

**Special issue on Women's Film Festival in
Afghanistan - 8 March**

A Periodical on human rights and civil society

Armanshahr



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International women's Film Festival: «Women, most qualified ambassadors of peace»



Armanshahr Foundation and Roya Film House, headed by Guissou Jahangiri and Roya Sadat respectively, organised «The First International Women's Film Festival-Herat» at the ancient citadel of Herat, 7-9 March 2013, marking 8 March, the International Women's Day. More than 1500 people attended. The Festival Secretariat had received 100 films from 20 countries, out of which 10 films from Afghanistan and 25 films from other countries were screened. Several filmmakers from Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan and India were guests of the Festival.

The Film Festival hosted celebrated cultural figures of Afghanistan including Sadiq Barmak, a leading organiser of the Festival and the first Asian winner of the Golden Globe and the Cannes Festival prize for the film Osama, Maria Bashir, the first women prosecutor in Afghanistan, Mahbuba Jamshidi, director of Women's Affairs Department in Herat province, Aziza Khayrandish, director of the Civil Society and Human Rights Network in Herat and a leading organiser of the Festival, Eng. Latif Ahmadi, the celebrated Afghan filmmaker, Ebrahim Arefi, head of Afghan Film, Afsar Rahin, cultural director of Afghanistan's Ministry of Information and Culture, Aqila Rezaei, actor and filmmaker, Diana Saqeb, filmmaker, Aziz Dildar, leading organiser of the Festival, actor and filmmaker,

and Fereshteh Etminan, the young Afghan actor.

International guests of the festival included: Gelareh Kiazand, filmmaker from Canada, Marzieh Riahi, editor of the Short Films News Website from Iran, Zulfia Sadiqof, secretary of the Didar Festival from Tajikistan, and Nupur Basu, filmmaker and representative of the IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival.

Roya Sadat¹ said: «This Festival is a proper channel to connect the women of Afghanistan both at home and abroad to discuss the challenges they are facing. One of the reasons why we chose Herat to organise the Festival, beside its historic and cultural background, was the relative calm that prevails here.»

Rooholamin Amini, deputy director of Armanshahr Foundation in Afghanistan and secretary of the Festival, addressed the governor of Herat in his closing speech: «By organising this Festival, we took the first step with your support and that of the other officials. We hope, you will take the next step to build a cinema theatre in Herat and we support you.»

Guissou Jahangiri, director of Armanshahr

¹ head of Roya Film House, one of the first female filmmakers in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taleban, winner of several international prizes and a member of the organising committee of the Festival

Foundation and member of the organising committee of the Festival, told the Armanshahr website: «Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries are going through unclear and critical conditions. Gender inequality, misogyny and war are characteristics of this historical period in the region. We, civil and cultural activists, needed to clearly express our concerns through the Seventh Art and women's participation. This Festival is the outcome of a long experience of the years of living with war and suppression. Women are now the most qualified ambassadors of peace. By underlining the social problems and challenges they are facing, they are standing up to harbingers of darkness and peace haters.»

Rooholamin Amini told the Armanshahr website: «a film festival on women's issues is a significant event in itself in Afghanistan, because we have managed to bring together two problematic issues in this society: cinema and women's conditions. There is also another dimension to this event. The Festival was held at the best possible place, best possible time and in the worthiest manner. Indeed, we were able to save face before the women and filmmakers of this land. In my opinion, the next Festivals will be organised much better. The first Festival attracted the attention of filmmakers, people, national and international media and even government officials; more than 40 national and international institutions supported this Festival.»

Elka Sadat,² the other secretary of the Festival, stressed: «The organising of this Festival on International Women's Day is of great significance. We did not expect such a high-profile participation of women. Women constituted half of the viewers of some films and occasionally more than men. Artistic films are rarely viewed in Afghanistan. Consequently, the screening of films from other countries provided an astonishing and educating experience that raised the level of their awareness. Another outstanding aspect of this Festival was the presentation of Herat as a city with many attractions for tourists. Many participants of the Festival believed that the emphasis on the ancient status of Herat was very important. It was on that basis that the Festival was held in the historic Ekhtiareddin Citadel, otherwise known as the Aleksander

2 a young documentary filmmaker and recipient of many prizes

Citadel.»

Ms Maria Bashir, who took part in the closing ceremony of the Festival, said: «It is a great honour to see the International Women's Film Festival in Herat on 8 March, with so many participants and international coverage. I deeply feel the impact of presenting the suffering of Afghan women by means of cinema and I sincerely congratulate the success of this Festival, especially to women filmmakers.»

In one of the round table discussions on the fringe of the Festival, some people commented that films should be chosen and screened with a view to «the society's pulse.» However, the organising committee of the Festival explained: «We should not restrict ourselves to the society's pulse alone; we must have the courage to screen films that go beyond the average level of the audience. Only in that case can we change the society.»

Latif Ahmadi, one of the speakers of the closing ceremony, stated: «It is a great honour to witness a great event in the history of Afghanistan's cinema in ancient Herat.»

Sadiq Barmak praised the Festival, saying: «I am greatly honoured to take part in organising this Festival, which was my wish, shoulder to shoulder with my sisters, in the lovable ancient historic city of Herat. When I see myself in this Citadel, I'm reminded of the renaissance of Herat. I noticed that the progeny of great thinkers are still caring for their culture and their art on the silver screen. I bow before the women who had the courage to hold this Festival.» He congratulated the success of the Festival to all and in particular to Armanshahr Foundation and Roya Film House.

Ebrahim Arefi, head of Afghan Film, said: «I promise to accompany the Festival organisers next year from the first moment to the end and I hope that we shall, in collaboration with the officials, Herat's cinema theatre at the opening of the Festival.»

It is to be noted that Herat's cinema was destroyed after the Taleban took power in Afghanistan.

Governor of the city of Herat, Dawood Shah Saba, responded: «I'm highly in favour of building a cinema theatre in Herat, but financial resources are the only requirements. I hope that this will lay a strong foundation for building the ambitions of future generations for participation and a humane life.

«I thank Armanshahr Foundation for its great work in Afghanistan in the past few years, and consistently serving culture. I also thank Roya Film House for their endeavours to organise this Festival.»

Awarding two memorial plates to Guissou Jahangiri and Roya Sadat, he said: «I hereby express appreciation for all the cultural activities of Armanshahr Foundation and Roya Film House.»

Some of the participants and guests spoke to the media. One of the viewers, Khaled Qaderi, told the BBC: «Even though I am a social activist, my view of the women's issue has changed after attending this Festival, noticing women's enthusiastic participation and watching the films. These films had such an impact that made me notice the wider dimensions of women's issue.»

Zulfia Sadiqof, actor and deputy director of Didar Film Festival of Tajikistan, referring to the final film screened in Herat's Film Festival, «Rashton Bread» made by Shadi Saleh from Tajikistan, hoped that the women of Afghanistan would also be able to bake bread for the weddings of their children free from gender-based discrimination and be happy.

On the final day of the Festival, there was a video message of congratulation and support from Paola di Florio, documentary maker and Oscar nominee, in Los Angeles. She said: «When I heard the news of the Women's Film

Festival, my heart beat faster and I wish to say what an honour it is for me to support you. The women's issue and breaking the silence about it is a universal matter and we are connected to each other.»

The International women's film Festival came to a conclusion with a concert of local music at the yard of the Herat Citadel by 10 celebrated musicians of Afghanistan.

A large number of the media outlets gave coverage to the reports of the Festival including the local ones such as Mujda Radio, People's Radio, Herat Radio and Television, Asia Television, Sheherazad (Girls) Radio, Camera monthly, Ettifaq Islam daily, Asr Television, Tolo Television, and Porsesh weekly.

The international media included: BBC Persian Service, Radio Farda, Agence France Presse, Huffington Post Live, Voice of America, China Post, Agura Voice, Radio France International, Zamaneh Radio, France Culture Radio, Pakistan's Express Tribune and Dawn dailies, the UK daily Independent, the French El magazine, German Deutsche Welle Persian service, France 24 Television, Swiss Geneva Tribune, UNAMA, Short Films News Website (Iran), a number of online websites from Iran, Vietnam and other countries.

The Festival organisers promised to celebrate the International Women's Day with a greater number of firms from different parts of the world in next year's Festival.



Suffering creates the stories and the stories create cinema

Interview with Sadiq Barmak



Sadiq Barmak Afghan filmmaker, winner of the Cannes Festival prize and the Golden Globe

Let's have a glance at women's presence in Afghanistan's cinema.

The people of Afghanistan came to know cinema during the rule of Amanullah Khan after his trip to Europe, when he brought back a film projector. The films screened at the time

were heavily censored. For instance, during World War II when a documentary about the Nazi German army was being screened for the Army cadets, the British ambassador summoned Hashem Khan and threatened him. Subsequently, the War University's cinema was closed.

The first Afghan film was made in 1948, because Hashem Khan who was economically dependent on the British opened up some opportunity for the media, theatre and cinema to calm down the public. Some of the artists made a critical piece of drama, which angered Hashem Khan and the theatre was closed. The artists were scared and fled to India, where they made a film and screened it in Kabul after Hashem Khan's fall. Women were absent from cinema and theatre and Indian women were invited to act in the films.

Zahir Shah liked films to be made about his life and trips. The films that were made were taken to the US or other countries to be edited and brought back and it would take six months for a film to be made.

Avanguard young man, Fayz Mohammadzadeh, set off developments in music and theatre at the time and made a film called the Eagle in 1962, which was a combination of a documentary and feature film. In 1965, the Americans made a studio for news films, which is the present Afghan Film. This prepared the ground for a number of people to make artistic films in which men and women acted. Prior to that, men acted the role of women in theatre.

Some films were made about violence against women. However, the current freedoms did not exist at the time. Women were allowed to act and play roles until a successful filmmaker, Farideh Anvari, emerged and made films and directed television drama pieces.

The post 1978 events led to progress on the one hand and disappointment on the other. Cinema and theatre were in part ideological. Boys and girls were forced to sing and dance on the stage and appear on the TV. These things pushed the people away from the government.

In my opinion, many of our miseries started at that time. Then the mujahedin came (even though some of them like Massoud supported cinema) and then the dark chapter of the Taleban began.

To look beyond Afghanistan, one can see two approaches to women: as a wife and as a human being equal to man. How was the situation in Afghanistan?

Things have changed not only in Afghanistan but in many countries. Patriarchal approach is the same all over the world. Traditions and religions occasionally strengthen or weaken it. In Afghanistan, on the one hand women are the principal decision-makers at home, even in the remotest villages. The patriarchal approach arises from the fear of woman's superiority. Men are jealous. The other issue is the sense of proprietorship. We still look at women as commodity. We also have a sense of inferiority and this feeling leads to cultural invasion. For example, during the Russian rule, there were many freethinking girls who took courageous steps, but they wore the head scarf. When we questioned them, they would reply: «I want to prove that I am.» They tied their identity to fanaticism. Our intellectuals are intellectual outside the home and leave it aside at home.

These issues also played a role in the cinema. They enjoy every film when they watch it, but their family should not be involved. I know many male actors who allowed their sisters to act as well, but after a couple of films they decided to leave Afghanistan, because they did not feel safe. In one case, a family forced their daughter to go out with chador, because they could not tolerate it. Nobody was prepared to marry their daughter.

In my opinion, actors, and female actors in particular, make the greatest sacrifice today. Those problems existed in many Oriental countries, even in our neighbouring countries, such as Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan. For instance, nobody was prepared to act in films in Iran for a while. Finally, filmmakers used women who did not have good reputation. Then, the new wave cinema emerged in Iran, and great filmmakers such as Taqvaei, Bayzaei and Kiarostami, made good films, in which a number of women dared play. Today, if you want to make a film, thousands of girls are prepared to play. This did not happen in Afghanistan. For example, if the power

structure was on the side of the cinema, religion opposed it; if it came to terms with religion, the power structure opposed it. Occasionally, both the clergy and the power structure opposed the cinema.

Did the new wave of male and female filmmakers of the past decade leave an impact on cinema?

The educated generation has come forward. For instance, Roya Sadat was the first person to enter this stage. She comes from Herat, a city where lots of things happened. Even the Herat Literary Society operated clandestinely during the Taleban. It was here where she made «Three Points», the story of the suffering and torture of a woman. Things also occurred in Kabul, which do not have much value from artistic point of view, but they also helped cinema.

Then other filmmakers such as Diana Saqeb, Sahra Karimi and others begin working in Herat, Kabul and Mazar. The few good documentaries have been made by women, because women can put forward the suffering that men are incapable of telling.

Why have filmmakers mainly concentrated on women's issues? Did they do it on purpose or were they influenced by foreigners?

When you have no other choice, you speak up and express your discontent. In South Korea, they concentrate on families and divorce. In South Africa, AIDS has become a national catastrophe and cinema deals with it. Afghanistan's cinema has to deal with the pains, because these pains create the stories. As a human being, I'm at pain to see that our cinema feeds the people with suffering. However, we have to narrate those pains. That is the reason why the writer, the poet and everybody else deal with women's issue. Even love comes through the misery, because women are the beginning to everything in Afghanistan. One of the dialogues in Atiq Rahimi's film goes like this: «Men, who do not know how to make love, fight.» This leads us to the issues that we have to tell. Catastrophe appears when there is no human relationship between man and woman at home and outside it. Half the equation in Afghanistan is the peace in the family and woman's peace. Otherwise, men fight.



Ms Zulfia Sodykova Tajik artist and secretary of the Didor International Film Festival, Ms Sodykova studied at the Fine Arts Institute and the Theatre Institute in Moscow

Women's cinema in Tajikistan, before and after independence

Interview with Ms Zulfia Sodykova

How did women progress in Tajikistan's cinema before independence?

There are two aspects to the women's issue in Tajikistan cinema: women as women, and women as filmmakers.

Tajikistan's cinema began in 1929. At that time, the Soviet government called on women to participate in social activities and one of the keys to freedom was to leave aside the hijab. This was quite courageous in theatre and cinema. The issue is reflected in present-day films, because the traditional Tajik society, which was under the rule of Islam, was unable to free itself quickly.

The contemporary cinema in Tajikistan is facing many problems, in particular regarding women's presence in the films. Prominent female directors were forced by the civil war to leave the country and to go to France, Belarus, Russia and elsewhere. There are still few female filmmakers and scriptwriters. Most women actors work in the theatre.

Women's status in the society has been mostly helped by the Soviet films. Women's issues and tasks were portrayed in several films during the Soviet rule.

How was the approach to women after the Soviets rule?

Feature films were made after independence, but they were of low quality and not professional. There are, however, memorable documentaries made after independence, which have taken a realistic and accurate approach to women's problems. Most of them have been made by men, e.g. *Sweet Homeland*, *Rashton Bread*¹, *Nassir Khorso*, *Mowlana*. There are also films, which have been screened abroad, e.g. the *Russian Uprising*, which won 13 international prizes and good films by Iskandar Osmanov.

Regarding the status of women, some Russian traditions are still in place. The Tajik people have great respect for women filmmakers.

Do the fundamentalists block women's artistic activities?

Tajik women are active in various sectors such as sculpture, singing, dancing etc. Nobody has insulted or pressured me yet. I don't think there are any obstacles.

Has the Didor International Film Festival filled in the vacuum in Tajikistan's cinema?

We receive films from many countries and select the best. If it were not for the festival, how would the people see those films? We had many films about women last year. Two films were offered by Afghanistan and both won prizes: *The Patience Stone* (Atiq Rahimi) and *Nassima* (Sahra Karimi).

When these films from Afghanistan were screened, many Tajiks did not know who the mujahedin and the Taleban are. One reviewer said: I pray to God that they do not come to Tajikistan.

What was your take from the International Women's Film Festival-Herat?

In my entire life, I had not seen three explosions in one place. The festival was held at a place where there was an explosion on the one side and the people watched films on the other side. This is very difficult. When we attended a poetry recital programme, a 12-13 young girl recited a poem saying: «I wish I had not been created a woman!» I cried. I had never heard from a woman in Tajikistan to say that she did not wish to be a woman. Women take pride for being women. Here, however, a young girl is fed up with being a woman. This reminds me of Tarkovsky's cinema, in particular of *Ivan's Childhood*. These are things that war does to people.

When I saw men and women watching films, I thought to myself it would be a great achievement for the people if those films teach a few people that life is more beautiful with a smiling lip and they should not commit violence against their women.

¹ This film was made by Shadi Salih, the Tajik filmmaker, and was screened in the International Women's Festival-Herat on 9 March 2013.

Women's film festival in Herat, a city without a cinema

The Women's Film Festival for a city that does not have a cinema theatre. This was a festival that Armanshahr Foundation and Roya Film House organised for 8 March. 30 films made by women from Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan and India were screened during the three-day festival and educational workshops were also organised. The city does not have a theatre with a screen where films can be screened and it is known as the city without a cinema. The festival did not have a competition section but it is due to have one in subsequent years.

Roya Sadat says: «The Festival can leave a great impact on Herat. We hope it will go on every year and encourage women who are interested in cinema.»

The festival was received quite well. During the two days I was there, women's participation was considerable. I even saw pairs who were sitting on the chairs in one of the halls of the Herat Citadel and watching films. Most films were documentaries produced about women in various countries.

The cinema industry has not grown in Afghanistan unlike its neighbouring countries. The religious rulers were not on good terms with cinema. Nevertheless, after the developments in 2001, there were hopes that it would grow similar to other aspects.

Gelareh, an Iranian filmmaker, says: «lots of things have not been defined in the Afghan cinema. One significant point is that one does not know the audience for which the Afghan filmmakers make films. Most of the films in Afghanistan are only narratives of the society.»

Sadiq Barmak, the Afghan filmmaker, says: «One of the big problems facing the cinema in Afghanistan is the lack of sufficient funds.» On the other hand, many foreign donors provide funds for filmmaking projects. However, it is obvious that those films are made only to win the project. Their quality is very low. There are also the documentaries, but the documentary filmmakers have many problems ranging from funds, to resources and research.

Another reason for the decline of the cinema industry is the approach of the authorities.

Barmak believes: «The authorities do not want the Afghan cinema to progress, because they do not care for this art.»

Women in pursuit of cinema, cinema pursuing women

Under these circumstances, women want to win a greater share of the Afghan cinema. The films that were screened in this festival were in a higher class in comparison with others, although a couple of those films followed the classical and narrative tradition in Afghanistan.



The city's historical citadel was the Festival's venue

One could even trace the Bollywood type sentiments in some of the Afghan films and the question remained why only the tears, laughs and punch-ups had found their way into the Afghan films.

I spoke to some filmmakers about the status of thought and art in the Afghan cinema. They believed that the first concern should be to find funding for the films. Some of them smiled and asked: In this cinema? In these conditions?

Nevertheless, the people's interest in films and cinema has not declined. In a stroll in the streets of Herat, one can see many vendors selling DVDs on the pavements.

Now, the women are seeking in this cinema-less city to revive the cinema and films. It will not be far-off if the government, the religious groups and the artists join hands.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2013/03/130311_mar_haqiqi_cinema.shtml



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Launch of the Herat International Women’s Film Festival: international solidarity with the women of Afghanistan

Paris, 6 March 2013 - On the eve of International Women’s Day, FIDH supports the first-ever International Women’s Film Festival in Afghanistan, which will take place from 7 to 9 March in Herat.

FIDH Press Release

Paris, 6 March 2013 – On the eve of International Women’s Day, FIDH supports the first-ever International Women’s Film Festival in Afghanistan, which will take place from 7 to 9 March in Herat

The cinema is a powerful medium to raise awareness on problems people face on a daily basis, sometimes without seeing them. This festival, organized in a context full of risks and challenges for women, heralds a breakthrough in today’s Afghanistan, stated Guissou Jahangiri, Executive Director of Armanshahr Foundation, FIDH’s member organization in Afghanistan

The Herat International Women’s Film Festival will be a unique occasion to highlight the vitality of Afghan civil society and express international

solidarity with the plight of Afghan women in a country that remains torn by conflict. Afghan women are not only victims; they are also actors and contribute to promoting peace and tolerance in Afghanistan, concluded Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President

The festival was initiated by Armanshahr Foundation and Roya Film House, with the support of 40 human rights and women’s organizations and media partners. It will be held at the Herat Citadel, also known as the Citadel of Alexander, in North-East Afghanistan.

The ancient city of Herat - as elsewhere in the country - has been the recent theatre of grave violations of women’s human rights. The festival’s organisers intend to remind the

Afghan people of a peaceful society.

"The cinema is a powerful medium to raise awareness on problems people face on a daily basis, sometimes without seeing them. This festival, organized in a context full of risks and challenges for women, heralds a breakthrough in today's Afghanistan", stated Guissou Jahangiri, Executive Director of Armanshahr Foundation, FIDH's member organization in Afghanistan.

"The Herat International Women's Film Festival will be a unique occasion to highlight the vitality of Afghan civil society and express international solidarity with the plight of Afghan women in a country that remains torn by conflict. Afghan women are not only victims; they are also actors and contribute to promoting peace and tolerance in Afghanistan," concluded Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President.

Co-Presidents of the Herat International Women's Film Festival

Guissou Jahangiri, Executive Director of Armanshahr Foundation/OPEN ASIA and Roya Sadat, Director of Roya Film House

In the post-Taliban era, despite the establishment of new bodies for the protection of women's rights, women have continued to endure grave violations; violence against women and girls has remained widespread. FIDH and Armanshahr Foundation reiterate their calls to the international community to strengthen support to the future of Afghanistan and call on the Government of Afghanistan to:

1. Ensure that acts of violence against women are effectively investigated and prosecuted in accordance with international obligations.
2. Abolish laws that discriminate against women and bring laws into conformity

with international obligations.

3. Strengthen the formal justice system, including by ensuring effective participation of women in the judiciary, and their effective protection necessary to ensure the free and independent exercise of their function.
4. Ensure that women's rights are not used as bargaining chips in peace negotiations with the Taliban and other stakeholders.

Three questions to Guissou Jahangiri, Executive Director of Armanshahr Foundation

FIDH: What has been the response from film directors to your initiative?

G.J: The Festival's Secretariat received about 100 films from national and international film directors, in particular women filmmakers. Many of them will be screened during the Festival. Members of the Advisory Team include internationally renowned Afghan film makers such as Seddiq Barmak (Cannes Film Festival and Golden Globe award-winner for the film Osama). Paris-based writer, Atiq Rahimi, whose new film *Sangue-e sabour* (Patience stone) is currently being screened, has also supported the initiative.

This year, the Herat-International Film Festival will not be a competitive event, but will provide a platform and space to discuss issues concerning women, in the belief that the participation of dedicated women filmmakers will contribute to changing the perception of women's roles in a traditional and war-torn society. Aside from the screening of the selected films, the Festival will also provide opportunities for roundtable discussions and critiques of the films, educational workshops for film-makers, as well as sightseeing tour of historical sites of Herat.

FIDH: What has been the involvement of Afghan civil society?

G.J: Armanshahr Foundation and Roya Film House have mobilised in-country assistance and have not received any international funding for the festival. In-kind support and solidarity from numerous local NGOs and institutions have also been mobilized. Governmental bodies such as the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture, the Provincial Council of Herat and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission have supported the initiative. In addition, other



regional festivals (9th IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival-India, the DIDOR Tajikistan International Film Festival, the Short Film News-Asia-Iran) and film production entities (Afghan Film, Barmak Film) have supported the Festival as a proof of their solidarity with Afghan women and the 7th art. The most popular television station in Afghanistan TOLO TV, 8 Sobh Daily Newspaper, the Amsterdam-based Radio Zamaneh and the Persian language BBC service will be covering the event.

FIDH: What is the future of such a festival given the instability in Afghanistan?

G.J: The festival is scheduled to be held every year, on the occasion of 8th March, International Women's Day, with a view to exposing communities to diverse ideas and creating a forum for peaceful exchanges, both inside the country and regionally. In future years, we could imagine holding the Festival in neighbouring countries if, to our regret, lack of security obliges us to do so.

Women's Film Festival in Herat - Pictures gallery



Women's participation in the Festival was remarkable



The ancient Citadel of Herat/Shemiran Citadel hosted the International Festival



Eng Latif Ahmadi, a well-known figure in Afghanistan's cinema described the festival as an important event in the history of the country's cinema



Afsar Rahbin, cultural director of the Ministry of Information and Culture read out the minister's message to the opening ceremony



Fortunately there were no problems despite security concerns



The Festival was established jointly by Armanshahr Foundation and Roya Film House



Davood Shah Saba, governor of Herat, gave the Festival's presents to the guests



Ms Maria Bashir, the first women prosecutor in Afghanistan, told the closing ceremony of the Festival that she was happy to see it organised in Herat



Several educational workshops were organised for activists of cinema, radio and television on the fringe of the Festival. One of the workshops was led by Ms Nupur Basu from India



Ms Zulfia Sodykova, secretary of DIDOR Festival of Tajikistan and a guest of the Herat Festival, received her present from the governor of Herat



The public received the festival enthusiastically. More than 1,500 people took part



The Festival's brochure was presented on the opening day



A number of women attended the Festival in their traditional attire



The domestic and international media reported on all three days of the Festival



Head of Afghan Film and governor of Herat expressed hope that a cinema theatre would be opened in Herat in the coming years



Aqila Rezaei, Afghan filmmaker and actor, was a guest of the Festival



Sadiq Barmak, the first Asian winner of Golden Globe and Cannes Festival's prize and a member of the organising committee of the Festival was one of the speakers at the closing ceremony



Fereshta Etmnan, Afghan actor, and Mazieh Riahi, secretary of the Short Films News Website from Iran attended the Festival



Aziz Dildar, Kabul University professor and a member of the organising committee of the Festival, was one of the lecturers of educational workshops



Women were the central issue in most of the films screened at the Festival



Famous local musicians performed at the closing ceremony



The First International women's Film Festival-Herat received wide coverage in international media



According to guests and participants the Festival was successful



Organisers of the festival informed the media of the festivals goals and programs in a news conference a day before its opening ceremony

Human rights in deadlock in Afghanistan



Armanshahr's 103rd Goftegu public debate was held with the title of «One step to collapse? Human rights in deadlock in Afghanistan» in the French Institute on 7 February 2013. This public meeting coincided with the publication of a report by Human Rights Watch titled "Rights at Risk as Military Drawdown Advances" and publication of three new books by Armanshahr: "Human Rights at Crossroads, a joint report of International Federation for Human Rights and Armanshahr Foundation"; "Prison, prisoners and human rights: Politis asia 12-13"; and "War and the city: Politis asia 14-15."

Speakers of the meeting included Ms Heather Barr (HRW researcher in Afghanistan), Mr Ahmad Behzad (Member of Parliament), Mr Seyyed Omar Sabour (Deputy minister of interior for gender, human rights and children) and Mr Azaryoun Matin (executive director of Human Rights Focus Organisation).

Ms Heather Barr said in her address: We criticised the Taliban's operations in 2012 for attacking the civilians. They used children in suicide attacks and violated women's rights.

They executed a woman in Parwan province. Civilians are also killed in night raids by ISAF and American forces. The American troops ill treated the prisoners at Bagram. The Afghan local police have also committed abuses.

Mr Sabour, the deputy interior minister said: Our cities and the foundation of our country were destroyed in 30 years of war. A country that has been destroyed in the course of 40 years cannot be reconstructed in 10 years. Afghanistan is like a 10 year-old child who still needs help. This is a war imposed in Afghanistan. The world is living in peace but the people of Afghanistan are sacrificed. Insecurity is rampant nationwide. Why do they not try the suicide attackers in international courts?

The First Bonn Conference did not shape a peace agreement, but a new coalition for war. The agreement was used by people who were accused of committing war crimes. In that year, thousands of the Taliban disappeared and gained the chance to shape a new war strategy.

He went on: There are 500 human rights activists in the ranks of the police and the police brings to justice its members as well as all other detainees.

He did not mention the number of the police who have been detained for human rights abuses, but he argued that the lack of a law to ban torture is one of the problems that prevents an end to torture.

In the opinion of Mr Sabour, the poor economic conditions of the families, absence of the rule of law, unemployment, and the failure to make proper use of mines, agriculture and industry are the reasons for the increased violence.

Mr Behzad, MP for Herat, referred to the achievements in the past 10 years and raised his question: how can we retain those achievements?

In his opinion, Afghanistan is a country with the most people inclined to leave. Offenders are not prosecuted; only 20 from 100 offenders are detained; out of those 20, two are interrogated and they are defenceless people.

He asked: if government officials, prosecutors

and courts do not comply with the law, how can we expect the common people to comply with the law? If nobody listens to the people, they will take action by different means.

Criticising the people, the government and other countries, he asserted: Our society is not healthy. Human rights can be implemented in a healthy society; in a sick society, everybody will be infected. We are a society plagued with despotism. We do not respect humanity and we would be excommunicated if we criticised. How many books are published in Afghanistan about human beings every year?

He argued: we are still subjects. The government does not see the people as citizens but as subjects. Torture does not prevail in prison only. The government forces people to live in caves; and such a government is torturer. Foreigners have given Afghanistan a lot of assistance, but the distribution policy was corrupt. More money was spent where there was more fighting.

Human rights activist Azaryoun Matin said: we will not progress towards democracy if the rights of the victims are ignored. Reconciliation between criminals will not lead to peace; reconciliation between criminals and victims shall lead to peace. Victims must be the focus of the peace process.

He explained: The First Bonn Conference did not shape a peace agreement, but a new coalition for war. The agreement was used by people who were accused of committing war crimes. In that year, thousands of the Taleban disappeared and gained the chance to shape a new war strategy.



What have we done, what are we doing, what shall we do?

A critique of a decade of support for women

Armanshahr's 104th Goftegu public debate - a bridge between the elite and the citizens - marking Woman's Day, was held in collaboration with the French Institute in Afghanistan and Roya Film House in the hall of Esteqlal School on 4th March 2013. The meeting, attended by nearly 100 people, was addressed by Mr Nooreddin Alawi (sociologist), Ms Homeira Ghaderi (writer and women's rights activist), Ms Sahar Motallebi (women's rights activist), Ms Diana Saqeb (filmmaker and women's rights activist), and Mr Khodadad Besharat (executive director of Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation).

There were difficult questions to be discussed: Have we thought about and dealt with the roots of violence against women? Have the activities directed at achieving women's rights in the past few decades, and in the last decade in particular, brought about any advances? What have we done, what are we doing and what shall we do?

Excerpts from the address made by Mr Alawi:

In the past, in China, India and other Asian countries, they exchanged women with cattle.

We note the sacrificing of the women every day in exchange for blood and other physical and psychological violence in Afghanistan. Is stoning a rational decree in our time? We need to seriously review our understanding of our religion, philosophy, sociology and culture. If this is done on the basis of academic standards, we may obtain a clear understanding of women's status and feel human freedom in our society.

Excerpts from the address made by Ms Ghaderi:

As long as there have been women, they have been viewed as commodity in Afghanistan. After the arrival of the international forces, the priority was given to security and it prevented serious attention to women.

Unfortunately, we do not have women in Afghanistan who can be compared to leaders of women's movements in other parts of the world. In the past 10 years, we mainly noted the effects not the causes. We occasionally engaged in political issues, at other times in cultural and social issues, but never in production of ideas and thought.



There has never been a political will to achieve women's rights. The government of Afghanistan spends all its power on security, which we have not achieved yet. The Ministry of Women's Affairs is an organisation on paper.

We are facing sexual apartheid in Afghanistan. With their actions, the Islamists have pushed us away from genuine Islam. We could never oppose them and did not dare do it. 20% of women live in the cities and the rest in the countryside. They always have a child on their back or in their belly. They work at home and in the farms.

Attention to women's issues in the past 10 years has been limited to a few pamphlets and a few workshops. However, we need political, cultural, economic and social determination to achieve sexual awareness.

Sahar Motallebi, the other speaker, said: "In my opinion, stating the problems reminds us of the suffering of women. We should consider the changes where women played a role. There is more development and national income where women's participation is higher. The other issue is that we have always waited for the government to enforce the laws it passed. However, 90% of the people who violated women's rights are ordinary men not the government. More education should be provided to the children and the young people."

Excerpts from the address made by Ms Diana Saqeb:

The women's institutions were active mainly from 2001-2006 and the people had more hope for improvement. Since 2006, there has been more disappointment and we are heading for Talibanisation.

The massive funds that arrived in Afghanistan in the past 10 years made the women's issue profitable. Many people rushed to have institutions registered for that purpose. Thus, we remained at the surface and forgot the foundations and the rotting cultural pillars. The workshops did not bring any solution and the projects never became processes.

Women have problems concerning literacy, economy and political leadership. We were happy with positive discrimination that allowed us to elect 25% female MPs, but

we never considered that those 68 women would unwittingly sign documents that would destroy women's lives. They were mostly women in parliament who defended the Shiite Personal Status Law. Women posed also the biggest problems regarding the Marriage Law, the Children Law etc. As long as I can achieve something for being a woman, nothing will be achieved for women. All the restrictions on women should be lifted and that can be achieved only through sustained education.

Excerpts from the address made by Mr Besharat:

Women entered the social, cultural and political arenas for the first time under Amanullah Khan, but they were defeated by hardline groups who always opposed women. The peak came under the Taleban. The same forces have opposed women in the past decade.

Women have occupied important positions in the past 10 years. Women's participation worldwide is 17% on average, but that ratio is 28% in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, they have a simplistic view of their own issues. Women have never viewed the existence of extremist forces as a problem. A strategy is missing within all women's organizations.

The problem with the international community is that they concentrated on a number of women and their NGOs and ignored the majority of women. On the other hand, the Afghanistan government lacks commitment to women. The government leadership has made instrumental use of women. On the one hand, they have tried to appease the extremists and, on the other hand, to win aid from foreigners. The government has sought to win assistance, but it has lacked a moral and ideological commitment.



FIDH & Armanshahr:

The Afghan government and the whole UN system must reinvigorate their engagement to protect human rights



in Afghanistan

22 March 2013

fidh

Human Rights

Last Tuesday, the UN Security Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) until 19 March 2014. FIDH and Armanshahr Foundation/OPEN ASIA, in a joint paper released today, welcome this mandate renewal, but urge the Afghan government and the rest of the United Nations system, including the Human Rights Council, to take all necessary measures to increase their engagement to protect and promote human rights in Afghanistan. This increased engagement is especially important in light of the upcoming period of transition in Afghanistan that will be marked by presidential elections and the withdrawal of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in 2014.

UNAMA's new mandate includes calls for more resources to be allocated to the mission, and enhancing of UNAMA's role in coordinating and promoting the coherence of UN funds, programmes and agencies in Afghanistan. It also highlights human rights as a key to build peace in the country.

"Still, the human rights situation in Afghanistan remains particularly worrying and we can only predict its further deterioration in the absence of an ambitious plan by the international community to protect and promote human rights. It is clear that the Afghan government has so far been unable to effectively establish the rule of law, secure democratic institutions, ensure the separation of powers and eradicate corruption in Afghanistan; it won't be able to do so without international support," said Guissou Jahangiri, director of Armanshahr Foundation/OPEN ASIA.

"Among other things, the Afghan government and its partners must take action to protect civilian populations from attacks by insurgents; massively invest in programs aiming at preventing gender-based violence and promoting women's role in society; and put an end to persistent impunity and discrimination in the justice system. The recent release of Afghan Taliban prisoners, including significant figures, to push the reconciliation process forward, could only deepen this culture of impunity and pose serious threats to sustainable peace in Afghanistan", she added.

"The engagement of United Nations Special Procedures in Afghanistan has been nonexistent for years. The mandate of the last Independent Expert on human rights in Afghanistan expired in 2005, the last report on Afghanistan by a Special Rapporteur was in 2008, and the last Working Group report was presented in 2009. Each mandate issued thorough recommendations, which unfortunately remain far from being implemented. Since 2009, no Special Procedures have been able to visit the country, in spite of repeated requests emanating inter alia from the Special Rapporteur on Torture and from the Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions," said Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH president.

In light of NATO's forthcoming withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Human Rights Council and other United Nations bodies must act to send a clear message to the international community to remain strongly engaged in Afghanistan. The UN Human Rights Council should consider the establishment of an independent mechanism monitoring the evolution of the human rights situation and providing technical assistance to the Afghan government to strengthen the rule of law in the country.

Download the report here:

<http://www.fidh.org/spip.php?action=telecharger&arg=6462>

Afghanistan: Rights at risk as military drawdown advances

Foreign Donors Should Bolster Civil Society, Protections for Women

February 1, 2013

(London) – Afghanistan [2]’s human rights situation remained poor, with deterioration in some areas, and growing concerns for the future, Human Rights Watch said today in its World Report 2013 [3]. In 2012, US-led foreign military forces began a drawdown as part of a major reduction set to be reached in 2014.

In its 665-page report, Human Rights Watch assessed progress on human rights during the past year in more than 90 countries, including an analysis of the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

The Afghan government under President Hamid Karzai continued to allow rights-abusing warlords and corrupt officials to operate with impunity in government-controlled areas. The rights of Afghan women and girls, which improved significantly after 2001, suffered rollbacks in 2012 due to security deterioration in several parts of the country. Taliban and other insurgent forces continued to commit unlawful attacks targeting civilians and failing to discriminate between civilians and combatants.

“The future of human rights protections in Afghanistan are in grave doubt,” said Brad Adams [4], Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “Corruption, little rule of law, poor governance, and abusive policies and practices deprive the country’s most vulnerable citizens of their rights.”

Growing international fatigue with Afghanistan has reduced political pressure on the government to protect and promote rights, Human Rights Watch said. Despite pledges of goodwill and support, international commitments to defending basic rights in Afghanistan have already shrunk and are backed by less political pressure. Cuts in international aid are already leading to closure of schools and health clinics.

Afghanistan’s justice system remains a potent threat to the rights of Afghanistan’s women, Human Rights Watch said. As of



spring 2012, 400 women and girls were in prison and juvenile detention for the “moral crimes” of running away from home or sex outside marriage, despite running away not being a crime under Afghan law and serious deficiencies in due process in these cases. Large areas of Afghanistan still rely on traditional justice mechanisms that can subject women to gross brutality.

Although women have attained some leadership roles in Afghan government and civil society since 2001, including as judges and members of parliament, Afghan women and girls continue to face everyday abuses. Many have been specifically targeted by Taliban and other insurgent forces.

Najia Sediqi, the acting head of the Afghan government’s Department of Women’s Affairs in the eastern province of Laghman, was shot and killed by an unknown gunman as she traveled to work in December. That same month, Anisa, a 22-year-old student and polio vaccination campaign volunteer, was shot to death in Kapisa province. Numerous other women in public life were targets of attack in 2012.

In July, a 22-year-old woman was publicly executed in Parwan province for alleged adultery. Under-age and forced marriage remain common in Afghanistan. Infant

“The Afghan government has become synonymous with corruption, torture, and impunity,” Adams said. “Afghanistan’s foreign donors should be prepared to link direct support to the government to benchmarks for improving human rights and accountability for past abuses.”

mortality and maternal mortality remain among the highest in the world, with one in ten children dying before the age of five, and a woman dying of pregnancy-related complications approximately every two hours.

“Afghanistan needs donors who will support women’s rights as a long-term priority,” Adams said. “Declining foreign interest in protecting the gains of the past decade will increase the risk that women will face greater systemic abuses in

– remain routine and widespread.

In September, the government appointed Asadullah Khalid, implicated in serious human rights violations including the operation of a private, unlawful prison in Kandahar, to head the country’s abusive intelligence service. Reports by the United Nations and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) have implicated the intelligence service in arbitrary detention, torture, and other abuses.

Afghanistan broke with recent practice by executing 14 people over two days, November 20 and 21, nearly doubling the number of government-sanctioned executions in the country since the fall of the Taliban government. The hangings cast doubt on hopes that the Karzai government was committed to bringing Afghanistan in step with the increasing international consensus to ban the death penalty.

The AIHRC, a nine-person independent government agency recognized internationally for its effective human rights research and advocacy, remained hobbled by Karzai’s failure to fill five commissioner positions. The government has also stalled the release of the AIHRC’s 1,000 page report mapping war crimes and crimes against humanity committed from 1978 to 2001.

“The Afghan government has become synonymous with corruption, torture, and impunity,” Adams said. “Afghanistan’s foreign donors should be prepared to link direct support to the government to benchmarks for improving human rights and accountability for past abuses.”

Source URL: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/02/01/afghanistan-rights-risk-military-drawdown-advances>

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[1] <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/02/01/afghanistan-rights-risk-military-drawdown-advances>

[2] <http://www.hrw.org/asia/afghanistan>

[3] <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013>

[4] <http://www.hrw.org/bios/brad-adams>

the future.”

The Taliban and other insurgent forces continued to commit human rights abuses and violations of the laws of war in 2012. Insurgent forces launched at least 34 attacks against schools in the first six months of 2012, half of which involved targeted assassinations of school staff or education officials.

“Many Afghans are now stuck between insurgents who would roll back rights and a government that doesn’t care about protecting human rights,” Adams said. “The Afghan government needs to explain how it plans to ensure rights protections in the aftermath of any negotiated settlement it might reach with insurgents.”

Warlordism and its attendant rights abuses remained one of the country’s most serious problems, Human Rights Watch said. The government has failed to prosecute high-level officials for corruption, criminal offenses, and other abuses, while the 2005 Action Plan for Peace, Reconciliation and Justice remains unimplemented. Abuses perpetrated by the US-backed Afghan Local Police and other militia groups ostensibly under government control – including extortion, rape and killings



UNAMA releases report on treatment of conflict-related detainees in Afghan custody



«Ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees in Afghan custody requires greater preventive measures and reform»

KABUL, 20 January 2013 - In a report released today, UNAMA found that despite significant efforts by the Government of Afghanistan and international partners to address ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees, torture persists and remains a serious concern in numerous detention facilities across Afghanistan. UNAMA's detention observation programme is carried out further to its mandate from the United Nations Security Council to assist the Government of Afghanistan and all Afghan people to improve respect for human rights and the rule of law including in the prison sector, and in cooperation with Afghan authorities.

UNAMA's 139-page report Treatment of

Conflict-Related Detainees in Afghan Custody: One Year On is based on interviews with 635 conflict-related detainees held by the Afghan National Police, National Directorate of Security, Afghan National Army or Afghan Local Police, visits to 89 detention facilities in 30 provinces from October 2011 to October 2012, extensive interviews with multiple relevant interlocutors and on rigorous analysis, corroboration and examination of documentary and other material. The National Directorate of Security and the Ministry of Interior provided access to detention facilities and met with UNAMA over the observation period to share appropriate information, and to discuss concerns and follow up measures.

Using internationally accepted methodology, standards and best practices, UNAMA found that more than half (326) of 635 conflict-related detainees interviewed experienced ill-treatment and torture particularly in 34 facilities of the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the National Directorate of Security (NDS) between October 2011 and October 2012. Torture, as defined and prohibited under Afghan and international law, took the form of abusive interrogation techniques in which Afghan officials inflicted severe pain and suffering on detainees during interrogations aimed mainly at obtaining a confession or information. Fourteen methods of torture and ill-treatment were described similar to practices previously documented by UNAMA.

The study found that while the incidence of torture in ANP facilities increased compared to the previous period (125 of 286 ANP conflict-related detainees or 43 per cent experienced torture or ill-treatment compared with 35 per cent in the previous 12-month period), detainees interviewed in NDS custody experienced torture and ill-treatment at a rate that was lower than the previous period (178 of 514 detainees or 34 per cent, experienced torture down 12 per cent from the previous year, when 46 per cent reported torture or ill-treatment in NDS). Numerous detainees were held and ill-treated in both ANP and NDS facilities or by other Afghan authorities.

“The findings of the UNAMA report are a

cause for serious concern,» said Ján Kubiš, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan. “The Government has repeatedly confirmed its commitment to international human rights and humanitarian obligations and respective provisions of Afghan laws, and stated that ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees is not a policy of the Government or its institutions but rather acts of individuals. The Government’s attention and efforts to address these abusive practices are visible and encouraging, and have produced some positive results but the system isn’t robust enough to eliminate ill-treatment of detainees. Clearly more needs to be done to end and prevent torture.”

The Government of Afghanistan instituted a range of measures aimed at improving



detention practices and responded to concerns as outlined in their detailed response annexed to UNAMA’s report which were considered in the report. As stated by NDS and the Ministry of Interior, they implemented expanded training programmes on prevention of detainee ill-treatment, issued policy directives, increased inspections and reassigned personnel. In 2012, the NDS created a sub-directorate of human rights that reports to the Director of NDS and the Ministry of Interior indicated it reinforced its human rights offices within the Afghan National Police. Both institutions stated they investigated allegations of ill-treatment however it is unclear whether any of these internal investigations resulted in the prosecution or loss of jobs of Afghan officials for involvement in torturing detainees or for having failed to prevent torture.

«UNAMA found a persistent lack of accountability for perpetrators of torture with few investigations and no prosecutions for those responsible,» said Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights for UNAMA. “The findings highlight that torture cannot be addressed by training, inspections

and directives alone but requires sound accountability measures to stop and prevent its use. Without deterrents and disincentives to use torture, including a robust, independent investigation process, criminal prosecutions and courts’ consistent refusal to accept confessions gained through torture, Afghan officials have no incentive to stop torture.”

Over the observation period, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) implemented a detention facility monitoring programme to support Afghan authorities in reforming their interrogation and detainee treatment practices prior to resuming international transfers of detainees to several facilities. In October 2012, following new reports of torture at several NDS and ANP facilities including locations where ISAF had transferred detainees, ISAF suspended transfers for a second time. ISAF subsequently stopped transferring detainees to several Afghan facilities and implemented a process limiting transfer to a reduced number of Afghan facilities and increasing monitoring and accountability.

UNAMA’s findings reinforces the urgent and long-term need for reforms in the judiciary, prosecution and law enforcement sectors and offers 64 recommendations to the Government and international partners. The recommendations strengthen proposals in UNAMA’s October 2011 report which have not been fully implemented. In addition to other measures, UNAMA recommends the creation of an independent national preventive mechanism on torture described in the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. Such a dedicated mechanism could be located within the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission with the authority and enhanced capacity and expertise to inspect all detention facilities, conduct follow up investigations and make detailed technical recommendations on prosecution of perpetrators and remedial measures. Establishing such a mechanism would require concerted and sustained support from the Afghan Government and the international community. UNAMA continues to observe the treatment of detainees and is working closely with Afghan authorities and international partners to bring positive change

<http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=12254&ctl=Details&mid=15756&Itemid=36279&language=en-US>



Press release

Transitional Justice Coordination Group (TJCG)

11/03/2013

Stop killing civilians and try those responsible!

The seventh report published in February 2013 by the United Nations Assistance Mission (UNAMA) in Afghanistan was followed by the intense concern of the public and the Transitional Justice Coordination Group. The report shows that 7,559 civilian casualties (2,754 civilian deaths and 4,805 injuries) from armed conflict in 2012. UNAMA documented 6,131 civilian casualties (2,179 civilian deaths and 3,952 injuries) by Anti-Government Elements in 2012. Of which 1,077 of them were religious leaders, elders and women who were involved peace talks. Also, 488 children have been killed and 814 others were injured. The report shows (20% increase in murders of women), and this number reflects that they still don't believe in peace as a value and a need, and they have no mood and willingness to participate and support this process.

Meanwhile, the Afghan government insists on continuing the peace process with the opposition, and is trying to share the power and provide opportunities for the opposition through the road map framework for power sharing. But the power-sharing plan itself encourages further violence and insecurity, as well as increased violence and killing civilians.

The lack of a clear strategy by the Afghan government and as well as inefficient tactics in achieving peace and no interest from the opposition for peace has left the High Peace Council convoy in a dark road which will only lead into the elimination of its members, manipulation of public opinion, a waste of public funds and preparing ground for hidden deals and corruption, It will not respond to the suffering of the Afghan society at all. The recent Fatwa (ruling) of Head of Pakistan's Religious Scholars' Council, who called suicide attacks permissible in Afghanistan, is warning bell regarding the civilian victims.

In addition to the killing and injurious of

civilians by the armed opposition of the government, the report shows that 491 civilians were also killed by international forces deployed in Afghanistan. The report shows that civilian deaths caused by the opposition increased and killings of civilians by international forces and the Afghan security forces has diminished.

According to UNAMA, the armed conflict in the past six years has killed more than 14,700 civilians in Afghanistan. According to the report, the graph of civilian casualties this year shows 14 percent reduction compared to previous years. However, the mortality rate at present is still catastrophic and disturbing, because still a large number of our people, including women and children, suffer greatly from the threats and risks of war, hostilities, terrorist attacks and roadside bombs.

According to paragraph 3 of Article 75 of the Afghan constitution, «to provide public order and security», is one of the key tasks of government of Afghanistan. Like the need for a sensible foreign policy, the government also needs a policy for participatory criminality to maintain independence and national sovereignty, territorial integrity and ensuring the protection of public order and security. But the Afghan government in reaction to the rise of organized crime and terrorist attacks does not have any criminal policy. That is why the Afghan people have repeatedly suffered losses and damages in a very substantial and irreparable scale.

On the other hand, during the armed conflict against the government oppositions, the international humanitarian law is not being respected as an external support mechanism for civilians and as a result the Afghan and the international forces in Afghanistan have committed horrific crimes.

The four Geneva Conventions (1949) and its Additional Protocol (1977) are the protective mechanisms that should be observed during armed conflict. Although the government has accepted it but still did not act in accordance with its provisions and fundamentally do not respect its provisions.

According to Article 3 of the four Geneva Conventions (1949): the two parties of the conflict are bound by the provisions of paragraph 1 of this document internationally known and it provides: «With those who do not participate directly in the war ...» under any circumstances, should be treated humanely. Also, in paragraph (a) of paragraph 1 of this Article, this states: “damage to their lives and body, especially killing in any form, amputation and cruel behavior...” with civilians or civilian is prohibited.

Therefore, the Transitional Justice Coordination Group, denounce s any loss of life, damage to public and private properties and request all involved parties in the conflict in Afghanistan, to put the prevention of civilian casualties and property damage on the top of their activities. To accomplish this goal, the following points to the parties involved is proposed:

1. Parties involved in the conflict make their troops familiar with the laws and regulations of war, and prevent them from attacking the civilian areas and monitor them regularly;
2. Parties involved in the conflict, should support the civilians.

In addition, we request the government of Afghanistan, international forces and the government’s armed opposition to consider the following in order to reduce the killing of civilians and financial damage to private and public properties during the armed conflict, terroristic attacks and by road side bombs:

Recommendations to the government:

1. Create an internal mechanism of protection of civilians in armed conflict against the opposition and monitor the actions and behaviour of the Afghan security forces and international troops stationed in the country
2. Security training and awareness of national and international human rights law and its observance;
3. Training of military personnel in connection with the protection of civilians during military

operations;

4. Observing the provisions of the Geneva Conventions in all military operations to protect civilians and

5. Adopt a rational criminal policy to prevent damage to civilian lives and property against regular attacks, terrorism and organized attacks the road side bombs by the state’s armed opposition.

To international forces:

1. Avoid operations in residential areas;
2. Address the complains of the victims and provide compensation for civilian victims, survivors of victims, and
3. Observe all the provisions of the Geneva Conventions in all military operations.

To opposition forces:

1. Do not use the village and civilians as trench and human shields;
2. Seriously avoid suicide operations which cause civilian casualties;
3. Avoid the murder and torture of civilians and humanitarian relief workers,
4. Avoid planting mines and improvised bombs on public roads that can kill civilians, and
5. Avoid murder, torture and intimidation of civilians along the way and in residential areas.

Our demands from the government and the international community, especially the United Nations:

1. Bringing to trial those accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the government and in cooperation with the International Criminal Court;
2. Address complaints of the victims and provide compensation for civilian victims and survivors of victims.

Transitional Justice Coordination Group,
Kabul, Afghanistan

For more information, please contact the following address:

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Press Release

Transitional Justice Coordination Group (TJCG)

The government should not violate the constitution through peace roadmap and release of Taliban prisoners

14/1/2013

Afghanistan is passing through one of the most critical juncture of its history and it is located in a crossroad of choice, return to a violent past or the transition to a just and sustainable peace.

On the one hand discussions, negotiations, ceasefire and peace and reconciliation, after four decades of bloodshed, became one of the most objectives and pressing needs of the people, on the other hand, the pressure from the Taliban and other armed opposition increases threats and may lead to subversion of the achievements of the past decade in Afghanistan.

Due to incompetence and lack of effective management of the government, the Taliban are trying to widen the gender, political, social, cultural, ethnic, class and language gaps between the people and more than any other time use it in the interest and for the revival of its authoritarian system.

After several attempts to secure peace which until now has not led to tangible results for the people – the government of Afghanistan adopted a new policy which is called the «Roadmap for Peace 2015», it stated that the five steps to achieve these goals are: to end war, truce; reintegration of all armed oppositions, encouraging them to establish their political organizations in order to share the power structure and to gain the support of the international community.

However, in Paris conference, the armed oppositions clearly ruled out the mentioned

roadmap and against the will of the people the representatives of the Taliban explicitly asserted that they don't recognize the constitution of Afghanistan and that they will not negotiate with the puppet government in Kabul. This has confused government officials, as the foreign minister of Afghanistan described the opening of the Taliban Representative Office in Qatar "very dangerous". This dubious approach of the government and its international partners has lost the trust of people on any kind of reconciliation.

On the other hand, the government is still pursuing this plan and strives to unilaterally implement it by giving high concessions.

Release of Taliban prisoners by the Afghan and Pakistani governments, removing their name from the blacklist of the UN Security Council and US are against Afghanistan, laws, norms and as well as conventions of international justice. Unconditional release of Taliban will continue the culture of impunity and more than anytime pose serious threats to lasting peace in the country.

Transitional Justice Coordination Group - made up of 27 national and international institutions understands the sensitivity of this historic landmark in the country because those members of the armed opposition group have been unconditionally released again continued their attacks. Hereby, the TJCG expresses its concern and seriously request the government and civil society, and

the international community to demand that:

1. The government should respect the country's constitution and ensure the enforcement of other laws in the country and should not encourage and promote a culture of safety by releasing the armed criminals. In fact the files of the arrested suspects, according to the law, court procedures and the final decision should be investigated in order to ensure justice.

2. The Government should immediately put an end to the unconditional release of the Taliban members and the Pakistan government should hand over the Taliban prisoners to Afghan government.

3. The justice sector, particularly the Afghan Supreme Court, having the responsibility for releasing Taliban prisoners is accountable to the people and should provide legal reasons for releasing Taliban without due process, and the parliament as the representative of the people should follow this as the representatives of the Afghan people.

4. The government of Afghanistan should adopt a mechanism for those Taliban who have been already released and ensure that they are not returning to the ranks of terrorists. The government should also clearly say, what kind of impact the release of these terrorist made on the securing peace. Otherwise, all entities and individuals who encourage impunity for the terrorists will be responsible of the consequences.

5. The Government should investigate cases of child prisoners in Bagram base and pursue its results with human rights organizations and the media and the public.

6. If the government is not able to prosecute criminals, Taliban and other prisoners, then in return for its commitment to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the government of Afghanistan should seek ICC support to them on trial.

7. The High Peace Council, through the road map 2015 for peace must not violate the constitution, but due to a major policy change on the system, the plan must be submitted to the National Assembly for approval and so that the government respect the redlines and

its objectivity during the peace negotiations.

8. According to studies conducted by human rights organizations, peace-loving people of Afghanistan want justice and end impunity, therefore the action plan for the implementation of transitional justice must be central to a peace plan to end forever the four-decade cycle of violence to gain political power.

9. Transitional Justice Coordination Group, as before, once again, ask for the repeal of the amnesty law, National Reconciliation passed by the National Assembly because it promotes the culture of impunity and lead to increased violence and instability.

10. Civil society, international organizations and the United Nations, more than ever should be aware of their responsibility towards the protection of human rights, respect the constitution and international treaties. UN Human Rights Council should appoint a special rapporteur for Afghanistan.

For more information please contact the below email address;

tjcg.afghanistan@gmail.com

Other items in the Dari version:

- Let's build a Khorassan together, report on celebration of Nowruz in Herat
- Domain of Norwruz – Davood Moradian in BBC (http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2013/03/130319_109_nowrooz_new_year.shtml)
- Female image of cinema in Afghanistan (http://www.jadidonline.com/story/08082011/frnk/diana_saqeb_film)
- A review of Khesht-o Khiyal, a film made by Sadiqa Rezaei
- A brief review of women's social role in Iranian cinema ([Http://forum.vatandownload.com/forum596/thread36884-5.htm](http://forum.vatandownload.com/forum596/thread36884-5.htm))
- Review of 3 new books published by Armanshahr

Politis asia

«City and the War»- Politis asia 14-15 published

Politis asia is the title of the series of Armanshahr publications that deals mainly with important, theoretical and academic issues. «City and the War» is the title of its issues 14-15 that has recently been published.

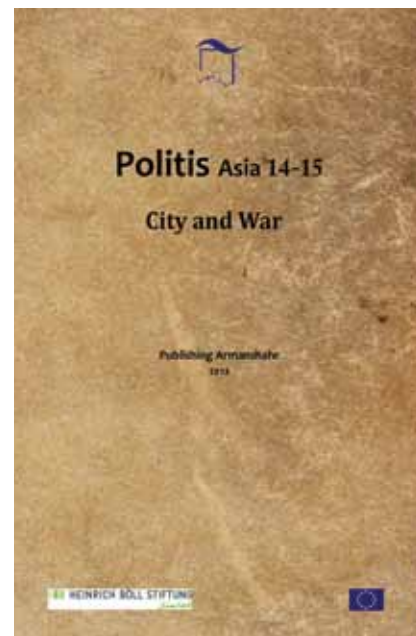
Excerpts from foreword:

Stephen Graham says geographers and other social scientists are inclined to avoid studying the war because they regard it as «an unusual and exceptional condition.» This is particularly true of urban studies. Nevertheless, many cities were ruined in wars and many people were killed or were forced to leave their homes in the past century. People from many cities are at war, homeless or in fear of war in the present century. In this part of the world, people of Kabul, Kandahar, Baghdad, Basra, Gaza, Jerusalem and others lose their lives as a result of terrorist attacks, bombardments or «war on terror» and citizens of New York, London, Madrid and others begin their daily lives with fear of terrorist attacks.

The Western world laid claim to «war on terrorism» after 11 September 2011. It is clear today that Clausewitz's definition of battlefields as an ongoing conflict between military forces in open space has come to its end. War has once again entered the cities, the daily domain of life and private sphere of the homes. Cities have come under military occupation again.

On the other hand, city has always been in connection with the concept of politics. A review of the philology of the city in various languages indicates the fact that all the terms used to denote city somehow refer to order, rule and superiority of a class or a social stratum.

Afghanistan has been caught up in war for nearly half a century. This issue of Politis asia aims to examine the reasons and impact of the war from the angle of urban sociology and geopolitics. The main question we are seeking the answer to is: why do some cities become important in wartime or why do they become



the scene of confrontation and the war?

Concentrating on Kabul, capital of Afghanistan, in this issue we have tried to view the question from different aspects. Kabul has been plagued directly or indirectly with international and domestic wars for more than four decades. Those wars have resulted in killing, homelessness and migration of millions of people, physical and extensive destruction of Kabul and have prevented the growth and development its services and infrastructures in the past few decades. They have also led to a chaotic socio-political state of property, land ownership, speculation of government and public land by strongmen and finally the spread of unofficial housing.

Ten articles have been compiled in two parts in this anthology. In the absence of notable domestic works, most articles have been written by Western specialists and have been translated from English. The writers have indubitably carried out their research in a framework which was not free from the influence of the new warlike atmosphere in the West. Their studies are significant for allowing us to grasp the new strategies of war and models of military intervention by examining the example of Kabul.

Part I entitled «Who governs Kabul?» is a compilation of articles that examine the significance of cities and efforts to establish military-political control over them based on Kabul. The first article, “Cities, War and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics”, deems the cities to be important strategic places which receive as much attention in regard to planning as in regard to destruction.

“City and hegemony: the role of political forces in urban development” examines the political and institutional aspects of the city and the power of control over other vital aspects of it. On the other hand, cities are important military targets because they house important economic and political centres of the countries.

“Who governs Kabul? Explaining urban politics in a post-war capital city” explains the urban policies of a post-war capital. With the growing international ties and statements such as «cities will replace national governance», capitals become points of conflict between political control and omission, wealth and poverty, and tradition and modernity.

“Kabul cosmopolitan: Geopolitical empire from the planner’s viewpoint” has employed the concept of cosmopolitanism as the theoretical framework to examine urbanism and planning in Kabul. It is notable that Kabul’s cosmopolitanism entails a spectrum beginning with totally vulnerable households to national and urban governments to the US Department of the State and Department of Defence. Besides, it includes an international donor community which is striving to «save the Afghans» and possibly speaks for the Afghans in the arenas of power and political discourse.

«The inverted cycle: Kabul and the strongmen’s competition for control over Kandahar, 2001–2006» is the last article in part one, which concentrates on the Kandahar province. The province of Kandahar has a specific status in the history and politics of Afghanistan. It has been the origin of almost all rulers of the country in the past few centuries. The interesting point in this article is the significance of the relationship with Kabul to gain political legitimacy, in particular

after 2001, and the fading of traditional tribal mechanisms.

Part II, with the title of «Kabul at War», deals with the impact and consequences of nearly half a century of war in Afghanistan on urbanism in Kabul in particular. The first article in this section, with the title of «Kabul - urban politics since Zaher Shah», examines urban planning in Kabul with a view to the urban functioning of Kabul as the capital since the time of the Zahir Shah to this date.

«Kabul at war (1992-1996): State, ethnicity and social classes» concentrates on the civil war in 1992-96. During those critical four years, Kabul was an incomplete model of the whole country. The article looks at Kabul as a metaphor of the state, a place where social identities have been redefined and as a centre of economic gamble as well as the centre of town versus countryside conflict.

«Kabul, an informal capital city» deals with one of the most acute problems of Kabul: shortage of housing and unofficial housing. The growth of unofficial settlements in Kabul is the result of inefficiency of political-economic macro structures, economic poverty and uneven distribution of resources between the cities and the countryside, political instability and several decades of war, absence of the rule of law, the distortion of property rights and misuse of public lands by power factions.

«Urban cohesiveness in Kabul city: challenges and threats» is a study of urban separation in Kabul based on ideology, ethnicity and socio-economic class. In the opinion of the writer, this separation is dangerous for the present and future stability of and an enduring urban development in the city. The final article, «The city as arena, hub and prey – patterns of violence in Kabul and Karachi», compares the models of violence in the two cities of Kabul and Karachi.

City and the War

Editors: Shourangiz Dadashi in collaboration with Dr. Hassan Javaheri

Translation: Khalil Rostamkhani

Layout and design: Rooholamin Amini

First edition: 2013

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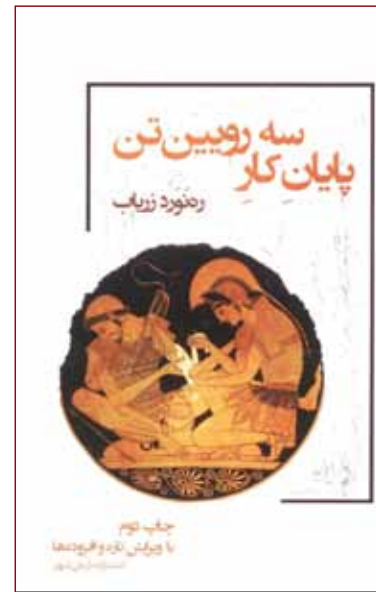
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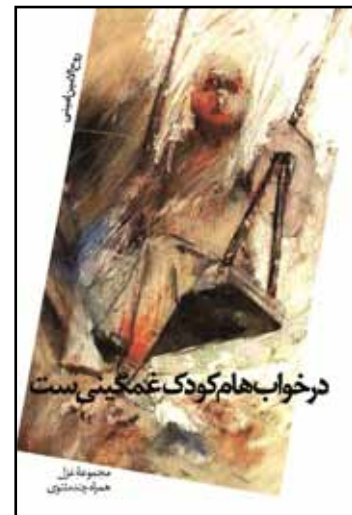
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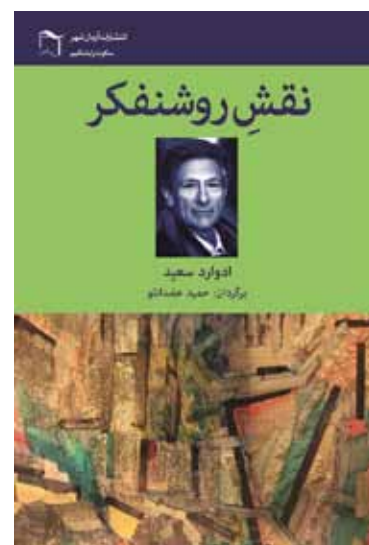
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