



Afghanistan: Violence Against Women



This briefing focuses on 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, including writing to your MP, making a patch for a 'solidarity quilt' to send to a women's shelter in Afghanistan, a direct appeal to President Karzai and media work.

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WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghan women human rights defenders are at the frontline in protecting human rights. As journalists, activists, health professionals, teachers and politicians they play a vital role in defending women's rights by non-violent means and building a stronger and fairer society in which all Afghans can enjoy their basic human rights.

However many women human rights defenders have been killed or threatened because of their activities and some have fled the country. As well as facing intimidation and attacks by powerful conservative elements in society, including members of the government, and the Taliban and other armed opposition groups who perceive their work as defying cultural, religious and social norms about the role of women in society, they are also at risk of threats and attacks by family members who may be embarrassed by the outspokenness or their work.



There has recently been a spate of such attacks against high profile women. In September 2013 Lieutenant Negar, one of Afghanistan's most senior female police officers was murdered. Shortly before that, in August 2013, two parliamentarians were attacked – fortunately they survived but the daughter of Rooh Gul, a Senator from the west of the country, was killed. Islam Bibi, a prominent senior female police officer in Helmand was murdered in July. This is just the tip of the iceberg of attacks against women in Afghanistan.

Afghan women's organisations have consistently raised concerns about the safety and security of high-profile women and in July 2012 wrote to President Karzai outlining key security steps that are needed to ensure their adequate protection. Despite the high profile of the victims, none of the perpetrators in the cases mentioned, or many others, have been brought to justice. Some Afghan women fear that violence and threats are likely to increase should Taliban or other insurgent commanders hostile to women's rights be brought into government.

Our campaign will show solidarity with women human rights defenders and will call on the Afghan government to ensure that defenders are better protected, that they receive more political, financial and technical support and that they are recognised and acknowledged as agents of positive social change.

The UK government also has a role to play through its obligations under the EU Human Rights Defender Guidelines. These Guidelines, adopted in 2004, recognise the vital role of human rights defenders in promoting fundamental human rights and the risks they face because of this. They require member states to take measures to support and protect human rights defenders, so we will be calling on the UK to fulfil its obligations.

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. We go to work fully covered under the *burqa* [veil]. The society here is very restrictive towards women and conservative elements 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, warning me not to leave the house and there are people following me. They warn me not to 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, women committing suicide and self-immolations. For example, I recently had a case of an 18-year-old woman who came to me and said her husband had beaten her and kept her hanging by a rope inside a well for three days. Her body was covered in marks showing that she had been severely beaten and abused. We don't have shelters for women here in Helmand, so I took her to the local Children's Centre. I don't know what happened to her. I also went with the police to her house. The surrounding area was cordoned off and her husband was arrested. Very rarely do the police get involved and arrest people who abuse women.

We have lots of problems dealing with these kinds of cases. Most of these domestic cases are resolved outside the usual legal procedures. In some cases, family disputes are resolved by village elders and women are then mostly victimised. 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, most of them young and all have suffered domestic violence. They 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, some had one child, others had two. There is no school in the prison for the children, the prison just gives them food, and clothes occasionally.

Action 1: 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. This is a fantastic response – so a big thank you to everyone who sent letters and arranged meetings with their MPs. It is now time to ask your MP to take further action.

What to do:

- 1) To find the name of your MP, visit: <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/>
- 2) Check if your MP has already signed the pledge to support Amnesty's campaign on women's rights in Afghanistan. The following MPs **have** signed:

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	

If your MP has already signed the pledge:

Use the sample letter on page 5 to write your MP, asking them to:

- **Support and attend a backbench debate** on women's rights in Afghanistan, to take place later in the Autumn, co-sponsored by Nicola Blackwood MP, Sir Robert Smith MP and Fiona O'Donnell MP
- **Sign Early Day Motion* 112 Women in Afghanistan** (*Please check the list overleaf to see which MPs have already signed the EDM – if your MP has, amend your letter and thank them for signing it*)
- **Attend our event in Speakers House** on 6 November 2013 which will celebrate YOUR activism and highlight the violence and challenges faced by women activists in Afghanistan

**Early Day Motions (or 'EDMs') are parliamentary statements that MPs can put their name to. They can be useful in demonstrating support for an issue, however some MPs do not sign them on principle ("political graffiti" is a description we have previously heard!) and Ministers rarely put their names to them.*

*If your MP has **not** signed the pledge:*

Please write to them using the suggested letter on page 6, which includes the same asks but does not reference their commitment to supporting the campaign.

NB please feel free to personalise your letter, especially if you have met with your MP on this issue already. The more personalised your letter is, the more likely your MP will remember it and appreciate how important the issue is to you.

EDM 112 and a list of MPs who have signed it

If your MP HAS signed it (or sponsored it), amend your letter to thank them instead of asking them to sign.

EDM 112 – Women in Afghanistan

Primary sponsor: Tim Farron; Sponsors: David Crausby, Jim Dobbin, Mark Durkan, Alan Meale, Jim Shannon

That this House notes with concern that despite steady improvement in the rights of Afghan women since the severe repression of the 1990s, women in Afghanistan are once again in danger; raises concerns about information indicating that women are being marginalised in the peace process, ignored in the security transition and that they continue to be subject to violence in the home and attacks against the defenders of women's rights; commends the efforts by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development to ensure the Afghan government upholds its commitments on women's rights, including through implementation of the Elimination of Violence Against Women law, which is a central commitment under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework; praises the campaign being led by Amnesty International UK to highlight the plight of women in Afghanistan; and calls on the Government to keep the pressure on the Afghan administration to put women first.

Signatures:

Campbell, Gregory
Caton, Martin
Cooper, Rosie
Crausby, David
Crockart, Mike
Dobbin, Jim
Dodds, Nigel
Durkan, Mark

Farron, Tim
Hermon, Lady
Hopkins, Kelvin
Leech, John
Long, Naomi
McGovern, Jim
Meale, Alan
Murphy, Paul

Owen, Albert
Ritchie, Margaret
Sanders, Adrian
Shannon, Jim
Smith, Robert
Stunell, Andrew
Ward, David
Williams, Mark

See overleaf for sample letters to send to your MP

Sample letter to send if your MP has signed the the pledge to support Amnesty's campaign on women's rights in Afghanistan (check the list on page 3 if you're not sure)

Dear X

I am writing to you regarding Amnesty International UK's campaign on women's rights in Afghanistan. I would first like to thank you for expressing your support through signing Amnesty's pledge to be a supporter of women's rights in Afghanistan. As your constituent I welcome your commitment to this issue, which I also feel very strongly about.

As you know, though Afghan women have seen some progress in the protection of their rights over the last ten years, this progress is patchy and fragile. Violence against women in Afghanistan, for example, continues to be endemic and is often committed with complete impunity. Violence affects women throughout Afghan society, including the women human rights defenders who work with survivors of violence and high-profile women who are attacked both because of their work and their gender.

In fact in the last few months alone, two female parliamentarians have been attacked (one escaped an attack in which her daughter was killed) and two senior female police officers have been murdered. This follows the last two Directors of Women's Affairs in Laghman province being killed. Still none of the perpetrators in any of these cases have been brought to justice and women across Afghanistan remain at risk.

The UK government has committed to prioritising action to tackle violence against women in Afghanistan. However it is not clear whether any plans will be developed following meaningful consultation with Afghan women's human rights organisations, which is essential in order to ensure activities are effective and appropriate. The UK government must also improve support for women human rights defenders, who provide essential support to women survivors of violence and are best placed to hold the Afghan authorities to account, but are themselves often at great risk due to their work. The UK parliament must hold the government to account for its commitments and ensure its activities are as effective as possible.

Since you are a key parliamentary supporter of the campaign, I would like to ask you to take action in support of women's rights in Afghanistan in the following ways:

- Express your support for and attend a backbench debate on women's rights in Afghanistan, calling for the government to support Afghan women through meaningful consultation and development of appropriate projects and protection mechanisms. The debate will be co-sponsored by Nicola Blackwood MP, Fiona O'Donnell MP and Sir Robert Smith MP (to be tabled with the Backbench Business Committee in October and to take place at the beginning of December);
- Sign EDM 112 – Women in Afghanistan;
- Attend 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, who face such challenges and risks in their activities. There will be a chance at the event to meet Amnesty members from across the country who have been active in the campaign and also Afghan women human rights defenders. Amnesty International will formally invite you to the event in due course.

Thank you again for expressing your support for this campaign, I look forward to hearing from you regarding how you will take action.

Best wishes

Sample letter to send if your MP **has not** signed the the pledge to support Amnesty's campaign on women's rights in Afghanistan (check the list on page 3 if you're not sure)

Dear X

I am writing to you regarding Amnesty International UK's campaign calling for women's rights in Afghanistan to be protected and promoted.

As you may know, though Afghan women have seen some progress in the protection of their rights over the last ten years, this progress is patchy and fragile. Violence against women in Afghanistan, for example, continues to be endemic and is often committed with complete impunity. Violence affects women throughout Afghan society, including the women human rights defenders who work with survivors of violence and high-profile women who are attacked both because of their work and their gender.

In fact in the last few months alone, two female parliamentarians have been attacked (one escaped an attack in which her daughter was killed) and two senior female police officers have been murdered. This follows the last two Directors of Women's Affairs in Laghman province being killed. Still none of the perpetrators in any of these cases have been brought to justice and women across Afghanistan remain at risk.

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As a supporter of women's rights in Afghanistan and your constituent, I would like to ask you to take parliamentary action in support of women's rights in Afghanistan and raise awareness of the issue with the UK government in the following ways:

- Express your support for and attend a backbench debate on women's rights in Afghanistan, calling for the government to support Afghan women through meaningful consultation and development of appropriate projects and protection mechanisms. The debate will be co-sponsored by Nicola Blackwood MP, Fiona O'Donnell MP and Sir Robert Smith MP (to be tabled with the Backbench Business Committee in October and to take place at the beginning of December);
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Thank you again for expressing your support for this campaign, I look forward to hearing from you regarding how you will take action.

Best wishes

Action 2: Solidarity with Women Human Rights Defenders

Before 2002 there were no safe shelters for women fleeing violence in Afghanistan. Now, thanks to the work of organisations like Afghan Womens Skills Development Centre (AWSDC) and Women for Afghan Women (WAW), there are approximately 20. In a country where violence against women is endemic and those responsible rarely face justice, shelters play a critical role in providing safety for women and girls escaping violence. The shelters also offer longer term support for residents such as counselling, legal aid and classes in literacy, computing, dressmaking and English classes to help survivors rebuild their lives.

But their existence is precarious. Shelters are predominantly in urban areas and many do not have long-term, sustainable funding which leaves them vulnerable to closure. The staff and organisations that run the centres do so at great personal risk, facing threats, intimidation and attack. Mary Akrami, Director of AWSDC told Amnesty, "It unsettles people to see a women being strong and vocal – and they get more upset when they see I encourage other women to be strong and vocal too ...there is no protection for human rights defenders."

Women for Afghan Women

Women for Afghan Women (WAW) has been providing front line 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, holistic 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 to do:

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.

You'll find guidance overleaf – you could make one individually or as a group. You could ask quilting groups in your community to contribute too. 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 may be used in a human rights day event and 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:
15 November 2013**

AWSDC



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.

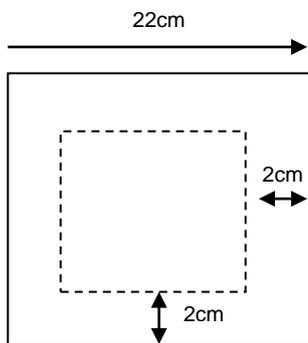
Since establishing the first women's shelter in Afghanistan in 2002, they have given safe refuge to 1389 women, girls and dependents.

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 and galvanise support for their initiatives.

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!



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.

Use an image – a flower, hand, heart, tree, sun, moon etc

Send your completed patches by November 15th to:

Hannah Shaw, Student Manager,
Amnesty International UK,
The Human Rights Action Centre,
17-25 New Inn Yard,
London, EC2A 3EA

Action 3: Write to the government of Afghanistan

What to do:

Please write to President Karzai, using the sample letter below, calling 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.

President Hamid Karzai
Gul Khana Palace
Presidential Palace
Kabul
Afghanistan

Your Excellency,

Since 2001, the Afghan government has pledged to advance women's human rights. Women human rights defenders play a vital role in helping your government to achieve this.

However, Afghan women human rights defenders frequently face intimidation and attacks, particularly by powerful elements in society, some of them members of the government, others allied with the Taliban and other armed opposition groups. In many cases, these brave women face attacks from within their own community or their family, or from local officials and religious leaders, who may be politically opposed or embarrassed by their outspokenness. Some have fled the country while others have been killed for raising their voice.

In areas under the Taliban's influence it is all but impossible for women human rights defenders to carry out their work, and several high profile women have been attacked and killed because of their work.

In recent months alone, two female parliamentarians have been attacked and two senior female police officers have been murdered. This follows the last two Directors of Women's Affairs in Laghman province being killed. Still the perpetrators have not been brought to justice and women across Afghanistan remain at risk.

I urge you to ensure that defenders of women's human rights are able to carry out their work in government-controlled areas without fear of violence, intimidation, persecution or punishment, and to:

- Ensure that threats and attacks on women human rights defenders are swiftly and fully investigated and effective remedies provided
- Strengthen the independence and capacity of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to respond to reports of threats and attacks on defenders
- Publicly acknowledge the value of women human rights defenders as agents of positive social change and promote awareness, including through training and guidelines among law enforcement officials, of their vital role and the specific risks they face as a result of this
- Invite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders to Afghanistan to document the situation of women human rights defenders.
- Ensure that adequate political, financial and technical support is provided to defenders of women's human rights.
- Require all authorities to fully implement the Elimination of Violence against Women Law and other relevant legislation aimed at protecting and promoting women's human rights.

Yours sincerely

Action 4: Media work

Here's a **template letter** and a **template press** which we'd encourage you to personalise and send to your student newspaper/website to help publicise Amnesty's work on the Afghanistan women's campaign.

It should be fine to do both at the same time, as the newspaper/website will have a choice of which to publish and may even publish both.

As ever, if you'd like any advice on media work, please feel free to contact me. Thanks in advance for anything you can do on this - it's greatly appreciated.

Neil Durkin, Media Officer (neil.durkin@amnesty.org.uk)

Template letter

Sir/Madam,

It might be out of the news compared to Syria, but we shouldn't forget that the situation in Afghanistan is still far from peaceful.

We're now little more than a year away from the withdrawal of British and other international troops from Afghanistan, yet the country is still regularly rocked by violence.

One group with a great deal to fear if insecurity increases are Afghan women and girls.

The Taliban and other armed groups appear to be stepping up attacks on prominent Afghan women. In the past few months alone we've seen two senior women police officers murdered, two women MPs attacked, and a much-admired writer who chronicled abuse by the Taliban shot dead outside her home.

As part of our Afghanistan campaign, [name] group has written directly to the Afghan President Hamid Karzai calling on him to ensure that Afghanistan's brave women's rights activists are protected and assisted in their work.

We've also written to [town/district] MP [name], urging him/her to support our campaign/continue supporting our campaign, including by pressing our own government for details on how they're assisting women in Afghanistan.

Politicians have repeatedly said they won't "cut and run" from Afghanistan and will go on supporting a nation that's been through more than its fair share of suffering.

The coming months will be a crucial test of that pledge.

Readers can find out more about Amnesty's work on Afghanistan at:
www.amnesty.org.uk/afghanistan

Yours sincerely,
[your name]

Template press release

Amnesty International Youruniversity

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: xx xx OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2013

YOURUNIVERSITY AMNESTY GROUP WRITE TO AFGHAN PRESIDENT HAMID KARZAI ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

'If President Karzai is responsible for Afghan security, surely that must include protecting Afghan women from the men with Kalashnikovs' - Roberta Roberston

XX XX MP urged to support campaign

Members of the Youruniversity Amnesty International group are writing directly to Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai in Kabul calling on him to ensure that women in the country are protected from attacks by the Taliban and other armed groups.

The initiative, part of the Amnesty group's campaign on Afghanistan, comes as British and other international troops prepare to hand over responsibility for security to Afghan forces, while the Taliban and other armed groups appear to be stepping up attacks on prominent Afghan women.

In the past few months alone we've seen two senior women police officers murdered, two women MPs attacked, and a much-admired writer who chronicled abuse by the Taliban shot dead outside her home.

Youruniversity Amnesty is also writing to XX XX MP, asking him/her to press UK ministers for details on how they will be improve support to women in Afghanistan during the crucial hand-over period. In March this year the International Development Secretary Justine Greening announced that tackling violence against Afghan women would be a "strategic priority" for her department's work on Afghanistan, a commitment made after lobbying from Amnesty.

Youruniversity Amnesty's letter to the Afghan President has been signed by XX [third-year politics, or whatever] student Roberta Roberston, the group's chair. She said:

"During their time in power the Taliban were notorious for their cruelty toward Afghanistan's women and girls, and this doesn't appear to have changed.

"If President Karzai is responsible for Afghan security, surely that must include protecting Afghan women from the men with Kalashnikovs.

"We're asking Hamid Karzai to live up to promises made over women's rights. In particular we want to see more protection for women's rights activists in the country - too many of these have been already been killed by the Taliban and other groups opposed to women's rights.

"Our own government has said that women's rights in Afghanistan are a key priority and we hope that XX XX MP's support can help keep ministers firmly focused on this during a crucial time for Afghanistan."

Background

[If relevant]: *Add in a short paragraph or two about any notable activity your group may already have carried out on the Afghan campaign, especially if it involved any public work - demos etc - in your area, or anything that you may have coming up.*

Additionally, you could add a line about your group's next meeting.

ENDS

Media contacts

[Add in Youruniversity Amnesty's media contact details, including a mobile number]

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