



AFGHAN WOMEN BACKGROUND

Decades of economic and political instability have particularly affected Afghan women. Before the Soviet occupation and subsequent years of war, women had major rights and educational and professional opportunities, especially in Afghanistan's larger cities. Women helped to draft the 1964 Constitution and in the 1970s there were at least three women legislators in the Parliament. Indeed, during the 60s and 70s, there were many improvements to women's rights such as allowing access to education and the prohibition of some traditional cultural practices regarding marriage and family law. These advances especially benefited women living in urban areas such as Kabul. Then in 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and the rise of the Mujahideen against them led to a period of unrest. In the early 1990s the Mujahideen formed an Islamic State and eventually civil war broke out. The Mujahideen favoured a return to more traditional roles for women, who were increasingly victimized.

After the Taliban's rise to power, women and girls were continuously discriminated against and marginalized, effectively setting their rights back by decades. The economic and social conditions of women and girls deteriorated throughout the country, in particular in areas under Taliban control. Women and girls continued to be severely restricted in their access to education, health care facilities and employment. Since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, however, women have been allowed to return back to work, the government no longer forces them to wear the burqa, and they have even been appointed to prominent positions in the government. Despite all these changes many challenges still remain. The oppression of women remains widespread in rural areas where many families still restrict their own mothers, daughters, wives and sisters from participation in public life. They are still forced into marriages and denied a basic education.

After the Bonn agreement, women's political and social participation was seen. Areas of progress in advancing the status of women include: Constitutional rights, Political representation and participation, Development, reconstruction, and education.

These goals were formalized in the 2004 Afghanistan Constitution and the Afghanistan Compact of 2006. Women's political participation is guaranteed under Afghanistan's

Constitution. Article 83 of the Constitution gives Afghan women 25% of seats in the lower house, and Article 84 guarantees them almost 17% in the upper house.

AFGHAN WOMEN AND GENDER CONCERNS INTERNATIONAL

Gender Concerns International, with its extensive experience and expertise of women and development works to strengthen the scope of influence of women's organizations. Because of the current unstable and difficult environment of Afghanistan, there is an acute lack of freedom and ability for women's organizations. Gender Concerns International has been active in Afghanistan and the region for many years, in cooperation with the Dutch Ministry Of Foreign Affairs.

In 2009 Gender Concerns International supported an initiative of Afghan Women's Network (AWN) working to empower Afghan women and ensure their equal participation in Afghan society. AWN seeks to improve the effectiveness of its members by nurturing partnerships and collaboration, undertaking advocacy and lobbying, and building their individual capacities. Gender Concerns International organized a Regional Stakeholders Meeting held in Kabul in July 2009, resulting in the creation of two key proposals to improve the status of women in Afghanistan and the region.

The first of these two items was the Kabul Declaration, a policy document created by the conference's five participant countries to affirm a collective commitment to the Meeting's concluding objectives.

The second of the items was the Platform: a network of women organizations from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, India and Uzbekistan who would focus their efforts to ensure actions and strategic measures are implemented that promote, endorse and enhance the Kabul Declaration and the Meeting's conclusions.

In January 2010, GCI organized the first 'Women at Flash Point' meeting, held at the Peace Palace in the Hague, resulting in over 200 participants from governments, non-governmental and international organizations discussing the situation in Afghanistan. After all the previous successes of Gender Concerns International, the European Union has funded a new project called 'REHBER PROJECT', which aims to strengthen women's leadership in post election Afghanistan.

GCI Projects

AWN Position Paper 6 October 2011, a decade of International Community presence in Afghanistan

Afghan women have the right, the capacity, and the desire to be involved in transition, peace process, and creating Afghanistan's future. This paper is an attempt to craft solutions for the current challenges in Afghanistan if the women are directly included and part of the national and sub-national processes.

Afghan Women's Network Consultation Workshop

As part of AWN's consultation process for International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn, following the Stakeholder's Roundtable at the end of July, AWN brought together around 100

women organizations to mobilize their inputs and concerns around the current and future challenges in Afghanistan from women's organizations and activists perspectives.

WOMEN AT THE FLASH POINT: 2010 AND BEYOND WOMEN'S VOICES FROM AFGHANISTAN AND THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

On 14 January 2010 Gender Concerns International (GCI) organized a conference entitled "Women at the Flashpoint: 2010 and Beyond - Women's Voices from Afghanistan and the Neighboring Countries" that took place at the Peace Palace in The Hague. It was organized as a follow-up to the Kabul Conference in July 2009 to raise awareness about the plight of women in the conflict zone of Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, India, and Tajikistan.

Afghan Women's Movement from First Women's Council to Kabul Conference 17-18 July 2010

Afghan Women's Movement from First Women's Council to Kabul Conference held on 17-18, July 2010 in Kabul Serena Hotel. The purpose of this conference is to bring a joint and collective voice of Afghan women that seems to be excluded from the grand Kabul Conference which took place on July 20, 2010.

Kabul Declaration Women in Afghanistan: Regional Stakeholders Meeting 6-7 July 2009

On 6-7 July 2009 Gender Concerns International and Afghan Women's Network organized meeting. The participants in this meeting were women leaders from Afghanistan, Iran, India, Pakistan and Uzbekistan. During this meeting the participant discussed the relevance of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in promoting peace, stability and development in Afghanistan and the region through the increased involvement and participation of women. The group also discussed the Hague Declaration and its impact on Afghanistan

Report, Gender Concerns International at CSW 2009, UN, New York,

The mission to attend 53rd session of CSW had a sole purpose to learn more about UN system and find ways to do lobby and advocacy for the women of the target group that Gender Concerns Internal is attending to in the region of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the neighboring countries. Further it was hoped to have created new networks and strengthened existing contacts by interacting with a wide range of women stakeholders present at CS

Women in Afghanistan: Regional Stakeholders Meeting Kabul June 2009

The International Conference on Afghanistan: a Comprehensive Strategy in a Regional Context event, held in The Hague, The Netherlands on 31st March 2009, has tremendous relevance and significance with regards to Afghan policy orientation as outlined by US President Obama's administration. The International Conference focused on the analysis of

the current political, security and development issues faced by the international community in Afghanistan whilst taking into account the regional context. Gender Concerns International as a Dutch Gender and Development organisation has been a major NGO actor involved in the preparation, implementation and monitoring processes of the Dutch National Action Plan

Afghanistan 2014 and Beyond - Female Leadership and Confronting Challenges

Major event in The Hague, 29 November 2012

Gender Concerns International is holding a public event on 29 November, 2012 to highlight female leadership in consideration of the possible withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan and the expected parliamentary elections in 2014.

Among EU, NATO and Afghan government representative speakers, our guests from Afghanistan include MP Fatima Aziz from Kunduz, MP Aziza Jalis from Sare-Pul, MP Fawzia Koofi from Badekshan, together with Afghan Women Network female leader Afifa Azim, and the regional representative from the Gender, Conflict and Development platform Shukria Hassani.

PRESS RELEASES

Afghan Women to challenge NATO at Chicago Summit

The Hague 16th May 2012

Women's and civil society organizations in Afghanistan have been busy making preparations and strategizing in the gear up for what is set to be the largest NATO summit ever held. Over 30 representatives from Afghanistan civil society will travel to Chicago this week to take part in events and side-events scheduled before and during the summit on 20 -21 May 2012.

In our press release issued last month, Gender Concerns International asked where the women were in these fundamental peace talks.

Gender Concerns International is pleased to report that a number of prominent women from Gender Concerns International's partner organization, the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), will attend the summit. A joint declaration is in the process of being agreed by AWN (the largest network of women's organizations in Afghanistan) following extensive consultations and discussions with member organizations. The declaration will outline the joint position of the network's member organizations on key issues affecting Afghan women and will provide recommendations to NATO. Gender Concerns International fully supports the position of the Afghan Women's Network and will publish the declaration once it finalized this week. Stay tuned!

Although Gender Concerns International commends NATO for including women in the summit, there is still a way to go to ensuring that women are adequately included in peace and security processes on the ground in Afghanistan. In the week leading up to the summit, Gender Concerns International reminds the international community of its commitment to Afghan women during the transition of full responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces by the end of 2014. As a minimum, protection of women must be at the forefront of all transition agreements. But we must also work to ensure women are fully integrated into the planning and delivery of the security and protection framework itself—to provide them with greater control over their own security, not just as victims of a seemingly unavoidable process. Chicago presents an opportunity to drastically increase the numbers of women making decisions about security in Afghanistan, from the National police to the Department of Defense and the Afghan National Security Forces.

Gender Concerns International strongly urges the international community to ensure that the international commitments made in UNSCR 1325 are both respected and enhanced by agreements reached during the NATO Summit in Chicago.

For more information, please contact Mellaney Rodriguez, Program Coordinator Inclusive Governance and Transition tel. 070 444 50 82, email: mellaney@genderconcerns.org | www.genderconcerns.org

World Leaders back Afghan Women's Inclusion at NATO Summit Chicago

The Hague 18th May 2012

Gender Concerns International endorses and supports strong statements issued by a number of women's and civil society organizations and prominent international leaders raising the importance of including women in brokering any peace deal with the Taliban and agreeing on a peace and security framework for Afghanistan post-2014. As representatives of the European Union, the United Nations, the World Bank and 61 countries prepare to meet to discuss the future of Afghanistan, Afghan women and civil society are also preparing to ensure that the summit keeps women at the forefront in agreements on how the international community will work with Afghanistan to create peace and security in the war-torn nation.

Gender Concerns International is pleased that Afghan women appear to be firmly on the agenda for the NATO Summit in Chicago this weekend. This has no doubt been due to the valiant efforts of civil society and several world leaders pushing for greater women's inclusion such as Hillary Clinton and Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi. During a congressional delegation in Afghanistan recently, Ms Pelosi encouraged the Afghanistan President to include more women in discussions at the Chicago Summit this week and in the follow up conference in Tokyo scheduled for July. Ms Pelosi stated that "On every occasion, our delegation stressed the importance of Afghan women being involved in security decisions, especially in light of the upcoming NATO summits in Chicago and Tokyo."

Anticipated to emerge from the Chicago Summit are final agreements on the date for the complete transition of the Afghan National Security Force, details of international support after 2014 and a roadmap for NATO in Afghanistan following the transition. Gender Concerns International hopes that the much welcomed prior commitment to Afghan women is reflected in these documents and marks a firm international commitment to include women in all future conferences tasked with discussions on the future of a nation.

Gender Concerns International strongly supports civil society and the Afghan women's struggle to protect women's rights during NATO discussions in Chicago. As promised in our press release issued on 16 May 2012, partner of Gender Concerns International, the Afghan Women's Network has issued its Position Paper, which can be found at the following link.

For more information, please contact Mellaney Rodriguez, Program Coordinator Inclusive Governance and Transition tel. 070 444 50 82, email: mellaney@genderconcerns.org | www.genderconcerns.org

Afghan Women and the International Security Agenda

NATO Concludes Preparation Talks for Chicago Summit on Afghanistan

High-level talks were concluded yesterday at NATO Headquarters in Brussels as representatives from the NATO allies, ISAF members, European Union, the United Nations and Afghan ministers “discussed the road ahead in Afghanistan.”[1] NATO states that the meetings are to prepare participants for what will be the largest NATO summit to date, scheduled for Chicago in May this year.

But after two days of intense discussions about the fate of Afghanistan, the question looms—where are Afghan women in the debate?

In his statement to the press on 19 April 2012, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen commented that the summit will remind “Afghan partners” of their commitment to support women’s rights. Although reminding the Afghanistan government of its human rights obligations to women is important, the international community must also honour its own commitment to Afghan women.

Gender Concerns International appeals to the international community to give Afghan women a genuine place at the decision-making table in peace and security talks. Rather than only discussing the impact of transition strategy on Afghan women, NATO needs to make a firm commitment that Afghan women will be included in decisions made at every step of the way in the lead up to transition. Consultation is not enough. As enumerated in Security Council Resolution 1325, there is a distinct need to increase women’s role in decision-making and ensure “full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.”[2]

This includes making sure that enough resources are allocated to effectively and sustainably include women in security and law and order mechanisms in Afghanistan. As the primary protection mechanism for women in post-transition Afghanistan, the “330,000 Afghan security forces” trained by NATO should include a large proportion of women, or at the very least, tackle the issues which prevent them from inclusion. As long-term supporter of Afghan women, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently stated, long-term peace and security in Afghanistan is impossible without including half the population.

Gender Concerns International is optimistic that NATO’s Chicago summit on Afghanistan will uphold the mandate of UN SCR 1325 to ensure that women are genuine participants in the implementation of the peace and security agenda in Afghanistan.

[1] 19 April 2012, Press conference by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_86299.htm.

[2] United Nations, “UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1325)” (New York: UN, 31 October 2000), <http://www.un.org/docs/scres/2000/SC2000/htm>