



Canadian Women *for*
Women in Afghanistan



BECAUSE HUMAN RIGHTS ARE UNIVERSAL

You Are Asking CW4WAfghan: What is ahead now for Afghan Women?

***CW4WAfghan urges Canadians to continue
to stand in solidarity with the
women and girls of Afghanistan.***

Afghan Women Face an Uncertain Future With Courage and Determination

by Lauryn Oates, Projects Director CW4WAfghan

As districts in some provinces of Afghanistan begin to be handed over from international security forces to Afghan security forces, much uncertainty surrounds the future of Afghanistan. The United States Government and the Afghan Government have officially voiced their support of negotiations with Taliban leaders, however as of yet no real negotiations have started, and the Taliban continue to carry out suicide bombings, kidnappings, assassinations and other acts of violence against Afghan men, women and children with alarming frequency. Further, there is little consensus among Afghans as to whether negotiating with the Taliban is an acceptable course of action, given the Taliban's horrendous human rights record. At the same time, many Afghans are disappointed with their current government's lack of accountability and the ongoing corruption.

As Afghans thirst for change and yearn to see democratic institutions consolidated, western governments—and their aid programs—are starting to pack up.

Yet, despite the Taliban's violence, weak governance, and an uncertain commitment from the international community, Afghanistan has experienced deep-rooted social, economic and political transformations since 2002. A freedom prevails unlike any semblance of life under the Taliban, and Afghans have paid dearly for this freedom, for what it's worth. Women in particular have moved forcefully into public life and their message to the outside world—and to the Taliban—is that they are unprepared to reverse these gains. We described some of the major changes women have experienced in our CW4WAfghan Policy Statement October 2010 (<http://www.cw4wafghan.ca/PolicyStatement>, click here).

It is precisely because of how much they value the changes that have come since 2002, that Afghans are expressing their alarm and angst at the signals that there will be a sudden disengagement from the international community in the months and years to come.

Through our work in the field, we are hearing panic among many, as well as bitter anger, fear and sadness at the hints that Afghans may once again witness the world abandon them just when the stakes are highest. The gains that have been made in the post-Taliban era are fragile, but they are significant, and they deserve to be protected. Most of all, those Afghans who have taken great personal risk to speak out for their rights and to make change in their society, will need our ongoing support and solidarity.

Now, more than ever, we must stand by the people of Afghanistan and their right to live free from tyranny and oppression, and we must ask that our governments do the same in policy and in practice. We must make it clear to the women and girls of Afghanistan that we will not walk away.

Because human rights are universal!

- Will CW4WAfghan stop working in Afghanistan or decrease it's support to Afghan women if and when international troops have left?

We did this work during the Taliban era, by supporting Afghan women and girls in clandestine schools in Afghanistan and in other underground projects and by supporting women's centres set up to meet the needs of the millions of Afghan women who were living in refugee camps in Pakistan at that time. Regardless of what Canada, the "international community", NATO and others do, we will continue with our stated purposes -- to advance education and educational opportunities for Afghan women and girls. We know there are challenges ahead far beyond our control, which makes it is exceedingly important that we stand in solidarity with Afghan women, as we have always done, and join them in their struggle with a strong, lasting commitment of support. We have the utmost confidence that there is a role for us, as Canadians, to continue supporting Afghan women in whatever unfolds in the future. We join Afghan women in the shared hope that some form of stability and peace will continue as the various NATO forces leave and we are thankful to have over 900 Canadian troops helping with the important role of training the Afghan army.

Solidarity is not a passing trend or a sentiment to harbour only when it's convenient or glamorous. It's a position one must live by whether it's easy to do so or difficult to do so, and whether it's popular or unpopular. Afghan women and girls have made their commitment to gaining the human right to education clear, and we will stand with them as they bravely fight for this right, in any circumstances, for always.

- What is the impact on CW4WAfghan's work now that Canadian combat troops have left Kandahar?

CW4WAfghan would have preferred the Canadian troops to stay on in some security role; however, we will not allow the troop withdrawal to slow down any of our projects. We were founded in 1996 and have been working in Afghanistan since 1997, before the involvement of Canada's government, and we will continue to work there. In partnership with local Afghan organizations, we have seen many positive steps in the last few years in the fields of education for women and children, literacy for rural villages, the establishment of libraries, community centres, teacher training, and the strengthening and sustainability of the organizations we work with.

We believe in what we are doing, our Afghan partners believe in what we are doing, and we will not leave as

long as there is work to do. We have a strong, trusting relationships with the Afghans we work with and they are very skilled in their own local security needs and working within their communities. To every extent possible, we work to align our position on the country's security and towards negotiations with the Taliban, with that of Afghan women. To read some of the views of Afghans on these issues, please see our policy statement mentioned above.

Together, we will continue to do the best we can under whatever circumstances may lay ahead, and we hope that Canadians will continue to support us in doing so.

- Could a Taliban Government return to power in Afghanistan if foreign troops withdraw prematurely? What will happen to women then?

Yes. This is a very frightening but possible outcome, if the Afghan Government is left without a sufficiently capable security sector (army, police and intelligence) to protect its citizens from a renewed Taliban occupation. It is not an outcome that the international community should be willing to accept, first and foremost because it will put the human rights of Afghans at grave risk, and secondarily, this is an undesirable outcome from a regional and international security standpoint as recent history would remind us. In some areas where the Taliban operate 'shadow governments', they have imposed their brutal and violent interpretation of sharia law, terrorizing citizens and committing atrocities such as stonings, mutilations, or hanging children, and have rendered women prisoners in their own homes once again. These are ominous indications of what can be expected with a full-scale return to power.

Afghan women activists and politicians are insisting that their rights not be for sale in any negotiations with the Taliban, and the international community has promised on numerous occasions that women's rights will be protected at all costs:

"We will not abandon you, we will stand with you always." ... It is "essential that women's rights and women's opportunities are not sacrificed or trampled on in the reconciliation process." – Hilary Clinton speaking to three Afghan women delegates visiting the United States, May 2010

These promises must indeed be upheld. As many Afghan women have been pointing out in the Afghan and foreign press, a peace without rights and justice is not a peace worth having.