work forward.

Robert made the comments about her more critical and sent her a letter that her capabilities did not match her job description. She thought about filing a case against this discrimination, but simply did not feel she could fight any longer. She felt very bitter about what had happened.

After Robert had successfully expelled Laila, Sadia was the last Pakistani left to face the burden. Over the next several months, she was continuously grilled by her colleagues in the UN tower for all the bad things she had done to the organization. Rachel was kept busily absorbed in the Interagency Unit so she hardly had any contact with Sadia. Also, being a foreigner meant that she was granted immunity from the local mudslinging that went on in Urdu. Sadia was the last witch to be burned.

Within a few months, Sadia was diagnosed with clinical depression. She felt she was living with a stigma and had a very hard time dealing with the social isolation. She told herself that the case was over and decided to create a new space for herself. She avoided any talk of the case. She stopped associating with the group and stopped answering our emails.

Even the Gender Unit's clerk and driver were hassled and pressured to leave, but they somehow managed to lie low and survived until the Unit itself was disbanded. Watching the Gender Programme deteriorate was another torture for Sadia. Programmes that had been praised by the Government were being cancelled. The only two that survived out of the five we had developed were "Women in Media" and "Micro Finance".

Sadia's increasingly frequent medical absences gave the management the excuse they were looking for and they terminated her. She quickly found another job, but avoided any talk of the Gender Programme or the case. She had little to hold on to and tried her best to keep going. The rest of us continued to communicate regularly among ourselves and created the space for Sadia to return when she felt ready.

When other cases of sexual harassment came up, the management viciously closed in on them, making sure that they did not let any case pass beyond the local management. In one project, under the Environment Unit, the project administration officer harassed all the women employees by making demands of a sexual nature as soon as they started work. When they complained, the UNDP silenced them as quickly as possible. Another issue of sexual harassment arose in a UNDP project in the remote province of Balochistan. The manager put together a committee that quickly decided there was nothing to the complaint. The message had been clearly communicated in many ways-senior management was not going to allow another complaint of sexual harassment to cause them any embarrassment.

Then, a gender discrimination report was lodged in a more forceful manner. A woman filed a case against her supervisor and sent a copy to New York. UNDP Pakistan management had to deal with the case and they handled it in an atrocious manner. Robert treated the woman roughly and Harumi called her in and yelled at her, saying that she should take her case back. He insisted that the man she was accusing was a decent person. Rather than putting together an inquiry committee, they intimidated the woman to the extent that she almost went insane. She kept writing to different people and, finally, Headquarters sent a consultant to review the process. After he left, the case was quietly dismissed.

Learning about all these cases, coming within months of our Hearing, I realized that the only lesson the UNDP Islamabad had learned was never to allow a complaint to become a formal charge. They were determined to finish them off before they created problems for the management. They cared nothing about changing the indecent behavior of their staff and managers.

I visited Pakistan once during this time and went to the UNDP office. My ex-colleagues in the building still hesitated to talk to me. It was as though by smiling at me they were betraying Robert. Some talked to me while looking around to see who was watching. Tarik's mafia was very much in place. He still had his office set up at his house and operated his spy network from there. He had given everyone the impression that he would be coming back soon, so no one wanted to risk his or her job.

My life in Manila continued happily, but regardless of what I was doing or where I was, part of my mind was always occupied with the tensions of the case—the wait for a decision, the torture Sadia experienced, the injustice to Laila, the attitude of my old colleagues, the disgusting feeling of what the office environment had become for women and, most of all, the pain I felt as Ann Keeling continued to dismantle the projects we had worked so hard to create.

I continued to be involved with Tasneem in following up her case of unfair termination. I helped her make her case for discriminatory termination, so we stayed in frequent contact by email. She had found a job at the World Bank, as had Nageen. Laila joined an international development organization. Nabila took a position with a UN development agency in New York. Masako was working with a very good development firm in Japan. I was still based in the Philippines with Paul, working as an international consultant as well as finishing my book, *Taboo*. Rensje was in Pakistan with her husband after trips to Peru and Afghanistan. Sheeba had decided to go to England to continue her education. UNDP had lost such talented women from their work-force while other agencies happily benefited.

Time passed, but still no word came about a decision from the Panel. We yearned for closure. The dead body needed to be buried!

61. WOMEN OF INTEGRITY

At the end of August, Paul and I went to the Bahamas for a vacation. We stayed with our friends, Roman, Paul's best man at our wedding, and his wife, Cathy. I had finally passed my swimming test, so this was going to be my first opportunity to go diving together with Paul after receiving my full scuba diving license. Just before we jumped in the water, the dive master said we might see a reef shark in this area. I suddenly looked at Paul, surprised at this casual comment, but I did not think that we would actually see any.

We drifted down to sixty feet under the surface. Soon after we reached the sandy bottom, fifteen grey reef sharks showed up and started swimming around us! It was an unbelievable experience. Paul was a bit worried since I was not an experienced diver, but he was pleased to see me calm and thoroughly enjoying the majestic view. The sharks had an indescribable grace, but their eyes were black and cold. They were all around us and seemed quite fascinated by the bubbles we were releasing.

When we finished our dives we felt very high, but even then, the UN case was never far from my mind. When we reached Roman's house he greeted us with the news I had been waiting for every minute of the last three months. He had seen a one-line news item in the paper about someone in the UNDP who had been relieved of his services on the charge of harassment. I could not believe it. Rather than jumping for joy, I held my emotions in check until we confirmed that it

was about Tarik and the UNDP Pakistan. Although I had been quite sure in my heart about this result, I did not know what challenges we might still face. When Paul told Roman that I swam with fifteen sharks in the ocean, he answered, “Why should that be difficult for her? She faced down those sharks in the UNDP; these ocean sharks are benign in comparison.” We all celebrated the justice system of the UN, which had finally come through.

I had to get to Pakistan. Until I could hug each one of our group, my celebration would not be complete and most of them were still in Pakistan. From the Bahamas, I went directly to Pakistan while Paul returned to Manila. Reaching Islamabad, I immediately contacted whomever I could. The news was out in the city, but the group was not as happy as I had expected. Everyone was very angry with the UNDP for the way they had announced the news. Tasneem told me, resentfully, that both Robert and Tarik knew well before the formal announcement. They each got a copy of the Disciplinary Committee report, but the complainants were left in the dark, as always. UNDP dealt with this final decision exactly as they had dealt with each step of the process: We had to find out about our case from other people. There was a small news item in the back pages of a newspaper.

A journalist told me that the United Nations Information Center, which releases such news, did not include this information in its normal Friday briefing, but sent it out separately in the late hours to keep it as a low-profile story.

I tried to get everyone together on the same evening. Tasneem warned me that Sadia’s condition was quite bad. She was still bruised and had totally disassociated herself from the group and continued to be traumatized by all the gossip and stigma.

Tasneem said she might not even come to our meeting. I promised I would do my best to bring her.

During the day, I faced the first of many “after-shocks”. A legal messenger arrived at our house to deliver a court summons for a case Tarik had filed in a Pakistani court against me, the rest of the group and a few newspaper editors. I could not believe it. I would have expected this kind of attack if we had lost the case, but even after the UN found him guilty of sexual harassment Tarik still kept insisting that we had defamed him and sued us for 60 million Pakistani rupees (about one million US dollars at the time). I did not accept the summons, which read “Tarik vs. Fouzia Saeed and others”. I got frantic calls from the other members. Some refused to accept the summons and some accepted it. We contacted Richard Dictus and he said we should not accept it because a UN case cannot be taken into a regular court. He said he would call New York for further clarification, but he never contacted us again. We called the Legal Section in New York directly and received the same response that UN immunity would be extended, since no national courts can deal with internal UN matters. Despite the initial supportive words from New York, the process of extending immunity stopped somewhere. We were not sure where. Whether it had been blocked in the UNDP Pakistan or in the Foreign Office, the immunity was not activated until three years later. Throughout that time, Richard Dictus remained unresponsive.

We all got together that evening. Sadia was a challenge as she did not want to communicate to anyone. I picked her up myself from her hostel, so she could not slip away at the last minute. We met at a place near Rensje’s house. Those of us in Islamabad were present, but we missed Nabila and Masako. Sadly, instead of celebrating and congratulating each other, everyone was angry. I said I had finally received an email from the Human Resource Section in New York

informing me of the decision. Rachel and Sadia received the same message. After all we had gone through, we only received three letters and, as Rachel noted with annoyance, “Even those, we received six days after they arrived in UNDP.”

Although the charges against Tarik were by eleven women, the UNDP had not written to all of us, either separately or as a group, to inform us of the result. We had all signed the group complaint together and the charges included all eleven complainants. We felt that we all deserved a response from the organization. Many in the group were also upset with Robert, feeling that he should have called us to his office to inform us of the result. Those of us who knew him well smiled at that and said since he had never been interested in the truth, the outcome of the inquiry only made him angrier with us. The court case was also making everyone nervous.

Tired of all the discussion, Sadia said she never wanted to hear a single word about this case again. I put my hand on her shoulder and said, “Sadia, this local office and this society wants to demean us because we spoke out. We should not do that to ourselves. We can say truthfully that we did something great. You were brave and truthful to yourself, braver than any of those criticizing us can imagine. Wasn’t she great, Rachel?”

Rachel clapped her hands and exclaimed, “Yes, she was!” Everyone applauded in appreciation. Sadia blushed and started to smile.

I tried my best to raise the group spirits. I said we all should be proud of ourselves. I told them that I heard Tarik had been immediately separated from the organization with no benefits. A team was dispatched to his house to recover the equipment Robert had kindly given for his use against us. As the team pulled out the phone, fax, photocopier and computer from his home office, he screamed at them, chased them and swore at them like a mad man. That image brought smiles to all our faces.

I also told them that some colleagues had come to me and said they had all grown very tired of Tarik and now understood that we women were braver than they were. They never had the courage to disagree with him, while we brought him crashing down. Tasneem remarked that most of the UNDP staff members were hypocrites who had kept quiet even after the result. I said, “Ignore them. Focus only on the positive comments you hear in the coming days.”

Rensje announced that some human-rights organizations were putting together a programme to celebrate our landmark success. She suggested we all go and make it into our own celebration. Tasneem, Sheeba, Nageen and Ghazala were surprised that people would care enough to do that. Sadia turned away, with a blank expression on her face. Rachel looked confused and hesitant. Rensje insisted that we should all go. I said that it was not only that the human-rights organizations were happy about our result, but they also thought we had opened the doors for other women and brought about a new awareness of the sexual harassment issue. Not everyone in the group believed this.

Feelings were mixed. People wanted to talk about getting a proper letter in response to our complaint before making any public statement. Nothing would make them feel the case was over unless they got a letter addressed to all of us from the UNDP Headquarters. I volunteered to draft a request to the office of Human Resources and Rachel said she would incorporate everyone’s suggestion at the end and finalize it. We agreed we would all get together at the celebration and finalize the letter then.

Another issue was pending on which I wanted their opinion. Someone from the Office of Human Resources had told me, as had Marco when we were in NY, that once the case was decided in our favor we could file for compensation. I wanted everyone's response so I could get a collective answer from the group.

This time Sadia was the first to speak, saying, "We cannot measure our pain in money." She asked me to tell the people in New York that women in Pakistan are still primitive and do not make any connection between suffering pain and receiving money. Tasneem said she wanted compensation in her other case regarding the wrongful termination, but not in the sexual harassment case. Everyone agreed that all they had ever wanted was for the UNDP to punish Tarik according to its own rules. No one wanted to discuss compensation at all. I understood that, in western countries, managements were ordered to compensate victims with large amounts of money only so they would take the issue seriously. In our context, it was very clear that we did not want any monetary compensation. We simply owed it to ourselves and to all other women, to report the man who had humiliated us.

I said I would feel compensated if the UN learned from this experience, amended its policy to close the loopholes we had seen and made retaliation by the management an additional charge within the policy. I also hoped that the organizational culture would improve after this case. Sadia rolled her eyes and got ready to leave, grumbling, "It has become worse." Tasneem reiterated, "We're not finished with this case yet," amid mumbles and grumbles about the UNDP and its management, I ended the meeting and made sure that everyone would turn up at the celebration for our case.

I arrived at the gathering, organized by different groups working on women's issues and human rights to celebrate the resolution of the most talked about sexual harassment case in Pakistan. My family came to join the celebration. Loads of people were congratulating Rensje and me for winning the case. The others had not yet arrived. The programme was outdoors in a big garden, with colorful tents, fairy lights and barbecued food. The house belonged to Dr. Iftikhar Hassan, a woman who ran a successful organization called Working Women's Association. Some people knew a few of the complainants, but most did not. Messages had been sent to activists and gender experts to join the gathering in appreciation of our effort and achievement. Well-known social activists made speeches reinforcing how common the problem of sexual harassment was in the work-places in Pakistan and how important it was for everyone to address this issue. Asserting that the government, private sector and the international agencies were all affected, they commended our efforts and said we had set a milestone in this struggle.

On the first anniversary of our complaint, December 22, 1998, some activities about curbing sexual harassment had taken place. Now, at this celebration, on behalf of the organizations working on women's issues, one of the women leaders announced that December 22nd would be designated to mark the struggle against sexual harassment. Every year, special programmes would be held to take stock of what we had done and what was still needed to address this problem. Everyone clapped at this announcement.

My eyes searched for the rest of our group. I was already sad about the messages from some saying they were unable to come. I saw Tasneem entering the gate and then Ghazala. I was still waiting for Rachel.

Someone told me that Rachel had left an envelope at the gate, but did not come in. We were disappointed. I consoled myself that I should understand her fear of further repercussions. Although she had decided not to renew her contract, Rachel was the last one working for the UNDP. Rensje and I looked at each other with heavy hearts. I thought sadly that even with a decision in our favor, we could not properly celebrate.

This was our first public appearance in connection to the case. This caused some anxiety since most of us had never revealed our identities. I had been named in the newspapers, because Tarik's entire defense strategy was focused on attacking me, but otherwise the papers had decently referred to it as the "Case of 11" without giving other names.

We were asked to speak and Tasneem, Rensje and I agreed to appear in front of the audience. Ghazala quietly sat in the back row, but when they asked us to receive bouquets of flowers in recognition of our struggles, she came up to accept hers. I was very proud of her for being there, yet I felt incomplete without the others.

Tasneem talked about her hardships, while Rensje eloquently described the whole management system that perpetuates such harassing behavior. For most of us, the case was not yet over. We all still felt wounded and upset with the management, which remained aloof and unaccountable.

When my turn came, I had a hard time controlling my tears. I cleared my throat, spoke about my personal experience and said that my reason for reporting was the intimidation I had experienced over a three-year period. My decision was linked to my own integrity. I went on, "It may seem that the case is over, but it does not feel that way to me. It may seem that we won, but it does not feel that way at all. The local management that sided with Tarik, that protected him and had fought us on his behalf, remains in control. Only one man was punished. The rotten system that protected him remains in place. The process of filing and pursuing this complaint lasted over one and a half years and has left wounds on our minds and souls. I hope that we will be able to begin our healing process at some time in the future."

I specifically mentioned that despite intimidation by the UNDP management in Islamabad, we were able to report this harassment only because the UNDP had a sexual harassment policy and the larger UN system did respond once we activated it. Therefore, I stressed that all organizations need to work not only on raising awareness of the inappropriateness of sexually harassing behavior, but also on ensuring that laws and regulations are put in place to protect employees who have the courage to speak out and fight it.

When I finished, many people raised their hands. Although this was not part of the agenda, I gave them the opportunity to ask questions. Some people wanted to know the details of the harassment that took place; some wanted to know the reactions of our family and friends. My colleagues answered these questions well.

One person said, "It is a shame that while the UN is believed to be a protector of the rights of women, in reality its officers treat women like their property."

I moved forward and answered firmly, "No, I am sorry, but this perspective needs to change. A sexual harassment case should not become a matter of honor or dishonor for an agency. People like Tarik will always be around. They will be in different organizations, at different times. The UN cannot do much about how some people have been raised in their homes. What the UN or any employer can do is to set norms of behavior in the work environment and have systems to

hold people accountable to those behaviors. The main question is how prepared an organization is to curb and deal with sexual harassment and how efficiently and justly they do so. "THAT...", I paused to look at everyone to emphasize this point, "THAT is the test of an organization. THAT is what counts. The occurrence of a sexual harassment case does not imply that UN is no longer a leader in promoting women's rights."

"In 1993, the UN formulated an anti sexual harassment policy, defining appropriate and inappropriate behavior between men and women. None of the other organizations, government, private industry or civic groups in Pakistan had a policy on sexual harassment, so I want to thank the UN for setting that precedent. Ultimately, their system did work, even despite much resistance from within the organization. I hope this case has made it clear that they need much more than just a policy if they are going to root out this debilitating behavior."

"Organizations should be proud to have men like Marco Carmignani in their system. During this process, we also met many other senior people in the UN who were committed to dealing directly with issues of sexual harassment. So, I say 'Hats off to the UN!' Organizations need not be ashamed of the Tariks, because Tariks will always be there, but they should be ashamed of the Roberts who, regardless of the commitment of the organization, actively work to distort the system to satisfy their desire for personal power."

Everyone clapped, but I felt exhausted. I looked at the faces of my friends who were standing by me. We hugged each other on the verge of crying. We quickly left the limelight and clustered in a corner to let our emotions out. We celebrated winning our case with tears in our eyes.

Rensje moved close to me and said, "It's not over yet. I cannot let Robert England off the hook."

"We will try, Rensje," I hugged her and said softly in her ear, "We will keep writing to the highest authorities in the UN and if they don't accept our complaint, maybe someday I will write a book and let the public be the judge."

EPILOGUE: Closing the Circle

Although our case was categorized as the first “pure sexual harassment”³ case in the UN records, only the three of us who went to New York ever received any official notification of the results of the case and none of us ever received a copy of the Disciplinary Committee’s report until it was posted on the official UNDP website.

The new UNDP Administrator, Mark Malloch Brown, remarked that curbing sexual harassment would be a significant focus of his time in office. In response, I wrote him a letter explaining that the management must be held accountable. In it, I gave specific details of what Robert England and his management had done to us and offered recommendations on improving both the policy and the system. I got no response. I sent him the same letter on the 10th of December, Human Rights Day, for each of the next three years, but never received even an acknowledgement of receipt.

The UNDP did form a special task-force to look at the loopholes in their policy. I learned the names of the task-force members and sent our recommendations to them. The UN agency for women, UNIFEM, asked us to prepare a note giving the details of the case. Over time, the UN did introduce many amendments to the policy and introduced training packages to raise awareness of sexual harassment that is required for all their employees.

Despite these efforts, in February 2009, the Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, expressed his concern that sexual harassment was a 'scourge' that 'remains a high priority issue'⁴ in the United Nations. The Secretary General's letter sparked a series of articles in national newspapers in the USA, particularly in the Wall Street Journal.⁵ The WSJ journalist, Steve Strecklow, wrote: “The United Nations...is struggling to deal with an embarrassing string of sexual-harassment complaints within its own ranks. Many U.N. workers who have made or faced accusations of sexual harassment say the current system for handling complaints is arbitrary, unfair and mired in bureaucracy. Cases can take years to adjudicate. Complainants have no access to investigative reports. Several women who complained of harassment say their employment contracts weren't renewed.” In 2010, Joseph Klein posted a hard-hitting piece⁶ in David Horowitz's internet journal, FrontPageMag, in which he wrote, “The fact is that the United Nations has a serious problem on its hands with sexual abuse and harassment cases, most notably in its peace-keeping forces, but at high managerial levels as well. Instead of serving as a role model on an issue that it purports to champion, the UN is fighting judicial accountability for the actions of its own employees.” These articles pointed towards the lack of acknowledgment of the institutional basis for the problem. Obviously, the 'problem' had not been limited to a few 'witches' in UNDP Pakistan and, judging from what Messrs. Strecklow and Klein gathered from their interviews, the organization is still struggling to handle the growing number of cases.

³ This means that we had complained purely against the behavior of another staff member rather than claiming that we had been cheated out of promotions or other benefits that had been promised in return for sexual favors.

⁴ Ban Ki Moon’s letter to Jessica Neuwirth, President, Equality Now, New York, February 24, 2009.

⁵ Steve Strecklow, Sexual Harassment Cases Plague U.N., Wall Street Journal, May 21, 2009.

⁶ Joseph Klein, The UN’s Hypocrisy on Women’s Rights, FrontPageMag.org, March 4, 2010.

Tarik's Pakistan court case against the complainants continued for three years. The proceedings went on. It ended when the UN Legal Office finally activated the immunity clause. Richard Dictus was in New York at the time and was quoted as saying he did not believe that there was a court case and we were only making a fuss. In response, I sent the Legal Section a copy of the court proceedings of the last three years.

On the other front, Tariq tried his best to undo the decision through the UN appeal mechanism. Two months after his termination, Tariq formally requested a review of the decision. The UNDP Administrator informed him that he had found no grounds for reversing the decision. Later Tariq filed a further appeal with the UN Tribunal claiming that the inquiry process had been biased, preventing him from proving his innocence. He made several allegations in an attempt to undermine the process and the decision. Two years later, the UN Tribunal, comprising several senior UN officials, rejected his appeal in its entirety after carefully reviewing the evidence and the entire process.

The UNDP posted Robert England to Thailand as head of the UNDP office. Before he left he made sure to finish his "clean up" campaign in the Gender Unit. He even neglected to extend the contract of Anne Keeling, thus dumping his own agent who had helped him to get rid of the 'mess'. Although he had been promoted to a higher grade, his posting in Thailand was definitely a step down from Pakistan. The Thai Government had little need for the UNDP because their economy and government were strong. After completing his tenure in Bangkok, he elected to take an early retirement. I have a hunch that his shining star had been tarnished somewhat by our actions, after all.

The UNDP also promoted Harumi Sakaguchi, but transferred him to Papua New Guinea, one of the least desirable UN postings. This was his last assignment as he also elected to take an early retirement. We are not sure if the agency suggested this or if he requested it. He said he wanted to teach in Japan. The only reference to him I ever found, however, was a note on the internet thanking him for helping in researching some World War II airplane wreckages in the Pacific.

Tarik started a commercial company and tried several times to return to the UN system as a consultant. Many people in the UN gave us information about his attempts. Perhaps they felt that this might compensate for their earlier failure to help us. Eventually, he did get a procurement contract from UNICEF Pakistan.

Did Tarik improve his relations with his wife and learn something from this episode? We doubt it. The way he pursued the court case against us, it did not seem as if he realized he had made a mistake. It also seems that our story has been added to the other sexual tales he tells his female subordinates behind closed doors. We have heard from various people that he has hired many young women in his new office and keeps telling them how badly we all wanted him, but filed a case against him only because he refused our advances.

Sadia remained in Islamabad. She is now married and has a daughter. She lives quietly and never worked actively on women's issues again.

Laila was offered an international job and left the country.

Masako and her husband remained in Japan for several years after her marriage, but now live in the USA with their two children. She continued her professional career in development as a consultant.

Tasneem worked at the World Bank in Islamabad and then moved within the organization to the USA. Now divorced, she lives with her children in Washington DC. She won her wrongful termination case and received compensation from the UNDP.

Nageen also continues to work in the USA.

Sheeba completed her studies in England and now works as a development consultant in Islamabad.

Rensje and her husband are now retired in Holland.

Nabila still works in New York.

Ghazala decided never to go back to work.

Rachel got married and continues to work in international development.

Finally, in case you were wondering, Paul and I continued to travel and, despite never getting this 'case' out of my system, we are still living happily ever after.

For the next three years, I never turned down any opportunity to suggest, recommend or write to any UN forum where I thought I could influence the policy on sexual harassment. In 2001, Paul and I returned to Pakistan and I joined an international development organization, Action Aid, as the country director. Apart from my other work on women's issues, I started a network called AASHA: An Alliance Against Sexual Harassment. This network highlighted the issue of sexual harassment at the work-place and created a national movement to counter it. I was very committed to making work-places safe and dignified for both men and women.

Eventually, I brought the Government on board and drafted an anti-sexual harassment policy in the context of the Pakistani culture. This policy went through a consensus-building process throughout the country with a variety of stakeholders, employers, trade unions, academics and government officials. Hundreds of private sector agencies adopted the policy on a voluntary basis and the momentum kept building. As the effort progressed, many new partners joined the movement: business leaders, media professionals, politicians, organizations of working women, labor rights groups, civic organizations and law enforcement agencies.

The momentum was just right in 2008 when national elections took place in our country. Progressive elements in Pakistan were hopeful that a democratically-elected government would change things around. The parties that had come to power as a coalition government after the elections were mostly those with women's issues as a priority in their party manifestos. I felt there would never be a better opportunity for us to push our legislation. Shehnaz Wazir Ali, a well-respected women's rights activist who had become a National Assembly member, became our door opener to the Parliament and we pushed our way in. Two Cabinet members, Ms Sherry Rehman, Minister of Women's Department and Senator Farooq Naek, Minister of Law, were our supporters from the beginning. Nevertheless, it still took them a while to assess what we had proposed, streamline it and initiate discussions with their party. We received support for this legislation not only from the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), but also from its coalition partners. Mr. Farooq Sattar, a senior leader from Mutahida Qaumi Mahaz (MQM), and Bushra Gohar from the Awami National Party (ANP), remained steady supporters within the government coalition throughout the process. Parliamentarians like Attiya Inayatullah from PML-Q and Tehmina Daultana from PML-N helped to ensure their party members voted in our favour. Senator Raza Rabbani was influential

in facilitating the bills' pathways through the Senate. Eventually, we got the crucial commitment from the Prime Minister, Yousaf Raza Gillani, and President Asif Ali Zardari that was needed to push the measure past the final hurdles.

They heard our concerns and our proposals found their way into the plans of the new government, committed to bringing a change in people's lives. The process over the next two years was like a roller coaster, with some bureaucrats delaying it at every step while others found loopholes to move the process ahead. Bottlenecks within the system posed serious challenges. Getting information and knowing the detailed rules were major roadblocks. I had to become a lawyer and a detective, gathering information from eight different sources and pursuing legal arguments at every stage. At times, we had to control the damage caused by actions of some of our own civic organizations, which had acquired a chronic negative attitude about any initiative taken by any government. We also had to counter the routine efforts of opposition leaders who sought every opportunity to squash the government's attempts to take positive steps. The process was rough and demanding.

Because of AASHA's lobbying efforts, the government agreed to consider two pieces of legislation. One was designed to make it mandatory for all institutions in the country to have an anti-sexual harassment policy. The second made sexual harassment against any citizen, man or woman, a crime that could be tried in the courts. Progressive politicians from various parties joined hands with the Government. Women parliamentarians succeeded in getting each of the bills passed unanimously in the National Assembly and by a heavy majority in the Senate.

Through AASHA and our partners, I led the civil society in lobbying with all the politicians. We had our friends in the print and electronic media run full campaigns on the need for the legislation. The President signed the bills into law in early 2010 and sexual harassment had been finally declared a crime. It was a landmark decision and the major benefits will be reaped by the next generation. Women celebrated throughout the country. This was the first time the public sphere was stamped as a legitimate place where women could venture without hesitation.

After the legislation was enacted, the Government supported a systematic implementation process. I was asked to lead a team of influential people from all sectors to ensure that organizations took the legislation seriously. Other countries in the region, like Afghanistan, India and China, saw this work as an example to be followed. In early December 2010, a very similar bill on sexual harassment was tabled for discussion in the Indian Parliament.

On December 22, 2010, the anniversary of filing the UN case in 1997, AASHA organized the 10th Annual Working Women's Assembly. This time I was able to get the full support of the Government. The Assembly was held in the Prime Minister's Secretariat. The Prime Minister, Yousaf Raza Gillani, the Speaker of the National Assembly, Dr. Fehmida Mirza, the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, Shahnaz Wazir Ali and the Minister for Women's Development officiated at the gathering of over 400 working women, including agricultural field workers, police officers, parliamentarians, doctors and senior government officials. In his speech, the Prime Minister declared December 22nd as the National Working Women's Day. He also fulfilled a major commitment of the law by naming Ms. Musarrat Hilali as the first Ombudsperson, to address the complaints of sexual harassment in Pakistan.

On March 8, 2011, I was invited to a UN event organized for the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day in Islamabad. This was an internal meeting for all the heads of the UN agencies and their staff working on gender issues. I was asked to do a presentation on the implementation of the anti-sexual harassment legislation, which was now completing its first year. As the member of the National Commission on the Status of Women, the chair of the Prime Minister's Implementation Watch Committee on these laws, and the core member of AASHA, I was an appropriate choice to be invited. What I did not know was that the UN Women, the new United Nations' agency focused on women's rights, had negotiated with all the heads of the UN agencies in Pakistan to adopt a Code of Conduct, based on their own anti-sexual harassment policy, but which complied with the new legislation in Pakistan. They undertook this move to show their solidarity with the Government of Pakistan and commitment to eradicate sexual harassment at the highest levels of the UN.

In my presentation, I reported how we had engaged with the Government and set up the systems necessary to install the accountability mechanisms in every department. I gave them the list of the regulatory institutions that had agreed to ensure the law would be implemented in the organizations under their control. These regulators cover the banking system, higher education institutes, oil and gas companies, telecom industry, medical facilities and others. I told them about the free legal aid centers that we had established all over the country to assist women who wanted to pursue cases against sexual harassment in the courts. I also explained how well civil society organizations were coordinating with the Government to spread the awareness and how a silent revolution had already begun. My heart beat fast when I told them that the benefits of this law were not just to convict perpetrators, but also to serve as a transformative deterrent and, even more, that it had stamped the public space as a legitimate arena into which women could venture alone. This space had been seriously eroded in recent years by successive waves of conservatism and militancy.

To my surprise, after the substantive presentations, all the heads of the UN agencies were each asked to sign a card, saying 'Zero Tolerance for Sexual Harassment'. Alice Shackelford, the head of the newly reconstituted organization, UN Women, in Pakistan, had me stand next to the table where this elaborate ritual was taking place. There were smiles of support on their faces and a sense of conviction pervaded the room. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. The senior leadership of the United Nations in Pakistan had taken this issue so seriously.

There are times in one's life when you feel as though you have lost contact with reality and suddenly it feels like you are in a play or in someone else's life. This was one of those moments. I looked around at all these well-dressed men and women, diligently signing these cards with cameras flashing all around them.

Suddenly, someone said there would be a group photo. I heard Alice say, "Fouzia, you stand in the middle." I was the only non-UN person in the room. All the heads of the UN agencies stood in a semi circle and I stood in the middle. After so many years, I do not think any one of those UN people knew that this whole story started in the UNDP office, right here in Islamabad. I felt a surge of emotions well up inside me. I was not sure if I felt happy, sad, excited, resentful or fulfilled. All I knew was that the woman standing in the middle of these senior UN officials was beginning to feel that she had closed the circle, although a small part of her still felt incomplete.

I am proud of my government for passing the legislation in Pakistan. I also want to acknowledge the honest people within the UN system who continue to address the 'scourge' of sexual harassment at the workplace, but someday I would like someone senior in the UN to say that it is women like us who represent the principles of the United Nations. I want them to say they are proud of what we did for the organization.