



## Women's Rights in Afghanistan: Women Workers at Risk



*Youth group members take action for Afghan women – July 2014*

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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](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/youth)

## YOUTH GROUP ACTION

### IN BRIEF:

We are entering the final, crucial phase of our work on women's rights in Afghanistan before UK troops leave at the end of the year. We will be focusing on ensuring that the work of women human rights defenders is supported and their rights protected. In particular we are focussing on the dangers that many women workers, such as teachers and doctors, face in the course of their work.

The action is a 'hazards' themed photo petition and a letter to your MP.

### THE CAMPAIGN: A Recap

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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. Our campaign aims to:

- Ensure Afghan women can participate in peace processes
- Ensure tackling violence against women is a key priority for the UK government
- Ensure the work of Afghan women human rights defenders is supported and their rights protected.

**For more details about Afghanistan since 1996 please see the 'Extras' section at the end of this mailing.**



## YOUTH GROUP ACTION

### What have *you* been doing recently?

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In March we asked you to take part in our photo petition to support women Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan and to put on a performance of 'Even if we lose our lives' – telling the real life stories of three Afghan women. Many thanks to everyone who took part. Did you do a performance of 'Even if we lose our lives'? Please let us know and send us photos if possible!



### What have *we* been doing?

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June was a busy month for the campaign, with actions initially focussed around the Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict Global Summit. We put on a performance of 'Even if We Lose Our Lives', collected photo actions and hosted a delegation of Afghan women human rights defenders. Follow the link for more information on the global summit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/sexual-violence-in-conflict>

Later in June, we hosted a delegation of Afghan women human rights defenders including Parween and Dr D, whose stories you may be familiar with from the 'Even if we lose our lives' script (and we've included their stories at the end of this mailing). It was a whirlwind visit and highlights included:

- Parween, a Head teacher of a girls' school who has experienced significant threats and violence due to her work, met with Christine Blower, the Secretary General of the National Union of Teachers. Christine and Parween discussed the challenges to education in the UK, in Afghanistan and around the world.



## YOUTH GROUP ACTION

- Baroness Warsi (the then Senior Minister at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) met with the Afghan women and hosted a parliamentary reception, where she promised to do more to help human rights defenders in Afghanistan.
- Parween, Dr D and Samira Hamidi (pictured below) met with many UK parliamentarians, who raised their voices in Parliament in a number of ways.
- We visited Quintin Kynaston School at St Johns Wood where the students had done many things for Afghanistan; including a sponsored walk, and sponsored silences raising over £4000



Left to right: Samira, Doctor D and Parween meet Labour Peers, Parween visits London school, Samira Hamidi with a blanket created by a youth group that she took back to Afghanistan

### What's next?

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You may have heard about the recent government reshuffle. This has presented new challenges as key politicians targeted in previous actions on the campaign are (frustratingly) no longer in positions to influence work on Afghanistan. Our concern is that all the advances agreed upon so far could be undermined by these changes. In addition, Baroness Warsi recently resigned. Again this is frustrating as she recently met with women human rights defenders and indicated support for a Human Rights Defenders Plan. The next phase of our campaign will focus on making the new leaders of the UK government hear our demands to improve support for women human rights defenders in Afghanistan so that the work we have built up is not lost.

Now is the time to stand up and speak out publically – calling for the new leaders to continue the work we have been fighting for over the last four years. Your public actions and support is going to be crucial to raise awareness.

# YOUTH GROUP ACTION

## Occupational hazards: Women workers at risk



Huge gains have been made for Afghan women in the last 13 years, but this progress, in large supported by the UK government, is fragile. Women brave enough to take on public roles live in daily fear of attack. Teaching girls in some parts of Afghanistan is still both brave and dangerous. Girls' education was banned under Taliban rule, and they continue to punish women who bring education to girls.

27 per cent of MPs in Afghanistan are now women. But last year one woman MP was kidnapped by insurgents (people who fight against an established government) and another faced an attack in which she survived but her 8-year-old daughter died. Women are being actively recruited into the police force but in one area of Afghanistan alone, Helmand province, four policewomen have been shot.

**Head teacher, Parween**, runs a girls' school. Her education has brought hope and opportunity to many girls. But she has been a target for insurgents. After repeated threats warning her to stop working, her son Hamayoon was kidnapped. After 14 months of searching his body was washed down from the hills. She still gets calls threatening to kill her other children.

**Doctor D**, works as a gynaecologist bringing healthcare to women suffering from abuse, rape and domestic violence. The Taliban have targeted her because of her work, killing her brother and badly wounding her 11-year-old son in a grenade attack.

**You can read the full stories of Parween and Doctor D in the 'Extras' section.**

# YOUTH GROUP ACTION

## TAKE ACTION 1 – ‘Hazards’ photo petition

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**The action is a photo petition and has two purposes...**

1. To show your solidarity with the women of Afghanistan.
2. To urge the government to put in place sufficient programmes to protect women human rights defenders before our troops leave.

**What to do...**

- Use the ‘hazard’ themed set of resources we’ve sent you (see Resources section for how to order more).
- Ask your group to pose for a photo holding placards and/or wearing ‘hard- hats’. (For those of you who are camera shy, put the placard in front of your face!) .
- You could do individual photos, a group shot or even a whole school photo stunt!
- Feel free to use real hard hats and high visibility jackets if your school has them (ask your caretaker). Be creative as you like!

**Want to tell your local media about your stunt? Contact us and we can provide advice and/or a draft press release.**

Email your photos to: [anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk) by **31<sup>st</sup> October 2014.** We hope to present the petition to the UK government in November.

**NOTE: Make sure those involved are happy for their photo to be used to express solidarity and to put pressure on the UK government as the photos may be uploaded onto a Flickr site or used on our website.**

## YOUTH GROUP ACTION

### TAKE ACTION 2: Write to your MP

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We've been calling for the UK government to uphold its commitment to support and protect human rights defenders in Afghanistan for some time. You have taken part in several actions aimed at the UK government which had pressed them to do more. However due to the government reshuffle, key targets have now moved on. We must ensure the new Minister responsible at the Foreign Office knows what we're calling for and is aware of all the work you have done already.

Write to your local MP Asking them to:

- Write to the new Minister responsible for Afghanistan at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office requesting their continued commitment for a Human Rights Defenders Plan
- Tell the new Minister responsible for Afghanistan how committed you, his/her constituents, are to this issue and all the wonderful things you have done in support of the campaign
- Mention any previous communications you have had with your MP – whether on this campaign or others - **emphasise the actions you have taken part in already on this campaign.**

We have a sample letter available if you prefer (please email [anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk) for a copy), though remember it's always best to try to personalise your letters as much as possible. If you would like to meet your MP we can advise on that too.



Youth group members meet Baroness Warsi with Kate Allen, Director of Amnesty International UK, 2013

# 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:



WM255 – Women's Rights A5 Flyer



Amnesty International [www.amnesty.org.uk/afghanwomen](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/afghanwomen)

WM257 – Women's Rights A2 Poster



WM256 – Paper 'Hard Hats'



# YOUTH GROUP ACTION



WM255 – Women's Rights Stickers



WM254 – Women's Rights Placards

## YOUTH GROUP ACTION

### 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 - 2014: The peace progress

Over the past few years, Afghan leaders 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.

## **YOUTH GROUP ACTION**

### **Parween's Story**

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*Head teacher Parween runs the only girls' school in Laghman province. Her education has brought hope and opportunity to a countless number of girls in the region.*

Parween originally attended the University for Teacher Training in Kabul, and on graduating, started teaching in the area. However, and in a short space of time, her work became too dangerous. She began receiving repeated demands for her to stop working.

Parween immigrated to a refugee camp in Pakistan. Showing complete defiance against previous threats on her life, she opened up a school within the camp. To her credit, the school she helped form is to this day still running, and many girls have graduated, going on to work as teachers, doctors, and other professionals.

On returning to Afghanistan Parween opened the only girls' school in the province. Again, the Taliban forcibly closed the school shortly after its initial foundation. Not to be swayed by the Taliban's rule forbidding female education, Parween began running the school from the secrecy of her own home.

After the collapse of the Taliban in 2001 Parween became a candidate for the Afghan parliament. Yet as a result of this, she began to receive an increasing amount of death threats and warnings.

In 2009 Parween's 18 year old son Hamayoon was abducted. His captors phoned Parween warning her to stop her work immediately and demanding a ransom for her child's safe return.

One year later Hamayoon's body was found in the desert with 12 bullets in his chest.

To this day Parween still receives calls telling her that if she does not stop working in education her other children will be killed. Because of this Parween and her family have left their house. They are always on the move.

### Dr D's Story

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*Doctor D. (name changed for security reasons) works as a gynaecologist, bringing healthcare to women suffering from abuse, including rape and domestic violence.*

Doctor D originally trained at Nangarhar University. Throughout her career she has worked with many women who have been victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence. With every case Doctor D tries to help those women seek justice. This is not an easy process as many of the attackers are in fact members of the victims' family.

Similarly to Parween, Doctor D's family have been targeted due to the nature of her work.

In 2007 she began receiving death threats from the Taliban. On several occasions her husband found them in their back garden. Most of the letters made claim that the work Doctor D performs is fundamentally "un-Islamic".

Shortly after she began receiving the anonymous warnings, her 11-year-old son was badly wounded in a grenade attack on her home. Nevertheless, Doctor D continued both her medical work, as well as receiving daily threats on her life.

She was targeted once again by a bomb attack. Her 22-year-old brother was killed.

Doctor D moved to a different province and is trying to work discretely. When her patients contact her they do so secretly. Doctor D always asks them to come with friends, not family members.



## YOUTH GROUP ACTION

### Quiz: Afghanistan & women's rights

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1. What year did the Taliban come to power in Afghanistan?
  - a) 1992
  - b) 1996
  - c) 1998
  
2. Mark as true or false:
  - a) Under the Taliban, women were banned from wearing high heels
  - b) Under the Taliban, girls were banned from attending school
  - c) Under the Taliban, women were banned from working outside the home
  - d) Under the Taliban, there was compulsory painting of windows so women couldn't be seen inside their houses
  
3. In what year did international troops go into Afghanistan to topple the Taliban?
  - a) 2001
  - b) 2002
  - c) 2003
  
4. Today, what percentage of Afghan parliamentarians are women?
  - a) 10%
  - b) 18.5%
  - c) 27%

Bonus question: is there a higher percentage of women in the UK Parliament? (Yes / No)

5. Today, what percentage of school-aged girls are enrolled in school?
  - a) 26%
  - b) 40%
  - c) 66%
  
6. What percentage of Afghan women experience a form of violence in their home?
  - a) 44%
  - b) 58%
  - c) 87%



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Answers: 1b, 2 all, 3a, 4c, Bonus: No, 5b, 6c