



Women's Rights in Afghanistan



Youth activists deliver our petition to Baroness Warsi, Senior Minister at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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We hope you will feel inspired to take action on all of our campaigns but remind you that all actions are optional.

This mailing is also available to download at

www.amnesty.org.uk/youth

IN BRIEF

This month we return to Amnesty's campaign for women's rights in Afghanistan, which aims to tackle violence against women and ensure women human rights defenders receive the support and protection they need. Your support is crucial and we have lots of actions for you to get involved with this month including:

- making a patch for a 'solidarity quilt' to send to women's shelters in Afghanistan
- writing a letter to President Karzai.
- lobbying your local MP

THE CAMPAIGN: A RECAP

It's been over ten years since the Taliban regime was overthrown in Afghanistan. Since 2005 the Taliban have increased their attacks in an attempt to regain control. Women and girls have been particularly threatened and abused. Over the past few years Afghan leaders have been calling for a peace process with the Taliban and there is a real risk that Afghan women and girls may be even more vulnerable. (You can find more background information about this on the last page). Our campaign has four key aims:



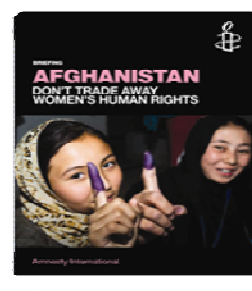
1. Ensure women are involved in peace processes



2. Ensure women's rights are protected as security is transferred from international forces to Afghan forces.



3. Making sure tackling violence against women is a government priority



4. Ensuring the work of women human rights defenders is supported and their rights are protected

In March we asked you to focus on aim three - tackling violence against women - and the results were fantastic! We received 19,428 signatures for our petition of which over 3,000 were from youth groups alone. Many of you also took part in our creative 'purple finger'* action. We've included photos of some of them in this mailing and many are going to be displayed at a Parliamentary event on November 6th. This time we are asking you to focus on aim four: **supporting women human rights defenders.**

Good news! Youth activists were key to securing a meeting with Baroness Warsi, the Senior Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. Dhibla, Vie and Vanessa from the Youth Advisory Group got to hand over our petition in person and ask her some questions(see photo on the cover). Getting politicians to recognise and highlight human rights issues is a huge achievement!

**Women and men in Afghanistan (and many other countries such as Iraq) show they have voted in elections by dipping their finger into purple ink. This to avoid double voting. In 2009, there were reports that Taliban members cut off the ink-stained fingers of two Afghan voters in Kandahar during the presidential election. We used the image of the purple finger as a symbol of women's determination to make changes in their country.*

WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghan women **human rights defenders** are at the frontline in protecting human rights. These women are teachers, journalists, activists, health professionals and politicians. Their aim is to make Afghan society safer and fairer. They play a very important role in defending women's rights in a peaceful way.

Human Rights Defenders are people who promote and protect human rights by non-violent means.

However, many women human rights defenders have been killed or threatened because of their activities and some have fled the country. They also face intimidation from some powerful members of society, such as government officials and the Taliban, who believe these women are rebelling against the role women should play in society. Some women are also at risk of threats and attacks by family members who may be embarrassed or worried by the outspokenness or their work.

There has recently been a spate of such attacks against important working women. This year two female senior police officers have been murdered as well as the daughter of one of the country's top female politicians and there are more cases like these.



SHALA'S STORY

Shala (not real name for security reasons) works as a woman's rights activist and teacher in Helmand province, where Taliban control and influence is widespread. Here she tells Amnesty International about the violence many women endure and the risks and challenges she faces in her work.

There are lots of risks for women working in Helmand. The society here is very restrictive towards women and some people do not like it when women leave the home and work in an office with men who are not family members. I receive lots of threatening phone calls. They warn me not go to work or help anyone. They said "you provoke our youth". I have received so many threats by phone but, despite this, I continue with my work.

I deal with cases of domestic violence and women committing suicide... We have lots of problems dealing with these kinds of cases. Most cases relating to family disputes are not reported to the government. If a woman goes to the government office to make a complaint against her husband she is branded a woman of bad character and is no longer respected.

There are about 20 to 30 women in Helmand prison. Many were abused by their husbands and wanted a divorce. They don't have a defence lawyer and the police are not addressing their problems. There is too much discrimination against women. Many of the women have given birth in the prison. There is no school in the prison for the children, the prison just gives them food, and clothes occasionally.

TAKE ACTION

Our campaign will show solidarity with women human rights defenders and will call on the Afghan government to ensure that defenders are better protected and that they receive more political, financial and technical support. We want the Afghan government to recognise that the work of women human rights defenders is very important and can bring positive social change.



Action 1: Solidarity with Women Human Rights Defenders

Who?

Afghan Women Skills Development Centre

Fifteen years ago Mary Akrami and a group of pioneering women's rights activists set up the Afghan Women Skills Development Centre (AWSDC) to tackle violence and inequality and to bring positive change to women in Afghanistan.

Since establishing the first women's shelter in Afghanistan in 2002, they have given safe refuge to **1389** women, girls and dependents.

The organisation also provides training for police officers to sensitize them to working with women survivors of violence. **1286** police women and men have now been trained and a referral system set up for access to shelters.

AWSDC also carries out work with traditional and religious groups to raise awareness about women's rights.

Women for Afghan Women

Women for Afghan Women (WAW) has been providing programmes and services to women in crisis in Afghanistan since 2002. WAW's main focus is tackling violence against women and girls through providing community based services including family guidance, mediation, legal aid, shelters and teaching on women's rights for both women and men.

WAW provides essential support and protection to survivors of violence, forced marriage and rape; without WAW, many of these women and children's lives would be in grave danger.

What?

Help us create a solidarity **patchwork quilt** for AWSDC and WAW to show that we support their work and are standing with the women of Afghanistan.

Solidarity:

Agreement between or support for members of a group.

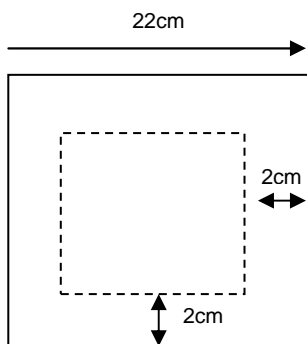
You'll find guidance overleaf – you could make one individually or as a group. Once your patch is finished send it to us and we will sew it together into a quilt displaying all the different individual expressions of hope and solidarity.

The patchworks will be sent to AWSDC and WAW to be displayed in their shelters to help give encouragement and support to the staff and residents.

Deadline for returning your patches: 2nd December 2013

Solidarity action: how to make your patches in 4 easy steps

- 1** Gather fabric and materials for your patch eg. marker pens, fabric glue, threads. You could use good quality clothing, plain or patterned fabric, and either sew, write or glue your message or image. Non fraying fabric would be ideal.
- 2** Cut your material into a square measuring 22cm in length and width
- 3** Draw a 2cm border inside your square. You will be leaving the border area clear to enable us to sew your patches together!



Send your completed patches by 2nd December to:

Anne Montague,
Youth Coordinator
Amnesty International UK,
The Human Rights Action Centre,
17-25 New Inn Yard,
London, EC2A 3EA

- 4** Get creative! Decorate the square/s with personal messages or images of solidarity. You don't have to sew your message. Marker pen and fabric images glued to the patch work just as well.

Tips!

- If you're feeling stuck for a message you could write: Your courage and strength is an inspiration to us all. We support you in your struggle for women's rights Or simply "courage" "strength" "solidarity" "support" "friendship" "sisterhood"
- You might like to include the name of your group, or your own names, and where you are from in the U.K.
- For inspiration look at these patches youth groups made for prisoner of conscience; Johan Teterissa a few years ago:



YOUTH GROUP ACTION

Action 2: Write to the President of Afghanistan

Please write to President Karzai, using points below. These call on him to ensure that women human rights defenders in Afghanistan are able to carry out that the important work they do. The Government of Afghanistan must offer protection to women human rights defenders at risk and ensure that any threats and attacks against them are swiftly investigated. Write in your own words.

Points you could make:

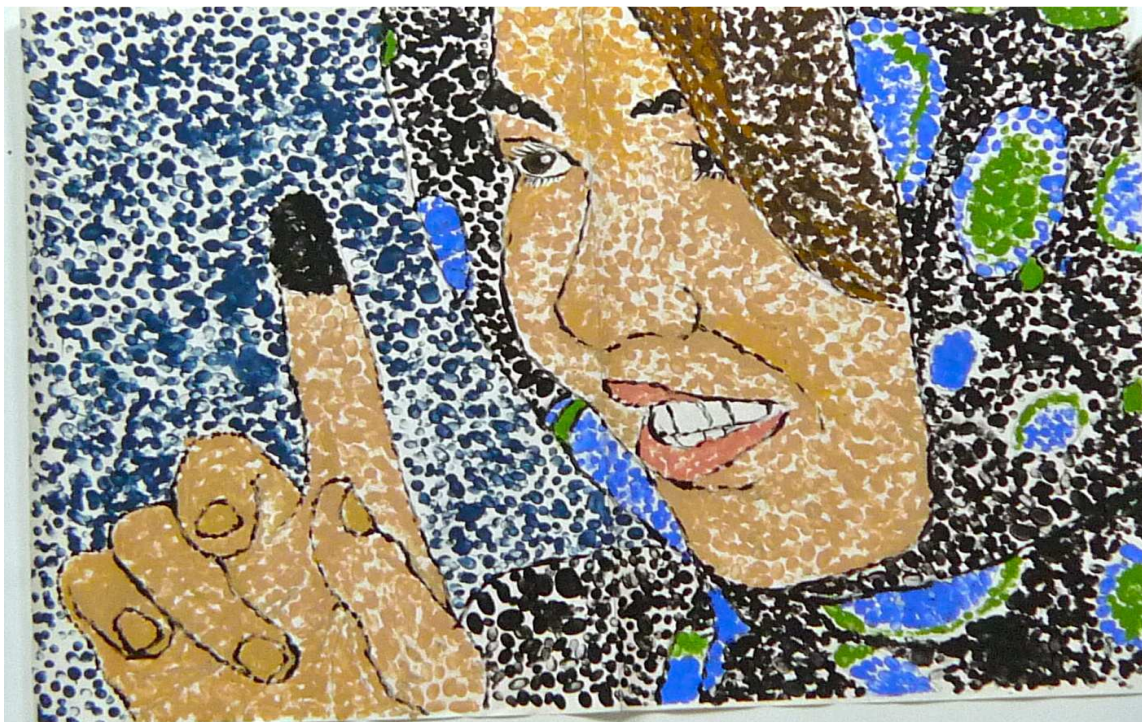
Introduce yourself and say why you are writing to him. Use information from this mailing to say why you are concerned about these issues.

Ask the President to:

- Ensure that threats and attacks on women human rights defenders are investigated quickly and fully
- Publicly acknowledge the value of women human rights defenders in their attempts to improve society.
- Ensure that adequate political, financial and technical support is provided to defenders of women's human rights.

Address: President Hamid Karzai
Gul Khana Palace
Presidential Palace
Kabul
Afghanistan

Address to: Your Excellency,



YOUTH GROUP ACTION

Action 3: Ask your MP to support the campaign in Parliament

So far **70 MPs** have signed our pledge to be a supporter of women's rights in Afghanistan, which is more than 10% of all MPs. And many others have expressed their general support.. It is now time to ask your MP to take further action....



1. To find your MP go to:
<http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/>



2. Then check if your MP has already signed the pledge to support Amnesty's campaign. Use the list of MPs on page 9!

3. Has your local MP signed the pledge?

YES

Use letter A (over the page) to help you write to your local MP

No

Use letter B to help you write to your MP.

YOUTH GROUP ACTION

Why is it important to write to your local MP?

Members of Parliament (MPs) have an important role to play in ensuring the UK government keeps its promises on women's human rights in Afghanistan. The more personalised your letter is, the more likely your MP will remember it and appreciate how important the issue is to you.

Letter A

(to send if your MP **has** signed the pledge to support Amnesty's campaign on women's rights in Afghanistan - *check the list on page 9 if you're not sure*)

Points to make:

Briefly introduce yourself and thank them for supporting the campaign so far. It is brilliant that they have signed Amnesty's pledge to be a supporter of women's rights in Afghanistan.

- Express your concern about the current situation for women human rights defenders in Afghanistan— you can use information from this mailing.
- Say that the UK government must also improve support for women human rights defenders, as they provide essential support to women survivors of violence.
- Ask them to take action by....

Attending an Amnesty International reception in Speakers House from 6pm – 7.30pm on 6 November 2013. The event will celebrate the activism undertaken by Amnesty members and groups in support of the campaign and also express solidarity with Afghan women activists.



Letter B

(to send if your MP **has not** signed the pledge to support Amnesty's campaign on women's rights in Afghanistan *check the list on page x if you're not sure*)

Briefly introduce yourself and the campaign.

- Express your concern about the current situation for women human rights defenders in Afghanistan— you can use information from this mailing.
- Say that the UK government must also improve support for women human rights defenders, as they provide essential support to women survivors of violence.
- Ask them to take action by...

Attending an Amnesty International reception in Speakers House from 6pm – 7.30pm on 6 November 2013. The event will celebrate the actions done by Amnesty members and groups in support of the campaign and also express solidarity with Afghan women activists

YOUTH GROUP ACTION

RESOURCES

You can order the following free resources from Amnesty's mailing house by calling 01788 545553 and quoting the relevant product code:

Policy position paper on Afghanistan & Women's Rights: WM248

Stickers ('Afghanistan: No Peace without women's rights): WM244

Posters (Afghanistan: No Peace without women's rights): WM245

GOT QUESTIONS?

If you've got any questions about the content of this mailing, including the suggested actions, please don't hesitate to get in touch by emailing student@amnesty.org.uk

MPS who have pledged their support to Amnesty's campaign on women's rights in Afghanistan:

Abbott, Diane	Greatrex, Tom	O'Donnell, Fiona
Abrahams, Debbie	Hamilton, Fabian	Opperman, Guy
Anderson, David	Hancock, Mike	Osborne, Sandra
Birtwistle, Gordon	Harvey, Nick	Phillipson, Bridget
Blunkett, David	Healey, John	Reed, Jamie
Blunt, Crispin	Hendrick, Mark	Rudd, Amber
Burrowes, David	Hodge, Margaret	Ruddock, Joan
Burstow, Paul	Horwood, Martin	Russell, Bob
Carmichael, Alistair	Hoyle, Lindsay	Sheerman, Barry
Carmichael, Neil	Leech, John	Stunell, Andrew
Collins, Damian	Lefroy, Jeremy	Thornton, Mike
Connarty, Michael	Lewell-Buck, Emma	Uppal, Paul
Crouch, Tracey	Long, Naomi	White, Chris
Cunningham, Alex	Love, Andrew	Whiteford, Eilidh
Cunningham, Jim	Lucas, Caroline	Williams, Roger
Curran, Margaret	Luff, Peter	Wishart, Peter
Davidson, Ian	Marsden, Gordon	Wright, David
Doughty, Stephen	Maynard, Paul	Yeo, Tim
Doyle, Gemma	McKechin, Ann	
Farron, Tim	Menzies, Mark	
Flint, Caroline	Mitchell, Andrew	
Gilbert, Stephen	Moon, Madeleine	
Glen, John	Mordaunt, Penny	
Godsiff, Roger	Morden, Jessica	
Goodman, Helen	Murphy, Jim	
Gray, James	Nandy, Lisa	

YOUTH GROUP ACTION

Background information:

AFGHANISTAN & WOMEN'S RIGHTS

1996: Before the Taliban

Before the Taliban came to power in 1996 women and girls in Afghanistan faced discrimination and inequality. There were high rates of maternal mortality*, low literacy* rates and high levels of violence against women including domestic violence. However, women's participation in their communities increased and there was some progress. For example:

- In 1919 Afghan women gained the right to vote.
- In 1964 women took part in drafting the Afghanistan constitution*, which established equality for women.
- Until the early 1990s, women held posts as teachers, government ministers, and medical doctors. They worked as judges, lawyers, journalists and writers.

** maternal mortality: death of women during or shortly after pregnancy*

** literacy: the ability to read and write.*

** constitution: the set of laws and principles that a country's government must obey*

1996-2001: Taliban rule - few rights for women

The Taliban movement took power in 1996. Women were particularly badly treated by the Taliban and they encountered discrimination in all walks of life. In effect women were confined to the home:

- Women were not allowed to study, work or participate in politics.
- They couldn't leave the house unless accompanied by a *mahram*, a male blood relative.
- Forms of violence against women were also carried out by the Taliban state including stoning to death for adultery.

2001: Military intervention - some gains for women

In 2001 the US government with its allies, including the UK, launched a military intervention in Afghanistan. One of the main reasons given for doing this, in addition to overthrowing the Taliban regime and finding al-Qa'ida camps, was the need to improve the human rights situation and in particular women's rights.

After the fall of the Taliban, women and girls gradually began to claim their basic human rights: they sought work, sent their daughters to school, and voted in local and national elections. Some entered politics even though it was still very risky.

- In 2001, fewer than 1 million children attended school, almost none of them girls. In 2008-9 more than 5 million children attended school, more than a third of them were girls.
- In the 2010 parliamentary elections 40 per cent of voters were women and women won 27 per cent of seats (more than the 25 per cent reserved for female candidates under the constitution).

2005: Women's rights under attack again.

Since 2005, the Taliban, along with other armed groups who were against the new Afghan government, have increased their attacks. The government have struggled to keep power outside the capital, Kabul. The rights of women and girls have been particularly threatened with frequent attacks, threats and killings.

2011: The peace progress

Over the past few years, Afghan leaders and the international community have been calling for reconciliation (a peace process) with the Taliban. This would involve negotiating with the Taliban. But many Afghan women fear that their rights may be sacrificed or traded away as part of these negotiations. If Taliban leaders are given any political power without restrictions, the rights of women and girls could be under threat again.

It is critical that women are involved in the peace negotiations. Not only is it their right to be there, the involvement of women will help to ensure that rights of women and girls are respected. Any peace process should include Afghans from all backgrounds, not just male leaders, and ensure that women are equal partners at the negotiating table.