



FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights Armanshahr/OPEN ASIA

Joint press release

Launch of the Campaign "Unveiling Afghanistan: The Unheard Voices of Progress"

Kabul, Paris, 29 January 2014 – Just two months before Afghanistan elects a new President, [Armanshahr/OPEN ASIA](#) and [FIDH](#) launch the Campaign "Unveiling Afghanistan: The Unheard Voices of Progress", which aims to spark discussion and debate about building a society that protects women's rights and human rights. Over 50 days, 50 interviews with influential social, political, and cultural actors will be published in the [Huffington Post](#) (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/unveiling-afghanistan/>) and in the major Afghan daily newspaper, *8 Sobh*.

"These elections are a critical step in the democratic transition Afghans have been demanding. Civil society is in the process of re-building itself. It is time for civil society actors to express their vision for the future of their country and have it heard by the world," declared Karim Lahidji, FIDH President.

Crippled by war, poverty, social divisions, and devastating underdevelopment, Afghanistan's governing institutions remain weak, and the rule of law almost non-existent. In the face of overwhelming obstacles, the population maintains hope for a peaceful future. Ordinary citizens, in particular women and a new young generation of civil society actors, have unfailingly demonstrated their faith in progress, justice and democratisation in Afghanistan. These actors for positive change in Afghanistan are making their voices heard through the "Unveiling Afghanistan" campaign.

"Serious security concerns have not prevented citizens from continuing to exert their right to participate in the democratic process, nor parents from sending their daughters back to school. Universities are overflowing and teachers keep their doors open. The international actors engaged in shaping Afghanistan's future must acknowledge this progress and act to preserve it," Guissou Jahangiri, Executive Director of Armanshahr/OPEN ASIA, explained.

Women and girls in Afghanistan are defending their rights to attend school and universities. They are claiming their rights to the same employment opportunities as their fellow male citizens. They are exercising their political rights by voting and even standing as candidates in elections. New political parties and movements with pro-democracy agendas have been registered; educated and committed representatives have entered parliament. Sources of information have proliferated, with hundreds of successful radio stations, television channels and newspapers. Simultaneously, civil society has expanded, with new organizations, networks, cultural, artistic and sporting initiatives promoting civic participation and human rights, including women's rights.

Unveiling Afghanistan gives voice to the demands of men and women for an open and inclusive society in Afghanistan. Critically, it will promote women's participation in the electoral process, by building awareness and knowledge amongst women about their fundamental rights and electoral choices. In doing so, "Unveiling Afghanistan" seeks to contribute to the emergence of a culture of democracy, human rights and gender equality in Afghanistan.

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