



Women's Rights in Afghanistan: Protect the progress



A small selection of the incredible patches you have sent us for our solidarity action with Afghan Women Skills Development Centre

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IN BRIEF:

This month we return to Amnesty's campaign for women's rights in Afghanistan, focusing on ensuring 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:

1. Hold a reading event of *Even if we lose our lives* - the moving stories of Afghan women working for human rights
2. Photo action in support of women on the front line
3. Meet your MP

THE CAMPAIGN

It has been over ten years since the Taliban regime was overthrown in Afghanistan. Since then, there have been some improvements in the situation for women who had been particularly badly treated by the Taliban. However, since 2005 the Taliban have increased their violent rebellion against the Afghan government. There is a real worry that in attempts to make peace with the Taliban, women's rights might be sacrificed. (See the 'Resources' section at the end of this mailing for more information on what has happened in Afghanistan since 1996). Our campaign has four main aims:

1 Ensuring Afghan women can participate in peace processes.	2 Ensuring women's rights are protected and promoted as security is transferred from international forces to Afghan forces.
3 Ensuring tackling violence against women is a key priority for the Afghan government.	4 Ensuring the work of Afghan women human rights defenders is supported and their rights protected.

WHAT'S HAPPENED RECENTLY?

October: we asked you to make patches expressing your solidarity with Afghan women's organisations. The response from groups was fantastic with over 400 colourful patches and three complete quilts. We are sewing them all together and will send them to Women for Afghan Women and the Afghan Women Skills and Development Centre.

Have a look at the next page for some examples of your amazing patches!

November: we held a high-profile event in Parliament attended by more than 60 Amnesty activists including members of 4 student groups and more than 20 MPs. The event really helped to keep the issues on the parliamentary agenda.

December: Justine Greening, Secretary of State for International Development, announced new funding for projects tackling violence against women in Afghanistan.

SOLIDARITY PATCHES



Afghanistan 2014: What lies ahead for women's rights?

2014 will see the withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan. There is considerable pressure to reach a political solution to the conflict which may involve negotiating with the Taliban. Afghan women fear that this could lead to their rights being sacrificed.

There are already signs that the progress made on women's rights is at risk. There have been attempts to change the number of women on local councils. There have also been attacks on nine high-profile women in the last year, including the murder of four policewomen. These attacks have happened without investigation or anyone being punished. This sends an incredibly dangerous message that, in the words of Suraya Pakzad, who runs several women's shelters:

"Killing women in Afghanistan is an easy thing. There's no punishment".

In the face of these attacks, the role of human rights defenders will be essential in protecting women's rights but they will not be able to do this if their own security is threatened. It is crucial that women's rights and the need to protect those on the frontline – teachers, doctors, activists and parliamentarians – remain on the UK government's agenda. The stories of these brave women need to be told and protection for them strengthened.

TAKE ACTION 1: Hold a reading of '*Even if we lose our lives*'

Tell the moving stories of Afghan women human rights defenders

Afghan women can be portrayed as passive and powerless. You can draw attention to the work of courageous women on the frontline by holding a reading of *Even if we lose our lives*. Amnesty has teamed up with theatre group *ice&fire* to create a script based on the testimonies of three women: Parween, a headmistress who has been victimised for running a girls' school, Dr D, a gynaecologist whose son was injured in a bomb blast and Manizha, who runs an organisation working on violence against women.

An instruction pack is enclosed with the script which will help you plan your reading event. You could even invite your MP and local media to the event.

NOTE: The script contains some hard-hitting details. Please read it thoroughly and consider your audience before using it.

"If we wanted we could leave this country and run away. But this is not our aim. Our main goal is to serve the people of this country. We want a progressed, peaceful, free and independent Afghanistan. For this, we have accepted the risks to our lives."

Parween, headmistress

"The shadow of fear is following me all the time."

Dr D, doctor

TAKE ACTION 2: Photo action

Show support for women on the frontline.

We know that your support is valued by Afghan women human rights defenders. **Mary Akrami**, founder of Afghan Women's Skills Development Centre, recently said,

'We are really grateful to you for this drive and supportit will go a long way to motivate us to keep up the hard work.'



Show your support by taking a photo of yourselves (preferably each member individually) holding messages which highlight the stories of the brave Afghan women who have lost their lives because of their work.

Who are the women featured in this action?

- In 2013 Lieutenant Negar, Senior Policewoman from Helmand province was murdered.
- In September 2013, Sushmita Banerjee, a well-known author who had written about life under the Taliban, was dragged out of her home and shot 15 times.
- In January 2014, Yalda Waziri, a senior government official in Herat, was murdered by unknown attackers who shot her from a motorbike.

What to do:

1. Print out the placards from the PDF attached to this mailing or order paper copies from our mailing house (see resources section).
2. Ask people to pose for a photo holding one of the placards (or they can put the placard in front of their face if they don't want their photo taken). Make sure people are happy for their photo to be used to express solidarity with Afghan women and as a way to put pressure on the UK government.
3. Email your photos to anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk



Don't want to use the placards? You are welcome to design your own placard instead with your own message and send it to us if you prefer.

TAKE ACTION 3: Meet your MP

Many of you have already been in contact with your MP to gain their support for this campaign. We'd like to encourage you to continue contact with your MP at this crucial time. We are asking for the UK government to strengthen its efforts to support and protect women human rights defenders.

If you feel you would like to meet your MP to re-enforce this message, get in touch with us for support. We have a Q & A and can help you prepare for your meeting.

Email: anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk

Resources

As well as the resources included in this mailing, you can also order other materials direct from our mailing house on 01788 545553 quoting the relevant codes.

WM249	Placard "Afghanistan. Protect Women on the Frontline"
WM250	Placard "Sushmita Banerjee. Killed August 2013"
WM251	Placard "Yalda Waziri. Killed June 2014"
WM252	Placard "Lt Negar. Killed Sept 2013"
WM244	Stickers (sheets of 12)
WM245	Poster



Benton Park (Leeds) and Chipping Camden (Gloucestershire) youth groups' amazing quilts (thanks for sewing them together for us!).

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 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.