

Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan

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Women are very important and crucial part of every society. As Charles Malik, former President of the United Nations General Assembly, said: "The fastest way to change society is to mobilize the women of the world." However, even if Kyrgyzstan is considered as democratic country, I think women's rights in Kyrgyzstan are prone to be limited due to common tradition of "bride kidnapping." Bride kidnapping or "ala kachuu" which is directly translated as "grab and run" is a marriage by abduction or marriage by capture. Although bride kidnapping has been illegal in Kyrgyzstan since 1994, it is a law that is rarely enforced, and one in three rural ethnic Kyrgyz women have been forced into such marriages. I think this "barbaric" tradition is very shameful truth about Kyrgyzstan which needs thorough consideration and taking immediate measures. Participating in a Conference "Women of the Mountains" gives me great opportunity to present this unusual to other countries tradition of "bride kidnapping." I see bride kidnapping as a real threat for Kyrgyz women in the present and the future as well.

First, bride kidnapping is a violation of civil rights of Kyrgyz women. Every woman is a human being who needs a respect. However, some see a woman as a "child-machine" which also includes such functions as cleaning, ironing, cooking, and washing. What a "convenient thing" for potential grooms who kidnap brides as if they are an animal which also includes so many functions in only one set.

Second, it is said that 90% of all kidnapped women stay with their husbands. It is mainly because kidnapped women are under enormous pressure from society, as bride kidnapping is commonly considered being a tradition of our ancestors, and it is a great public shame for a girl and her parents if she leaves. Therefore, very often women who wouldn't stay become outcasts of society. It should also be pointed out that girls, once they are kidnapped, are not considered to be pure (virgin) any more, as in most cases when kidnapped girls refuse to stay, the "grooms" end up raping them, and virginity is an important factor in making a family. Therefore, there are also some cases when kidnapping ends tragically, e.g. girls could not stand it and committed suicide.

Third, even though Kyrgyzstan is considered to be a democratic country, and high government officials say that "ala kachuu" is illegal, they take no action when it occurs. Officially, the rights of women are protected by the Kyrgyz Criminal Code. Moreover, there is a range of international laws that protect women's rights like Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, despite all the laws that sanction taking radical action to eliminating bride kidnapping, in real life almost no one appeals to the courts on the issue. It may be because although law dictates "ala kachuu" is illegal, it is widely accepted as a tradition and in Kyrgyzstan traditions constitute the essential part of daily life, and people follow them very faithfully.

I believe that bride kidnapping is a serious problem of Kyrgyzstan which literally "screaming" to be solved. Participating in the Conference "Women of the Mountains" and giving a presentation about bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan can give a wide look into this urgent problem for other countries and maybe find a right solution. Of course this

problem cannot be solved instantly, but gradually. However, this conference can be a start of “truly democratic society” in Kyrgyzstan as well as in other countries, because as Vincent Van Gogh said: "Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.”