

Urge the US Government to Support the Rights of the Afghan Women

End Date: 1/22/2010

Since the defeat of the Taliban in 2001, at least 3,500 schools have been built and hundreds more are planned. More than six million students, about 30 percent girls, are enrolled in 11,000 schools across the country, compared to about one million boys in 2000, according to the Ministry of Education.

However, more than 600 schools, primarily in the volatile southern provinces, are closed because of prevalent insecurity and attacks on formal education. Despite the recent improvements, the situation is far from what it should or could have been, particularly for girls. The Ministry of Education estimates that 40% of children aged six to eighteen were still out of school in 2005. At the secondary level, just 24% of students were girls during that same year. Not all children enrolled actually attend school or attend regularly with a yearly drop-out rate of at least 10-13%.

Security conditions continue to preclude development and reconstruction in many areas of the country. Many organizations have called upon Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai to do more to ensure students, especially girls, are safe in school and on the way to and from school. For girls to remain in school, many more females need to be trained as teachers. International donors should increase support for construction of schools and other acceptable learning spaces, programs geared toward improving the quality of education, including teacher training as well.

Afghan people desperately need assistance, particularly women, who still suffer human rights abuses. Despite legislation forbidding underage marriage, more than half of all Afghan girls are married before their sixteenth birthday. Poor families in rural areas still view girls largely as commodities to be bartered into marriages. Afghan women still have very little recourse to justice and are discriminated against in both the formal and informal justice systems. The recent passage of a highly discriminatory law concerning Shi'a women households speaks volumes for President Karzai's failure to secure women's rights.

Targets:

United States President:

Barak Obama

1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500- 0004
USA

United States Ambassador to Afghanistan:

Karl Eikenberry

Embassy of the United States
Kabul, Afghanistan
USAmbassadorKabul@state.gov

Sample Letter:

I would first like to thank you for the latest release of 23 million USD to benefit Afghan women. I know that there has been improvement on women's rights, specifically in rural areas. This is most markedly so with regards to access to healthcare and schools. There are also several seats held by women in the Afghan Parliament.

The work, however, is far from done. In spite of eight years of involvement from the US and its allies in Afghanistan, the situation for most Afghan women remains dire. This is a travesty, and one you and your staff should have the courage to speak about in public as well as in private. This is especially important when you and your staff speak to the Afghan government on the subject of assistance.

I would like to draw attention to the disparity between the aid money going to Afghanistan and the investment in Bosnia's reconstruction. Bosnia receives far more, even though Afghanistan ranks as the fifth poorest nation in the world. The extreme poverty of Afghanistan makes many young men vulnerable to joining the Taliban and other armed forces. This could be prevented, if young men had other ways of feeding their families.

Additionally, many Afghan people have expressed that they would support the presence of international forces, as long as it was clear that those forces were present to help protect the human rights of the Afghan people. To that end, I encourage you to include human rights benchmarks in the Afghanistan Strategy.

You and your staff are in a unique position. You have improved the image of the US in the world, but the only way to win the hearts and minds of both the Afghan and the American people is to show a strong commitment to the people of this war-ravaged country. Military action will do little if we, as a nation, do not seriously invest in improving the lives of the most vulnerable victims of war and conflict: the women and children.

Thank you for your time, and I hope you consider these grave matters, as they are of great concern to us all.

Sincerely,

