ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

RESPECT, PROTECT, FULFILL

Afghan women’s rights at a crossroads
Introduction

This toolkit is a resource for anyone who wants to join the global solidarity movement to support the rights of Afghan women and girls. It was borne of a belief at the core of Canadian Women for Women of Afghanistan’s (CW4WAfghan) work - that engaging Canadians as global citizens can help to bring positive and meaningful change.

We’re excited that this new initiative brings us back full circle to our advocacy roots. Advocacy is in our DNA as an organization, and in the last two decades we have learned a great deal from listening to Afghan women and working with local communities to deliver solutions to their challenges. We think that Canadians are uniquely positioned, through our government’s commitment to a feminist international assistance policy centred on gender equitable development, to recognize that women’s rights are human rights, and to influence the international community through this message.

CW4WAfghan began in 1998 as a grassroots advocacy movement among Canadian women concerned by the situation faced by Afghan women, at the time living under Taliban rule. Today, as a Canadian NGO operating exclusively in Afghanistan, we feel called upon to support advocacy efforts nationwide, and engage Canadians in standing with Afghan women and girls who are calling for the rights to be upheld.

The situation in Afghanistan is complex and ever-changing; it’s easy to get lost and feel overwhelmed amid the political dynamics. This toolkit has been designed to be accessible to a wide range of supporters, from those with an in-depth knowledge, to supporters who are just discovering Afghanistan’s rich and layered history. In the spirit of solidarity with women’s activism globally, this work may yield lessons for use in other women’s rights movements. Here, you will find ideas and strategies for organizing that can be achieved in a short space of time, as well as suggestions for more intensive and sustained campaigning that you can build within your own local networks. The idea is to create many options and points of access to build mass support for women’s rights in Afghanistan.

We hope that you will find these resources informative and inspiring. Let’s stand in solidarity to show the world that Canadians care about the fate of women and girls in Afghanistan at this critical time.
Despite common portrayals in media and popular culture, Afghan women are not passive victims of their circumstances. Afghan women have shown us repeatedly that they are standing up and fighting for their fundamental rights, and you will read examples of how Afghan women are advocating for themselves in the pages that follow. Our role as allies is to leverage our networks and positions to amplify the messages of Afghan women for a wider audience, and to support systemic change through our global solidarity. In the same way that CW4WAfghan’s education projects respond to locally identified needs in the diverse communities where we work, our advocacy efforts are best shaped by the interests and needs identified by Afghan women, who come from varied backgrounds and bring diverse skills, experiences and strategies to this work.

The aim of our advocacy work is twofold

1. To show our solidarity and support for Afghans, particularly women and girls, as they as they advocate for the protection of their rights through the peace process and beyond, and;
2. Demonstrate to decision makers in Canada and throughout the international community, that Canadians care about the fate of Afghan women and girls as the country continues the Intra-Afghan talks, showing decision makers that we demand protection of their rights and gender equitable access to education.

CW4WAfghan’s Advocacy Messages

The following are the three key messages at the heart of our advocacy campaign:
1. We want a true, immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Afghanistan as a condition for peace talks to occur, and a sustained, monitored ceasefire as an outcome of peace talks.
2. We want a peace process that will not bargain away the rights of women and girls.
3. We want Afghans’ right to education to be legally protected, for boys and girls, women and men, and at all levels, from primary schooling to higher education.

What it means to be an ally to Afghan women

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Getting Started: Concrete Actions To Take Now

- **Post to social media**, sharing @CW4WAfghan social media posts and advocacy messages, and use hashtags that support our advocacy campaign efforts in your own words: #HumanRightsAreUniversal #NeverGoBack #EducationIsARight
  Download social media assets from: www.cw4wafghan.ca/AdvocateNow
  Share our short video that highlights the voices of Afghan women advocating for the protection of their rights during peace negotiations. View, download or share from www.cw4wafghan.ca/AdvocateNow

- **Mark or celebrate important global campaign days** relevant to our cause, including International Women’s Day (March 8th), World Literacy Day (September 8th), International Day of the Girl (October 11th) or International Human Rights Day (December 10th). These days are often marked with action taken by leading institutions; you can highlight or be part of this, helping build widespread awareness.
  Need a calendar of international days to consider planning around? Contact us! Community@cw4wafghan.ca

- **Organize an event** to raise awareness and show solidarity with Afghan women. Members of our Peterborough Chapter have been organizing Red Pashmina Walks in partnership with the Red Pashmina campaign for a decade, educating the broader community on the importance of taking action (and fundraising too!).

- **Reach out to media** in your community. Send a letter to the editor of your local paper or ask them to publish a story on the issues faced by Afghan women, and the support they have among Canadians. Offering a local angle that highlights the activism of community members is a good approach, and one that Madeliene Tarasick of our Kingston Chapter has used to great effect.

- **Write a letter** and join our letter writing campaign calling for the Canadian Government to stand by its Feminist International Assistance Policy and do everything in its power to push for the three demands outlined above. Strength in numbers goes a long way for getting the Government’s attention - and this will help do the trick. Resources and templates are available through CW4WAfghan: download from www.cw4wafghan.ca/AdvocateNow.

- **Engage your MP** to work within Government to push for the campaign’s three demands. Send a letter or email, or ask for a meeting with your MP and ask what they can do to help. Fee free to reach out to us for support if you land a meeting.

- **Share stories of success** that demonstrate the impact of our collective advocacy efforts. From screening documentary films to story sharing on social media, these stories can help potential supporters build an emotional connection with a cause and simultaneously educate them on the hurdles to be overcome.
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CW4WAfghan has compiled a regularly updated list of relevant films. Contact us for a copy!

- **Hear from influential voices** by following these social media accounts from prominent Afghan activists who frequently post in English, to inform yourself about the current situation and to hear perspectives of those directly affected

  - Our Voices, Our Future Coalition @OurVoiceForOur1
  - Afghan female photojournalist @FarzanaWahidy
  - Farahnaz Forotan, Afghan Journalist and founder of the #MyRedLine campaign @FFForotan
  - Adela Raz, Afghanistan’s Ambassador & Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, and co-founder of the Friends of Afghanistan network @AdelaRaz
  - Forozan Rasooli, Deputy Director of Equality for Peace and Democracy dedicated to empowering women and youth at the community and policy levels in Afghanistan @forozan_rasooli
  - Palwasha Hassan, Director of Afghan Women’s Education Centre, working for “reducing vulnerability and building capacities among marginalized communities” @PalwashaHasan
  - Afghan Women’s Network “working to empower women and ensure their equal participation in Afghan society” @AWNKabul
  - Mary Akrami, Director of the Afghan Women’s Skills Development Centre “dedicated to the promotion and protection of the rights of women in Afghanistan” @MaryAkrami
  - Afghans Empowered podcast, “creating a space for representation; sharing resources for community involvement worldwide” @afgempowered

- **Some Resources to Get You Started**
  CW4WAfghan’s virtual Annual Symposium recently brought together a lineup of women’s rights activists to provide an overview of the current status of women’s rights in Afghanistan, what is at stake in the Intra-Afghan talks, and what the international community, including grassroots women’s rights activists, can do to show support. Their fresh analysis is an invaluable backgrounder and resource in situating advocacy efforts in the current context. Click here for the full panel interviews.

  Check out these resources on our website, including up-to-date facts and figures, open letters and statements from partner coalitions, and letter templates and ready-to-post social media content to help get you started. This page is updated regularly, in response to developments in the Intra-Afghan peace talks and as we launch new campaigns, so check back often!

  Read and share our joint statement with Women for Afghan Women calling for a commitment to protect the rights of Afghan women.

  To discuss your advocacy ideas, learn more about resources, or for further support, you can also contact CW4WAfghan Community Engagement and Advocacy Coordinator, Sarah Keeler at community@cw4wafghan.ca

- **Other Helpful Resources**
  The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data Collaborative has an extensive database of resources to support and inspire advocacy around equality issues, particularly relating to the Leave No One Behind agenda.

  The Narrative Project is a great online resource base that includes guidance on how to share stories of resilience that highlight the agency of those whose rights we are supporting, and challenge the portrayal of people in the majority world as passive victims.

  Right to Education is a collaborative initiative focused on the cause of education as a human right. Their website contains a wealth of information and helpful statistics on equitable education, and educational access around the world. In particular, their campaign page outlines useful materials and approaches to advocacy for education.
As Afghanistan faces peace talks with the Taliban, and despite Afghan society making significant advances in democratization, in human rights and in its education system, the fundamental human right to education for women and girls is under threat. CW4WAfghan is acutely aware of the need to advocate for gender-equitable access to education and to ensure it becomes an enshrined and protected right for all in Afghanistan. The rights of Afghan women and girls are in peril. This is not a time to stay silent. Read more at: http://www.cw4wafghan.ca/about-us

The Situation in Afghanistan: Protecting Positive Change

Definitions: Key Message

A key message is a concise and persuasive statement about your advocacy that captures what you want to achieve, the change you want to see, why you want to achieve it, how you propose to achieve it and what action you want the audience to take. Well-designed messages are simple, memorable, easily understood, culturally appropriate and meaningful to the audience.

Agency is defined as “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important”

Amartya Sen
Nobel-prize winning economist

Women’s rights are “the single most important litmus test of Afghanistan’s post2001- progress.” - Belquis Ahmadi, Senior Program Officer, United States Institute of Peace;

Member of the Board of Directors of Women for Afghan Women
Advocacy is about using our voices and available evidence to call for change. We advocate in order to make our collective voices heard, and to influence people and systems to bring about change. Evidence shows that achieving sustainable peace is most likely to occur where women are meaningfully involved in peacebuilding\(^1\), and that in order to take on these roles, women need opportunities for education that will empower them, giving them the skills to fully participate in their communities and societies. In order to advocate for the full inclusion of Afghan women in peacebuilding, and to support their right to education, we must first establish who we want to influence and how to direct that influence. In other words, we need to have clear plans for both the messages we want to convey and the actions that will get those messages heard. Advocacy is often directed at government, either at a municipal, provincial or federal level. But advocacy can also be aimed at shifting the policies, attitudes, and behaviours of groups, organizations, or society as a whole.

Many people don’t think of themselves as having the power or position to be advocates, but advocacy is really about responding when we see injustice - so if you have spoken up about social conditions or inequalities that concern you, you are already an advocate. This toolkit is designed to help you identify and draw on effective strategies and actions to advocate for Afghan women’s rights and opportunities for education.

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1. UN Woman, 2015
There are many ways to engage and advocate. Planning your own advocacy will depend on where you are most comfortable engaging, what resources you have available (including your time and personal contacts), and what impact you are hoping to achieve. You may want to raise awareness within an organization you belong to, or in your local faith community. You might work to ensure local media provides more coverage of the reality Afghan women face. You can bring the conversation to groups and networks on social media, or lobby the government to be active on this topic within the international community. All are important steps in building the critical mass necessary to effect lasting change; successful advocacy takes time and happens on multiple levels. Having identified a specific long-term outcome -- in this case, the protection of Afghan women’s rights, particularly the right to education -- we can work backwards to develop a strategy and the tools necessary to carry it out.

Advocacy work takes patience. Being proactive by observing incremental successes and challenges, and regularly brainstorming new ideas to address these, are part of the long-term process. Although the results of our advocacy work can take time to materialize, our individual actions don’t need to be time-consuming. If we start by identifying simple, concrete actions, our individual efforts can build to collective, even societal change. In this toolkit we have compiled a list of ideas for some of these simple acts, along with suggested resources to get you started.

Check back regularly at the CW4WAfghan website for up-to-date facts, figures and curated media content to help you in your planning. Start here to find resources to build your advocacy efforts.
Examples of Successful Advocacy

1. Canadian women’s lobbying and the founding of CW4WAfghan

From Veiled Threat, by Sally Armstrong (cited and adapted with permission):

“It started with the response to the 1997 Homemaker’s Magazine article published about the plight of the women I had met. Throughout that late spring and summer, more than 9000 letters arrived from women all across Canada. They were gutsy, compelling missives demanding something be done about the ghastly conditions of the women in Afghanistan. The letters were delivered to Canada’s Foreign Minister at the time, the Honorable Lloyd Axworthy. In September, Axworthy addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations and said, “Canadian women are appalled at the treatment of their sisters in Afghanistan and have started a letter-writing campaign. Then Axworthy contacted the magazine’s editorial office and asked if he could arrange for Dr. Sima Samar, who’d been profiled in the article, to attend a roundtable consultation in Ottawa. At the roundtable she said, Canada is a country that can make alliances with the United States and countries supporting the Taliban such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Your government can pressure the Taliban to change their policies toward women.” When asked what she wanted Canadian women to do she replied, “We need solidarity and sisterhood. We’re part of the female global body. If we are hurt, other women are hurt.”

The Canadian women she referred to were busy launching Women For Women Afghanistan (W4W) groups all across the country. Janice Eisenhauer and her W4W group in Calgary, Alberta took the lead in publishing a newsletter and establish a web page to provide international updates for the thousands of women who had taken on the struggle. Seven women met in Toronto on November 4, 1999 to discuss the need to take the issue of gender apartheid to another level. They took their concerns to a meeting with Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy on December 1999. At that meeting Mr. Axworthy shared the concerns of the group and made several suggestions including creating a resolution for the International Status of Women meeting being held in New York in February 2000 and lobbying the American government to get the women on the same agenda as Osama bin Laden. The Minister said that if those things were done he would take the issue to the Security Council when Canada became president of the council on April 2001. Human rights lawyer Marilou McPhedran wrote the resolution to be presented at the International Status of Women meeting. More than 60 women’s non-government organizations took the resolution to the Consultation of the Feminist Alliance for International Action. The resolution was passed at that meeting and carried to the Status of Women meeting in New York. And coalition members teamed with the Feminist Majority in the U.S. to press the U.S. government to include the human rights catastrophe facing the women of Afghanistan on the same agenda as the Osama bin Laden file.

Minister Axworthy was good for his word. On April 7, his inaugural address marking Canada’s presidency of the Security Council at the United Nations, was focused on the women and girls of Afghanistan. He went on to say, “All aspects of this conflict are reprehensible. But some stand out more than others. Perhaps the most disturbing is the Taliban’s systemic pattern of violation of the human rights of half the population – women and girls – a violation that the Taliban misrepresent as having a religious foundation.” The gathering resulted in three action plans for putting pressure on governments that supported the Taliban, for promoting awareness in Canada and around the world and for embarrassing the Taliban.
The #WhereIsMyName is an inspiring example of the powerful impact that can arise from social media advocacy. In Afghanistan, women are often referred to publicly as ‘aunt’ or, by their husbands, as ‘mother of my children,’ but until recently, rarely by their own names. Publicly referring to a woman by her name has traditionally been seen as taboo, a practice that discouraged women from actively participating in public life. As Somaia Ramish, a member of the Herat Provincial Council, described it, women have been “erased systematically” throughout history and reduced to their relations with men.

This also had practical implications, since women were not named on their children’s birth certificates, and mothers could therefore not enroll their children in school. The Where Is My Name campaign, launched by Laleh Osmany, a young Afghan woman frustrated with the limitations this placed on her freedom, set out to change that situation, as well as the attitudes and behaviours that propped it up. This grassroots effort gained strong support among women activists in Afghanistan, who began posting to social media with the hashtag #WhereIsMyName, and the movement soon gained backing from Afghan celebrities and MPs, followed by coverage in international media, bolstered by other forms of awareness raising that took place offline, including posters and demonstrations.

In September 2020, after three years of campaigning, President Ghani signed an amendment allowing for mothers’ names to be included on children’s birth certificates; during a press conference to officially support the movement, the Governor of Herat publicly named and thanked his mother, a previously unthinkable action that challenged societal taboos. The #WhereIsMyName campaign, which began with local grassroots advocacy, culminated in a momentous symbolic step for women’s rights in Afghanistan.

When we see a small barefoot girl in a crumbling classroom who comes from a family where no one can read or write, we don’t see a victim. We see a child poised to fight for her right to be there and burning for change. And if she gets a hand up: the tools to learn and the guidance of trained, passionate teachers – if she is aware that even outsiders are prepared to defend her right to be there – she will prove to be everything the Taliban fear: a defiant, smart, imaginative, and even revolutionary, leader.

Lauryn Oates
CW4WAfghan Executive Director
3. Men Are Important Allies in The Fight for Women’s Rights
Mia Khan, a father in conservative Paktika province in southeast Afghanistan, was determined that his daughters would have the same educational opportunities as his sons. He dreamed of his 12-year-old daughter Rozi graduating and attending medical school, and serving as a doctor in their village, which has no medical care. In order to provide his daughters with the same quality education as his sons had locally, Khan travelled 12 km daily, sometimes by motorbike and sometimes on foot, to accompany his girls to school, waiting outside during their four hour classes. Earlier this year, the Afghan Government recognized Khan’s exceptional commitment to equitable education, when it announced that a school will be opened in the family’s village and named in his honour. Men and boys are crucial allies in advancing women’s rights, which is why CW4WAfghan works with entire communities to create gender equitable education.

4. Afghan Women and Girls as Change Agents
Maryam, age 17, is a participant in one of CW4WAfghan’s Afghanistan Reads! Community literacy classes in a village near Kabul. Maryam shares her story: “I was born into a farming family in Kabul, and from early childhood I wanted to learn. I completed my education until ninth grade alongside my friends in the village. I was very interested in continuing my education, but my brothers prevented me from going to school any longer. They made me so upset that I wanted to commit suicide, but my mother prevented me from going through with it. I believed that being a woman was an obstacle between me and freedom. In August 2017, CW4WAfghan established a literacy class in our village and my younger sister, who could not read, registered. The literacy class also had a library for our community, so I started visiting the library. Every day I borrowed books until I had read most of them and shared them with my family and friends in the village. I struggled hard and shared the things I read from the books with my family, talking to them about the rights of girls, until eventually my brothers agreed to register their daughters in the best school in the village. I am delighted that my words affected my brothers and neighbors and they no longer prevent their daughters from studying. With support, we have been able to build our capacity for education!”

Maryam’s story informs our advocacy efforts, and stories like hers sit at the very core of our mandate: the belief that Afghan women from many walks of life and with varied skills and experiences, can, with opportunities for empowerment, be powerful change makers for their own communities and societies.
BECAUSE HUMAN RIGHTS ARE UNIVERSAL!

#CW4WAfghan