



Happy Women's Day!

A periodical on human rights and civil society
Special issue on women

Armanshahr

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Exclusive interview

Historical suffering of women and impact of political control on their participation

Jawad Darwaziyan

An interview with head of AIHRC **Sima Samar**.¹ Excerpts taken from the Dari version:

On women's participation:

I have always called for women's participation. When the Americans began bombing Afghanistan, I was in Pakistan and told the UN representative for Afghanistan in Islamabad that women must certainly take part, otherwise it will be very difficult to find a place for them later. When I became minister of women's affairs, we did not have anything, neither a place nor equipment. The present building of the Ministry belonged to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs at the time and it took two months to take the empty and almost ruined building.

On the failure to resolve the problems of women since the early 19th century:

In the most advanced countries of the world, women's issues come up during the elections and are forgotten afterwards. All the means are used to control half the population; it can be the hijab, culture, traditions, religion etc. We notice those problems in the Sudan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran and India. Other problems such as the low level of literacy and poverty also play major roles. Hijab has different interpretations in the Islamic countries. For example, in the Sudan, women must have a



chador around their head, but they can wear long sleeves and their legs can be bare up to the knee. In Bangladesh, women's stomach can be seen when they wear the sari. In my opinion, traditions are mixed with the religion in every country to control the human beings. Unfortunately, that is a serious problem in Afghanistan.

Religion was abused under Amanullah Khan in relation to hijab; it was used against the Russians. Culture, traditions and religion were used against women to marginalise them. In most humanitarian projects during the war (both during the Jihad and resistance and in the Taleban era), women were forgotten. Some institutions were active in the field of education, but not education for girls! The World Food Programme distributed food to a number of religious schools, where there were no girls at all. You would not see weak participation of women in any advanced society, including the ones that relatively comply with human rights and women's rights.

We still have the highest rate of illiteracy. This was one of the reasons why the war has been prolonged and is very brutal. If you look at the internal conflicts throughout the world, most countries in war have either low rate of illiteracy or high rate of poverty.

On abuse of women under the Mujahedin:

The women's issue has been abused from the Taraki era to Dr Najib's era and afterwards. We can only fulfil women's rights when women are empowered to achieve the rights. If men join us to defend our rights, they would be defending their own dignity. That is why governments in countries like Afghanistan have responsibility to prepare the way to advance, e.g. access to education. It is true that more than 6 million children go to school in Afghanistan, but the majority of children who have access to schools are boys.

1- Ms. Sima Samar is the chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. For her biography, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sima_Samar

This shows the priority that parents give to boys over girls. Secondly, when the school is located two hours away from the village, the families would send the boys to the school but not the girls, because boys are less likely to fall victim to sexual abuse. My personal experience was that whenever the regional officials or religious leaders allowed their daughters to school, other people followed suit.

On assessment of opportunities provided to human rights and women's organisations in the past decade:

Things have changed a lot in comparison with 10 years ago. In the past and during 23 years of war, a girl would be killed for having been raped. A brother or a father who had killed his sister/daughter, would come to be known as a zealous and courageous person, but today the cases are exposed and justice is demanded. Before, nobody would interfere, nobody would report to the police and everybody would show them respect.

We have a short report that is the outcome of interviews with 12 women. They all come from the same locality and are totally illiterate. They said, "Violence against us has been reduced, because there is an authority we can go to," even though none of them has referred to the AIHRC or other authorities to complain.

In comparison with the protests against the Ulema Council's resolution nowadays, there was hardly any resistance, when the issue of hijab came up in the mujahedin era. In the Taleban era, when a woman left the house to spread clothes over a rope, Taleban members who saw her would beat up her husband. Therefore, men would not allow their wives to leave the home. That's not the case now, but the conditions are not satisfactory, because it's not the case in entire Afghanistan. Such freedoms still prevail in big cities and some of the districts and in some places where our people have access to the press and the media.

On the extent of those changes and the resistance to other developments:

I'm not too worried, because we are not prepared to lose our freedoms; but absence of political commitment at the level of the national leadership means that progress has not taken place as much as it should have.

Wives of political leaders are still hiding at home. We cannot solve this problem so long as the leadership lacks the required commitment. For example, most of them do not allow their wives to be photographed for election cards.

The other example of zealotry in our society was the Law for the Personal Status of the Shi'ite and extensive problems are created. Now, the Law for Elimination of Violence against Women is facing problems in the Parliament. They must chain other people in order to show their manliness and zealotry. What is considered as zealotry in Afghanistan is regarded shameful in other countries.

On AIHRC's work for women:

We do not wish to prioritise a gender over another, but women's rights have been violated more, therefore we have a women's section. We have endeavoured and will continue to endeavour to make the laws in Afghanistan compatible with international conventions and law and human dignity. The commission has also worked on implementation of the laws. There are still some people above the law in Afghanistan and take the liberty to speak above the law. Examples are some of the people in the Ulema Council who take the liberty to impose their own unconstitutional demands on other people!

On transitional justice and Conflict Mapping Report:

The conflict Mapping report was assigned to the AIHRC under the government's plan of action and the Commission has fulfilled it. It will remain in the history of Afghanistan, but we cannot publish it so long as we can not make healthy use of it to improve the situation and bring a lasting peace and justice to Afghanistan, because the Commission's colleagues do not enjoy immunity. Nevertheless, we shall certainly publish it. Nobody can destroy that report. I expect the civil society and believers of justice and human rights to use this report as a means to fulfil national reconciliation and security in the country. There is no statute of limits for justice. The Serbian generals and perpetrators of crimes in Cambodia are on trial today. The cohorts of the famous Chilean dictator, Pinochet, are facing prosecution today. That will also be the case for us.

Exclusive interview

HRDs and women facing Taleban-type and Western fundamentalism!

Jawad Darwaziyan

An interview with MP **Fawzia Koofi**.¹ Excerpts taken from the Dari version:

On the laws enacted in the previous parliament regarding women:

The previous Parliament was more successful in legislating in comparison with representing the people and monitoring. There were surely flaws, the most significant of which was lack of seriousness in participatory legislation, i.e. the people and the civil institutions were not consulted adequately. Civil institutions were not active before the passage of the laws and they would react afterwards, e.g. in the case of the Law for Personal Status of the Shi'ite. One of the laws we rejected was the election law, regarding which the parliament fulfilled its responsibility, even though Mr. Karzai upheld it by a presidential decree. The media law was one of the most important laws that were approved.

The Law for Investigation of the Offences of Children, which was based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, had some provisions regarding women and in particular the girls. When the law was passed for the first time, it was full of discriminatory provisions. The age of adulthood for girls had been set at 17 and four boys at 18, which was an unconstitutional



discrimination. We opposed it; the civil society opposed it after its passage. We exerted pressure on Mr. Karzai, who rejected the law. Under the Constitution, when the president rejects a law, then it will need a two-thirds majority for approval if it contains the same provisions. We made a lot of efforts to prevent its passage by a two-thirds majority. Finally we passed a law that was compatible with international criteria.

Unfortunately, no laws were passed regarding women. There are sensitivities regarding the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in the Parliament. Afghanistan has not stated any reservations at the time of signing the CEDAW and has accepted all its articles. Therefore, the internal laws in Afghanistan must be based on the Convention. One of the considerations regarding this Convention is the issue of divorce. If a woman wishes to divorce her husband, as provided for by the Convention, it would contravene the domestic laws in Afghanistan, because the sharia has authorised women only to apply for divorce. For that reason, if the Convention were to be deliberated in the Parliament, there would be the likelihood of withdrawing the ratification for it.

We made efforts in the previous Parliament to have gender-based laws; for example, women are members of the Constitution Monitoring Committee. In the Law on Prisons and Detention Centres, we provided for special care for imprisoned women. We also stipulated in the annual budget laws that there must be gender departments or directorates in all the departments. There was serious opposition to this provision. In protest, a number of women MPs walked out of the session. In my opinion, we have had achievements in regard to positive discrimination in favour of women in the laws.

The present Parliament has paid less attention to all areas. We have elections in

1- Ms. Koofi is a Member of Parliament and head of its Women's Affairs, Human Rights and Civil Society Committee. For her biography, see:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fawzia_Koofi

2014 and we must guarantee transparent and fair democratic elections. However, the MPs are engaged with daily issues. As a result, the laws remain in the committees. Unfortunately, the women's base in the parliament and in the country as a whole is eroding. The parliament, as a whole has become an institution obeying Mr. Karzai and the ruling establishment. There is a backward movement in this Parliament as is the case in the whole country. The Parliament does not have an orientation towards women's rights and human rights.

On the Law for Elimination of Violence against Women (LEVW):

We are worried that some of the laws may not be approved including LEVW. In this law, we have defined as violence many instances that exist in our society in the form of traditions: forced marriage, under-age marriage, beating women and exchanging women for blood and other indecent traditions.

A number of female MPs have opposed it, because they thought that the Women's Affairs Committee would take the credit if the law were approved. A number of others are worried that it may not be approved if it came up for discussion. If the law were to be rejected, we would only have the presidential decree which is in force, and that decree would lose its importance, too.

On positive changes for women in the society:

One of the troubling issues is the difference between the urban and rural life. The rural people receive fewer benefits than the urban people. However, there has been an improvement in attitudes towards women. To give an example concerning elections, it was impossible for a woman to win votes in some areas 5 years ago. However, I and a number of other women won votes in such areas last year. In 2005, most women voted for the same candidates as their husbands. In 2010, most people who came to the Women's Bureau had active brothers and husbands in other campaigns. The women, however, campaigned for women and voted for them without paying attention to the view of the man of the family. That trend is not uniform in all areas. However, those changes can be felt more in our areas. In some other areas, in particular the southern regions, both women and men are still deprived.

On attitudes towards women:

The attitudes of 2004 and 2005 towards

women do not exist today. Human rights and women's rights had priority at the time. Today, however, the government's greatest concern is negotiation with the Taliban. Therefore, the women's issue is increasingly pushed to the sidelines. One other reason is that the national leaders, even though they have taken office through democracy, have a transitional outlook and they prefer to stay with those traditions rather than become modernised. In the presence of Parliament, they set up the traditional Loya Jirga.

Furthermore, the women's issue is not a social issue; it is a political issue unlike other countries. We are sitting between two types of fundamentalism. One is the Taliban-type fundamentalism, which is ideologically in power even if not physically. The other is the Western fundamentalism, which is increasingly tightening the domain around human rights defenders by killing, detaining and causing civilian casualties. When you talk of human rights and women's rights nowadays, some people prefer that there would be no American soldiers, who killed in Kandahar, if they are defenders of women's rights. Both types of fundamentalism are increasingly tightening the domain around us. All kinds of fundamentalism are opposed to women's rights. There is no difference between the two types of fundamentalism. The Ulema Council issued a statement a few days ago saying: Human rights defenders committed crimes in Kandahar; whereas a soldier that commits some action cannot be called a human rights defender.

On present priorities of women:

In my opinion, the priority is to protect their achievements. There must be public mobilisation. The statements that are issued one after another provide the first test for the society. These statements are politically motivated; they are not religiously motivated. If we were to back down in the face of such actions, their subsequent steps will be more serious. If women were removed from the public domain, there would remain no place for human rights defenders, intellectuals, the young people and other dissenters. Therefore, to protect the hard-won values, there must be civil resistance by all ethnic communities, intellectual and dissenting men and women against the Taliban mentality. The women's issue is one of the achievements. In the absence of resistance, others could be simply lost as well.

Exclusive interview

Discrimination against women's participation

Jawad Darwaziyan

An interview with Herat's Prosecutor-General **Maria Bashir**.¹ Excerpts from the Dari version:

On Afghan women:

The Afghans have never had any country, where justice would prevail and women would be free from scores of problems. Women have suffered all the harms from the war. They love their homes and lives more than men and they have lost everything in the war. Men have created the wars and caused destruction. Women have always taken the harms. However, when it comes to implementation of laws, they are implemented in the interests of men. Women have received less benefit from laws and justice. The suffering of the women under the Taleban is well known to all. We were all insulted, humiliated; we could not leave the house even with covered faces to meet our basic needs; we were flogged and bore scores of other insults.

Or major achievements of women during the decade after the dark era of the Taleban:

Women entered politics; entered the Parliament; had laws legislated including the Law for Elimination of Violence against Women; families allow their women and girls to go to school and the University. There are high figures of women's education; the presence of women in various departments and positions, in particular in the justice system, is promising. However, women have to move very slowly. Discrimination still prevails and women, in particular those who work, realise the problems gradually more and



more. Even the political and so-called intellectual men are not in favour of the entry of women in the social arena and cannot bear to see women next to them. Our high-ranking statesmen do not believe in women's rights. All those who talk of women's rights and democracy in Afghanistan, to not want them for their own wives

Women of Afghanistan do not yet believe in their capabilities. They still see themselves as the "second sex."

On the reasons for failure women to shape civil action:

There are many obstacles, in particular in regard to security and political issues, facing the women. There are only some women here and there, who are doing what they can. In my opinion, the government of Afghanistan, which is obliged to protect women's rights, must prepare the way to improve the women's conditions. I'm of the opinion that the political problems, security threats and other issues have prevented women from getting solidly organised.

I do not know why they created the Ministry of Women's Affairs, perhaps to show us that we have been given some privileges. However, what was expected of the Ministry in regard to protection of women's rights, in particular in regard to employment and economic problems, knowledge of the laws and the like, has not been fulfilled to this date.

On women's impact on the power structure:

Women of Afghanistan do not have political power. They have the power to impact political, social, cultural and economic issues, but they have not been able to demonstrate it.

On human rights and the change in patriarchal attitudes towards women:

There are changes that are leaving impact on the families. Girls and boys can go to school to study. However, there is still discrimination. Even urban families do not provide the girls with the same privileges as for boys.

On the rise of Taleban-type Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan:

The government of Afghanistan has promised women that the Constitution of the country shall

1- Ms. Maria Bashir is the chief prosecutor-general of Herat province since 2009. For her biography, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Bashir.

be complied with regardless of the events. Under the Constitution, article 22, men and women have equal rights. If the law is violated and women are subjected to political trading, then a national uprising shall be necessary for women to prevent the loss of their rights and that of their children.

On violence in Herat:

We have the Law for Elimination of Violence, which was enacted two years ago. We have a special unit in the Prosecutor's Office in Herat to fight violence against women. We have investigated 190 cases of violence against women

in one month alone. The more we investigate such instances, the fewer they will become and there will be fewer instances of escape from home. When women gain knowledge about the law, they will come forward instead of committing suicide.

The cases of violence we have investigated concern beating, domestic threats, forced marriage, under-age marriage, addiction of men, economic poverty, polygamy and repeated marriage, but more frequently beating. We have recorded self immolation, self poisoning, suicide by hanging, and self injury. There are also children who have been married at young age.



Exclusive interview

Ministry of Women's Affairs has the lowest budget within the government!

Jawad Darwaziyan

An interview with Deputy Minister **Sayeda Mojgan Mostafavi**.¹ Excerpts taken from the Dari version:

On the most important achievements of the Ministry in the past 10 years:

We have a gender strategy based on which we have worked out at national plan for the women of Afghanistan. Our plan has six sections: security, human rights, economic development and poverty reduction, women's leadership and political participation, health, and education. We have had achievements in every field. For example, we prepared the Law for

Elimination of Violence against Women in cooperation with the civil society and women MPs, which was signed by the president. We had 40 sessions about the family law, which is still underway, but unfortunately the Ministry of Justice has not done anything about this law. We had specific regulations to improve the economic conditions of women. In the regulations on safe houses and custody of poor children, we tried to give women a share in guardianship as well. We have had other policies to improve women's access to justice and to improve conditions of imprisoned women. Every year, thousands of legal cases are referred to the Ministry, which we examine. In the nine months to December 2011, we have received about 4,000 cases from different provinces. We have plans regarding professional training and literacy of women and have constructed 16 gardens for women and two more are under construction. Besides, we have established gender units in 18 ministries.

On the budget and executive power of the Ministry:

The Ministry has the lowest budget within the structure of the government. Our total ordinary budget is 168 million Afghanis and our development budget was \$1,100,000 last year. The reasoning of the government is that our ministry is a policy-making body and more should be provided to executive ministries which provide services. The services we provide are mainly done through cooperation with the NGOs.

Regarding the executive power of the Ministry, this is how the pertaining law was legislated. It was decided that the Ministry would provide its services through the NGOs. Through a project with CIVA in India, 3,000 women have received professional training.

We are planning to raise the share of women

1- Sayeda Mojgan Mostafavi is deputy minister for technical and policy affairs of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. She has written four books on journalism and women's issues and scores of articles. For a partial biography, see: <http://www.wecf.eu/download/2011/November/AfghanDelegationWomenattheFlashpointII.pdf>

in various ministries and we have asked our different sections to formulate their plans for the next three years, e.g. development of cultural activities of women. We are also planning to undertake a more careful monitoring of 18 organisations operating in regard to women.

Some of the ministries are not directly involved in women's issues, but some of them are. We established priorities in 41 cases last year, e.g. the security sector includes all the bodies operating in the fields of justice, judiciary and security such as the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice, Prosecutor General's Office, National Security Directorate and others.

On women's presence in various departments and centres:

Last year's figures show that a total of 25% of government employees are women, but unfortunately only 9% of them are in decision-making positions. Figures for other sectors are as follows: security 5%, health 24%, justice 10%, school students 28 %, teachers 29%, university students 21%, university professors 15%, private school students 27%, professors of private universities 10%, students of private university 13%, primary schools 45%, intermediate schools 32%, high schools 23%. 22% of the employees of 1,699 NGOs registered with the Ministry of Economic Affairs are women. Our ministry has registered 425 NGOs involved in women's issues.

We do not have figures for political parties even though we ask for them. Whenever we notice that the figures are too low, we plan to raise them, e.g. in the security sector or the justice sector.

On the falling number of women civil servants reported by Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission:

Yes, I would not deny it. The main problem is that the Administrative Reforms Commission reduces the percentage of women based on its criteria. For example, a woman with 20 years of work record and experience in the position is prevented from occupying higher positions only if she doesn't have a

bachelor's degree. Based on the present regulations, the first, second, third and fourth ranks can be occupied by holders of bachelor's degree. For example, a couple of years ago, director of women's affairs in the Noorestan province resigned and the commission has refused to accept a high school graduate woman to serve in her place and we have not been able to find a university graduate woman for the province. Hence, the post has not been occupied. There are negotiating with the universities in Kabul and other universities to enable a large number of working women to study in evening courses. We must raise the mentioned percentages to at least 30% by 2014 and 2015.

We received reports about discrimination and the various organisations say they need women with higher education. But, women must also believe that they can occupy higher positions. I remember when I spoke somewhere about promoting women to higher positions, I was told that women refuse to take higher positions when they are asked to, because they think they are not capable of assuming senior positions in the security, justice and judicial sectors.

On women's absence from the leadership of Supreme Court:

We have made proposals to the Supreme Court. We had a big meeting with the head of the government and proposed that there should be at least five women ministers, five ambassadors and at least one woman among the nine members of the Supreme Council of the Supreme Court to pay more attention to women's

judicial issues. Those proposals have not been rejected. The Supreme Council of the Supreme Court, they said they were trying to find such a woman who could occupy the position and we offered more convincing reasons. Some time ago, the Court was planning to make changes to article 42 of the Law for Elimination of Violence against Women, which prevents impunity for perpetrators of violence against women. We prevented this from happening.

It is not the first time we have made that proposal, it is the fifth time. We strongly request the head of the Supreme Court and all those involved to help us have one woman on the Supreme Council.

On figures of women victims in the war, burning of schools and in suicide attacks:

Unfortunately, we do not have specific figures. We only received figures of domestic violence. The problem is the absence of a regular reporting system. Nevertheless the violence prohibition commission of the gender directorate at the Ministry of the Interior gives us some reports, but they do not have figures for the entire country.

Last year, the highest number of women casualties occurred in the provinces. A large number of women and children were killed in an incident in Kabul on the day of Ashura. In another incident in Shandand, 80 women and children were killed in a wedding ceremony. A large number of women are victims of the war every year. The figures of school burning were lower in the reports we received last year.

On peace negotiations and lesser role of women:

We have always expressed our concern. Peace in Afghanistan will never come at the price of sacrificing the ten-year achievements of women. We will defend all the achievements of women in the past 10 years with our lives.

On the Ulema Council's resolution and Ariana Airways statement that women can only leave the country in the company of a close male relative:

At a meeting for 8 March, where more than 1000 people took part, the president spoke about the achievements of women. I only

heard that the Ariana Airways had issued a statement. However, half the population are women and if they are not taken into consideration, half of the country will be paralysed. A number of our leading women are senators and MPs. The resolution raised some issues quite well and its provisions were not all hostile. I think by mingling, they meant unauthorised mingling. I am a university professor, and a large number of my students are men. We need women's presence in society, but Islam has its own conditions, which means a woman must adhere to Islamic culture for her presence in the society.

On the president's promise to women not to sacrifice their achievements and his support for the Ulema Council's resolution:

The president stated his direct support for women and not for the resolution. He said he had talked to the head of the Ulema Council. My interpretation is that we are in an Islamic and traditional society and the ulema enjoy a special status in our society. When the Law for Personal Status of the Shi'ite was signed and the controversy followed, we made proposals in 12 cases to solve the problem. We have talked to a number of the ulema and thinkers about this resolution. Some of its contents about the presence of the women in the society are not enforceable, in particular in a society in the 21st century.

On conditions of women in prison and fleeing home:

The Constitution and the applicable laws are principal in a country. Other resolutions and statements cannot contravene the Constitution or other laws. There are no provisions in any laws in Afghanistan to criminalise fleeing home, but other issues alongside it such as fornication, murder and theft criminalise it. We have sent a proposal to review the dossiers of all imprisoned women. Every year, on various occasions, we propose amnesty for a large number of women. We have asked the Supreme Council of the Supreme Court to have an extraordinary commission review dossiers of about 600 imprisoned women and we have proposed that women, who are only charged with fleeing home, should be released.

AIRHC

**AIHRC's press release
on the resolution of the
Council of Ulema¹**



۱۶ جوزا ۱۳۸۱

Kabul, 7 March 2012: The AIHRC regards the Constitution as one of the most important achievements of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in which the rights and duties of all citizens are guaranteed in accordance with the Sacred Religion of Islam. The AIHRC believes that the Constitution is one of the most important and most basic elements of a democratic and efficient society and the government is committed to ensure its observance. In the light of this Constitution the Violence against Women Act, after getting approved by the Council of Ministers, was endorsed by the president in 1388 [2009].

The Commission while underlining the content of paragraph 5² in which women are defined as the foundation for an educational society, and endorsing subparagraphs 1 to 8 of this section of the resolution in which the women's property ownership, inheritance, Mahr [dower], the right to choose a spouse, the right to dignity, women's freedom and independence are approved, expresses its concern about paragraphs 9 to 14 of this resolution which are not in compliance with Articles 22 and 24 of the Constitution and the government's commitments to International Human Rights Instruments and provisions of the Violence against Women Act.

It is expected that the Afghan government would give a serious consideration to observance of the Law as a fundamental principle in order to ensure a rule-governed and collective society and react with responsibility against all cases that can bring the provisions of the Laws under question.

AIHRC

1- <http://www.aihrc.org.af/en/press-release/1031/press-release-on-the-resolutionproclaimed.html>
2- See the partial translation of the Ulema Council's resolution in the current issue of Armanshahr for the mentioned paragraphs

**Collective Statement of the
Afghanistan Women's 50%
Campaign and 21 Women's rights,
Human rights, Civil society and
media organisations and networks
for the 101st International
Women's Day**

We are concerned today that dark-mindedness, illiteracy and lack of awareness may once again push the people of Afghanistan, our women, men and children, over the precipice

8th March 2012 Kabul, Afghanistan

**Ladies, gentlemen, elected representatives of the
people of Afghanistan!**

We intend to address you about our commitments, obligations and pledges. Eleven years ago when Afghanistan raised itself from the ruins remaining from the reign of Taleban, you, us and the international community pledged together to step on the path of freedom and equality for all. Tightening our belts and relying on the most meagre facilities, we did our best to promote humane causes and advance the society. We reopened schools and achieved brilliant results in entrance examinations and universities. We accompanied and assisted you as civil servants and worked in non-governmental organisations. We were active in and left our impact on audio, visual and print media despite all the risks. We stepped on the difficult path of electing and getting elected; we accepted all the hardships and dangers, because we believed we were heading along the priceless path of equality and liberty. We women were actors of the various social stages and did our utmost to rebuild our country from the ruins of the past. Even though there have been and there are still shortcomings, women have



benefited from a number of civil and political rights in recent years thanks to their own endeavours. Nevertheless, they are still absent from micro and national decision-making processes.

In every country democracy and freedom is assessed by evaluating the conditions of women

Today, 11 years on, when we review our achievements, we are very pleased that we heeded to the country's call and behaved as the worthy children of this land. We have been loyal to our pledge. However, it is with regret that nowadays we hear different views and ideas from you. Today, women are not treated as actors with deserving roles in the administration of their society but as "minors" who are targeted by adverse positions under different pretexts and whose human rights are trampled upon. Considering them to be "secondary" to men, slashing their ears and noses and other limbs, stoning and imprisoning them, marrying them under-age and by force, closing the schools to girls and other similar acts as well as failing to engage women in peace-related issues are all interconnected. Both the international community and the government of Afghanistan are visibly appeasing the armed opposition groups by returning the society to the conditions of 11 years ago and trading away the human and civil rights of women. The only thing that is not important to them is their pledge to us and to themselves. They have forgotten that the liberation of women in Afghanistan was the most basic reason for their presence in this country.

Ladies, gentlemen, elected representatives of the people of Afghanistan!

Now that the international community is present in Afghanistan, it is our task is not to suffice to their experience in military and physical reconstruction matters but to benefit from their experiences regarding freedom, equality and democracy. The people worldwide have priceless experiences in these areas. You have all borne witness to the notable role and involvement of women in the ongoing revolutions in the Moslem states of the Middle East. How can we achieve such a status in an Islamic society? Is there any answer to this question other than: newer readings of religion to advance religion itself, as well as life conditions of men and women, free of some micro local customs and traditions? Even if we do not wish to consider the whole vast world and to view only the Moslem states, how can we close our eyes to the achievements of women in Turkey, Egypt, India, Bangladesh and even Pakistan, Iran, Qatar and others and once again repeat our same old experiences? How

can we speak of democracy and freedom, when we close our eyes on half of our population and easily trade away their rights? Even if the opponents of women's participation in various spheres of life prevent women's presence by invoking cultural and ideological issues, this is not a reason to marginalise women and trade away their rights.

Afghanistan is a part of the international community. It has signed many international treaties and conventions including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). After a decade of continued company with the international community, after having voiced complaints and remorse for forgetting Afghanistan in previous decades, we must learn from their experiences in all fields and in particular in regard to women in order to solve the problems of the society. The government of Afghanistan has a duty to adopt a responsible approach to its obligations before humanity and in particular the people of Afghanistan and not allow half the population to be banished to oblivion once again. All the authorities and elected representatives of the people must adhere to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as the highest legal instrument in this country and be respectful of all the achievements of the government and civil society of Afghanistan in the past 11 years.

We are concerned today that dark-mindedness, illiteracy and lack of awareness may once again push the people of Afghanistan, our women, men and children, over the precipice and force us to relive the bitter experiences of the past.

Afghanistan Women's 50% Campaign, Armanshahr Foundation/OPEN ASIA, Women's Political Participation, All Afghan Women Union, Transitional Justice Coordination Group (TJCG), Afghanistan Civil Society Forum (ACSF), Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), Afghanistan Human rights and Democracy Organisation (AHRDO), Radio Mojda, Cooperation Center for Afghanistan (CCO), Cooperation for Peace and Development (CPD), Fadayi Herawi Publishing House, Foundation for Culture and Civil Society (FCCS), , Human Rights Focus Organisation, Young Women for Change, 8 Sobh daily, Social Association of Afghan Justice-Seekers (SAAJS), Rawan on line, Foundation of Solidarity for Justice, People's Radio (Mardom), Negah Zan Network, Ertebat.

To contact us: campaign50darsad@gmail.com
/ <http://campaign50darsad.blogfa.com//>

Statement of CSHRO for 8th March

The Civil Society and Human Rights Organization (CSHRO) issued a statement on the occasion of 8th March. Excerpts are as follows:¹

.....



- Recently, the Religious Council (Shora-ye-Ulama) of Afghanistan has released a statement addressing the role of women in the Afghan society. The statement is demanding limitations to the political, civil and social rights of Afghan women. The Civil Society and Human Rights Organization, CSHRO (The Network), considers such a statement to be against the national and international law. The statement also contradicts Afghanistan's commitment to the international legislation.

- ... The CSHRO (The Network), would like to call upon the national and international community to give more room and opportunity to the role of women in peace- and security building in Afghanistan, based on United Nations Security Council Resolution no. 1325.

- According to a civil society report, the Afghan women often become victims of discrimination... We would like to ask the Afghan Government to ban any discriminatory acts and practices which are against Afghan women's rights.

- We would like to call upon the Afghan state and international partners to support the Afghan women in reducing poverty. Poverty is one of the main challenges for the Afghan women in their social life.

- Domestic violence is also a very important challenge for the Afghan women. The Afghan civil society would like to ask the Afghan government to organize implementing- and monitoring mechanisms to aid the realization of national and international legislation concerning the role of women in Afghanistan.

1- The full text may be accessed here: http://www.cshrn.af/CSHRN_English/Documents%20of%20CSHRN/Statements%20and%20Messages/Statements.htm



Afghanistan government reports on CEDAW

Zafar Shahrouei¹

The government of Afghanistan has for the first time presented its report on the implementation of the Convention for Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) nine years after joining the convention in March 2003. The 100-page report that was completed last June has specified the priorities and requirements to improve the conditions of women in Afghanistan.

The report has described the Law for Elimination of Violence against Women, the Family Law and the inclusion of the convention's provisions in several other laws as important steps taken by the government to improve the conditions of women in Afghanistan. Establishment of gender units within government departments, formulation of new policies to develop women's rights and establishment of the High Commission to Eliminate Violence against Women are other measures of the government intended to implement the convention's provisions.

Strong challenges

The government, nevertheless, is facing important challenges in regard to the implementation of all the regulations of the convention. The government has named the continuing insecurity in the country and undesirable traditions as some of the challenges that prevent women from benefiting from their rights. According to the report, women in the southern and eastern parts of the country are subjected to violence more than other areas. Armed conflict and the Taliban influence in those regions have been mentioned as the principal factors causing the increased violence against women. In the words of the report: "Owing to insecurities, the government cannot properly offer health, education and judicial services in some of the regions. The presence of the NGOs is very weak in the insecure regions, where they cannot offer services to the people. Therefore, victims of domestic violence have access to legal means."

The report has listed domestic violence, self-immolation, forced and under-age marriage, and rape as the most important problems of women. The most important reasons for the violence against women are widespread illiteracy among men and women, extensive poverty and lack of knowledge of women's rights among the people.

Nevertheless, the authorities have called the presentation of the report as an important step toward improving women's conditions and they say the government is committed to all its international obligations regarding the improvement of women's conditions. Ms. Asila Wardak, head of the Human Rights and International Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one of the main writers of the report, said trips had been made to all parts of Afghanistan to prepare the report. On the other hand Minister of Women's Affairs Hassan Banu Ghazanfar said that the presentation of the report would assure the international community that the government is committed to its international obligations for improvement of the conditions of women.

Deputy Director of UNAMA's Women's Section, Najia Ziwari, said the report would be examined next June and the government will receive recommendations from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

1- Source: 8 Sobh Daily, 14 March 2012

http://8am.af/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24527:1390-12-23-16-04-21&catid=1:title&Itemid=553

Implementation of the Elimination of Violence against Women Law in Afghanistan has a long way to go



Judicial and law enforcement officials are so far implementing sporadically the two-year-old law supporting the equality and rights of Afghan women, and the Government has not yet succeeded in applying the law to the vast majority of cases of violence against women, the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights said in a report released on 23 November 2011.¹

“Judges, prosecutors and police in many parts of Afghanistan have begun to use the new law which is a positive development; but unfortunately only in a small percentage of violence against women cases,” said United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay. “Although the law’s implementation is clearly growing, there is a very long way to go before Afghan women are fully protected from violence and their equality is properly supported through this important law,” she added.

Enacted in August 2009, the landmark Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) law criminalises child marriage, forced marriage, selling and buying women for the purpose or under the pretext of marriage, *baad* (giving away a woman or girl to settle a dispute), forced self-immolation and 17 other acts of violence against women including rape and beating. It also specifies punishment for perpetrators.

The 33-page United Nations report entitled *A Long Way to Go: Implementation of the Elimination of Violence against Women law in Afghanistan*, found both positive progress and gaps in the implementation of the law in the period from March 2010 to September 2011.

The report is based on 261 interviews with judicial, police and Government officials and UNAMA/United Nations human rights office monitoring of numerous violence against women cases throughout Afghanistan. The report analyses statistical data on the law’s application by judicial and law enforcement authorities in 31 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces in its first full year of implementation (21 March

2010 - 20 March 2011) with additional research over the following six months.

The report notes that comprehensive official statistics on the number of cases of violence against women in Afghanistan are not available and most incidents are unreported. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission registered 2,299 incidents of violence against women that could be defined as crimes under the EVAW law between March 2010 and March 2011. Using the available figure of 2,299 incidents as a baseline estimate, United Nations human rights officials found that prosecutors in 28 provinces opened cases in 26 percent of the total 2,299 incidents (i.e. 594 cases). They filed indictments in seven percent (155 cases) and primary courts relied on the EVAW law as the basis of their judgments in only four percent of total incidents (101 cases).

“The justice sector in some provinces has applied the EVAW law which is encouraging. But the low number of cases prosecuted and tried shows that a much more active collective effort by justice system actors, Government decision-makers and others is needed to urge judicial and local authorities to apply the law to all cases of violence against women,” said Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA. “Progress on the status of Afghan women over the last ten years, including their 38 percent access to schools, their 69 MPs in Parliament and some women who have qualified as airplane pilots, is undermined by uneven implementation of the Elimination of Violence against Women Law.”

Prosecutors in 17 provinces filed indictments under the law. Herat province led the country, with 68 EVAW law indictments filed and 35 cases tried. The Special Violence against Women Unit of the Attorney General’s Office in Kabul opened approximately half of all cases in the country - 285 from Kabul, in addition to 47 received from 19 other provinces. However, its record of filing indictments with the courts was comparatively small: a total of only 21 indictments were filed in Kabul courts from March 2010 to March 2011.

The report determined that many cases of violence against Afghan women were

1- Full report at: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/AF/UNAMA_Nov2011.pdf

withdrawn or mediated including serious crimes that would require prosecution. United Nations human rights officials found that some murder cases and other serious crimes criminalised under the EAW law were instead prosecuted under the Penal Code or Sharia law. This sometimes resulted in acquittal of perpetrators, reduction of charges to less serious crimes, convictions with lighter sentences and women victims themselves being accused of “moral crimes”. The report also found that police and prosecutors in many regions continued to refer a majority of cases of violence against women to traditional dispute resolution mechanisms that did not enforce the EAW law or adequately protect women’s rights.

Mediation was used extensively for domestic violence complaints by institutions including the Police Family Response Unit, Department of Women’s Affairs, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the Special Violence against Women Unit of the Attorney General’s Office. While mediation was sometimes preferred by women complainants, the report found that authorities often inappropriately pressured women to withdraw complaints and opt for mediation.

The report said that provincial branches of the Commission for the Prevention of Violence against Women are struggling to fulfill their mandate and require more support from provincial Governors, the national Ministry of Women’s Affairs and other government bodies. Of the 28 provincial branches established since the EAW law was enacted, only 16 are still functioning currently and meeting regularly.

“As long as women and girls are subject to violence with impunity that violates their human rights, little meaningful and sustainable progress for women’s rights can be achieved in Afghanistan,” said Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights for UNAMA. “Ensuring rights for Afghan women – such as their participation in public life, including in the peace and reconciliation process and equal opportunities in education and employment – requires not only legal safeguards on paper, but speedy and full enforcement of the EAW law.”

To improve implementation of the EAW law, UNAMA and the United Nations human rights office made 32 recommendations to the Government and its international partners, including to make a much greater effort to raise awareness of the law among Afghan women and men and within all levels of the Government; to have the Supreme Court, Ministry of Interior and Attorney General’s Office instruct all officials to apply the law consistently, rapidly and efficiently; and, to train police, prosecutors and judges on how to apply the law. The report called on international donors to support and fully fund the 2008-2018 National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) and the

National Priority Programs on Law and Justice for All and Capacity Development to Accelerate NAPWA Implementation.

Excerpts from the Report

Examples of application of the EAW law:

Herat prosecutors applied Article 22 of the EAW law and Article 395 of the Penal Code to pursue a double murder. Two sisters, age 15 and 17, were killed in Karukh district of Herat in July 2010. Reportedly, the 17-year-old had refused to marry a man her family had chosen for her. Five people, including her would-be in-laws and two other men attacked the two girls in their home and killed them. Police arrested the five in October 2010. The Court of Appeals acquitted three of the men, but sentenced the would-be husband and father-in-law to 16 years imprisonment.

In Jawzjan province, in March 2011, a district court found a former ANA soldier guilty of forcing his wife into prostitution (EAW Article 18). Injured and unable to work, the former soldier told his wife to have sex with their landlord in exchange for rent. The wife refused and reported the case. The husband confessed and was sentenced to three years imprisonment; the Court of Appeals increased the sentence to seven years.

In March 2011, a woman reported her daughter’s forced suicide to the (Kandahar) Family Response Unit. Her family had given away their 25-year old daughter in marriage for 300,000 Afghanis (US\$6,600). Her in-laws constantly berated the woman saying “Your parents took so much money from us you must now pay it back by working in people’s homes.” In February 2011, after ten years of marriage, the in-laws ordered her to have sex with three male guests visiting the family. A month later, the woman set fire to herself in her room. “She was always saying that she would burn herself one day. I would tell her, please tolerate, this is life as it comes and one day you will have a bright future,” the woman’s mother said. Police recorded the mother’s complaint but made no attempt to investigate. Forced self-immolation is one of several crimes the EAW law instructs must be pursued by police and prosecutors even in the absence of a complainant.

In Daikundi province, authorities referred a case of serious violence against a woman to elders for resolution. The case involved a man who stabbed his sister-in-law multiple times in November 2010. She survived, was hospitalized and police arrested the perpetrator. Authorities then reported the case had been resolved through the informal justice system with the assistance of community elders. Their resolution was a pledge from the man that he would leave his sister-in-law in peace instead of prosecution. The prosecutor denied responsibility, blaming the police for referring the case to the elders.

Afghanistan: Hundreds of Women, Girls Jailed for 'Moral Crimes'

Government Should Target Abusers, Not Victims¹

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

March 28, 2012 (Kabul) – The Afghan government should release the approximately 400 women and girls imprisoned in Afghanistan for “moral crimes,” Human Rights Watch said in a new report released today. The United States and other donor countries should press the Afghan government under President Hamid Karzai to end the wrongful imprisonment of women and girls who are crime victims rather than criminals.

The 120-page report, “‘I Had to Run Away’: Women and Girls Imprisoned for ‘Moral Crimes’” in Afghanistan,² is based on 58 interviews conducted in three prisons and three juvenile detention facilities with women and girls accused of “moral crimes.” Almost all girls in juvenile detention in Afghanistan had been arrested for “moral crimes,” while about half of women in Afghan prisons were arrested on these charges. These “crimes” usually involve flight from unlawful forced marriage or domestic violence. Some women and girls have been convicted of zina, sex outside of marriage, after being raped or forced into prostitution.

“It is shocking that 10 years after

the overthrow of the Taliban, women and girls are still imprisoned for running away from domestic violence or forced marriage,” said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch. “No one should be locked up for fleeing a dangerous situation even if it’s at home. President Karzai and Afghanistan’s allies should act decisively to end this abusive and discriminatory practice.”...

Human Rights Watch interviewed many girls who had been arrested after they fled a forced marriage and women who had fled abusive husbands and relatives. Some women interviewed by Human Rights Watch had gone to the police in dire need of help, only to be arrested instead.

“Running away,” or fleeing home without permission, is not a crime under the Afghan criminal code, but the Afghan Supreme Court has instructed its judges to treat women and girls who flee as criminals. Zina is a crime under Afghan law, punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Women and girls interviewed by Human Rights Watch described abuses including forced and underage marriage, beatings, stabbings, burnings, rapes, forced prostitution, kidnapping, and murder threats. Virtually none of the cases had led even to an investigation of the abuse, let alone prosecution or punishment...

Human Rights Watch said that women and girls accused of “moral crimes” face a justice system stacked against them at every stage. Police arrest them solely on a complaint of a husband or relative. Prosecutors ignore evidence that supports women’s assertions of innocence. Judges often convict solely on the basis of “confessions” given in the absence of lawyers and “signed” without having been read to women who cannot read or write. After conviction, women routinely face long prison sentences, in some cases more than 10 years.

Afghanistan’s 2009 Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women makes violence against women a criminal offense. But the same police, prosecutors, and judges who work zealously to lock up women accused of “moral crimes” often ignore evidence of abuse against the accused women, Human Rights Watch said.

“Courts send women to prison for dubious ‘crimes’ while the real criminals – their abusers – walk free,” Roth said. “Even the most horrific abuses suffered by women seem to elicit nothing more than a shrug from prosecutors, despite laws criminalizing violence against women.”

Abusive prosecution of “moral crimes” is important to far more than the approximately 400 women and girls in prison or pre-trial detention, Human Rights Watch said. Every time a woman or girl flees a forced marriage or domestic violence only to end up behind bars, it sends a clear message to others enduring abuse that seeking help from the government is likely to result in punishment, not rescue.

The plight of women facing domestic violence is

1- <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/28/afghanistan-hundreds-women-girls-jailed-moral-crimes>

2- <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/03/29/i-had-run-away>

made still worse by archaic divorce laws that permit a man simply to declare himself divorced, while making it extremely difficult for a woman to obtain a divorce, Human Rights Watch said. The Afghan government made a commitment to reform these laws in 2007 under its National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan, and a committee of experts drafted a new Family Law that would improve the rights of women. This new law, however, has been on hold with the government since 2010, with no sign of movement toward passage...

By maintaining discriminatory laws on the books, and by failing to address due process and fair trial violations in "moral crimes" cases, Afghanistan is in violation of its obligations under international human rights law. United Nations expert bodies and special rapporteurs have called for the repeal of Afghanistan's "moral crimes" laws. The UN special rapporteur on violence against women has

called on Afghanistan to "abolish laws, including those related to zina, that discriminate against women and girls and lead to their imprisonment and cruel, inhuman, and degrading punishment." The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has urged Afghanistan to "[r]emove so-called moral offences as a crime and release children detained on this basis."

"The Afghan government and its international partners should act urgently to protect women's rights and to ensure there is no backsliding," Roth said. "President Karzai, the United States, and others should finally make good on the bold promises they made to Afghan women a decade ago by ending imprisonment for 'moral crimes,' and actually implementing their stated commitment to support women's rights."

Afghan women after the Taliban: Will history repeat itself?



6 March 2012

Press Release

The future of women's rights in Afghanistan is more unpredictable than at any stage over the last ten years. With the planned withdrawal of the international troops by 2014, an expected cut in international aid, and the increasing possibility of a political compromise of the Afghan government and the international community with the different insurgent groups, most of women's important achievements over the last decade are likely to be reversed.

'Afghan Women After the Taliban: Will History Repeat Itself?' is a comprehensive report that examines the situation of women in Afghanistan ten years after the fall of the Taliban. Published by the Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization (AHRDO), this report is the outcome of a highly innovative community-based theatre piece that was staged in five regional centres of Afghanistan and involved approximately 5,000 Afghan women from all walks of life. The objective of the different project

activities was to use different forms of interactive theatre for Afghan women to critically analyse their situation in the country and make suggestions for legislation that protect and promote women's rights in Afghanistan.

The dubious and non-transparent process of political negotiations with extremist groups, the resurgence of Salafist and religious conservative circles and the unfortunate division and fragmentation among Afghan civil society groups, present serious possibilities of a relapse into the past and a repetition of history that will once again turn back the clock for millions of Afghan women. This historical trend today continues to be led by radical religious leaders who have managed to monopolise women's legislation process over the last couple of years.

"If the women are to protect their hard-gained achievements of the last ten years, they must come up with a clear message vis-à-vis the recent developments, particularly the negotiations with radical Islamist groups and the gradual international disengagement. These processes will adversely impact women's lives in the future and Afghan women must do everything possible to minimise the risks and dangers involved" says Khodadad Bisharat, Executive Director of AHRDO.

'Afghan Women After the Taliban: Will History Repeat Itself?' was presented in the Afghan parliament on February 7, 2012, and is available to the general public now.

86th Public Debate

Present and future of women in Afghanistan: challenges in safeguarding rights



The 86th (6th year) Goftegu, a bridge between the elite and the citizens, of Armanshahr Foundation, marking 8 March, women's day, was held in cooperation with the French Cultural Institute of Kabul in the Institute on 11 March 2012 with the title of "Present and future of women in Afghanistan: challenges in safeguarding rights." Most participants were women.

The speakers were: Ms. Fawzia Koofi (MP; Head of Parliament's Human Rights and Civil Society Committee), Ms. Seyyeda Mojgan Mostafavi (Deputy Minister of women's affairs) Ms. Jamila Omar (Head of Research and Defence of Human Rights Organisation), Ms. Homaira Ghaderi (Writer), and Mr. Zia Moballegh (Director of Rights and Democracy NGO). Rooholamin Amini and Jawad Darwaziyan, from Armanshahr Foundation, were the moderator and the discussant, respectively.

The programme started by screening a part of a play that Armanshahr Foundation had staged on 19 September 2007 with the title of "Two women, two poetesses: in praise of Makhfi Badakhshi and Mahjouba Herawi." Mr. Amini congratulated the Women's Day and reminded that the meeting was originally scheduled to be held on 3 March 2012 but it was postponed owing to security issues.

The first speaker, Ms. Fawzia Koofi (MP), addressed the concerns of women at present time: "Afghanistan is presently going through a politically and socially sensitive period. Women have always been the first victims of political developments."

Referring to the recent resolution of the Ulema Council, she said: "This resolution is an example of political retreat. We were under the impression that many problems had been resolved, e.g. the mingling of men and women at work, but they are taking us back to their tribal traditions and norms. Unfortunately, there is no structural system to protect women under the present conditions. Even those who claim to be intellectuals, take the same positions arising from the views in the Ulema Council's resolution. The only support for the women of Afghanistan is the Constitution. However, there is no punishment for the violators of the Constitution, even though one would be brought to trial if they violated the civil code or the penal code."

Ms. Koofi went on: Many cases of violence against women in Afghanistan are rooted in our history and fundamental and long-term plans are needed to resolve them. However, some of the problems are rooted in 30 years of war. The endeavour towards justice for women is the third or fourth priority in the country. We will not go forward and even move back so long as we do not have an active and independent civil society and the state institutions are not bound by important instruments such as the Constitution and the 10-year plan for women. Another storm is on the way and women will surely be the first victims of it.

Ms. Seyyeda Mojgan Mostafavi (Deputy Minister) said: We have a solid plan today, based on which we formulated the Violence Elimination Act and the Family Law. Today

425 women's NGOs have been registered in the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

In response to the moderators question about the president's repeated support for women as well as his support for the Ulema Council's resolution and the attitude of Ministry of Women's Affairs to the issue, she said: "We are a part of the government and we follow its policies and the policies of Mr. Karzai. There are different opinions in our society and we cannot decide for all the people based on the opinion of a few people. You are stating the opinions of a number of people who have returned from the West. Look at the media. Women appear in the worst possible forms. The people want their women to cover themselves. All the people want to live under the Islamic sharia, not under the international conventions."

Ms. Jamila Omar said: "In our country, perhaps even the women cannot accept to be present in the society as human beings. Otherwise no council or individual would dare talk about women as secondary subjects. Our problem is living from day to day. We believe in women's rights today, but not tomorrow. We do not approach the issues in depth. Superficial approach is not a lasting one. In our country, fleeing home is a crime, because this could occasionally be followed with moral offences, even though it is a right. The other issue concerns cover. Nobody has the right to cover women; nobody has the right to undress women. However, we have born witness to both in this country. If women do not sit at the table face-to-face with the opposition to arrive at a conclusion, there can be no negotiations about peace based on popular values.

Ms. Homaira Ghaderi discussed misogyny in historical literature and the female poets who lived in secret. She asked: Why could women not occupy a higher position throughout the history? One of the answers is that they lack sufficient living experience. When a man says 'home is the best place you can be in', how can one achieve various experiences?

Mr. Zia Moballegh, referring to the resolution of the Ulema Council, said: "Unfortunately, they put forward an interpretation that deprives everybody from stating the opposite, i.e. the man is the principal and the woman is secondary. This is the most dangerous step in the direction of an official reading of religion. People should consult the Koran

themselves to see if the Koran says what these people say. Why have they monopolised the understanding of the Koran? This indicates that we are moving towards a dictatorial system. If an official reading of religion, based on article 3 of the Constitution, is brought into practice in this country, it will be a catastrophe."

Ms. Najia Ziwari, representing the women's section of the UNAMA, said: "I wish to state the support of UNAMA in respect of the resolution of the Ulema Council, where they offer good protection. We believe this is a good opportunity for all Moslem woman living in an Islamic society under the Constitution they accepted. Moslem women, living in a country, are subject to some of the laws, which have not been imposed on them and they have accepted them."

"Our message is that we should take as good omen parts of this resolution of the Ulema Council and try to discuss some parts of it with the great Ulema. The position of the UN is that all issues should be discussed jointly. The UN has established the Institute of Studies on Women and Islam as a place to discuss and research the women's issues. We have talked to institutions such as the University of Kabul about this."

In conclusion, the discussant and the participants asked questions and the speakers responded to them. The discussant asked Ms. Mojgan Mostafavi: Although Mr. Karzai may not have directly addressed the women's issues, what does his support for the Ulema Council's resolution mean and why have his subordinates issued a directive about the hijab of women who work in the television stations?

Mostafavi replied: when I am in favour of the statement of the Ministry of Information and Culture about hijab, I cannot view the issue from the Western point of view. Women in the western societies are commercial items. Women marry women and men marry men. We cannot tolerate this in Afghanistan. We are much better than them. The media must be stopped. They have destroyed our society. People do not accept the media in the villages. I do not want my own child to give birth before getting married lawfully. The media promote prostitution and vice nowadays and they must be stopped. I do not want the afghan women to appear on the media like colour dolls.

Women, telling the untold

Six years of Goftegu public debates about women



Women and issues related to them are topics that various societies are not inclined to discuss seriously, in particular in traditional societies where women are still regarded as 'wife', 'family', 'honour' etc. The truth is, however, that women form half of the population and play a fundamental role in creating the social foundations.

We must admit that the women's issue is a political issue and requires political action. It is not confined to social and cultural areas.

To aid the civil society and its activists, to create a proper channel for respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in Afghanistan, Armanshahr pursues debate and dialogue and exchange of ideas.

In the past six years, Armanshahr Foundation has organised a series of debates in various fields: politics, society, economics, women, literature and arts. Special attention has been paid to women's issues. Up to now, out of the total 86 Goftegu public debates that have been held regularly throughout these years, 12 Goftegu debates and one seminar specifically concerned women's issues. Armanshahr approach was to invite specialist and informed women in debates concerning general issues as well to provide an opportunity for women's voices and views to be heard. Hence, more than 60 opinionated and specialist women attended the public debates as speakers.

A review of the titles of Goftegu public debates would demonstrate that fundamental issues influencing the lives of women have been given coverage to a large extent: the conditions of

women's movement, social justice, arts and literature, political participation, women's role in government negotiations with armed opposition, transitional justice, peace and women's cinema.

The women's issues are common in general and in particular among Afghanistan's neighbours, which require attention to the experience of other nations in the region. Therefore, attention has been paid to other countries in the region in regard to topics and issues. Armanshahr Foundation organised a seminar titled "Strengthening the women's movement in Afghanistan and national and transnational experiences" in 2008. Besides domestic activists, women's rights activists from India and Iran took part in the seminar. In another programme, Ms. Lucia Dierenberger, research on women's issues in Tajikistan, and domestic experts discussed the conditions of women in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

The most recent Goftegu public debate, titled "Present and future of women in Afghanistan: challenges in safeguarding rights" marking 8 March was held on 11 March 2012. Titles of Goftegu public debates of Armanshahr Foundation concerning women are as follows:

- Social justice in multi-ethnic countries and multifaceted view of women's rights
- Women's movement: a national movement or an artificial process?
- Two women, two poetesses: Makhfi Badakhshi and Mahjouba Herawi
- Strengthening the women's movement in Afghanistan and national and transnational experiences – a seminar
- National dialogue with women: justice rendered or one step back?
- Women and justice
- Women's 50% Campaign and future strategy of political participation
- 30 years of poetry in 30 years of war
- Dream of women of Afghanistan, we, cinema, society; where Playing the Taar, a film by Ms Roya Sadat was shown
- Women, peace and cinema
- Women and justice in war and peace
- A comparative reading up the conditions women in Afghanistan and Tajikistan
- Present and future of women in Afghanistan: challenges in safeguarding rights

Ulema Council's resolution about women

4 March 2012



Here's a rush translation¹ of the controversial resolution from Afghanistan's Ulema Council, a religious advisory body comprised of the country's leading clerics. The three-page resolution talks about an array of subjects under five bullet points, but the fifth and longest one is about women...

The Ulema first spell out the rights women enjoy under Islam and then explain the responsibilities of women:

[Paragraph 5:]Unlike other civilizations and societies of the present and the past, the sacred religion of Islam – in recognition of the fundamental role of women in nurturing the society – offers women many civil and social rights, and human dignity and honor.

In the centuries before Islam, and among human civilizations and nations, women were deprived of any kind of human and social rights. They were treated as cheap property and were even buried alive. But by the advent of the globe-illuminating sun [that was] the sacred religion of Islam, many rights were given to women according to nature, such as:

- a) The right to property, ownership and commerce
- b) The right to inheritance according to the principles of the sacred Shariah of Islam
- c) The right to mehr (very roughly, dower), which is exclusively the woman's [property] and no one has the right to take it without her consent. All other practices known as toyana, shareeb, etc. do not have a basis in the Shariah.
- d) The right to choose a spouse according

to her own will. Forcibly marrying an adult woman is not allowed, although consultation with the guardians – which is a religious rule – is practiced

e) Women, like men, have dignity and are beings with freedom; therefore, exchanging a woman for someone's blood (badal), or for [establishing] peace, or exchanging a woman for another's dower are haram and prohibited under the Shariah.

f) Women cannot be inherited. Similarly, there are many other rights, granted to a woman under the religion of Islam, which are observed. But, where a Muslim woman has many rights, [she also] has duties and obligations, such as:

1. Adherence, in faith and action, to the orders and prohibitions of Islam's sacred Shariah
2. Complete adherence and observance of the hijab [according to the Shariah], which protects the dignity and personality of the woman
3. Avoiding mingling with stranger men in various social situations, such as education, shopping, the office and other affairs of life
4. In consideration of the clarity of verses 1 and 34 of Surah an-Nisa' [of the Qur'an], men are fundamental and women are secondary; also, lineage is derived from the man. Therefore, the use of words and expressions that contradict the sacred verses must be strictly avoided.
5. Respecting [the orders] about the multiplicity of wives (polygamy), which are in accordance with clear orders of the Qur'an
6. Avoiding travel without a [Shariah-sanctioned] mahram (male companion)
7. Adherence to the clear orders of Muhammad's Shariah in case of divorce

It needs to be said that teasing, harassment and beating of women without a Shariah-compliant reason, as set forth clearly in the Glorious Qur'an, is prohibited. Afghanistan's Ulema Council requests the judicial and law-enforcement organs of the country to punish, in accordance with Muhammad's Shariah and national laws, the perpetrators of any kind of assault from persons against women.

A multitude of rights and responsibilities are set forth in the religious texts of Islam; they will be consulted as needed.

1- Source: <https://afghanistanaanalysis.wordpress.com/2012/03/04/english-translation-of-ulema-councils-declaration-about-women/>

Report: US sent detainees to Afghan prisons known for torture despite moratorium



KABUL, Afghanistan (AP; 17 March) - A report released by two rights groups says the U.S. sent some detainees to Afghan prisons where torture was found despite an announced moratorium on such moves.

The report by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and the New York-based Open Society Institute suggests that Afghanistan's international allies are still failing to ensure that people captured on the battlefield are treated humanely despite a massive reform program in recent months.

NATO forces regularly hand Afghans that they have captured over to Afghan authorities after they have decided that the detainees are no longer an immediate threat. But the coalition stopped such transfers to 16 Afghan detention facilities shortly before a U.N. report was issued in September that found evidence of torture at those prisons.

The report documents 11 "recent, credible cases" in which detainees said they were captured by U.S. personnel, then transferred to an Afghan facility in Kandahar where U.N. investigators had found evidence of torture.

The transfers happened after July, when NATO and U.S. forces stopped sending detainees to the facility because of torture concerns, the report said.

U.S. military officials could not immediately be reached for comment, but are cited in the

report as saying that there are no NATO or U.S. military forces transferring detainees to the facility, which is operated by the National Directorate of Security, or NDS — the Afghan intelligence service.

"There is compelling evidence that at least some U.S. forces or personnel continue to transfer individuals to NDS Kandahar despite not only a widely acknowledged risk of torture but also evidence that detainees transferred to NDS Kandahar by U.S. forces have been subjected to torture," according to the report.

Interviews with detainees and U.S. responses to queries suggest that "there may be U.S. forces or personnel, perhaps including C.I.A. or other U.S. intelligence officials," operating outside of these commands and who have detained people and sent them to the supposedly banned facilities, the report said.

A U.S. embassy spokesman said: "We have not seen the report, and so can't comment," spokesman Gavin Sundwall said.

The report — which also details abuse at nine Afghan intelligence service facilities and "several" prisons operated by the Afghan police — was based on interviews with more than 100 detainees between February 2011 and January 2012, along with interviews with lawyers, legal aid workers, detention facility officials and government representatives, the authors said.

Saturday's report, called "Torture, Transfers, and Denial of Due Process," names a number of facilities that were not flagged in the United Nations report. But the facility that receives the most criticism is the NDS Kandahar facility, where the report says there has also been recent evidence of beatings and being shocked with electric cables.

"Monitors received 10 credible allegations of abuse in NDS Kandahar as recently as January 2012," the report said.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/report-us-sent-detainees-to-afghan-prisons-known-for-torture-despite-moratorium/2012/03/17/gIQAWJ8wIS_story.html

The culture war over Afghan women is heating up

Una Moore

9 March 2012



Painting by: Maryam Ebrahimi

Just over ten years have passed since the international community overthrew the notoriously misogynist Taliban regime, and Afghan women are again at the center of a volatile national debate over whether basic rights and freedoms should be extended to the female half of the population. With the US and Afghan governments reaching out to the Taliban for peace talks and conservatives within the Afghan government making statements in support of restricting women's dress, freedom of movement, and rights to work, to justice, and to be protected from violence, activists fear they are witnessing the beginning of a major crackdown on women.

Influential conservatives have increasingly focused their advocacy on rolling back aspects of women's progress ranging from hard-won guarantees of rights to expressions of individuality and happiness. A few of their pet projects:

2010: The Ulema Council, Afghanistan's advisory council of religious leaders, called for the reintroduction of the death penalty as a punishment in adultery cases.

2011: Conservatives within the Ministry of Women's Affairs unsuccessfully attempted to take over the country's NGO-run women's shelters, and the Ministry of Justice proposed a

law banning mixed gender wedding parties and wedding gowns that show women's curves.

2012: The Ministry of Culture and Information sent a letter to television studios stating that, "all female news presenters must avoid heavy make-up and wear a headscarf."

Then, this week –as if timed to dominate the discourse around International Women's Day– the Ulema Council released a statement saying that "men are fundamental and women are secondary." The statement called for the strict segregation of the sexes in public spaces, and for women to veil and avoid traveling without a male guardian. Disturbingly, it also appeared to sanction violence against women under some circumstances. (The line in question reads: "It needs to be said that teasing, harassment and beating of women without a Shariah-compliant reason, as set forth clearly in the Glorious Qur'an, is prohibited.")

Heather Barr of Human Rights Watch summed up why the statement caused widespread alarm among human rights activists.

If this was just the view of conservative religious leaders, it would be discouraging, but just another in a long line of discriminatory statements about women from Afghanistan's male dominated institutions. What caused consternation, however, was the sense that President Hamid Karzai had embraced the statement. In a departure from usual practice, the statement was posted on the Presidential Palace website, distributed to the media by the Palace, and defended by President Karzai at a news conference.

As regressive and reminiscent of Taliban edicts as the Ulema Council's most recent statement is, the Council is hardly the only Afghan institution to threaten women's rights, and, as an advisory body with no law-making power, it's not the most dangerous either.

It is the Afghan justice system that most grimly embodies the government's opposition to implementing laws to protect women's rights, and all of its institutions remain deeply hostile to women. Throughout Afghanistan, four hundred women and girls are currently serving prison sentences for so-called "moral crimes" –usually extramarital intercourse, including being raped, running away from abusive homes, and fleeing forced marriages. (Global Post just published the story of a woman who is doing time in Kabul's infamous Badam Bagh prison for refusing to submit to an incestuous marriage to her own uncle.) For Afghan women, aid to the justice sector over the past decade has yielded little more than cleaner prisons for the unjustly incarcerated –a fact that international donors are reluctant to admit.

Last year, the European Union refused to release a documentary it had commissioned about the plight of Afghan women imprisoned for "moral crimes" because the film shed light on the abusive practices of the Afghan judiciary. That move sparked outrage among Afghan activists and international human rights groups who argued the EU's decision betrayed the women who had agreed to be filmed in the hope of drawing attention to their cases.

Deep-seated fear of a return to the dark days of the 1990's, when Afghanistan's atrocities were largely ignored by the rest of the world, pervades the progressive activist community in Afghanistan at this juncture.

"The signs of hope for Afghan women are fading faster than at any other time in the past few years, yet they have not disappeared completely – because our history teaches us that there has always been women who struggled, failed, struggled failed and then succeeded well," prominent women's rights advocate Orzala Ashraf Nemat wrote in her International Women's Day piece for the Guardian.

<http://www.undispatch.com/the-culture-war-over-afghan-women-the-bad-news>

President Karzai and the 'secondary' sex

Rachel Reid Friday

March 9, 2012



The Afghan government was "too busy" for International Women's Day on March 8, so it postponed official acknowledgement until the 11th. It was not a great moment to celebrate, anyway. A week earlier a council of religious scholars -- the Ulema Council -- published guidance that declared "men are fundamental and women are secondary." It called for women to travel with mahrams (male escorts), and to avoid mixing with men in offices, markets and educational facilities. The statement also said that beating a woman is only permissible with a "Shariah-compliant reason."

The Council's edicts have no legal standing, and were not unprecedented from this conservative body. What was more troubling was that the Office of the President published the statement, and President Hamid Karzai appeared to endorse it, by telling reporters that it was "in accordance with a Sharia view of our country, which all Muslims and Afghans are committed to." With women activists already anxious about the potential impact of deals with the Taliban, Karzai's words served as a sobering reminder of his poor track record on women's rights.

Concerns about the impact of a deal with the Taliban on women's rights are often dismissed with assertions that Taliban views on women are not so different from many in the government. This statement by the Ulema Council supports that viewpoint, and you'd certainly find a few former warlords nodding in agreement with it in the Cabinet and parliament.

But the conservatives in government have, for the most part, grudgingly accepted the presence of women in political life. The current environment may be hostile to women, but activists have been able to negotiate significant victories. Last year, when conservatives in government tried to take over women's shelters, women activists fought back and won. In 2010 parliamentarians and activists successfully stymied some egregious articles in a bill to regulate family law for Shia Muslims. The year before that they succeeded in pushing through a law on violence against women which made the crime of rape explicit for the first time. Progress may be slow, but it is steady, and

often heroic.

Some who speak regularly to Talibs say they have become more progressive when it comes to things like women's access to education. One source admits, though, that many Talibs would still oppose the presence of women in the workplace and in politics.

Taliban hostility to women's presence in public life often came up in work I carried out in 2010, interviewing women living in de facto Taliban controlled areas, and gathering "night letters" - threat letters delivered under cover of darkness. Fatima K., (a pseudonym), lives in a southern province, where she received this letter from the Taliban in February 2010:

"We Taliban warn you to stop working otherwise we will take your life away. We will kill you in such a harsh way that no woman has so far been killed in that manner. This will be a good lesson for those women like you who are working."

Fatima K. left her job. Others choose to ignore the threats. When Hossai, a 22-year-old Afghan aid worker in the southern city of Kandahar, received threatening phone calls from a man who said he was with the Taliban, she didn't believe it. The man had told her to stop working with foreigners. But Hossai didn't want to give up a good job with an American development company, Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI). Within weeks Hossai was dead. On April 13, 2010, a gunman lay in wait for her when she left the office. She was shot multiple times and died the next day.

Days after Hossai's killing, another young woman working in Kandahar, Nadia N. (a pseudonym), received a letter signed by the Taliban, which threatened her with death:

"We would warn you today on behalf of the Servants of Islam to stop working with infidels. We always know when you are working. If you continue, you will be considered an enemy of Islam and will be killed. In the same way that yesterday we have killed Hossai, whose name was on our list, your name and other women's names are also our list."

These letters are reminders that it may not be right to treat the Taliban as just another set of conservatives. Their views on women may overlap with a significant segment of opinion in Afghanistan, but the Taliban are also a force which has become used to imposing their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam with violence and fear.

To express concern about the possible impact of deals with the Taliban sometimes opens you up to glib accusations that you are 'pro-war' or 'anti-peace.' In fact, there is no contradiction in wanting to see an end to the devastating loss of life in the conflict, welcoming a search for a political solution, while simultaneously expressing concerns about potential pitfalls and costs.

Sadly, there are many reasons to be wary at present. The Afghan government seems to lack the credibility or vision to forge a just and inclusive peace deal. And as the president's response to the Ulema Council statement illustrated, he seems unlikely to take a stand against religious conservatives in defense of women's rights.

Meanwhile, it is far from clear that the Taliban have the will or the ability to forge a lasting deal, or that they would be prepared to meet the government's precondition of recognizing a (man-made) constitution with all that it enshrines, including women's equality, democracy and freedom of expression.

After the Ulema Council published their statement, I spoke with several women's rights activists in Kabul. They were dismayed, but immediately turned to strategizing about the most pragmatic means of responding. Afghanistan now has a generation of women activists who have earned a quiet confidence born of successive achievements.

But if a deal with the Taliban is to avoid dramatically shrinking their space, it will require leadership from a president with the courage to recognize them as his equals.

Rachel Reid is Senior Policy Advisor on Afghanistan and Pakistan for the Open Society Foundations. More of the "night letters" referred to here are also featured in an essay by Reid in a book published this week: "The Unfinished Revolution: Voices from the Global Fight for Women's Rights" (Seven Stories Press).

http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/09/president_karzai_and_the_secondary_sex

The NYT Reports on Slavery in Afghanistan

17 February 2012 by Amanda Taub

The following is a guest post from Una Moore, who blogs for U.N. Dispatch.

Human rights abuses in Afghanistan are too often wrapped in euphemisms and exoticism. Think: "opium brides." The term conjures images of dark-eyed women sensually smoking from opium pipes while sitting on silk cushions, but it actually refers to little girls who are handed over to drug lords (who subsequently rape, traffic and sometimes kill them) by their indigent families as "repayment" for poppy crop debts. Most international media outlets are guilty of using terms like "opium bride" for people who, were they not South/Central Asian, would simply, bluntly, accurately be called victims of human trafficking. Because that's what they are.

Given the prevalence of this double standard, I was surprised today when I read the New York Times article 'For Punishment of Elder's Misdeeds, Afghan Girl Pays the Price.' In describing one of the most violent and heinous violations of women's human rights in Afghanistan today, the NYT calls the practice of "baad" what it actually is: the enslavement of young girls and women for purposes of sexual exploitation and manual labor. It even used the s-word!

Despite being denounced by the United Nations as a "harmful traditional practice," baad is pervasive in rural southern and eastern Afghanistan, areas that are heavily Pashtun, according to human rights workers, women's advocates and aid experts. Baad involves giving away a young woman, often a child, into slavery and forced marriage. It is largely hidden because the girls are given to compensate for "shameful" crimes like murder and adultery and acts forbidden by custom, like elopement, say elders and women's rights advocates.

The article tells the story of Shakila, a 10-year-old girl who was taken, along with her young cousin, by a family of local thugs in her native Kunar as punishment for her uncle running away with the wife of a warlord. Tied up in a dark room, starved, kept filthy, and beaten for months, Shakila finally escaped and made her way back to her parents. Her

abusers quickly chased after her, and her family was then left with no choice but to flee from their village to the provincial capital. When interviewed by the NYT, Shakila's father explains that it wasn't the fact that his daughter was thrown against walls and fed only water and bread for months on end that bothered him most, it was the fact that he'd already promised Shakila to someone else by the time she was taken.

"We did not mind giving girls," said her father, Gul Zareen. "But she was not mine to give."

Men like those who abused Shakila continue to operate with impunity in areas where there is little government presence to speak of and where local people rely on tribal dispute resolution mechanisms, the article goes on to explain. If you've worked in Afghanistan, as I have, you've heard it all before: people don't trust the government, the courts are corrupt, tribal customs are deeply rooted, and so on. And all of that is true, but the NYT article highlights something else, something that gets at the real reason there's so little meaningful opposition to baad –the grim fact that many urban, pro-government Afghan men support baad and similar practices that destroy the lives of Afghan women.

Take, for example, these jaw-dropping quotes from a member of parliament from Nangarhar province, another hot spot for the enslavement and trafficking of women and girls.

"Giving baad has good and bad aspects," said Fraidoon Mohmand, a Member of Parliament from Nangarhar Province, who has led a number of jirgas. "The bad aspect is that you punish an innocent human for someone else's wrongdoings, and the good aspect is that you rescue two families, two clans, from more bloodshed, death and misery."

[...] "When you give a girl in baad, they are beaten maybe, maybe she will be in trouble for a year or two, but when she brings one or two babies into the world, everything will be forgotten and she will live as a normal member of the family," he said.

Did you get that? Enslaving women and girls isn't really so terrible, because the rapes and beatings ease up after a few years and a few forced pregnancies.

<http://www.wrongingrights.com/2012/02/the-new-york-times-reports-on-slavery-in-afghanistan-actually-uses-the-s-word.html>



THE USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY IN

2011-Afghanistan

Amnesty International Death Penalty Report 2011 indicated that after two years without executions, judicial killings resumed in Afghanistan on 20 June 2011, when two men were executed by hanging at Pul-e-Charkhi prison outside Kabul. The men, Zar Ajam, a Pakistani national from North Warizistan, and Mateullah from Kunar province in Afghanistan, were convicted of killing approximately 40 people and injuring some 78 others during a raid at a branch of Kabul Bank in the eastern city of Jalalabad

on 19 February 2011. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. Death sentences were known to have been imposed in 2011 and at least 140 to be under sentence of death at the end of the year.

Demonstrations against the death penalty were held in the cities of Herat, Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif on 21 January, to protest against the use of capital punishment in Iran where up to 4,000 Afghan nationals were believed to be under sentence of death at the end of 2011.

Press release: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ACT50/001/2012/en/241a8301-05b4-41c0-bfd9-2fe72899cda4/act500012012en.pdf>

The full report: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ACT50/001/2012/en/241a8301-05b4-41c0-bfd9-2fe72899cda4/act500012012en.pdf>

Human rights violations news

Women

• A woman executed in Paktia

At the decision of a clan assembly, a woman was executed in Paktia province on the accusation of having illicit relations. The security officials of the province said that the execution took place two days ago. The police commander of the province said that two brothers of the woman had been detained and added: "The man, who had been accused of having illicit relations with this woman, was in prison in Kabul, but I don't know why he has been released now. The woman has been killed at the decision of a clan assembly and the murderers have escaped the region. Our investigations show that the victim's brothers were involved in the murder."



3/4/2012;

<http://www.women-af.com/%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/2007.html/print/>

• Domestic violence: Suicide of young girls in Herat and killing of women in the North

In the past few years, the province of Herat has had the highest figure resolved women's suicide and self immolation. Reports indicate that in the past few months, women have frequently hanged themselves. In the latest instance, a 13-year-old girl, who had committed suicide as a result



of domestic violence, hanged herself two days ago. In another incident, a 30-year-old woman also hanged herself yesterday.

Ms. Shahab, head of the Human Rights Commission in Herat, said that nearly 30 young women have either committed suicide or been mysteriously killed in the past 11 months. The figures presented by the Prosecutor's Office in Herat indicate that in the year beginning 21 March 2011, nearly 250 cases of violence against women have been recorded.

On the other hand, a non-female teacher who had been stabbed by her brother in the province of Baghlan, died in the hospital yesterday. Figures made available by the Women's Affairs Directorate in the province indicate that 11 women including several young girls have been killed as a result of family disputes in the beginning 21 March 2011.

14/3/2012; <http://afghanhumanrights.com/women-rights>

• Herat's Prosecutor's Office: Violence against women has increased in the province

Officials of the Prosecutor's Office in Herat say more than 205 cases of violence against women have been recorded in the province. Appeals prosecutor of Herat, Maria Bashir, said today that in the latest case of violence, Iman had cut off his wife's tongue and fingers and eaten them in front of her eyes. The victim told the journalists that her husband had killed the four-year-old child a few days before. The prosecutor said that the husband, an addict with mental problems, had been arrested.



21/2/2012; <http://bokhdinews.af/human-rights>

• Rape victim imprisoned; rapists free

Ghamargol, a woman was raped by two men, is in prison in Sarpol province and has given birth to a child there. She says, she has been offered a large sum of money by the rapists to withdraw her complaint she has not accepted it. She is a dressmaker who was kidnapped by two men who took her to a hotel in Mazar-e Sharif and raped her last year. In a phone contact with Radio Liberty, she said that she had gone to a judicial institution in Mazar-e Sharif and spent some time in a safe shelter: "After a while, they handed me over to Women's Affairs Directorate in Sarpol province, and after a while they security officials of the province imprisoned me and charge of fornication. The rapists have paid a lot of money and are free, while I'm imprisoned here."

Head of the human rights organization, Maghferat Samimi, in Sarpol province confirmed the story saying: Those who raped Ghamargol have paid money and gone free. The rate of violence against women is on the rise in the province and there are many similar incidents which are not investigated.

6/3/2012;

<http://da.azadiradio.org/content/article/24506160.html>

• A widow with six children in Kandahar

Golpaneh lost her husband in the war five years ago. She has six children and lives in the turbulence Kandahar province. She has two feed her children in the extremely traditional and insecure province. She says she doesn't know Women's Day and is

doing her best on eighth of March to bring full two children. Despite the hardships, she sends her children to school and says when her husband was alive, she never concerned with the living expenses of her children. Since the death of her husband, there have been times that she has not been able to pay for dry bread.

8/3/2012;

<http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15796181,00.html>

• UN says figures of violence against women are worrying

Deputy minister for civilians of the Ministry of Women's Affairs said: "Unfortunately in our society, women are strongly effected by undesirable transitions that have prevailed before Islam." UNAMA officials have said that the figures of violence against women are worrying in Afghanistan. They asked the government to

take serious action to reduce violence against women. The issue of Sahargol, a 14-year-old girl, who had been cruelly tortured by the family of her husband, once again drew the international attention to the terrible conditions of women in Afghanistan. The UN has asked for the full and speedy implementation of the Law for Elimination of Violence against Women.

8/3/2012;

<http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15794898,00.html>

• The President and Ulema Council's resolution

Hamed Karzai, president of Afghanistan, voiced his support for the recent resolution of the Ulema Council of Afghanistan. Several and women's groups said that resolution would restrict social activities women and violate the freedom.



The president said on 6 March 2012 in a press conference in Kabul: "The Ulema Council have stated the Islamic principles and values in support of the position of women, which is the sharia's viewpoint in our country and all the Moslems in Afghanistan and adhere to it." He added the resolution would not impose any restrictions on women and the Ulema Council has taken a clear stand against violence against women.

The Ulema Council's resolution asked women "to avoid mingling with strange men in various public spheres such as education, shopping, offices and other spheres of life." The resolution also stated that women must respect polygamy and not to travel without a close family man. (See translation of the related part of the Ulema Council's Resolution in the current issue of Armanshahr)

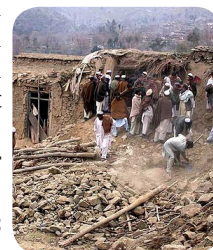
6/3/2012;

<http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15787818,00.html>

Armed opposition

• UN: 2011 civilian casualties highest in five years

The UN announced an annual report that the civilian casualties in Afghanistan in 2011 at the least of highest level in the past five years. UNAMA said that the number of civilian casualties in 2011 was 3021 income powers and to 2790 in 2010 and 2412 in 2009. According to



the report, the insurgents were responsible for the majority of the casualties through roadside

bombs and suicide bombs. The UN Secretary-General's envoy in Afghanistan said: "The death of Afghan children, women and men has been consistently on the rise in this war. Civilians have paid the highest price in the war." The UN wrote in the report that the total number of casualties since 2007 had reached 11,864. The report held "anti-government elements" responsible for the killing of 2331 civilians in 2011, i.e. 77% of total civilian casualties. This showed an increase of 14% in comparison with 2010. The operations in support of government forces accounted for the deaths of 410 people, 14 % of total civilian casualties in 2011. That was decrease of 4% over 2010.

4/2/2012;

http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2012/02/120204_k02-un-report-afghan-civilian-casualties.shtml

• Ascendancy in armed conflict with the Taliban and the insurgents in 2011

The New York-based Human Rights Watch said in its world report 2012 on Afghanistan that an conflict with the Taliban and other insurgents have increased in 2011. The report indicated that the government of Afghanistan had kept the way open for well-known war lords, human rights violators and corrupt politicians. It also added that little had been done in regard to torture and ill-treatment of prisoners and the extensive violation of women's rights.



22/1/2012;

<http://www.voanews.com/dari/news/Afghanistan-Human-rights-watch-137855533.html>

Internal refugees

• Amnesty International: Thousands of internal refugees facing extreme cold

Amnesty International issued a statement warning about the conditions of thousands of internal refugees facing extreme cold in Afghanistan. The new report said around 500,000 people be widespread problems arising from the cold winter and poverty, while the government of Afghanistan and the international donors failed to pay attention to them. The report said, alone in the camps around Kabul, at least 28 children have lost their lives as a result of the cold. Most of the refugees have taken shelter in the camps to avoid violence and war in the living areas. The report called on international donor

institutions to be sure about a part of the aid is allocated to improve the living conditions of the internal refugees.

23/2/2012;

http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2012/02/120223_k01_afg_winter_slums.shtml

War victims

• "Memories Box" exhibition



A group of human rights activists have organised an exhibition demanding attention to the conditions of survivors of the war in Afghanistan. The personal effects of people killed in more than 30 years of war in Afghanistan are on display in this exhibition, including books, clothes, personal notes written in prison, watch, classes etc. The Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation says the objective of the exhibition is to achieve justice and attention to the families of victims.

3/3/2012;

http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2012/03/120303_k02-kabul-exhibition-war.shtml

International

• American soldier kills 16 civilians

An American soldier left his base in Kandahar province and opened fire on civilians, killing 16 people. NATO said the incident was regrettable and the US Embassy in Afghanistan issued a statement saying that they perpetrated would be brought to justice.

11/3/2012;

<http://www.voanews.com/dari/news/Afghanistan-violence-142239855.html>

• UN human rights Commissioner on Guantánamo prison

Navy Pillay, the UN's human rights commissioner expressed "deep regret" that the US administration had failed to close down the one panel prison, in a speech on the 10th anniversary of the opening of the prison. She also said the prisoners in that prison remained in detention for "an indefinite period." Ms. Pillay said the prison was "a clear violation of international law."

23/1/2012;

<http://www.voanews.com/dari/news/UN-GUANTANAMO-137886903.html>

Exclusive interview

Freedom of societies depends on liberation of women from captivity

An interview with Guissou Jahangiri.¹ Excerpts taken from the Dari version:



On the situation of women's publications and feminist studies:

There have been several private initiatives to publish women's magazines in the past 10 years. Most of them are popular magazines with news, translated articles and interviews as well as cooking instructions and perhaps picture of an actor or a singer on the cover to attract buyers. Figures about the readership of these magazines within the educated classes are not available. There have been one or two periodicals with a specific mission of disseminating knowledge and information and campaigning to some extent. However, they have been captive of repetitive discourses and lacked clear editorial policy. Furthermore a large number of reports and studies relating to women have been published by aid, non-government and intergovernmental organisations.

Books relating to women's issues have rarely been published in the past few years. It is fair to say that Armanshahr has performed well in this respect by publishing at least 10 titles about women's issues with a total print run of 15,000 copies in the span of the past 5-6 years. One may dare say that none of the 66 titles (100,000 copies) published in the same period lacked a relationship to women's issues. We need to establish the foundations of academic studies and mobilise a new generation of cultured men and women.

1- Ms. Guissou Jahangiri, human rights and women's rights activist, graduate of political sociology from France, is the executive director of Armanshahr Foundation.

On the excitement of the society and absence of fundamental work since the Taliban fall:

War interrupts the historical memory in every society. It is not therefore surprising that there is not a common summation of 100 years of women's participation in civil and political activities. Destruction is easier than building. Reconstruction of Afghanistan in various spheres, access to electricity and water, health and school, as well as studying and summing up the collective experiences of the land may need half a century of public mobilisation. Afghanistan did not bid farewell to war in the past 10 years. The national economy is not yet ready for something similar to the Marshall plan. Some people are even of the opinion that without reconstruction, it may not be possible to produce ideas.

On achievements of civil institutions regarding women's rights:

I am wavering between two interpretations of the past decade. To take a positive view, this can be described as one of the most attractive and most dynamic periods, considering the participation of women as voters and the elected, as government officials, and human rights and civil society activists, the reopening of schools to girls and participation of thousands of young girls in the entrance examinations of the universities, the presence of women in the media and the cinema as well as government departments, the existence of the Ministry of Women's Affairs despite its shortcomings.

However, if we were to consider the quality and impact of all these initiatives, we would come across many shortcomings. The elite overwhelming majority of women's institutions have emerged overnight as a result of financial aid by international bodies and they are operating in a vacuum to a large extent; their policies are determined mostly on a day-to-day basis without an elite insight of the future.

There is still a lack of common answer to the question why the first schools for girls were opened by Amanullah Khan in the 1920s and they were set on fire 70 years later.

On the major demands of the women of Afghanistan:

The most important problems of the society are war, security and poverty. Therefore, you would hear other demands such as freedom, equality, and political participation only within the urban and educated communities. Forced marriage of young girls, lack of independence in the social

sphere, illiteracy, domestic suppression and violence are problems of the majority of women in this land.

We cannot expect to lab progressive demands of the women in political and similar spheres without a pervasive movement based on collective consciousness. The elite groups have naturally taken seriously the promises of the government



and its international supporters regarding the principality of women's issues. They have also been in conflict with the opposition forces. The conditions are ripe for ideas similar to the Taleban era. Families throughout the country receive threatening newsletters from the Taleban and their cohorts not to send their girls to schools.

There is no energy to pursue consistent work to produce ideas, e.g. in the field of women's studies. Even the History Department of the Academy of Sciences is not allowed to conduct studies about the past 50 years.

On international conferences and the issue of violence against women:

Unlike some other regional states, Afghanistan has signed most international conventions, e.g. CEDAW, but there is neither the will to adhere to those conventions nor the possibility of doing so at present. The international community – for example Ms Hillary Clinton – keeps expressing concern for the women of Afghanistan in words. Those words are mainly directed at the public opinion in Western countries, because those countries are involved in the war in Afghanistan. To prepare the ground for pulling out of Afghanistan, they say 'there is nothing we can do for the culture of this land [meaning: of the armed Taleban]'. Through apparently extensive opinion polls, they prove that the whole country is in favour of misogyny and there is nothing that can be done about it. They have been frequently inducing the idea in recent years on the international level that the people allegedly have no problem with the return and participation of the Taleban in what is referred to as the peace process.

If the informed and conscious men and women of Afghanistan do not come forward to take charge of the country's fate, it would be futile to expect foreign actors, regardless of their gender, to show concern for the progress of Afghanistan. Currently, after the Ulema Council's resolution, and the nontransparent negotiations with the Taleban and their supporters, it is quite clear that women's rights are one of the issues at stake in the negotiations. The Taleban cannot offer a different view about the status of women, because this issue constitutes the backbone of their view of the society and power. We must never forget that 50% of the population was practically eliminated from all aspects of life under the Taleban.

On the activities of various organisations regarding women's rights:

Women's mortality rate in Afghanistan is the highest in the world. More than 80% of women are illiterate. Empowerment in this country has no other meaning except focusing on these two problems. A doctor told me that the women's mortality rate can be reduced by 50% by training only 5,000 new midwives. If I know this, surely the authorities also know it.

The fight against illiteracy should have been at the top of the priorities list. The whole world knows their relationship between literacy and progress, development and better living. Despite the sporadic aid which is provided, there is no public policy at hand to change the conditions that promote death, inequality and powerlessness.

On the numerous women's organisations and the concept of women's movement:

There is no general progressive and egalitarian movement of the women, nor is there any other general movement. Eradication of the cultural war, weaponry and force takes a very long time. The emergence of a peaceful social movement and the accepting of demands of such movements by a government would require the existence of a democratic framework. Nowadays, power and force have the final say.

On the other hand, the elite groups, influenced by the confusions of the past two decades, are facing many crises. Distrust is an outcome of war-afflicted countries. History has demonstrated that the cooperation of the other gender, men, is essential to change the unequal gender relations. Women of Afghanistan do not have dedicated allies among the men. The society as a whole does not believe that its liberation depends on the liberation of women from captivity.

People: actors of change



The people of Afghanistan have been engaged in bringing about practical changes with the hope of achieving freedom, security, justice and a better living. This involvement has been clearly demonstrated in four elections, the enthusiasm to go to schools and universities, to comment in the media and take part in civil institutions, political parties and so on and so forth. A brief review of those achievements follows:

Education:

There were 3400 schools in entire Afghanistan in 2001, where around 1 million students studied and 20,000 teachers worked. The number of female students was practically next to 0. The girls went to schools in very remote villages where neither the Taliban nor the mujahedin had access to.

There are now about 14,000 schools in the entire country, where 8,100,000 students study, of which 5,117,000 are boys and around 3,272,000 or 38% girls. The number of teachers is 190,000, of which 117,800 are men and 72,002 women. In 2001, very few teachers were professional ones; today 36% of the total is professional. The same remarkable difference is noticeable in the teachers training centres and adult education centres.

Universities:

There were 6,500 university students and 650 professors in 2002. Under the Taliban, most universities

were either destroyed or abandoned. The majority of members of the academic staff escaped the country, some of them were killed, and some others engaged in non-academic work. The spokesperson of the Ministry of Higher Education said: "Around 131,000 people registered to take part in the universities entrance examinations in 2010, of whom 120,000 sat the examinations and 70,000 were admitted to higher education institutes." In 2002, only 15,000 students had taken part in the entrance examinations.

Elections:

In the first presidential election (October 2004), there were 18 candidates including one woman, when Mr Karzai won the election.

There were 10,567,000 registered voters, of whom 41.3% were women, and more than 7 million used their right to vote. Two elections monitoring organisations, i.e. FIFA and AIHRC, deployed 50% and 30%, respectively, female observers.

In the first parliamentary election in September 2005, 6 million of the approximately 12,600,000 electorate went to the polls. 44% of the voters were women. There were 6,103 candidates, a number of whom were disqualified, leaving a total of 5,800 including 582 women.

The second Presidential Election as well as the Provincial Councils Elections were held in August 2009. In the Presidential Election, there were 41 Candidates including two women. In the Provincial Councils Elections, there were 3,180 candidates including 333 women. The Elections Commission gave the following report about the 2009 presidential election: participation rate around 38.8%; 59.3% of the voters were men and 38.2% were women.

The second General Election was held in September 2010, under worse security conditions, threats of armed opposition, riggings and irregularities in many parts of the country as well as low participation of women in particular in the war-afflicted areas. Prior to the elections, Ministry of the Interior announced that only 11 districts out of 360 were free of security problems. Around 40% of the electorate voted; participation of the people in the secure areas was considerable. A total of 2,600 people competed for 249 seats. The number of female candidates rose from 335 (2005) to 413, with increases in 18 provinces and decreases in three other provinces.

Media:

Despite the security problems, threats, and terror by terrorists as well as government threats, the media are still operating in the majority of provinces. There are 150 radio stations, 52 TV stations, 177 print media

including newspapers, weeklies, bi-weeklies, monthlies, bi-monthlies and quarterlies. Even though, this is the best era in the history of the media and press in Afghanistan, the media workers have suffered badly. Since 2001, 28 journalists have been killed, 20 others injured, 28 kidnapped, 60 have been detained by domestic and international security forces for short or long terms, 65 others have been beaten up and more than 100 have received threats.

Political parties:

After the approval of the Parties Law, 108 political parties had been established by 2010. Owing to technical reasons and the large number of parties, Ministry of Justice undertook to re-register the parties. Political parties were asked to provide 10,000 filled-in membership forms and have representatives in 34 provinces. As a result, 41 political parties that fulfilled the new regulations were registered. During this period, six coalitions were formed.

Women's role:

After the civil wars and the fall of the Taleban regime, women of Afghanistan have been able to make their demands heard by the government and the international community. The establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, despite all its problems was a great step. The ministry was established in 2001 and has had four ministers. It has 508 female employees and 366 male employees.

Women's quota in the lower house 27% and in the Senate 22%. There are three women ministers and 53,115 women are working in various ministries. 425 women's groups and organisations have been registered with the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Civil and human rights groups:

During the past 10 years, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and many other civil institutions have taken shape and a new generation of human rights activists has entered the social and political stage.

Human rights culture is gaining ground among the people, in particular among the elite groups and the young generation, thanks to the activities of the human rights groups as well as the foreign visits of educated people, publication of reports and articles on human rights issues, organisation of various seminars and workshops, the teaching of human rights fundamentals in some of the universities, contacts with international human rights organisations etc.

Justice:

A fundamental activity of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission in the

past 10 years was the publication of "People's Voice for Justice" report in 2005, where 6,000 people were interviewed and it formed the basis for the government's plan of action to fulfil justice.

The data in that report indicated that 86.8% of the people demanded implementation of justice and 90% of the people demanded the dismissal of human rights violators from their posts. Based on that report, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the government Afghanistan jointly developed the "Peace, Reconciliation and Justice" plan.

Resolution 1589 of the UN Security Council as well as the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Commission of the UN welcomed the efforts to improve conditions of human rights in Afghanistan, significance of the transitional justice and the efforts of the Afghanistan government to fulfil human rights and implement transitional justice.

Demobilisation:

When the first stage of demobilisation (DDR) process started, the remnants of the former armies (People's Democratic Party, the Taleban, the Mujahedin) and the majority of the people gave up their arms. Most soldiers and officers, who had worked for the previous regimes, are still unemployed. They have staged more than 50 peaceful protests against the Ministry of National Defence and other organisations concerned. The second stage of demobilisation (DIAG) and the disarming of what is referred to as irresponsible groups started in 2005 and is still in progress. Nevertheless, it has not been implemented as efficient as it was expected.

Conclusion:

The people of Afghanistan have consistently supported the actions of the government and the international community, which favoured reforms in the country. Neither the government nor the international community, however, responded properly to the people's performance. Thus, we notice retreats on the part of the international community and the government Afghanistan, e.g. the recent stands taken on women's issues. The women of Afghanistan have clearly demonstrated in the past 10 years that they can play a significant role alongside men and are strongly inclined to be present on the national and international stages. However, they have not received a deserving response from the government and its international supporters who may even push to country back into the swamp of Taleban fanaticism.

Exclusive interview

From a decade of women's cinema to a decades of cinema for women



An interview with filmmaker Roya Sadat.¹ Excerpts taken from the Dari version:

On the work of women in cinema in the past decade:

There have been considerable changes in this field in the past decades. In the 1950s and 60s, men occasionally played the role of women, e.g. a film titled Friday Night (1969). There were no women in other areas, e.g. there were no women directors. There was only Ms. Noorani, who directed some of the TV plays. Now we have women filmmakers, actors and editors. Women have achieved considerable success, e.g. actors Aqela Rezaei and Marina Golbahari received numerous international prizes. Director Alka Sadat received 12 international documentary prizes.

On problems of women filmmakers in Afghanistan:

The visual culture of our people has been strongly harmed and confined to Indian and Pakistani

dances and fights. In our society, where most women are captives of chador and do not enjoy their minimum human rights, dancing of a 17-year-old girl with a 40-year-old man would harm people's trust regarding women's work in cinema. Women actors are facing many problems. Most of them hide their real names. Fathers and brothers are not prepared to be seen with their actor sister or daughter. Most families torture women actors, but they take pride in male actors.

On productions about women:

There are digital productions, short feature films and documentaries by young filmmakers. There are very few long feature films and documentaries: two or three per year. Short digital films have less access to cinema theatres and television stations. In our country, where violence against women is the first headline, cinema has hardly been able to present the women.

On the aspect of women's life hidden from the camera:

Many topics dealing with women's problems have remained hidden from the camera and a large number of topics have been reduced to minimal topics. More important is the fact that self-censorship is rooted in our culture. Even though, there is no censorship in the law before screening, we can produce as we wish, but there is no escape from self-censorship in our thought and in our writing. There are various moral topics and the like which are subjected to mysterious conservatism that the filmmaker may not even notice. On the other hand there are topics that force the filmmaker to take a relatively conservative approach owing to the prevalence of violence and absence of the rule of law. Examples concern problems of women in prisons, dealing with stories based on reality, dealing with family and ethnic problems. Nevertheless some films, e.g. Osama, Ash and Earth and others managed to escape self-censorship.

On the genres that have been more successful:

The long feature films produced during the past decade were in particular successful outside Afghanistan and they won international prizes. Even though

1- Ms. Roya Sadat is a director, script writer & producer. See also: <http://www.royafilmhouse.com/custom/roya-sadat-director/>

they were few in number, they were more successful in portraying the women in Afghanistan. On the other hand, documentaries dealing with women's stories also drew attention from the international audience in festivals and some of the foreign television stations. Unfortunately, there are hardly any filmmakers operating in this field who dare show their films on domestic television stations. The restrictions on the screening of documentaries mean that feature films are more tangible for the Afghan viewers.

On the future of women's cinema:

Even though young women lack experience, in particular the ones who started making short, feature and artistic films and documentaries, there are high hopes for the expansion of women's participation in various fields of acting and filmmaking. There are also concerns, because Afghanistan has always had changing politics. There was a time, they made women wear miniskirts and then at some other time they had to wear the chador. There was a time, when women were called to the Parliament and at other times to the gallows. There are rarely women in modern music and cinema, who receive full support from their family and the society.

On the most important technical weakness of Afghanistan's cinema:

There are many topics to be filmed in a land, where the years of silence are full of misery. There is thought behind the choice of stories. Films enjoying



proper intellectual support frequently turn out to be weak films without any audience. Good script, good cinematography, good sound mixing and edit and directing are guarantees for an excellent film, but they all need standard technique and we have problems in this field.

On film festivals in Afghanistan:

The Kabul International Festival that was organised from 2006 for four years was almost on par with international festivals and provided a good channel for Afghan filmmakers to screen their films. Unfortunately, it came to a stop in 2009.

International festivals are supported through various means and revenues, but the motive does not exist in our country. I hope that an international festival with international standards would take shape in our country. Perhaps the government should realise the value of cinema. Countries like France, South Korea and others organise famous festivals with the help of the government.

On films of Afghan directors in international festivals:

Afghan directors have been successful in international festivals and Afghan films have representatives in most short film festivals. Sadiq Barmak was the first filmmaker who brought the Golden Globe to Asia. The first film nominated for an Oscar was made by the Afghan filmmaker Atiq Rahimi. Alka Sadat, the young filmmaker, has won many international prizes for documentaries

Six years of publishing on women's issues



Armanshahr Foundation has published up to now 66 titles with more than 100,000 copies during the last six years. Ten titles specifically concerned women and women's rights. The titles ranging from fundamental issues such as the conditions of women's movement, education, political participation, war and peace, and talks with the armed opposition, indicate a serious approach to women's issues.

One of the first titles that Armanshahr published was 'Women celebrate peace', which is an anthology of poems by mostly female poets from different countries.

'Discrimination and political participation of women: role of education', an issue of the periodical *Politis asia*, is a collection of interviews and discussions with activists in the field of education as well as researchers of women's issues from Afghanistan and Iran, with the aim of promoting exchange of ideas and raising the level of knowledge in the region. The collection is aimed to emphasise the need for progressive men and women of the world, and of the region in particular, to enter discussions with each other regardless of

the government policies, to learn from each other's experiences.

'Justice for women and war and peace' is another book that was published in spring 2011 and it is one of the few – if not the only – books to discuss seriously the violation of human rights and war crimes as women's issue.

Besides all the legal, cultural, economic, political, social and transitional problems, women of Afghanistan are caught up within the larger issue of war, internal and international crisis. This requires them to arm themselves with the knowledge to fight for women's rights. The following is a list of related books that Armanshahr Foundation has published:

- We are All feminists (Perhaps we don't know it)
- Women's Movement: A National Movement or an Artificial Process?
- Women Celebrate Peace (An anthology of national/international poems by women for Afghanistan)
- Afghanistan women's demands from the future president
- National dialogue with women: justice rendered or one step back?
- Discrimination and political participation of women: role of education
- The Afghanistan Women's 50% Campaign pamphlet
- Nothing can be said in fifty years (collection of poems), Homeira Nekhat Dastgirzada
- Justice for women in war and peace
- A review of conditions of women in Afghanistan and Tajikistan

Other articles in the Dari version of Armanshahr

- Women and human rights; a review of the provisions of the Geneva Conventions, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC)
- Book reviews: 1984 (George Orwell); "A Handbook of Transitional Justice - A to Z" (Armanshahr); both published by Armanshahr; Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate (Leila Ahmed); War's Offensive on Women: The Humanitarian Challenge in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan (Julie Mertus)
- A glance at an Armanshahr play staged in 2007 about correspondence between two contemporary poetesses of Afghanistan, Mahjouba Herawi (from Herat) and Makhfi Badakhshi (from Badakhshan) (http://www.jadidonline.com/story/03102007/makhfi_mahjoubeh)
- An article titled 'space, gender and women's gardens,' that discusses the discriminatory impact

of strictly-for-women spaces with examples from Iran and Afghanistan.

- A review of the work and life of Mahasti, a 12th century Persian speaking poetess (for more information, see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahasti>)
- Is there a fourth wave [feminism]? Does it matter? by Jennifer Baumgardner; <http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/genwom/baumgardner2011.html>
- Ce qui change pour les femmes (What has changed for women in Latin America) <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2011/12/OUALALOU/47027>
- Speech of Maria Herczog (Expert of CRC) at the "Incarcerated Connection" Conference of United Nations University in Maastricht about the children of incarcerated parents
- Féminisme du monde arabe (Feminism in the Arab world), by Marina Da Silva; http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2006/09/DA_SILVA/13933

Armanshahr/OPEN ASIA Publications

1. One Thousand and one Poems for Afghanistan (anthology of writings and poems trilingual edition), Winter 2003
2. Caravan of Poetry for Peace and Democracy in Afghanistan (An anthology of poems); Spring 2003
3. Caravan of Light (for young readership); Spring 2003
4. Poems for Peace (Tajik edition in Cyrillic), Summer 2003
5. In praise of Ahmad Shamlou, Living Conscience of International Poetry, December 2006, Goftegu series
6. Who is a citizen? What are their obligations and rights vis-à-vis the government and the society? December 2006, Goftegu series
7. Role of Citizens in Seeking Truth and Justice, December 2006, Goftegu series
8. Social Justice in Islam, Systems of Governance and other Schools of Thought, January 2007, Goftegu series
9. Challenges of Freedom of Expression, Media and Press in Afghanistan, February 2007, Goftegu series
10. Democracy and Social Justice in Multi-ethnic Countries, March 2007, Goftegu series
11. In Search of Civil Society, International Experiences and Local Realities, April 2007, Goftegu series
12. Cultural Incursion and Impact of a Quarter of Century of Immigration on Cultural and Political issues, May 2007, Goftegu series
13. Against Oblivion, Experience of Truth and Justice Commissions, Monireh Baradaran, May 2007 Let's break the silence series
14. Do Afghanistan Universities have the Capacity to Produce Elites? June 2007, Goftegu series
15. Two Interpretations of Globalization, July 2007, Goftegu series
16. We are All feminists (Perhaps we don't know it), August 2007, Goftegu series
17. Women's Movement: A National Movement or an Artificial Process? August 2007, Goftegu series
18. Women Celebrate Peace (An anthology of national/international poems by women for Afghanistan), compiled by Guissou Jahangiri, 2009, Spring 2009; Let's break the silence series
19. Tradition and Modernism, Confrontation or Correlation? Spring 2009, Goftegu series
20. Sayyed Jamaledin and New Religious Thinking; Spring 2009, Goftegu series
21. What has gone astray in Afghanistan's Higher Education System? Causes and Solutions; Spring 2009, Goftegu series
22. The 50% Campaign: Afghanistan Women's Demands from the Future President, Spring 2009; Let's break the silence series
23. Violations of Human Rights and US Policy, Editors Guissou Jahangiri and Khalil Rostamkhani, Summer-Autumn 2009 (Politis asia 1-2)
24. Simorgh (An Anthology of Poems for Peace); Autumn 2009; Let's break the silence series
25. Youth and the Provincial Council; What is the Provincial Council doing? What do People Want? Autumn 2009, Goftegu series
26. A Practical Guide for Victims to the International Criminal Court, Reporters without Borders, Autumn 2009; Let's break the silence series
27. National Dialogue with Women: Justice Rendered or One Step Back? Autumn 2009, Goftegu series
28. It is an Abandoned Time Here, Rooholamin Amini; Winter 2010; Let's break the silence series
29. NATO, Exceptions to Democracy and Decline of Empires, Editors Guissou Jahangiri and Khalil Rostamkhani, Winter 2010, (Politis asia 3)
30. Voice of Victims for Justice, Transitional Justice Coordination Group, Summer 2010; Let's break the silence series
31. From Structure of Parliament to a Critical Evaluation of First Parliament in Afghanistan; Summer 2010, Goftegu series
32. Simorgh's Feather (Selected poems of Simorgh Peace Prize); Autumn 2010, Let's break the silence series
33. Market Economy in Afghanistan, Autumn 2010, Goftegu series
34. From Book to Freedom of Expression, Autumn 2010, Goftegu series
35. Animal Farm, George Orwell, Summer 2010, Simorgh series
36. An evaluation of a decade of international presence in Afghanistan, Autumn 2010, Goftegu series
37. Afghanistan: In Search of Truth and Justice, Editors Guissou Jahangiri and Delphine Carlens, Autumn 2010, Let's break the silence series
38. To the 21st Cigarette, Rooholamin Amini, Autumn 2010, Simorgh series
39. Discrimination and Political Participation of Women: Role of Education, Editors Guissou Jahangiri and Shourangiz Dadashi, Spring-Summer 2010 (Politis asia 4-5)
40. Universal Jurisdiction, mechanisms to prosecute human rights violators, Editor Khalil Rostamkhani, Autumn 2010, (Politis asia 6-7)
41. The Afghanistan Women's 50% Campaign Pamphlet, Winter 2010; Let's break the silence series
42. Simorgh, the Thirty Wise Birds (an English anthology of poems and photographs for peace in Afghanistan), Guissou Jahangiri, Rooholamin Amini, Photographs by Mohammad Asef Rahmani, Winter 2010, Simorgh series
43. Violations of Human Rights and US Policy, Editors Guissou Jahangiri and Khalil Rostamkhani, 2nd Edition, Winter 2011, (Politis asia 1-2)
44. NATO, Exceptions to Democracy and Decline of Empires, Editors Guissou Jahangiri and Khalil Rostamkhani, 2nd Edition, Winter 2011, (Politis-asia 3)
45. Against Oblivion, Experience of Truth and Justice Commissions, Monireh Baradaran, 2nd Edition, Winter 2011, Let's break the silence series
46. Young people, a World Between Fear and Doubt, Winter 2011, Goftegu series
47. Revisiting our Collective Memory, Winter 2011, Goftegu series
48. Nothing Can be Said in Fifty Years (collection of poems), Homeira Nekhat Dastgirzada, Spring 2011, Simorgh series
49. Discrimination and Political Participation of Women: Role of Education, Editors Guissou Jahangiri and Shourangiz Dadashi, 2nd Edition, Spring 2011 (Politis asia 4-5)
50. The Past Enlightens the Future (a collection of interviews with victims and political personalities), Spring 2011, Let's break the silence series
51. A Review of War Ruins (an eye-witness account of war, Herat 1989), Rasoul Pouyan, Spring 2011, Let's break the silence series
52. Justice for Women in War and Peace (international contributions), Spring 2011, Let's break the silence series
53. Truth Seeking and the Role of Forensic Science, Physicians for Human Rights, Summer 2011
54. From illiteracy to war, from war to illiteracy, Summer 2011, Goftegu series
55. Writers without readers, readers without books, Summer 2011, Goftegu series
56. "Simorgh Stories", Selected Stories of Simorgh Peace Prize, Summer 2011, Simorgh series
57. Re-visiting 60 years of contemporary history in Afghanistan, Summer 2011, Goftegu series
58. A Handbook of Transitional Justice, A to Z, Editors Guissou Jahangiri and Khalil Rostamkhani, 2011, (Politis asia 8-9)
59. Zeer o Bam, a Study of Traditional Music from Badakhshan, Herat and Badgeis, Wahid Qassem, 2011, Goftegu series
60. Federalism and democracy, Editors Seyyed Jawad Darwaziyani and Guissou Jahangiri, 2011, (Politis asia 10-11)
61. Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Children and Adolescents, 2011, Children & Young People series
62. Political system and social justice, 2012, Goftegu series
63. The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2012, Children & Young People series
64. A review of conditions of women in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, 2012, Goftegu series
65. Ringing passed by the rain; a review of contemporary poetry of Tajikistan, Mujib Mehrdad and Behrooz Zabihullah, 2012, Simorgh series
66. 1984, George Orwell, 2012; Simorgh series
67. Armanshahr (a periodical of human rights and civil society), 24 issues, (Year IV)