



DATE AUGUST 2014

Women's rights in Afghanistan: make some noise about attacks on women



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Afghanistan 2014: Preparation for international withdrawal

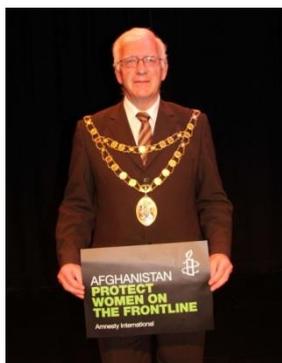
We are entering the final, crucial phase of our work on women's rights in Afghanistan. The presidential elections – marking Afghanistan's first ever democratic transfer of power - took place in April. The forthcoming NATO and London Conferences in the autumn will now finalise if, and how, the International Community will remain involved after troops leave at the end of the year. In this critical time we must protect and build on the gains that have been achieved over the last thirteen years.

A demonstration of how far Afghanistan has come since Taliban rule ended in 2001 is the recent democratic elections. Despite repeated threats of violence from armed insurgents, approximately 60% of Afghans took to the polling stations on Election Day - 35% of those voters were women. Unfortunately, the results of the elections have not been so positive with both Presidential candidates accusing each other of electoral fraud. This has resulted in an audit process reviewing more than 8 million votes. Although an optimistic timeline has been put in place, as it stands, it is unlikely that the next President of Afghanistan will be decided before the NATO summit in Newport, Wales at the beginning of September.

While the new parliament is still to be decided, it remains unclear who will attend the NATO summit on behalf of the Afghan government. However, it seems highly likely that Afghan women's participation in the summit will be extremely low. Even more worryingly the UK government, despite hosting the Summit, has not appeared to take any action to encourage the Afghan government to include women in its delegation, or deliver on the commitment made in June 2014 that Women, Peace and Security principles will be discussed at the NATO summit. It is absolutely essential that the UK government are publicly held to account for this backslide on women's rights.

Changes made to the UK government in the recent reshuffle have presented new challenges, as key politicians targeted in your actions over the last four years are (frustratingly) no longer in positions to influence work on women in Afghanistan. William Hague acted as a champion for gender issues as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, raising huge public awareness through his Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. The NATO summit represented the first opportunity to realise some of those commitments, but that opportunity has been missed. Following numerous actions and public pressure from you, Senior Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Baroness Warsi met with women human rights defenders from Afghanistan and indicated support for our ask for a Human Rights Defenders Plan. However following her recent resignation we must now ensure that the pressure you have built up over the last four years is not lost, and ensure her successor, Baroness Anelay, understands how important the issue is.

What have you been doing?



In our last Campaign update we called on local groups to put on their own version of our performance piece – 'Even if We Lose Our Lives' - telling the real life stories of three Afghan Women. The support from local groups has been amazing. We pay special thanks to Horsham Amnesty group who had over 70 people to attend their performance, including the Mayor and local MP for Crawley, Henry Smith.

Amnesty International GROUP CAMPAIGN UPDATE



We have had an overwhelming response from local groups to the photo action in support of women human rights defenders. You sent a clear message of support to Afghan women and pressured the UK government to keep Afghan women's rights on the agenda. Ealing local group held an event to coincide with International Women's Day and collected many messages of support for Afghan Women.



Supporters helped us revamp the photo action to highlight the hazards Afghan women workers face at the Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict Global Summit in June. We have now collected over 600 messages of support for the women of Afghanistan.



What have we been doing?

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 civil society activists.

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. It was a whirlwind visit and highlights included;

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- Parween, a Headteacher 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.
- Baroness Warsi 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 met with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss women's inclusion in the NATO summit
- 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, Dida and Parween meet Labour Peers, Samira Hamidi with a blanket created by local Amnesty groups that she took back to Afghanistan)

Now, we are busy working towards the NATO summit in September and the London Conference on Afghanistan in November, which provides another opportunity to remind the International Community that the involvement of women in the peace process is crucial to Afghanistan's successful transition of power. These are key events for planning what will happen next for Afghanistan - NATO in terms of military withdrawal and the London Conference on development issues. We will use this opportunity to publically remind governments that the women of Afghanistan still need their support. We are planning a media stunt around the NATO summit, so keep your eye out for that.

What next for the campaign?

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. We welcomed commitments made at June's (Prevention of Sexual Violence Initiative) PSVI summit. Our concern is that all the advances agreed upon could be undermined by the government reshuffle. Now is the time to stand up and speak out publically – calling for the new leaders to continue the work you have been fighting for over the last four years. Your public actions and support is going to be crucial to raise awareness, so we have lots of actions for you to get involved with in this mailing.

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ACTION 1: PUT ON A MEDIA STUNT IN YOUR LOCAL AREA

During October we will focus on publically highlighting the dangers faced by working women in Afghanistan. We are collaborating with various professional associations here in the UK which corresponds with jobs that can be dangerous for women in Afghanistan, such as teaching unions and medical associations. We need your help to ensure our demand that Afghan women receive increased support and protection from the UK government is heard across the country; we want you to engage your local media and your MP in one fail swoop!

We would like you to stage a media stunt in your area using our 'hazard' resources (see below for Resources) and messaging. The key objective is to create a striking image which can be captured in a photograph which local media will want to print. Critically, **you should invite your local MP to join the stunt** and be part of the photograph – if they aren't able to, you should **ensure your MP is mentioned by name in the accompanying press release (see Appendix 1)**, which should make sure they know the local media has ran the story. If your MP does join you, use this as an opportunity to **discuss the issues with them and call for their support** (emphasise the different actions you have undertaken in support of the campaign if appropriate).

What to do:

- Write to your local MP advising that you plan to engage local media to highlight the risks that Afghan women face in their work as part of our campaign – advise what you plan to do and invite them to be involved (emphasise that they could feature in the photo sent to local media)
- Include in the letter an ask for the MP to write to the Minister responsible about the issues (amend/use MP letter template in **Appendix 2** – feel free to shorten the letter but ensure you include the key information about the stunt and the ask for the MP to write to the Minister)
- Invite local media (amend/use Press Release template in **Appendix 1**)
- Take a good photo of the stunt and circulate to local media afterwards – make photo available to MP if they join; send it to them as follow up if they don't.

Here are two ideas of possible stunts:

Stunt 1 – Mock block your local MPs surgery

This concept relies on the idea that Afghan women are excluded from participating safely in society through jobs such as being a teacher, doctor or MP, due to threats and attacks against them – many are kept from accessing such occupations, and those that do often experience grave danger as a result of their work.

Plan for your local group to dress up in high-vis jackets and hard hats and use hazard tape* to “mock block” the outside entrance to your MPs office. Stand around the “block” holding ‘hazard’ placards (see below for resources).

NB – ideally this stunt would only be done with your MP's permission and engagement. If your MP is not supportive, either stage a different stunt or ensure it is done in a public space, which does not physically prevent access to the office. Do not publically criticise your MP for not taking part if they don't agree – they may just be very busy; just emphasise to media that you have called for them to support the campaign and write to the Minister responsible.

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Stunt 2 – Wrap up in hazard tape

This concept relies on the idea that Afghan women are constricted from participating safely in society through jobs such as being a teacher, doctor or MP, due to threats and attacks against them. Such threats and attacks restrict women's right to work and participate, not only for the women specifically concerned, but also for many others who won't participate due to fear of reprisals.

Identify a public location of some local significance to stage the stunt (e.g. outside a town hall, in your town centre, in front of a recognisable building). Plan for your local group to dress up as teachers (wear smart clothes), doctors (wear doctors coats) or MPs (wear smart clothes) and wrap yourselves in hazard tape* (making sure mouths are covered) and display hazard placards.

Whatever stunt you do, please ensure you send us any photos afterwards. If your MP agrees to take part and you would like any further support/information to help you prepare for meeting them, please contact karla.mclaren@amnesty.org.uk

***We aren't able to provide hazard tape (yellow and black striped tape) – please source from local shops if you intend to use it.**

ACTION 2: WRITE TO YOUR MP

If you are going to take part in Action 1, you will write to your MP as part of that - please only write to your MP once.

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 using the suggested letter in **appendix 2**. 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

Please personalise the letter as much as possible. Reference 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.**

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ACTION 3: COLLECT SIGNATURES FOR A PETITION CALLING ON THE UK GOVERNMENT TO MAKE A PLAN FOR SUPPORTING AFGHAN WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

We will launch a petition on 4 September 2014, calling for signatures to pressure the UK government to fulfil its obligations to women human rights defenders in Afghanistan. Please look out for the online launch of the petition and email kate.hughes@amnesty.org.uk for hard copies.

RESOURCES: Below are resources that you can use for your action. They can be ordered direct from our mailing house by contacting them on 01788 545553.

Occupational Hazards stickers

Product code: WM253

Occupational Hazards placards

Product code: WM254

Occupational Hazards A5 flyer

Product code: WM255

Occupational Hazards spiro paper hat

Product code: WM256

Occupational Hazards A2 poster

Product code: WM257



Appendix 1 – template press release for local media stunt

NB this template imagines you will perform the ‘wrap up in hazard tape’ stunt and that your MP is happy to attend. Please amend accordingly depending on what stunt you decide to perform.

If your MP is not able to attend, amend the title, remove the MP quote and add the following line:

Xxx Amnesty group is calling on local MP xxxx to support its call on the UK government to ensure there are plans in place to protect Afghan women and girls from attack.

If you require any help with getting local media contacts, or would like some advice on your press release – or have any other media enquiry, please contact press officer Harriet.garland@amnesty.org.uk who is happy to help.

Amnesty International XX [town]

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: XX SEPTEMBER 2014

XX [town] AMNESTY GROUP AND LOCAL MP XXXX HIGHLIGHT DANGERS TO AFGHAN WOMEN

XX XX SEPTEMBER - XXX LOCATION

Members of the XXX [town] Amnesty International group together with local MP XXX will be wrapping themselves in hazard tape on XXXday in order to highlight the dangers to Afghan women who take on high-profile jobs in violence-wracked Afghanistan. The stunt draws attention to the constricting effect of attacks against women because of their jobs - not only for the women specifically concerned, but also for many others who won't work publically due to fear of reprisals.

The move is part of a ‘Hazards of the Trade’ campaign to highlight the fact that women MPs, police officers, doctors and teachers - professions which are essential to development and security - have all been targeted by the Taleban and other armed groups in recent months.

With only months to go before the UK and other international armed forces withdraw from Afghanistan at the end of the year, Amnesty are calling on their MPs across the UK to pressure the UK government to ensure there are plans in place to protect Afghan women working on human rights, from attack.

XXX, who lives in [locality] and is the chair of the XXX [town] Amnesty group, said:

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“This is a visual way of sending a really vital message. Afghan women must be able to do their jobs without the fear of getting killed simply for being a woman.

“With just a few months before the troops pull out, these women are now at the frontline of protecting their country. They’re teaching the next generation and helping those that have suffered from sexual violence.

“These are brave women and they need our full support.”

XX, local MP for XX, said:

“Being an MP, or a teacher, or a doctor or any of the jobs we consider normal and safe here, could put your life in danger in Afghanistan, if you are a woman.

“I am fully committed to making sure that the UK does all it can to ensure the protection of women and girls in Afghanistan as the last British troops leave.”

Background on Afghanistan

Since the fall of the Taleban in 2001 there have been significant improvements for women and girls in Afghanistan, with new anti-violence laws passed, some 2.4 million girls now enrolled in schools, and women taking an active role in public life (including as MPs, with 27% of MPs in the Afghan parliament women – a higher percentage than in the UK). However there has also been a recent upsurge in targeted killings of prominent Afghan women by the Taleban and other armed groups, and MPs, police officers, schoolteachers and doctors have all come under attack.

For more information, see: www.amnesty.org.uk/Afghanistan

ENDS

Media contacts

[Add in Yourtown Amnesty’s media contact details, including a mobile number]

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Appendix 2 - MP Letter Template

NB this template is drafted for Action 2 – if using for Action 1, remember to amend to include invitation to take part in local media stunt

Dear X MP,

We are writing as members of Amnesty International [INSERT NAME OF TOWN] group regarding our campaign in support of Afghan women human rights defenders. This issue is of great importance to us because we believe that sustainable peace and security cannot be achieved in Afghanistan without the safe participation of 50% of the population.

Afghan women working as doctors, teachers and civil society activists are building the Afghanistan of tomorrow – without their work, development and security will be impossible. But in the last six months of 2013 alone at least nine high-profile women were attacked or killed due to their work, including police officers, teachers, local government workers and MPs.

Amnesty International has highlighted the cases of Parwin, a Headteacher of a girls' school whose son was kidnapped and murdered due to her support for girls' education; and Dr D, a Gynaecologist working with survivors of sexual violence, whose house was bombed and son severely injured because of her work opposing violence against women.

Women like Parwin and Dr D have not been helped by the Afghan authorities, who seem helpless in the face of such threats and attacks. They need the support of the international community. The UK has championed support for women human rights defenders internationally through its efforts on combatting sexual violence in conflict and at the UN General Assembly. As a key donor and international ally in Afghanistan, it should be championing the issue there.

The UK government has stated that it is committed to implementing the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, but has no strategy in place outlining how to do that in Afghanistan, even though that is a key recommendation of the Guidelines themselves. The UK government has stated that it works through the EU in Afghanistan, but the EU itself recommends that countries develop their own strategies of support for human rights defenders, which should contribute to the EU's work overall.

[As you know] we have undertaken lots of work in [INSERT NAME OF TOWN] to highlight this issue. We have [INSERT ACTIVITIES E.G. COLLECTED PETITION SIGNATURES, MADE SOLIDARITY QUILTS, TAKEN PHOTOS, MADE KITES, HOSTED EVENTS ETC.] and have [written to you/met with you to discuss the issues].

We know that the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with responsibility for human rights and Afghanistan has recently changed and we don't want all the work we – and other Amnesty International activists all over the country – have done to go to waste.

Please write to the new Minister with responsibility for Afghanistan at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, emphasising how important we, your constituents, think this issue is, demonstrated by the actions we have taken. Please ask the Minister to commit to developing a plan of how to support women human rights defenders in Afghanistan. This plan should outline the work the UK does independently and the work it does through the EU, in order to avoid duplication.

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