

# Women held in ‘protective custody’ make appeal for alternative solutions

By Rana Husseini - Feb 25, 2020 - Last updated at Feb 25, 2020

AMMAN — Amal (not her real name) has been held in detention at Juweideh Correctional and Rehabilitation Centre (JCRC) for the past five years without any charges, because she left her family’s home for four days.

Amal, who is being held at the centre by the administrative governor in what is termed “protective custody”, was ordered to be detained because she attempted to stop the marriage of her 15-year-old daughter.

“My husband started physically abusing me because I was against the marriage, and I ended up leaving the house for four days. When I was found, the administrative governor decided to lock me up, because he determined that my family might kill me,” Amal said.

Amal is one of 102 women held at the JCRC for "administrative reasons", many of whom met with women politicians and civil society representatives to tell their stories and receive legal and psychological assistance at the centre on Wednesday.

The visit was organized by Mizan Law Group to mark International Women’s Day, which falls on March 8.

“I urge you all to help us find an alternative solution other than staying at the JCRC, because we should not be detained with other inmates since we did not commit any crimes, and instead we are detained for indefinite periods because the government wants to protect us,” Amal added.

The delegation also heard stories and demands from three women on death row who called on the government to either reopen their files or change their sentences.

Currently, there are 20 women on death row in Jordan and 102 who are detained for "administrative reasons" including dozens detained by the administrative governor to protect them from their families for reasons related to so-called “family honour”, according to JCRC Director Colonel Muna Abu Odeh.

Abu Odeh told the gathering that the JCRC administration views the inmates as “part of society that should not be ignored”.

“We believe in our inmates and their capability of giving to their communities once they leave the doors of the centre,” Abu Odeh said.

In 2018, the state-of-the-art “Amneh House” (“safe” in Arabic), also called the “Guest and Rehabilitation House for Women”, was opened by former minister of social development Hala Lattouf to replace the old procedure of imprisoning women for indefinite periods to protect them from their families.

Before the house was opened, all women whose lives were in danger were sent by the administrative governor to the JCRC.

Hundreds of women have been imprisoned at the JCRC for indefinite periods without being charged in what is termed “protective custody”. Some of the stays exceeded 10 years, during which women could not

leave the facility without the administrative governor's permission or a male guardian's signature guaranteeing he would not harm her if she was released.

However, Mizan Law Group Executive President Eva Abu Halaweh said that, in some cases, "women whose lives were in danger were sent back from Amneh to the prison, and this is not a good sign".

"There have been some challenges for women to enter Amneh in recent months because of certain classifications that are being imposed by the Ministry of Social Development [MoSD]," Abu Halaweh said.

The MoSD should be responsible for protecting women and providing them with a safe environment, or find safe alternative solutions besides the JCRC and "not put up barriers to receiving the women", Abu Halaweh added.

MoSD Spokesperson Mahmoud Hrouf denied that the Amneh house stopped receiving cases or that there are hurdles in place to hinder the process.

"We take each case based on its circumstances. We did not stop receiving the cases and we currently have 14 women in the house," Hrouf told The Jordan Times.

Most of the women in protective custody were involved in cases of rape, adultery and incest, and, fearing for their lives, left their families' homes voluntarily.

On some occasions, women were reportedly killed after being bailed out by family members, even after guarantees had been signed that no harm would be inflicted upon them.

Around 15 women are murdered annually for reasons related to "cleansing family honour" in Jordan.

Also addressing the gathering and inmates at the JCRC was Senator Sawsan Majali who pledged to convey the inmates' demands to government officials.

"We bear a responsibility on our shoulders to convey your demands and to try to help in any way possible, because we know that most of you are victims of certain uncontrollable circumstances," Majali said.

MP Dima Tahboub also pledged to reach out to officials to demand a safer and better environment for women who are held at the JCRC for administrative reasons.

Meanwhile, Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) Secretary General Salma Nims said that the government "should be more involved and provide a better environment and alternatives" for women who are detained for "administrative reasons".

"Some people make mistakes and end up in prison, while others are locked up for protection. In both instances, it is the government's duty to provide the necessary social and psychological support for these individuals to help them start a new life once they are released," Nims said.