

Key Recommendations for the UK Government:

1. Ensure that women's rights are prioritised at the 2015 Senior Officials Meeting on Afghanistan, including violence against women, women's participation in the police force and women's participation in peacebuilding at all levels.
2. Implement the actions on Afghanistan listed under the four pillars of the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, through dedicated financing, transparent reporting, and in consultation with local civil society groups. This should include action on violence against women, women's participation in the police force and women's participation in peacebuilding at all levels.
3. Support the Afghan government to implement legislation and policies to end violence against women (EVAW) by implementing DFID's commitment to EVAW as a strategic priority in Afghanistan.
4. Provide accessible long term funding for Afghan civil society, including women's groups, who stand on the front line in the fight for gender equality, including in ending violence against women and promoting women's role in peacebuilding.

Background

2015 is a crucial year for women's rights in Afghanistan, as the country enters the 'Transformation Decade'. Advances in women's rights, during the last fourteen years must be maintained and strengthened during the next period of political transition, building on **President Ghani's public statements and support for women's rights**ⁱ. Against this backdrop, the UK has a unique part to play as one of the largest aid donors to Afghanistan. **The Senior Officials Meeting, and annual review of the UK National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 this autumn mark key moments to measure progress, and step up UK support for women's rights in Afghanistan.**

Progress

Significant gains have been made by Afghan women since 2001. This progress is thanks to the tireless efforts and bravery of Afghan women and girls who have fought for their rights to education, political participation, and public office, frequently in the face of death threats and fatal attacks. There have been advances in women's rights and participation in education, employment, public life and other spheres; 28% of the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House) are women, and the President, who appoints one-third of the Meshrano Jirga (Upper House) is constitutionally required to select at least 50% womenⁱⁱ. Millions more girls are in school compared to 2001, when years of Taliban rule had banned women and girls from getting an education, being outdoors without a male chaperone, or having a jobⁱⁱⁱ. In June 2015, President Ghani appointed two female governors in Daikundi and Ghor provinces.

There has also been progress for women's rights in domestic legislation and policy. In 2003 the Government of Afghanistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)^{iv} and in 2009 the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Law was passed by

presidential decree^v. The Government of Afghanistan launched its first National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in June 2015.^{vi} However, despite the passing of CEDAW and EAW, these are not yet consistently and effectively enforced.

The UK National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security launched in June 2014, includes Afghanistan as a focus country. The Afghanistan country implementation plan includes indicators for women's political participation and influencing roles in the peace process, and protection of women human rights defenders amongst other areas.^{vii} The UK Government in conjunction with GAPS and Women for Women International, supported a civil society consultation with Afghan civil society groups and women's rights organisations to inform the development of the UK NAP at the end of 2013.^{viii} The NAP is jointly owned by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence. The next parliamentary annual review of the UK NAP Afghanistan implementation plan will take place in autumn 2015.

The UK government has committed to putting women and girls at the heart of their development and humanitarian assistance through initiatives such as the *Call to Action to Protect Women and Girls in Humanitarian Emergencies*^{ix}. This has been further strengthened through the passage of the International Development Gender Equality Act 2014^x which requires UK development and humanitarian assistance to be assessed against the promotion of gender equality and gender-related differences. Specifically in relation to Afghanistan, **the UK has recognised the need to support women and girls' participation in politics and peace processes and announced in 2013 that violence against women would be a country strategic priority^{xi}.** The FCO has committed to supporting the reform and/or removal of discriminatory laws and policies in Afghanistan and to tackling the root causes of violence against women and girls through challenging societal attitudes, behaviours, and practices.^{xii}

Commitments to Women's rights were made at the London Conference on Afghanistan (LCA) in 2014, including strengthening the implementation of Elimination of Violence against Women (EAW) Law, and women's economic empowerment.^{xiii}

Challenges

Despite these indicators of progress, women's rights in Afghanistan remain precarious and there is a real risk that progress could be 'rolled back' with the recent withdrawal of troops and transfer of power to the Afghan government^{xiv}. For example, in November 2013, a draft law by Afghan officials aimed at reinstating public execution by stoning was only subsequently stopped after being leaked to the media^{xv}.

Since 2014, humanitarian security has deteriorated, with the spread of *Islamic State* in Afghanistan and a recent car bomb attack by the Taliban on the Parliament building on June this year. Since the insurgents' spring offensive started in March 2014, violence has spread into previously stable areas of Northern Afghanistan, resulting in greater numbers of civilian casualties and displacements.

Violence against Women: This year, Amnesty International reported that attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) are increasing, with threats coming from all sides, including but not limited to the Taliban^{xvi}. This situation is compounded by the Afghan authorities' 'institutional indifference' and failure to protect WHRDs.

There are also concerns that a lack of prosecutions is undermining the legitimacy of the EAW law, often in tension with customary law^{xvii}. Attacks on women have increased, including the case of Farkhunda, a woman who was attacked and murdered by a mob in Kabul in March 2015 after being falsely accused of burning a Qur'an^{xviii}.

Women's exclusion from peacebuilding: Women are drastically under-represented in peacebuilding at all levels of Afghan society as well as in the international arena, having been absent and ignored at critical points of the peace process. There is a risk that women's exclusion from the negotiating table will act as a

barrier to sustainable peace and protection of women's rights. Yet, evidence demonstrates that women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding increases the likelihood of sustainable peace outcomes^{xxix}.

Afghan women have expressed concerns that, without their presence at the table, hard-won gains in women's rights will be traded off as part of a peace deal with the Taliban. A recent Oxfam report noted that The High Peace Council (HPC), created in 2010 to enable dialogue with the Taliban, has only 9 female members out of 70 and women's rights activists have also argued that the few women members present is tokenistic and that they lack any real political power^{xx}. The same report also found that of 23 known Afghanistan peace talks between the international community, Afghan government and the Taliban over a ten-year period, not a single Afghan woman had been involved.

It is a great cause for concern that women's voices and participation in local decision-making structures have been reduced, including in provincial councils, where the quota for women was cut from 30% to 20%. They have also been sidelined from participating in international peace conferences, including the NATO Summit in Wales in September 2014. Donors have funded peacebuilding initiatives such as the HPC whilst failing to use conditionality to ensure gender equality in negotiations^{xxi}.

One of the first actions of President Ghani was to initiate renewed peace talks with the Taliban; these have generally been informal and exploratory processes, though an announcement was made in June for post-Eid formal talks. Ground-breaking informal talks were held recently in Norway between a group of women Afghan MPs and Taliban representatives^{xxii}. This must translate into women's formal inclusion in peace talks at all levels.

Women in the police force

In 2014, women made up less than 2% of the Afghan National Police (ANP)^{xxiii} which falls well below the 5% national target by 2015^{xxiv}. A consequence of this is that crimes against women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence, often go unreported as women feel unable to approach male police officers^{xxv}. Women police officers are subject to violence and threats from anti-government factions, as well as discrimination and sexual harassment within the police force itself^{xxvi}. It has been widely recognised that women's participation in the police is key to promoting long-term peace and development. The Ministry of the Interior has committed to increasing the number of women in the police force, and in its *10 Year Vision* committed to ensuring that women make up 10% of the police by 2024. Pressure from the international community is vital to ensure that progress is made towards this target.

Recommendations to the UK Government

- **Ensure that women's rights are prioritised at the 2015 Senior Officials Meeting on Afghanistan, including violence against women, women's participation in the police force and women's participation in peacebuilding at all levels.**
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- **Support the Afghan government to implement legislation and policies to end violence against women (EVAW) by implementing DFID's commitment to EVAW as a strategic priority in Afghanistan.**
- **Provide accessible long term funding for Afghan civil society, including women's groups, who stand on the front line in the fight for gender equality, including in ending violence against women and promoting women's role in peacebuilding.**

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- ⁱ <http://president.gov.af/en/news/47135>
- ⁱⁱ Quota Project: <http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=AF>
- ⁱⁱⁱ UNICEF, 2013 http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_70759.html
- ^{iv} CEDAW - States Parties: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en
- ^v Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 1 August 2009
- ^{vi} <http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/launch-ceremony-of-the-national-action-plan-on-unscr-1325-women-peace-and-security>
- ^{vii} UK NAP on UNSCR 1325 – Country Implementation Plan
- ^{viii} <http://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/NAP-Afghanistan-Workshop-Report-Final-03032014.pdf>
- ^{ix} <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/greening-girls-and-women-must-be-kept-safe-in-emergencies>
- ^x <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/9/contents>
- ^{xi} Speech by Justine Greening, 4th March 2013; DFID Strategic Vision for Girls and Women; Operational Plan 2011-2016: DFID Afghanistan
- ^{xii} FCO Human Rights & Democracy Programme Strategy
- ^{xiii} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/communique-from-the-london-conference-on-afghanistan>
- ^{xiv} Oxfam, 2014, *Behind Closed Doors: The Risk of Denying Women a Voice in Determining Afghanistan's Future*, page 7
- ^{xv} Human Rights Watch, 2014 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/04/afghanistan-reject-new-law-protecting-abusers-women>
- ^{xvi} Amnesty International, 2015, *Their Lives on the Line: Women Human Rights Defenders Under Attack in Afghanistan*,
- ^{xvii} <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/28/afghanistan-hundreds-women-girls-jailed-moral-crimes>
- ^{xviii} Guardian 2nd July, Human Rights Watch 26th March
- ^{xix} Graduate Institute Geneva, 2015, *Results On Women And Gender From The 'Broader Participation' And 'Civil Society And Peacebuilding' Projects*
- ^{xx} Oxfam, 2014, *Behind Closed Doors: The Risk of Denying Women a Voice in Determining Afghanistan's Future*, page 17
- ^{xxi} Oxfam, 2014, *Behind Closed Doors: The Risk of Denying Women a Voice in Determining Afghanistan's Future*, page 21
- ^{xxii} Reported by the BBC, 6th June 2015 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-33035268>
- ^{xxiii} European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan, December 2014: <http://www.eupol-afg.eu/taxonomy/term/84>
- ^{xxiv} UNDP, <http://www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/ourwork/womenempowerment/successstories/ColonelJamilabayaz.html>
- ^{xxv} Oxfam, 2014, *Women and the Afghan Police*, page 2
- ^{xxvi} Amnesty International, 2015, *Their Lives on the Line: Women's Human Rights Defenders Under Attack in Afghanistan*, page 31