



# MISSING THE TARGET

A report on the Swedish commitment to women, peace and security in Afghanistan



Kvinna till Kvinna



Swedish Committee for Afghanistan

*This report has been commissioned by a consortium of three Swedish non-governmental organisations consisting of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA), the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, and Operation 1325.*

*The objective of the report is to provide an overview of the effects in Afghanistan of Sweden's commitment to UNSCR 1325 and ensuing resolutions forming the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Specifically, against this background, the report analyses Sweden's role, based on its National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.*

*The text and the opinions expressed in this report are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect those of the commissioning organisations.*



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## Summary

For several reasons outlined in this report, the United Nations' Security Council Resolution 1325 is particularly difficult to implement in Afghanistan. At the same time, the country powerfully illustrates the need for this resolution. It is plausible, indeed probable, that, had it been put into place 30 years ago, the thinking behind the resolution would have made a great difference to the situation in Afghanistan today.

One of the root causes of the disempowerment of Afghan women is a lack of education. Illiteracy entails a lack of control over one's own life. The ability to read and write constitutes basic empowerment. Women who can contribute to their families' incomes are likely to receive better treatment in their own homes than women who are financially entirely dependent. In spite of the unprecedented expansion of girls' schools in the country, literacy among adult women is still estimated to be as low as 10-15 percent, approximately half of the rate for men, and just over half of all girls do not go to school.<sup>1</sup> Contributions to the education sector thus continue to be crucial.

Maternal mortality in Afghanistan has been brought down drastically in the past decade but still remains among the highest in the world, with an estimated 500 deaths per 100,000 live births, or one pregnancy-related death every two hours. In many cases, maternal mortality is a consequence of under-age marriages resulting in premature pregnancies. But it also reflects the lack of medical services, as well as women's difficulties in accessing those services. According to statistics, 60 percent of child births are still unattended – since services are available in most towns, this figure means that in the countryside practically all child births take place without assistance. The scope of this problem warrants classification as structural violence against women. Contributions to sexual and reproductive health remain very important.

The concept of women's participation in the public sphere runs contrary to the traditional perception of gender roles still prevailing in Afghanistan. There is generational pressure to change this pattern, but the ongoing armed conflict seems to have deepened the attachment to set models rather than allowing for modernisation and renewal. It remains to be seen how the political forces inside Afghanistan will play out in this regard after the withdrawal of international troops in

2014. What many Afghan women fear is that the new era will see the re-entry of the Taliban into government affairs. If so, substantial gains made since 2001 regarding their mobility and visibility in society will then be erased.

The backlash is already being felt. When the Afghan clergy issued a statement in March 2012 clearly endorsing the secondary role of women, it was largely accepted by the Afghan government and met with silence from the international community, at least at a public level. In the organs of the state most directly dealing with the political process linked to the international exit, such as the High Peace Council (HPC) and the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP), women have little clout.

When it comes to protection, Afghan women are extremely exposed. Cultural values of family honour give a central role to girls and women that entails a precarious balance between respect and abuse. Respect is built on the acceptance by the girl or woman of a severely restricted existence. For those who try to break out, the punishment can be very harsh. After more than three decades of armed conflict, Afghanistan has become a country rife with violence, with women and children as the primary victims. Domestic violence is understood as a more or less normal feature of life and its level of brutality is sometimes staggering. Most Afghan women are not yet in a position to make individual choices in fundamental matters such as selecting a marriage partner. Women in high-profile positions are targeted from many directions, including the Taliban, warlord militias, and their own families. Government authorities are clearly unable to protect them, and there is a need for measures facilitating asylum for Afghan women under threat.

The international intervention in Afghanistan since 2001 has been massive, leaving Sweden as a relatively small player with little separate identity inside that intervention. The difficulties encountered by ISAF as a whole also apply to Sweden. As other ISAF contributors, Sweden is in Afghanistan to support the government, but with the increasing corruption and loss of credibility of that government the legitimacy of the international intervention has been gradually eroded. These are problems Sweden alone has not been in a position

<sup>1</sup> Statistics in Afghanistan are difficult to ascertain. According to the CIA World Fact Book 2012, adult literacy rates are 43.1% for men (aged over 15) and 12.6% for women (aged over 15). The *Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals Report 2012* states that, overall, only 17% of men and 6% of women (aged over 25) had any access to formal education until recently. According to figures quoted in i.a. the World Bank report *Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014* (May 2012), 72 million children were enrolled in schools in 2011 – 68 percent of all boys and 44 percent of all girls.

to significantly influence. In addition, however, ISAF support to local militias and supplementary police forces is perceived to have contributed to the lack of security, and this is a development in which Sweden has participated. On balance, the goal of creating stability has been thwarted by these measures in the areas covered by the Swedish Transition Support Team (TST). Ultimately, people feel more insecure and less hopeful now than when the Swedes arrived in 2006.

More specifically, on the political level, pressure from the Swedish government to promote the values enshrined in UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan has been limited. Still, as part of the Nordic countries and, to a lesser extent, of the EU, Sweden is seen as a positive force in keeping gender issues on the international and European agenda, sometimes also pushing them forward. On the military side, there has been an interest within the Swedish armed forces to develop new approaches to international cooperation in conflict areas, which has pushed an early and active engagement on the Afghan ground. UNSCR 1325 has been interpreted as a tool to achieve enhanced operational effectiveness, which has left a mark mainly inside the army, where this process continues, but has had little effect on the Afghan population in the area of operation.

Sweden's development assistance has grown substantially during recent years, and Afghanistan will soon become its largest bilateral recipient. Since aid flows to Afghanistan are massive, this does not mean that Sweden is a big donor country in Afghanistan. However, Sweden's long-term commitment to assist Afghanistan to the tune of 1.2 billion US dollars during the period 2015-2024 sets a good example. Through actions like this, Sweden can enhance its influence over other donors and thus play a larger role than warranted by the figures alone.

Within the development effort, empowerment of women, i. a. through education, is a central feature, while action directly related to UNSCR 1325 remains insignificant. According to the development cooperation strategy adopted for the period 2012-14 by the Swedish government, the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and its follow-up resolutions is to be a priority issue in the development dialogue between Sweden and Afghanistan. In practice, however, the right resources are

not in place to effectively push this agenda and the dialogue depends on what is foremost in the minds of those in charge of it, which is seldom the participation and protection of women. Security matters in the traditional sense of the term tend to crowd out other aspects, particularly those seen as less urgent. The participation of women is seldom deemed to be urgent, thus not considered – and, in the long run, this could lead to less inclusive security solutions and potentially more conflict enhancing this pattern in a negative spiral.

Looking to the future, there is a risk that the baby of democracy will be thrown out with the bath-water of an international intervention that has largely missed its goals. Without boots on the ground, western influence will naturally diminish. On the other hand, the option of prolonging the military presence is not available in the prevailing atmosphere of growing disillusionment among Afghans as to what it could achieve, coupled with increasing economic problems in the troop-contributing countries. Thus, none of the parties is interested in prolonging the military presence – but in Afghanistan, women stand out as those who voice fear over the exit.

The international attention span is also limited in scope and time. Other crises are cropping up and elections issues are blocking far-sighted policies. However, Afghanistan will continue to need a large input of development assistance and the power of the purse could be applied much more consistently to an Afghan government that has come a long way towards losing its legitimacy among the people it is supposed to serve.

Ultimately, the development of good governance and respect for human rights remains in the hands of the Afghans themselves. Among them, in spite of all the difficulties inherent in their situation, there is remarkable political will and courage to fight for a better society. This goes, not least, for the women.

## About the Report

This report was commissioned by a consortium of Swedish NGOs consisting of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan

(SCA), an organisation initiated as a reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, now working for development and respect for human rights with a specific focus on women, children and persons with disabilities in rural parts of the country; the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, which supports women during times of war and conflict to increase women's power and influence in accordance with UNSCR 1325; and Operation 1325, an umbrella organisation working for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Sweden and internationally through advocacy, information and education. The aim of the report is to provide a context to and an overview of the effects in Afghanistan of the international commitment to UNSCR 1325 and ensuing resolutions forming the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Against this background, the report specifically analyses Sweden's role based on its National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (NAP), which departs from a global vision and is not broken down into country-specific objectives.

Ann Wilkens, former Swedish ambassador to Pakistan and Afghanistan (2003-07) and former chair of the SCA (2007-09), was contracted to write the report. Ann Wilkens is now a member of the Advisory Panel of the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) and has published a number of papers and reports on the Pakistan/Afghanistan region. The present report, which was crafted over three months, does not fulfil strict academic standards, and is based on journalistic methods. The work consisted mainly of a desk study of relevant documents coupled with interviews with persons in Sweden and Afghanistan. A field trip to Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, where Sweden is leading a Transition Support Team (TST), was undertaken from 22 June to 5 July 2012. In Sweden, interviews targeted persons with a special insight into Swedish action in Afghanistan either in the political, military or development assistance field. In Afghanistan, the target group consisted of women activists and international experts dealing with UNSCR 1325-related issues, as well as Swedish officials currently posted to Kabul or Mazar-e-Sharif. Due to the sensitivity of the subjects covered, direct quotations attributed to interviewees are not used in the report. A list of interviewees is provided on page 42.

In addition to the main pillars of Participation and Protection, a third "P" for Prevention or (the terminology varies in

different reports) Promotion is often added in analyses of UNSCR 1325. In this report, however, prevention is subsumed into the protection pillar and promotion of women's rights is understood as a prerequisite for both participation and protection, not a separate element in its own right. This is in line with the Swedish NAP, which is based on UNSCR 1325, and which stresses the two pillars of Participation and Protection, and treats UNSCR 1820 "as lending depth and clarity to the protection aspect of Resolution 1325."<sup>2</sup>

The report consists of four main parts. The first two cover the two pillars of UNSCR 1325 concerning participation and protection respectively. In order to put recommendations regarding the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan into perspective, we first need to analyse the conditions on the ground. The two following chapters deal with the Swedish National Action Plan (NAP) and Sweden's work with UNSCR 1325-related aspects in the political, military and development assistance fields in Afghanistan, ending in an assessment of its impact and some reflections on the way forward.

## About the Resolution

Resolution 1325 adopted by the United Nations Security Council on 31 October 2000 represented a breakthrough for a more broad-based and inclusive understanding of security policy than had hitherto been the norm in a sector dominated by traditional, military concepts. It stressed the importance of "equal participation [of women] and [their] full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."<sup>3</sup> Thus, women were no longer to be relegated to the role of victims of conflict, they were to be empowered as actors in political processes dealing with conflict prevention, peace-making and nation-building. This part of the resolution had the potential to be transformative, as it aimed not primarily to ensure the rights of women but to improve the quality and sustainability of peace solutions through the inclusion of women. However, at the same time the resolution stressed the need to protect women and girls

<sup>2</sup> The Swedish Government's action plan for 2009–2012 to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, Stockholm February 2009, under "Introduction". Available at <http://kvinna.tillkvinna.se/sites/default/files/HP1325%202009-2012%20final%20engelsk%20version.pdf>. Retrieved on 26 August 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Fifth preamble.

during and after conflicts and called on all parties “to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict.”<sup>4</sup> This part of the resolution reverts to traditional thinking in the sense that women are, again, primarily victims.

This inherent duality (if not dichotomy) serves, to some extent, to trip up the resolution. Governments and other actors with limited inclination to change traditional patterns in the security policy area can concentrate on the protection pillar when efforts to implement UNSCR 1325 are to be accounted for. The protection pillar has also been dominant in the ensuing resolutions which together with UNSCR 1325 form the international agenda for Women, Peace and Security. These are: UNSCR 1820 in 2008, which dealt with sexual violence during armed conflict, UNSCR 1888, which requested the appointment of a Special Representative,<sup>5</sup> as well as a rapidly deployable team of experts in the area of sexual violence, UNSCR 1889 in 2009, which reverted to stressing women’s participation in peace processes, as well as the importance to hold perpetrators of sexual violence accountable, and UNSCR 1960 in 2010, which stressed the need to punish perpetrators of sexual violence.

Albeit contradictory, both main aspects of UNSCR 1325 are highly relevant and interconnected in Afghanistan. Without adequate protection, Afghan women have great difficulty in participating and the lack of protection remains a primary obstacle to the efforts of promoting participation. For international actors, it is irresponsible to promote Afghan women’s participation without a full understanding of the risks involved – risks which may be underestimated since they may reflect cultural patterns widely different from the western world and as such be difficult to grasp. Consequently, it is safer and easier for troop contributors and donor countries to implement the participation part of UNSCR 1325 within their own internal structures, and this is also where the work seems to have been concentrated. The insertion of Gender Field Advisers and Gender Focal Points into the security forces aims to slowly change these structures and influence thinking in security matters, but the process is still in its initial stages and results on the ground, which can be felt in

the lives of Afghan women, are largely another matter.

In 2006, Sweden was among the first countries to develop a National Action Plan (NAP) guiding the implementation of UNSCR 1325. The current NAP covers the period 2009-2012. On the basis of goals formulated by Afghan women, this NAP is analysed on pp. 37-38. The work to develop an Afghan NAP is ongoing in Kabul, led by UN Women and assisted by the government of Finland. Given the current lack of security in the country, a major challenge is to find ways to reach out to rural areas in a country-wide consultation. More information on this process can be found on p. 28.

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<sup>4</sup> Paragraph 10.

<sup>5</sup> The first Special Representative to be appointed was Margot Wallström, former Swedish minister and EU commissioner.

## Introduction

A decade after the armed intervention in Afghanistan which, in the words of the US First Lady Laura Bush was equivalent to “a fight for the rights and dignity of women”,<sup>6</sup> Afghan women have indeed made a number of inroads into the totally male-dominated society of the Taleban era: the constitution adopted in 2004 stipulates equality between men and women, there is a quota of at least 25 percent women in the lower house of the parliament, Wolesi Jirga, (and currently one woman who has been regularly elected, having beaten a man to the seat), around 2.7 million girls are enrolled in schools (as compared to the near total absence of girls’ schools during the Taleban regime),<sup>7</sup> the number of midwives were estimated at 3,000 in 2011, compared to 467 in 2002,<sup>8</sup> a small number of women hold prominent posts as ministers, provincial governor or army officers, female voices are heard in a developing, quite vibrant media sector, vocal organisations advocating women’s rights have been formed, and so on.

Still, the overall mood is one of despondency. The increase of insecurity in large parts of the country, notably areas which have been “transitioned” to the Afghan security forces, has already affected the mobility of girls and women.<sup>9</sup> This hampers their access to education, medical care, employment and participation in programmes which aim to empower local communities. Also, confinement within the walls of the family home has a detrimental effect on mental as well as physical health, and tends to enhance women’s subordination and vulnerability to violence.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, attacks against girls’ schools and reports of poison gas inside classrooms make parents think twice before allowing their daughters to go to school.<sup>11</sup> A number of killings of high-profile women deter other women from breaking out of traditional roles. “We are now sliding backwards”, as one Afghan women’s rights activist formulated it. It is as if the treasure of liberation has been waved in front of the eyes of the women, only to be stored away when the going gets a bit rough.

During these circumstances, it is remarkable that a great number of Afghan women are still prepared to continue the “fight for the rights and dignity of women” invoked by Laura Bush. Among the international partners, however, this fight seems to have been subordinated to other interests (if it was ever primordial), as is the case for the initial idea of

forming a model democracy for the surrounding region in Afghanistan. The international intervention turned out to be a lot costlier and more complicated than initially foreseen, now it is drawing to a close. Principles are traded to facilitate the exit, deals are sought with the Taleban. Afghan women fear that they will have to pay the price for whatever compromises needed in this process.<sup>12</sup> In spite of their growing and continuously better organised lobbying – and contrary to the international commitment in the year 2000 – they are not prominently represented in the political processes surrounding the international withdrawal. If UNSCR 1325 was correct in its assumption that peace based on the political participation of the society as a whole will be more sustainable than peace deals cut between a limited number of representatives of the warring parties, then the ongoing process is not very likely to lead to lasting stability.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> James Gerstenzang and Lisa Getter, *Laura Bush Addresses State of Afghan Women*, Los Angeles Times, 18 November 2001. <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/nov/18/news/mn-5602>. Retrieved on 16 July 2012. Then-US Senator Hillary Clinton argued along the same lines in the days following the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001: “The mistreatment of women in Afghanistan was like an early warning signal for the kind of terrorism that culminated in the attacks of September 11 [...] By empowering women with the freedom to choose their own future [...] America can do more than rid the world of an international terrorist network.” Human Rights Watch, “*I Had to Run Away; The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for ‘Moral Crimes’*” in Afghanistan, March 2012, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> A number of clandestine girls’ schools, some of them run by the SCA, managed to keep functioning throughout the Taleban rule.

<sup>8</sup> Figure cited on the website of the Afghan Midwives’ Association, based on Ministry of Public Health records.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. “Afghan Women’s Declaration” from the Bonn conference in December 2011, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Dying to Be Heard*, Self-Immolation of Women in Afghanistan, Findings of a Research project by medica mondiale 2006-07, paragraph 53, p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> On 25 July 2012, Pajhwok Afghan News reported that 23 schools had been closed due to insecurity and shortage of teachers in the southeastern province of Paktia. Daud Husseini, *Insecurity Shuts 23 Schools in Paktia*, PAN 25 July 2012. In a study done by an NGO, 1 145 of attacks against the education sector were recorded during the two-year period of 2006-08, including “arson, the murder of teachers and acid attacks on girl students.” David Cortright and Sarah Smiles Pershinger, *Afghan Women Speak*, University of Notre Dame, October 2009, p. 14.





<sup>12</sup> These fears are based on harsh realities. On 6 March 2011, an article in The Washington Post laid out the changes in USAID strategy and quoted a senior official: "Gender issues are going to have to take a back seat to other priorities. [...] There's no way we can be successful if we maintain every special interest and pet project. All those pet rocks in our rucksack were taking us down." Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *In Afghanistan, U.S. shifts strategy on women's rights as it eyes wider priorities*, The Washington Post, 6 March 2011. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/05/AR2011030504233.html>. Retrieved on 6 August 2012.

<sup>13</sup> For research supporting this assumption, see Lederach, John Paul, *Building Peace, Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Washington 1997, pages 38-43, as well as Wanis-St. John, Anthony, and Kew, Darren, *Civil Society and Peace Negotiations: Confronting Exclusion*, International Negotiation 13, 2008, 11-36, pp. 18, 24-28 and 30.

# Participation

## Progress and setbacks

The concept of equality between men and women is not alien to the conservative interpretations of Islam that prevail in Afghanistan – but it is then a concept of *equal but separate*. Men have their role in society, women have theirs. Men are the ones representing the family in the public domain but, in principle at least, it does not necessarily mean that the work inside the walls of the home done by women is less valued. Men are the breadwinners, women are in charge of, above all, reproduction.<sup>14</sup> (The average birth rate is still high, five-six children per woman.)<sup>15</sup> The emphasis on women's sexual and reproductive roles may be facilitated by the fact that relatively few women survive long after reproductive age. Only some years ago, the average life expectancy at birth was estimated to be shorter for women than for men<sup>16</sup> but it has now risen and is estimated at around 50 years for both genders.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, there is a harsh gender hierarchy that puts women in a vulnerable position. But it is dual, in the sense that women are also assigned the role of carriers of the family's honour. In fact, women's roles are paradoxical – the West tends to see the problem of Afghan women as primarily one of inferiority while their role is, in fact, a central one inside the family. As with all paradoxes, making it work involves great difficulties.

The concept of *respect* is often used in connection with women, and among Afghan men and also largely women there is a feeling that women are much more respected in their culture than they generally are in the West. However, in the Afghan context, respect for a woman remains contingent upon her voluntary submission to restrictive social norms. The ease with which respect is turned into abuse, physical or otherwise, once the woman questions or opposes these norms, is notable (cf. pp. 18 ff.).<sup>18</sup> And in practice, women are largely seen as secondary to men.

## The Ulema Council statement

This became quite clear when the Afghan Ulema Council, a religious advisory body consisting of the country's leading clerics, issued a statement in early March 2012, which first contained a number of positive rulings on the status of women, among them that women have "[t]he right to property, ownership and commerce"; the right to inheritance "according to the principles of the sacred Shariah of Islam"; and "[t]he right to choose a spouse according to her own will." But the statement went on to enumerate the duties of women and then, i. a., declared: "In consideration of the clarity of verses 1 and 34 of Surah an-Nisa' [of the Qur'an], men are fundamental and women are secondary." There were also rulings affecting the freedom of movement of women, who were stated to have the religious duty of "[a]voiding mingling with stranger men in various social situations, such as education, shopping, the office and other affairs of life"; as well as of "[a]voiding travel without a [Shariah-sanctioned] mahram (male companion)."<sup>19</sup> President Karzai initially supported the statement, then – after protests from human rights defenders – backed down. But eventually, in a typically ambivalent action, only the English version of the statement was removed from the website of the Presidential Palace, while the Dari and Pashtu versions remained. It should be noted that the financing of the Ulema Council comes from the President's office, which in turn is funded by international donors.

The *ulema* statement runs contrary to the ruling in the Afghan constitution adopted in 2004 that "[t]he citizens of Afghanistan – whether man or woman – have equal rights and duties before the law" (Article 22). However, at the same time the standing of the constitution in these matters is ambiguous, as it is also stated that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam" (Article 3).<sup>20</sup> Thus, in fact, the Ulema have the ultimate word.

Against this background, it is not surprising if UNSCR 1325 rulings on equal participation of women in security matters are difficult to digest in the Afghan context, as formulated for instance in the fifth preamble: "Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts

<sup>14</sup> A recent study on Afghan women's perceptions of their place within a highly patriarchal society puts it in the following terms: "[T]he idea of a patriarchal contract which is woven into much of their narratives about gender relations in the family represents in microcosm a notion of society and citizenship that is closer to the communitarian vision of mutual responsibility than the liberal one of equal rights." Naila Kabeer, Ayesha Khan and Naysan Adlparvar, *Afghan Values or Women's Rights? Gendered Narratives about Continuity and Change in Urban Afghanistan*, IDS Working Paper, Volume 2011 No 387, p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> CIA World Factbook, 2011 estimate. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>. Retrieved on 28 July 2012. See also *Afghanistan's demography, A bit less exceptional*, The Economist, 23 June 2012, which refers to the Afghanistan Mortality Study indicating a birth rate of 5.1 children per woman, down from 6.6 some years ago. <http://www.economist.com/node/21557370>. Retrieved on 24 September 2012.

<sup>16</sup> In a research study carried out in 2005-06, a German NGO, medica mondiale, indicated that men outnumbered women with an average ratio of 104 for all ages – in spite of the preceding decades of armed conflict. Life expectancy was estimated at 44 years for women and 45 for men. medica mondiale, *Dying to be Heard, self-immolation research report 2006-2007*, p. 69. This research also indicated that "Afghanistan may be the only country in the world where female suicide rates strongly outweigh male suicide rates." Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> The CIA World Factbook gives the figures for life expectancy at birth of 48.45 for men and 51.05 for women. 2011 estimate. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>. Retrieved on 28 July 2012.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the concept of respect, see Ann Wilkens, *Suicide Bombers and Society – A Study on Suicide Bombers in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, FOI-R – 3058--SE, pp. 51 ff. <http://www2.foi.se/rapp/foir3058.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Unofficial translation posted on the website Afghanistan Analysis. <https://afghanistananalysis.wordpress.com/2012/03/04/english-translation-of-ulema-councils-declaration-about-women/>. Retrieved on 27 July 2012.

and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.” As the knowledge of the resolution is limited in Afghanistan, it is not widely discussed. If it were, it would probably mostly serve to feed into existing anti-UN moods. Many Afghans see the UN largely as an extension of western supremacy on the global scene. Attacks by the Taliban (who regard it as a legitimate target) and others against UN employees and offices have not been widely condemned by the public.

### *Progress over the last decade*

However, in spite of the difficulties offered by tradition and conservative interpretations of Islam, participation of women in public life has been powerfully promoted during the last decade, albeit from a minimal level during the preceding Taliban rule. The Constitution adopted in 2004 plays a pivotal role in this development. Not only does it, as mentioned above, lay down the principle of gender equality – it also contains a ruling that half of the presidential appointees to the Upper House (*Meshrano Jirga*), i.e. half of one third of its members, should be women (Article 84). In addition to this, the electoral law stipulates a further quota of 68 seats reserved for women in the Lower House (*Wolesi Jirga*). The result of the 2010 parliamentary election was 28 percent women in the Wolesi Jirga and 27 percent in the *Meshrano Jirga*.<sup>21</sup>

Female parliamentarians regularly come under criticism for not being independent enough, having been placed in their positions by related power-brokers. To this, one could say that the same applies to a large number of male parliamentarians. No doubt, the mere presence of women on the legislative scene is a leap forward and, in addition, a number of female parliamentarians are quite vocal not only on women’s issues but also on, e.g., security policy. (One of them, Fawzia Koofi, has survived several assassination attempts but is still running for president in the upcoming election 2014, as is Shukria Barakzai, who has been chairing the Defence

Commission, of which she is still the only female member.)

In the government, however, there is no quota for women and the number of female ministers has remained limited. There are currently three women ministers (for labour and social affairs, health and women’s affairs, respectively). The only constantly female minister has been the minister for women’s affairs, but her standing is precarious – the existence of the ministry is regularly questioned, either based on the view that women’s issues should be mainstreamed throughout the government, rather than relegated to a special ministry, or because there is no corresponding “ministry for men” and the situation is deemed to be unjustly favourable to women. There is one female provincial governor (Habiba Sorabi in Bamyan) and a limited number of women in other high-profile posts, including in the Afghan National Army (ANA). They are all actually or potentially living under threat,<sup>22</sup> receiving less protection from the government than male colleagues,<sup>23</sup> often criticized by their own families, and they also have to constantly assert themselves in their workplaces not to be relegated to secondary roles. On top of this, most of them carry the burden of combining an exposed high-profile position with a traditional female role at home.

### *Few women dealing with reconciliation process*

When it comes to institutions dealing, in particular, with the transition and the post-2014 period, women are not prominent. There are some female members of the High Peace Council (HPC) created in 2010 to seek reconciliation with the opposing armed forces, currently nine out of a total of 70, as well as in the corresponding provincial peace councils where there is a quota of three-five women for each province. (The total number of the provincial peace council members depends on the number of districts in the province – there should be one member per district.) However, the work of the HPC was stalled after the murder of its chairman, Burhanuddin Rabbani, on 20 September 2011 until the appointment of his son Salahuddin Rabbani as his successor more than half a year later and it remains marginal in the actual political process – being more of a discussion forum

<sup>20</sup> Translation found at the website Afghanistan Online. [http://www.afghan-web.com/politics/current\\_constitution.html](http://www.afghan-web.com/politics/current_constitution.html). Retrieved on 27 July 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Figures according to the website of the QuotaProject (Global Database of Quotas for Women). <http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?country=4>. Retrieved on 27 July 2012. It should be noted, however, that Afghan women obtained the right to vote in 1964, resulting in the first women entering the parliament in 1965.

<sup>22</sup> One interviewee stated: “Every day I have a feeling that I will be murdered today or tomorrow.”

<sup>23</sup> For instance, *Women Candidates in Afghanistan Travel a Dangerous Campaign Trail*, published in Politics Daily before the parliamentary election in 2010, describes how cultural barriers prevent women from demanding security escorts and also quotes an American observer from the International Republican Institute as saying: “The Afghanistan Ministry of Interior promised to provide every female candidate with two bodyguards, but never followed through because it lacks the resources.” <http://www.politicsdaily.com/2010/08/04/women-candidates-in-afghanistan-travel-a-dangerous-campaign-trail/>. Retrieved on 4 September 2012.

than a platform for negotiations. Also, its female members remain marginalised inside the Council – as one of them stated: “We are trying to be involved in the peace process but in my opinion, most of the time we’re not included in major discussions. [...] Our mission is to figure out how to keep the role of women active in the High Peace Council and not have our presence serve only as a statistic.”<sup>24</sup>

Nor is there any female representation of consequence inside the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), the other part of the peace process which was set up in 2010 to encourage insurgents to join the government fold and reintegrate them into mainstream society – and which disposes of large international funding. Both the HPC and the APRP are also deemed to lack a meaningful gender perspective in their work. In line with the norm that women do not control money, funds distributed by the APRP generally goes exclusively to male heads of family. Also, there is no mechanism for transitional justice linked to the programme.

While a real negotiating process with the Taliban has not yet taken off, a series of meetings, surrounded by secrecy, have taken place between US and/or Afghan representatives and representatives of the Taliban in different places around the world. Very few women are known to have been present at these discussions and no woman is known to be part of the inner circle at the Afghan presidential palace, where much of the political wheeling and dealing is actually taking place. Nor is there any woman present in the National Security Council, another key player in forming actual policies.

This situation is particularly biased as women’s rights are at the very centre of the armed conflict and its possible resolution. For ideological Taliban, what they see as the “chastity” of women is a fundamental reason to fight the foreign intervention<sup>25</sup> – and Afghan women have reason to assume that their concept of “chastity” is linked to severe restrictions on what women can do in society. The same goes for Hezb-e Islami (HIG/HIA), another group within the armed resistance intermittently reported to be involved in discussions with Afghan government representatives. Spokesmen of this movement have openly called for renegotiation of the Afghan constitution and it is a reasonable assumption that amendments would

affect the ruling about equality between men and women.<sup>26</sup> In this situation, Afghan women increasingly fear that the rights that they have obtained since 2001 are now, if not explicitly, then at least implicitly up for grabs on the negotiating table. The back-sliding on women’s rights noticed in the Afghan government, for instance in the reaction to the Ulema Council statement, points in that direction. Deal-making, not principles, has always been at the heart of Afghan political management and continues to be characteristic of how the country is run. The international presence may have been a counterweight to this tendency, but now the overriding interest of the government’s international supporters lies within the realm of military count-down and exit. At the same time, international attention is increasingly turning to other crises than the intractable situation in Afghanistan. Without the international push, it is feared, gender issues will not fare well in the Afghan context.

### *Growing women’s movement*

The main counterweight to a scenario in which Afghan women, cast in the role of passive bystanders, see their rights go up in smoke, is the political energy and bravery which have been developed by the same women once they got the chance to become organised and make their voices heard after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Apart from the relatively few women who have managed to reach high-profile positions, there are a number of active women’s organisations with strong leaders, who are able and willing to increasingly mobilise against threats to their human rights. The Afghan Women’s Network (AWN), created by Afghan participants at the UN Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing in 1995, remains the umbrella organisation for these groups. In spite of great challenges in terms of logistics and coordination, the AWN has managed to come together around common positions, e.g. in the international conferences held on Afghanistan, and has also been successful in influencing the number of women who have participated in these conferences. One criticism directed towards the AWN – of which the women interviewed for this report were acutely aware – is that it remains based in the Kabul elite. In today’s climate of increasing

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Gulali Noor Safi, Reuters 22 March 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/22/us-afghanistan-women-idUSBRE82L0FP20120322>. Retrieved on 28 July 2012.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance the statement issued on 20 June 2012 by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (the official name assumed by the Taliban) on “Responsibility of the Nation towards Afghan Women”: <http://www.globalterroralert.com/index.php?view=article&id=1089:the-islamic-emirate-of-afghanistan-the-taliban-issue-statement-on-the-responsibility-of-the-nation-towards-afghan-women>. Retrieved on 28 July 2012.

<sup>26</sup> For instance, in a TV programme on 5 January 2012, “Harun Zarghun, spokesman for Hezb-e Islami led by Hekmatyar, sets conditions for the peace talks with the Afghan government, saying the constitution should be amended, foreign troops should leave Afghanistan and an interim government should be established to hold elections.” Afghan Aina TV news in Dari 1430 gmt 5 Jan 2012 reproduced in BBC Monitoring Afghanistan News on 7 January 2012.

instability, it is not easy to effectively reach out into the rural areas. It is deemed that core support to the AWN could facilitate the tasks ahead.

One sign of the growing strength of the women's movement is the reaction from Afghan civil society after the Ulema Council statement, which was stronger and more outspoken than would have been thinkable five-ten years ago. (At the same time, the statement reflects a change of atmosphere – it could hardly have been made some years back.) While egregious crimes against women still – and possibly on an increased scale – take place (cf. pp. 18 ff.), awareness of women's rights has grown substantially during the last decade, not only among the educated elite.

The Afghan women's movement is not without its share of internal problems. Apart from the above-mentioned lack of outreach to rural women, the ones most commonly mentioned during the field interviews were a lack of coordination among the organisations (including a certain amount of back-biting and self-promotion), and the fact that some of its most vocal spokespersons spend a large portion of their time attending international meetings and seminars abroad. But, at the same time, there are several young women coming up as potential leaders and the effects of the unprecedented build-up of girls' schools will be increasingly felt.<sup>27</sup> It should also be noted that, as testified by a number of interviewees, an increasing amount of Afghan men are joining in the fight for women's rights.<sup>28</sup> In short, the demographic situation in Afghanistan, with a median age of only 18,<sup>29</sup> presents a possibility to increase the pressure on outdated gender structures. While there is also religious radicalisation among the Afghan youth, the existence of vibrant media as well as access to the internet would seem to be factors encouraging a generational change.

At the same time, there are counter-indications: the Taleban and warlords are tightening their grip over increasing parts of the country. In an atmosphere of growing insecurity, the social control over the lives of girls and boys tends to become even stronger. Hierarchic patterns and the increasing influence of a limited number of wealthy families make upward mobility in society difficult. From this perspective, the majority of the people are held hostage by a ruling elite of conservative

warlords and other power-brokers. Logically, though, in a fairly open society like the Afghan one, sooner or later the authoritarian patriarchy should crack open to allow a broader participation in decision-making processes. The questions are rather how long that will take, if that amount of time is available before the country slides back into warfare and what set-backs might be suffered along the road.

However, as previously underlined,<sup>30</sup> the participation part of UNSCR 1325 is not primarily about women's rights. It is about creating more lasting peace. It is assumed that if the political base of peace-making is broadened and made more inclusive, the following solutions will be more sustainable. From this perspective, excluding half of the population with – not least in the case of Afghanistan – partly other experiences than those characterising the male half, from essential political processes is simply not a good idea. Deals cut in back-rooms between a limited number of representatives of a limited number of interested parties, without outside mediation or neutral advice, cannot be the best recipe for turning the armed conflict into a constructive peace process. In this sense, the Afghan process runs a tangible risk of adding a bad example to international experience already gained – at great cost. And the time for changing the approach is rapidly running out.

## Afghan perceptions of the international role

A series of large international conferences on Afghanistan, which have been held during the last decade, may now have ended with the Tokyo conference in July 2012.<sup>31</sup> Advocacy work by national and international human rights organisations has had an effect on the participation of women, as well as the attention paid to women's role in peacemaking in these conferences. Declarations from the Tokyo conference, as well as the preceding Chicago Summit of Afghanistan and ISAF-contributing countries in May 2012, underline the importance of UNSCR 1325. In the declaration made at the Tokyo conference, “[t]he Participants [...] stressed the

<sup>27</sup> It is estimated that only six percent of women aged 25 or older have received formal education. Norad and Sida, *Gender Review Report*, Royal Norwegian Embassy Afghanistan, Norad Report 14/2011 Discussion, p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> In the UN Women office in Kabul around 40 percent of the current staff are men and, in the words of their director, all “really engaged” in the issues before them.

<sup>29</sup> The CIA Factbook puts the median age of both men and women at 18.2. 2011 estimate. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>. Retrieved on 28 July 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. pp. 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> The next international conference now planned is a follow-up to Tokyo in 2014.

importance of the participation of civil society organizations and women's groups in support of the peace process and the culture of peace and human rights in Afghan society in particular in the light of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325.<sup>32</sup> In the Mutual Accountability Framework established by the conference, "[t]he Afghan Government affirmed that the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its citizens, in particular the equality of men and women, are guaranteed under the Constitution and Afghanistan's international human rights obligations."<sup>33</sup>

However, these are not binding commitments and the gap between lofty declarations and the reality in which Afghan women lead their lives remains huge. Among women human rights defenders, there is tangible disappointment with the follow-up to earlier commitments made by the international community, typically at the first stages of the intervention. Many feel that the plight of Afghan women was used as a pretext for the military intervention, and that humanitarian purposes were not at all the real reasons for coming to Afghanistan.<sup>34</sup> Perceptions of what the actual reasons were will vary – but conspiracy theories run deep into the Afghan society. Increasingly, the combination of wars in Muslim parts of the world is seen as a Christian crusade aimed at destroying the religious identity of Muslims. And this may be a potentially more dangerous interpretation than other explanations common in the debate, such as western demands for raw material and wealth.

In any case, hypocrisy in international behaviour is seldom lost on the Afghan public. The lack of women at the negotiating table is not a purely Afghan phenomenon but has its correspondence on all sides of the international community. Men are dominating these processes. Double standards would be striking if, for instance, a delegation of ambassadors – there is only one female ambassador in Kabul at the moment (one out of five US ambassadors) – would approach Afghan authorities with a demand for more women in the political process. No doubt it would be easier to push the issue if there were more expatriate women in a position to participate. Thus, more attention still needs to be paid to paragraph 1 in UNSCR 1325 which "[u]rges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making

levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict." How could Afghanistan, a country with a particularly conservative policy vis-à-vis women in public life, be expected to do a lot better than the rest of the world?

In the light of increasing instability during the past decade, the international community is perceived by women activists to have been too pliable, too anxious to accommodate the Afghan government even when it acts in contravention to its international obligations, and too unwilling to question reactionary demands. International interventions have been patchy, geared towards one-off events rather than part of systematic action to reach a goal. As a whole, the international community is perceived to have adopted the government "ploy" that, in order to maintain stability, conservative elements have to be appeased. In this way, the government is largely excused from dealing with sensitive issues such as women's rights.

Instead of being so adaptable, donors could send a signal by, for instance, refusing to finance male escorts, *mahrms*, when women are invited to international meetings and conferences – as one interlocutor put it: "This is baloney! We do not want them around." In other contexts, interviewees observed that international concepts should be more adapted to the Afghan environment. For instance, the idea, popular among donors, of *mainstreaming* gender rights throughout the system was seen by several interlocutors as premature in the Afghan context. What is needed at this point in time, they thought, is rather the *targeting* of women's rights – through quotas, special budget lines and specific commitments to advance women. The practice of posting quite young international experts in positions to lecture older Afghans on gender equality (not uncommon in Afghanistan) was seen as particularly offensive and leading to increased resistance to all foreign presence, where the difference in salary scales between expatriates and locally employed officials also plays a role.

In the same vein, the international community was seen by interviewees as sometimes insensitively pushing issues, even at the risk of placing Afghan women in difficult situations or outright danger. The attempt to recruit more women into the Afghan police force was a case in point.<sup>35</sup> First, they reasoned,

<sup>32</sup> Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, The Tokyo Declaration, Partnership for Self-Reliance in Afghanistan, From Transition to Transformation, July 8, 2012, paragraph 9. Available at [http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle\\_e/afghanistan/tokyo\\_conference\\_2012/tokyo\\_declaration\\_en1.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/afghanistan/tokyo_conference_2012/tokyo_declaration_en1.html). Retrieved on 7 September 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., paragraph 12.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Introduction, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> In 2011, the number of female police officers was estimated at 1 195, representing one percent of the total force. Human Rights Watch, "I Had to Run Away"; *The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for "Moral Crimes" in Afghanistan*, March 2012, p. 27. However, 80 percent of them were posted in only four provinces, with more than 40 percent in Kabul (out of these, more than 20 percent at the Ministry of Interior) and the rest in Balkh, Herat and Nangarhar.

the Afghan National Police (ANP) would have to be reformed, only then could women be expected to join. As it functions today, “no family in their right mind” would like to see their female members wearing a police uniform. Female police officers are looked upon as prostitutes by large parts of the public, a perception which is backed up by reports that female police officers are actually forced to provide sexual services to their male colleagues.<sup>36</sup> To some extent, the same goes for any woman working in a public environment – as it is a well-known fact that men often pay for their positions, why should the same not apply to women? And, generally lacking control over money, how would they pay? Women on night duty, for instance nurses, are particularly exposed to rumour-mongering as well as actual pressures.

Against this background, some women activists deemed it to be too early to push e.g. female mediators into a scene dominated by males. According to Islamic division of labour, the task of women in this context was perceived to be primarily to convince other women. There is a widespread concept of women as “messengers of peace”, untainted by previous participation in violent conflicts. According to this thinking, government-affiliated women should go and talk directly to wives and daughters of the Taleban in order to create a mutual drive for peace. At the same time, the separation of gender roles isolates the women from, for instance, the informal mentoring and other personal relations that serve to make men visible as political actors. It is notable that in the nationwide consultation presented in “A Call for Justice” only 1.3 percent viewed women as having a role in the truth-seeking and reconciliation wanted by 79 percent of the population.<sup>37</sup>

On an overall level, however, there is recognition that the international community has played a positive role to promote awareness of ideas related to UNSCR 1325 inside Afghanistan. One activist explained: “At first we did not understand that we were actually doing 1325 work but internationals explained it to us. And since then awareness as well as confidence has grown a lot. Serious strategizing, however, started only in connection with the London conference [in the beginning of 2010], when the plan to buy out the insurgency was put forward.” At the following

Consultative Peace Jirga in June 2010, systematic training of grass-root activists took place and the number of women participating was raised from 10 to around 20 percent, about 334 women out of 1,668 participants in total.<sup>38</sup>

On balance, the pros and cons of this picture can be summed up as follows: The international push is crucial for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan. Left to its own devices, the Afghan government would do little to live up to its commitments in this area - as one activist put it: “Without international support, the government would never listen to us! We would be eliminated from the process.” In spite of the sometimes limited understanding of the cultural environment, international push has helped a great deal to take the issues to where they are today – but to women activists, this is not far enough. On the whole, women’s issues tend to remain an add-on, an after-thought in order to be politically correct, rather than reflecting a genuine commitment or, even less, an outcome of the understanding that women’s participation is central for peace-making and long-term stabilisation. Security issues are still seen through the traditional, male lens and, during the past decade, they have become increasingly dominant. The other main problem is the lack of cultural sensitivity in the application of the UNSCR 1325, which has to be adapted to the Afghan environment. Thus, the understanding of both the objectives of the UNSCR 1325 and the Afghan culture still need to be enhanced and, based on a better understanding of the Afghan environment, the international push needs to be further intensified.

## What could the international community do?

Although the time pressure is increasing, beyond a lack of engagement and political will there is no real reason for the international community to sit back and watch the Afghan political development derail. If it wants a holistic solution, based on inclusive participation, this is still a possible option. If it wants to apply UNSCR 1325 and have women involved as actors in the ongoing process, there are capable and willing

<sup>36</sup> In Mazar-e-Sharif, an investigation in March 2012 by the National Public Radio “discovered disturbing allegations of systematic sexual coercion and even rape of female police officers by their male colleagues”. Several women police officers interviewed confirmed this picture: “Pay and promotion depend on sexual favors.” Women were “ashamed to say they’re cops”. Quil Lawrence, *For Afghan Policewomen, Sex Abuse Is a Job Hazard*, NPR 8 March 2012. Retrieved on 16 June 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), *A Call for Justice - A National Consultation on Past Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan*, 25 January 2005, pp. 32 and 36. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/47fdad50.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Afghan Women’s Network, *UN SCR 1325. Implementation in Afghanistan*, 31 October 2011, p. 26. The report is available at [http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/AWN\\_UN-SCR1325ImplementationinAfghanistan.pdf](http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/AWN_UN-SCR1325ImplementationinAfghanistan.pdf).

women to involve. It is significant that, in spite of the danger that they are exposed to, there were 413 female candidates in the 2010 parliamentary election, an increase from less than 350 in the preceding 2005 election.<sup>39</sup> Engaging these and other women in the political process is quite feasible, but it requires some rethinking in Washington and a number of other capitals, as well as applying pressure on the Afghan government. The Afghan state, however, is highly dependent on external funding – conditionality could be a powerful tool. International conferences without tangible Afghan female presence at the table (not just in parallel arrangements) could simply not be financed. A Gender Code of Conduct to which organisers would be held responsible could be worked out, in which a specific proportion of women to participate in all conferences and negotiations with regard to their country is defined.

In some cases, starting with the Bonn II Conference in December 2011, pressure from Afghan civil society and other organisations has been effective, resulting in a larger share of women representatives than first planned.<sup>40</sup> This is a step forward. The flip-side is that it was taken only at a late stage and not primarily as a consequence of international awareness on a political level. Obviously, the international community still has a long way to go until inclusiveness is integrated into the thinking of political actors on the peace and security scene. But nothing is stopping it from taking this road.

Specifically, when it comes to resolution 1325, there are paragraphs that are less sensitive. Awareness-raising in a context such as provided by the High Peace Council (with mainly warlord representation) could start by discussions on these items in order to prepare the ground for more difficult messages to be gradually introduced. Quick results should not be expected, it has to be a long-term effort – but more systematic action could help to close the gaps.

The aid dependency of the Afghan economy has been growing during the last decade, fuelled by the availability of massive aid flows. Today, it is extreme.<sup>41</sup> With the 2014 military exit, interest in Afghanistan in the donor countries can be expected to drop and this development is likely to lead to less aid. In this context, the Swedish decision to commit aid for the whole post-transition period of 2015-2024 is a welcome

exception and an important signal<sup>42</sup> – but obviously far from enough to make up for other expected losses. If nothing else, expenditure (also large) directly connected to the military presence will dry up. This process will enhance the relative importance of the remaining development assistance and could potentially enlarge the scope for increased attention to women's participation in economic and social development. On a practical level, projects can be withheld from villages which lack female representation in the decision-making process.<sup>43</sup> Other ways of clarifying the benefits of holistic participation in societal development could also be probed.

Training enabling Afghan women to be more active on the political scene, nationally and internationally, is another central area. Women who do not follow the rules run the risk of being ostracised in the longer run.<sup>44</sup> More aid to higher education for women was a recurrent demand from interviewees in Kabul. The emphasis on girls' schools remains welcome, but has to be followed up by further education in order for Afghan women to make more of a mark on the political development of their country.

Allowing more space for the democratic political parties is likely to affect women's participation in a positive way. International support could be geared in that direction and electoral reform, allowing parties to put up candidates in parliamentary elections, could also be more seriously considered.<sup>45</sup> Twinning arrangements between, for instance, female Afghan parliamentarians and their female counterparts in other countries could play a supportive role, as could cross-border mentoring arrangements. The financing and supporting of a secretariat for the Afghan Women's Network could be a crucial contribution to improve coordination between different groups of women's rights activists, which would be in line with, for instance, the gender profile developed by the Nordic countries.

High-level official visitors to Afghanistan could see to it that a number of prominent women are always included in their meeting programmes – and be held accountable in that regard. Participation issues could figure higher in international dialogue and declarations. Rather pathetically, it seems to take a woman – US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton – to raise these issues on a political level with some consistency.

<sup>39</sup> David Cortright and Sarah Smiles Pershinger, *Afghan Women Speak*, University of Notre Dame, October 2009, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> According to the German Federal Foreign Office, "[a]lmost half of the Afghan civil society delegates in Bonn [were] women. At least one quarter of the official Afghan delegation [were] women." [http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid\\_D2DF2A3AC32C5DF4B4DB9EB32DD6B017/EN/Aussenpolitik/RegionaleSchwerpunkte/AfghanistanZentralasien/Bonn\\_Konferenz\\_2011/Zivil-gesellschaft\\_node.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_D2DF2A3AC32C5DF4B4DB9EB32DD6B017/EN/Aussenpolitik/RegionaleSchwerpunkte/AfghanistanZentralasien/Bonn_Konferenz_2011/Zivil-gesellschaft_node.html). Retrieved on 24 September 2012.

<sup>41</sup> According to the World Bank, "[a]id is estimated to be \$15.7 billion – about the same as the size of the GDP in fiscal year 2011." *Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014*, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/af/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/AFGHANISTANEXTN/0,contentMDK:23052411~menuPK:305990~pagePK:2865066~piPK:2865079~theSitePK:305985,00.html>. Retrieved on 24 September 2012.

<sup>42</sup> See p. 34 for further details.

<sup>43</sup> See also p. 35.

<sup>44</sup> This seems to have happened to Malalai Joya, who made headlines at the 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga by denouncing the presence of warlords and war criminals. Later, as an MP, she continued to make similar denouncements, after which she was banned from the parliament in 2007. She survived several assassination attempts and, as late as in 2010 and 2011, was placed on various lists of the world's most influential leaders. Now, she is reported to be encountering difficulties in getting a job, while other educated Afghan women are much sought after on the international as well as national labour market.

<sup>45</sup> According to the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system adopted by the Afghan government before the first parliamentary election in 2005, candidates cannot run for election as representatives of political parties. As a consequence, the parliament is organized along interest lines, not according to party affiliation.





# Protection

## Afghan women's exposure to violence

Physical, psychological and sexual violence against girls and women in Afghanistan comes from multiple directions. Women's rights activists are targeted by the Taliban, warlords and members of their own families. "Moral crimes" are prosecuted with a vigour ostentatiously lacking when it comes to crimes against women. Poison attacks inside girls' schools are an effective way of disrupting education. Shelters are few and far between and their existence precarious. Stepping outside the walls of the home can be risky for women but, quite often, remaining inside them is just as dangerous.

### Domestic violence

The primary source of gender-based violence is found inside families, where women and girls are especially exposed to violence from close relatives. As the overwhelming majority of cases remain unreported, it is extremely difficult to assess the extent of the problem. However, various research points to staggering realities. A study published in 2008 stated that "87 percent of women reported that they had at some point experienced at least one form of sexual, physical, or psychological abuse, and 62 percent reported more than one form of abuse at home."<sup>46</sup> In 2006, UNIFEM declared that domestic violence appeared "endemic." Perpetrators were close family members: "More than eight out of every 10 acts of violence is committed by a family member such as a husband, father-in-law, son or cousin. In many of the remaining cases the perpetrator is someone known to the woman." Women were also perpetrators, using the little power that they have – but to a much lesser extent: "The study found that women committed about 10 percent of the violent acts."

<sup>47</sup> A study made public in June 2012 found that 92 percent of 15,000 women interviewed all over Afghanistan regarded domestic violence as a normal feature of life.<sup>48</sup>

A report based on interviews with Hazara women in Kabul participating in microfinance programmes – a group that, on the surface, would seem to be less exposed than others – found

that "one of the most striking findings [...] was the high levels of physical violence that punctuated everyday life. [...] [T] here were reports of mothers-in-law beating daughters-in-law, brothers beating sisters, parents beating their children and, most frequently of all, husbands beating their wives. Men's right to beat their wives appeared to be an accepted feature of the marital contract: husbands were justified in beating their wives if they ceased to behave like 'good women', acted selfishly or wilfully disobeyed their husbands or [...] had failed to produce a son."<sup>49</sup> These women appeared less bitter about their situation than one would think, seeing a link between the physical violence and "the stresses and strains that men were going through as a result of the disruptions to the economy caused by several years of conflict, the erosion of their capacity to carry out their breadwinning roles and the frustration that this engendered."<sup>50</sup>

Thus, in the prevailing climate of growing insecurity, there are signs that violence against women is on the rise. During the field visit, this development was underlined by several interlocutors. And according to a report by TOLO News "[b]ased on a survey done by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, there has been a 51-percent rise in violence against Afghan women in the first nine months of this Afghan calendar year."<sup>51</sup> In the western province of Farah, the department of women's affairs registered 60 cases of violence against women during the first half of 2012, including 13 killings – as compared to 91 cases registered during 2011, none of which was classified as murder.<sup>52</sup>

While it remains difficult to ascertain to what extent these figures reflect an increase in real terms, rather than an increase in the reporting of incidents, it is clear that violence remains widely used as a method of controlling women, keeping them in place in case they want to rise above their relegated role. Impunity is the rule. First of all, very few victims even attempt to report the crime. Secondly, police stations are known to often turn reporting victims back to their families to solve the problem between themselves. Thirdly, even if the police register the report, the perpetrator can bribe himself out of the investigation. Fourthly, the jirga-based judiciary system prevailing in many areas does not consider domestic violence a crime – in fact, like almost everyone else, it considers it quite

<sup>46</sup> This report by Global Rights: Partners for Justice, *Living with Violence: A National Report on Domestic Abuse in Afghanistan, March 2008*, covering 4,700 households in 16 provinces, was cited in Human Rights Watch, *"I Had to Run Away"; The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for "Moral Crimes" in Afghanistan*, March 2012, p.30.

<sup>47</sup> UNIFEM, *Uncounted and Discounted*, 2006 – a study of more than 1,300 cases of domestic violence reported to authorities between January 2003 and June 2005. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=19512&Cr=afghan&Cr1>. Retrieved on 24 July 2012.

<sup>48</sup> Report produced by the Central Statistics Office of Afghanistan, with support from UNICEF.

<sup>49</sup> Naila Kabeer, Ayesha Khan and Naysan Adlparvar, *Afghan Values or Women's Rights? Gendered Narratives about Continuity and Change in Urban Afghanistan*, IDS Working Paper, Volume 2011 No 387, pp. 13-14.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/5331-ahrc-concerned-over-increasing-violence-against-women>. Retrieved on 26 July 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Zahinon, *Violence Against Women on the Rise in Farah*, PAN 25 July 2012.

normal. (If Sharia law is applied, varying interpretations will be possible – a differentiation between permitted domestic abuse and violence beyond that pale is likely to be made.) Fifthly, if a regular tribunal does seize the case, it too can be bribed in favour of the more resourceful party (in terms of money and connections, i.e. not the woman). Finally, if the perpetrator is indeed sentenced, he can bribe his way out of jail, which might increase the risk for revenge run by the reporting victim.<sup>53</sup>

In the formal justice system, domestic violence is proscribed by the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) law adopted in 2009 via presidential decree but never actually passed by the parliament. The fact that it has been published in the official gazette still makes it valid. At first, some women activists were working to have the law formally passed but they seem to have now concluded that it could not happen without serious set-backs to its provisions, when conservative MPs would start to debate it in detail, and abandoned this effort. The law criminalises child marriages, forced marriages, the selling and buying of women for the purpose or under the pretext of marriage, *baad* (giving away a woman or girl to settle a dispute), forced self-immolation and a number of other acts of violence against women, including rape and beating. However, there is no action plan linked to the EVAW law and, according to a report released in November 2011 by OHCHR and UNAMA, the law, albeit now starting to be implemented in most provinces, was still only sparsely applied: “[M]any cases of violence against Afghan women were withdrawn or mediated, including serious crimes that would require prosecution. Some murder cases and other serious crimes criminalised under the EVAW law were instead prosecuted under the Penal Code or Sharia law. This sometimes resulted in acquittal of perpetrators, reduction of charges to less serious crimes, convictions with lighter sentences and women victims themselves being accused of ‘moral crimes.’”<sup>54</sup> In addition, the law can be used in such a way that violence against women is no longer a matter for state prosecution, but dependent on the individual women to file a criminal report – in which case she comes up against the difficulties of being received and taken seriously in the police stations. (This is not the case for men, as there is no special law on violence against men.)

Occasionally, particularly egregious cases of violence against women make headlines in the international press, which usually leads to official Afghan condemnations followed by promises to apply “exemplary punishment” to the perpetrator. To what extent these promises result in the actual carrying out of sentences is probably another matter, albeit difficult to clarify. One such case concerned a 19-year-old Afghan woman, Aisha, who had her nose and ears cut off as punishment for having run away from an abusive home in the southern province of Uruzgan. A photo of her mutilated face was used as front cover of the issue of Time Magazine published on 29 July 2010<sup>55</sup> and she was later transported to the US for reconstructive surgery. A more recent case has not hit the headlines but was brought to justice through the efforts of an Afghan police investigator, Captain Raheema, working within a Family Response Unit.<sup>56</sup> It concerns a 16-year-old girl in Balkh. The following is an excerpt from a report circulated within the UNAMA Police Advisory Unit, which illustrates the immense difficulties faced by victims but also how determined action can be effective:

<sup>53</sup> One way of taking such revenge is through acid throwing, which leaves victims disfigured and ostracised for life. See p. 22.

<sup>54</sup> UN News Centre, *Afghanistan Has ‘Long Way to Go’ in Protecting Women from Violence* – UN report, 23 November 2011, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40491&Cr=violence&Cr1=women>. Retrieved on 24 July 2012. According to a UNAMA report from November 2011, cited by Human Rights Watch, only 26 percent of cases of alleged crimes under the EVAW law reported to the AIHRC during the first year of its existence were opened by prosecutors, and less than seven percent led to the filing of an indictment. In half of Afghanistan’s provinces no indictment under the EVAW law was filed. Human Rights Watch, *“I Had to Run Away: The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for ‘Moral Crimes’ in Afghanistan*, March 2012, p. 87.

<sup>55</sup> A debate on ethics followed this publication, linked also to the accompanying headline: “What Happens If We Leave Afghanistan” (no question mark). However, according to a Pajhwok Afghan News report on 6 December 2010, the Uruzgan head of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission had investigated the case and concluded that the Taleban (who also denied involvement) were not implicated. PAN also reported that Aisha’s father-in-law had been arrested and that Aisha had run away from her home four times since her marriage at the age of 12. (Other news sources later reported that the arrested man was released.) Ahmad Omed Khpalwak, *Taliban Not Responsible For Cutting Aisha’s Nose, Ears: AIHRC*. <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2010/12/06/taliban-not-responsible-cutting-aishas-nose-ears-aihrc>. Retrieved on 24 July 2012.

<sup>56</sup> The first Family Response Unit, FRU, opened on 22 January 2006 in Kabul. FRUs are to be staffed by Afghan policewomen and designed to address domestic violence, i. a. by making it easier for Afghan women to report incidents.

Captain Raheema assisted the Charbulak police with a homicide and aggravated assault. The victims are a 16-year-old woman and her unborn infant. The defendant is her 25-year-old husband. The Women's Safe House employees notified Raheema of a woman at the Hospital in Mazar. The victim's neighbors called her father and he transported her to the hospital for treatment. The victim who was 7 months pregnant, had her tongue almost completely severed and was beaten so badly that her child died within her womb.

The hospital originally refused treatment for the victim due to her financial status. Charbulak officials refused to investigate the case. They advised that the victim had to report to the Police Station in Charbulak to make the report. Raheema had her commander call Charbulak to convince them to investigate. Charbulak CID called back Balkh CID and said that the husband denied the charges and without evidence would not hold him.

According to Raheema, doctors at the Mazar hospital surgically reattached the partially severed tongue and delivered the dead infant. Raheema sent two of her investigators to the hospital to retrieve the medical report with documented injuries. The hospital gave the dead infant to the victim/mother. The victim's father transported her and her dead infant back to Charbulak to show the evidence and file the charges. Raheema sent the medical report to Charbulak.

Charbulak officials were going to release the husband regardless of the evidence and the report. Raheema contacted the local media and advised them of the situation. Cpt. Raheema notified her commander of the media notification. Collectively due to media pressure, as well as pressure from high-ranking Police Commanders in Mazar, Charbulak and Balkh CID collaborated and arrested the husband now referred to as the defendant. Police jailed the husband in Charbulak.

Captain Raheema drove to Charbulak to pick the victim up and transported her back to the Mazar Hospital. The hospital refused to treat the victim again but eventually agreed to due to media pressure. The victim remains hospitalized this date. Raheema assured me she will pursue Murder and Assault charges against the defendant. Raheema reported she is concerned that the defendant will bribe officials and gain his release.

As a sign of the growing openness of the Afghan society, extreme brutality against women increasingly leads to public protests. The public killing of a 22-year-old girl in Parwan after a summary village trial, filmed and spread via the internet, led to demonstrations in Kabul. On 11 July 2012, “[n]early 200 women, including members of 80 civil society organisations and rights’ activists, staged a protest for nearly an hour from the Ministry of Women’s Affairs to the Zambaq Square of Kabul in front of the UN office.” One of the slogans was: “Islam is a religion of honour and should not be misused.”<sup>57</sup>

A 16-year-old acid attack victim was at the forefront of the demonstration, along with female and male human rights activists. While most demonstrations still take place in Kabul, they are not limited to the capital: in the central province of Bamyán, “[h]undreds of youth and civil society activists [...] staged a protest against a provincial council member for [raping and] murdering a young girl” on 25 July 2012. Here, some of the slogans were: “[S]hame on the attorney, shame on incompetent officials, criminals should be punished.”<sup>58</sup> Still, this development is in its initial stages and the rule that crimes against women go unnoticed is still largely valid.

### “Moral crimes”

Afghan women victims of domestic violence have few places to turn to. Having left their original families when they were married, they are often barred from returning to their parental homes due to the stigma attached to leaving one’s husband – regardless of circumstances. In fact, “running away” from home is regarded as a “moral crime” in the traditional justice system still governing the lives of many women, particularly in rural Afghanistan. While it is not listed as a crime in the Afghan Penal Code, the Afghan Supreme Court has, through “guidance” in 2010 and 2011, instructed the country’s judges to treat “running away” as a crime. The offence tends to be linked to the formalised crime of *zina*, which can render 5-15 years of prison.<sup>59</sup> *Zina* constitutes the crime against Sharia law of extramarital sex and provides the legal ruling that can perversely lead to rape victims being imprisoned while the perpetrators remain unpunished (and, indeed, does lead to that). The EVAW law is not specific on what constitutes the crime of rape, and an accusation of rape from a female victim is often not believed if the accused man states that the act was consensual.<sup>60</sup> The crime of *zina* is not gender-specific but in practice the law is applied almost exclusively to women – and, unlike rape cases, it is enforced with vigour. For every arrest in a rape case, there are four arrests related to *zina*.<sup>61</sup>

The obsession with sexual behaviour characterising societies such as the Afghan, which expends a lot of effort on barring non-formalised sexual contacts, puts suspicions of *zina* in the

<sup>57</sup> Weda Barakoin, *Public Execution of Woman Sparks Protest*, PAN 11 July 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Hadi Ghafarion, *Bamyán Girl’s Murder Sparks Protest*, PAN 25 July 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Human Rights Watch, *“I Had to Run Away”: The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for “Moral Crimes” in Afghanistan*, March 2012, pp. 5 and 113. In 2010 an international organisation requested the Afghan Supreme Court to clarify whether “running away” is a crime. The memo issued by the Supreme Court differentiated between “running away” to the house of a relative or “legal intimate” or to security or justice departments, on one hand, and “running away” to a “stranger’s house”, on the other, considering the latter act prosecutable according to Sharia law. In September 2011, the Supreme Court elaborated on this position, which, however, in substance remained more or less the same, referring victims to “governmental channels”. See Human Rights Watch, *“I Had to Run Away”: The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for “Moral Crimes” in Afghanistan*, March 2012, pp. 101-102. As this report points out, the Supreme Court overlooks the fact that it is not safe for women to contact government institutions in these cases (p. 102).

<sup>60</sup> Also, a woman who has been raped but cannot produce four male witnesses of good standing to prove it can be jailed on the ground of false accusation, *qazf*, and/or adultery, if she is married, or “fornication” if she is unmarried. See Ann Wilkens, *Suicide Bombers and Society, A Study on Suicide Bombers in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, a report published by the Swedish Defence Research Agency, February 2011, FOI-R-3058-SE. <http://www2.foi.se/rapp/foir3058.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Based on statistics found in Afghan Women’s Network, UN SCR 1325 – *Implementation in Afghanistan*, 31 October 2011, p. 33. The report is available at [http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/AWN\\_UNSCR1325ImplementationinAfghanistan.pdf](http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/AWN_UNSCR1325ImplementationinAfghanistan.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> In a Swedish radio programme, growing up as a young woman in a culture governed by the concept of family honour was described as constantly living “on a catwalk”. Raket Chukri, *Sommar*, Sveriges Radio P1 23, July 2012.

forefront of the minds of those who are in a position to judge girls or women, be it morally or formally. Girls and women are the carriers of family honour and as such constantly watched, assessed and judged by family members, as well as the surrounding society.<sup>62</sup> Dress codes can be literally a matter of life and death. Women are expected to avoid looking strangers in the eye and are not to laugh loudly in public. How one's behaviour is evaluated by others is, in fact, more important than the actual behaviour itself.<sup>63</sup> Human Rights Watch, in its report on "running away" points to the sexist bias of judges and prosecutors dealing with "moral crimes"; and adds: "The judges also make ungrounded assumptions about women's consent in cases of alleged zina, assuming that sexual acts took place simply because a man and a woman were alone together."<sup>64</sup> Teenage girls fleeing marriage to elderly men are automatically assumed to be "motivated by 'immoral relationships' with other men" and "the mere fact that a man and a woman acknowledge knowing each other [is treated as] evidence of zina". Married women are assumed to flee home "only because of an adulterous relationship, even where there is evidence of domestic violence".<sup>65</sup> HRW estimates that, in January 2012, approximately 400 women and girls were imprisoned for "moral crimes".<sup>66</sup> It is a sad paradox that the Afghan judiciary, highly dysfunctional in most legal cases, expends so much energy and resources on regulating the behaviour of girls and women.

Against this background, escaping from home is not a solution easily at hand for victims of violence. Such escape would also, in most cases, mean that the women lose contact with their children. Still, the level of brutality, presumably fed by over three decades of almost uninterrupted armed conflict, can become so unbearable that the risks involved are simply taken. A recent case in Farah serves to illustrate how far domestic violence can go and how difficult it is to escape: the murder of a 24-year-old woman, Jamila, was reported in July 2012. Being a widow with a child, she had been forced to marry a 54-year-old man, who already had a wife and children. He maltreated Jamila and, together with a step-sister, she had fled to Pakistan but been brought back by her husband, who then intensified the maltreatment. According to her father, Jamila's husband had "chained and locked her [up] for one month and poured hot water over her body. He cut her ears, nose and lips with scissors and cut her

right foot with a saw"; and finally she was shot dead.<sup>67</sup>

## Self-immolation

Forced and/or under-age marriages are at the root of much domestic violence and abuse.<sup>68</sup> In extreme cases, victims resort to voluntary self-immolation in order to escape their fate. (Forced self-immolation also takes place but is another matter, now regulated in the EAW law.) Unlike Mohamed Bouazizi, the young Tunisian street vendor who triggered the Arab Spring by setting himself on fire on 17 December 2010, these girls attract little attention. Still, the phenomenon is reported to be on the rise<sup>69</sup> and there are signs of a link between insecurity and incidences of self-immolation.<sup>70</sup> Forced marriages and domestic violence are deemed to be the main reasons.<sup>71</sup> In some cases, self-immolation has been a reaction by young girls to being taken out of school.<sup>72</sup>

Paradoxically, the increase in the extreme practice of self-immolation is often blamed on women's rights, in the sense that girls and women are viewed as having lost their "patience" and "tolerance" as a consequence of foreign organisations having invaded the country to spread the message of individual women's rights.<sup>73</sup> However, the likelihood that these victims, mostly illiterate and in their teens, have been informed of their rights is limited. On the contrary, women themselves tend to have adopted the view that they should tolerate even conditions which seem intolerable.<sup>74</sup>

What these reactions reflect, however, is a reactionary trend in perceptions of women's rights as part of a western conspiracy foisted upon the Afghan people through military might – the same trend that has resulted in the equation of "gender" with a curse word. It is a clear illustration of the difficulty inherent in pushing values along the line of UN-SCR 1325 from outside, when domestically there is little or no political will. The conditions, however, vary inside Afghanistan, with the south and east providing the most difficult environment. For instance, in these areas there are practically no shelters for abused women.

<sup>63</sup> A researcher on the cultural codes of Pashtunwali describes this phenomenon, which is relevant not only in the Pashtun areas of Afghanistan, as follows: "Behaviour is honourable or shameful when it is honourable or shameful in the eyes of other people. [...] In addition, the cited rule implies another dichotomy: individual honour and shame are closely linked to the honour and shame of other people." Lutz Rzehak, *Doing Pashto, Pashtunwali as the ideal of honorable behavior and tribal life among Pashtuns*, Afghanistan Analysts Network, AAN Thematic Report 01/2011, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> Human Rights Watch, *"I Had to Run Away"; The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for "Moral Crimes" in Afghanistan*, March 2012, pp. 80-83.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> Zahinon, *Violence Against Women on the Rise in Farah*, PAN 25 July 2012.

<sup>68</sup> According to a 2008 report from the Afghan Public Health Institute, cited by Human Rights Watch, 173 percent of all girls between the ages of 15 and 19 were married. The same year, UNIFEM reported that 57 percent of all marriages involved at least one party under the age of 16. Human Rights Watch *"I Had to Run Away"; The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for "Moral Crimes" in Afghanistan*, March 2012, p. 31.

<sup>69</sup> medica mondiale, *Dying to be Heard, self-Immolation research report 2006-2007*, p.11, 13 and 21.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>72</sup> In one such case, medica mondiale has interviewed a family member: "Since she loved studying and school and once more she was prohibited from going to school so this time she was scared of her father and she committed suicide by burning herself." *Ibid.*, p. 64.

## Shelters

With the difficulty of escape remaining almost prohibitive, at least one safe haven for victims is provided by the system of shelters. However, there are still only “about a dozen shelters across the whole of Afghanistan”,<sup>75</sup> mainly in less conservative areas. Their existence is also precarious, regularly coming under criticism – not least from official quarters. At a conference in June 2012, organised by the Afghan parliament’s women’s affairs committee, Justice Minister Habibullah Ghaleb categorized shelters as “centres of misconduct” and suggested that women residing in them were prostitutes. In the ensuing storm of protest from Afghan women’s organisations as well as internationals, the minister apologised but did not change the substance of his statements.<sup>76</sup> At this point, shelters run by NGOs were already subjected to strict regulations, resulting from the government’s attempt in February 2011 to close all non-governmental shelters, which was largely thwarted but left the door open for detailed regulations and monitoring by the Ministry for Women’s Affairs. On this issue, the Afghan Women’s Network writes: “Had the government been successful in its campaign, women and girls seeking aid and protection from shelters would have been subjected to dehumanizing panels where they would have to make their case and forensic exams prior to being helped.”<sup>77</sup>

However, even for those relatively few women victims of violence who have access to shelters, serious problems remain. The risks involved are such that sheltered women are not allowed to go outside. With funding from the UNODC, two homes have been established for women and girls who have been released from prison, where they are allowed to leave for education and employment seeking<sup>78</sup> – but many more are needed for sheltered women to be able to change their life conditions. The difficulty for a woman to live alone, or at least without a husband, sustain and protect herself constitutes a formidable obstacle to leaving a shelter. Therefore, the way out for most victims is to seek possibilities of returning to the family from which they fled, in many cases leading to continued abuse.

## Acid throwing

To throw acid into the face of a girl or woman is a cheap, easily available and effective way of shattering her life, without much risk of punishment. Some victims die from their burns. Survivors are permanently disfigured and often blinded. The pain is excruciating. While there are also a small proportion of male victims, the practice of acid throwing is typically connected to rejected suitors who want to take revenge, while also preventing others from getting what they were refused. It is reported mostly from South Asia proper but is also a well-known phenomenon in Afghanistan, where it has been innovatively used as a tactic to deter girls from attending school. One such case took place in Kandahar in November 2008, when men on motorbikes squirted acid on three groups of teachers and students going to school, some of whom suffered permanent injury.<sup>79</sup> Naturally, the school was empty the following day. “Mysterious” gas spread inside girls’ schools serves the same purpose.<sup>80</sup> Such incidents occur with some regularity; several were reported during the summer of 2012

## Attacks against women human rights defenders

Several of the persons interviewed for this report had been subjected to threats of different kinds, commonly by telephone or e-mail.<sup>81</sup> These threats are not to be overlooked, as all too often attacks against women human rights defenders are actually carried out. On 10 August 2012, Sima Akakhel, principal of a girls’ high school in Shinkai in Balkh district, was murdered in her home by “unidentified gunmen.”<sup>82</sup> In another recent incident, Hanifa Safi, Women Affairs Director in the eastern province of Laghman, was killed by a bomb planted on her car,<sup>83</sup> while her colleague in Logar survived an attack a couple of weeks later.<sup>84</sup> Earlier in 2012, General Shafiqua, a renowned female army officer heading the gender and human rights directorate of the Ministry of Interior, was granted asylum in Norway (presumably on the ground of threats to her life). On 28 September 2008, the highest placed woman in the Kandahar police corps, Lt. Col. Malalai Kakar, was murdered by the Taliban on her way to work.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pt 5.2 The Doctrine of Women’s Rights, p. 37.

<sup>76</sup> A study on Afghan women’s perceptions of their place within a highly patriarchal society found that “[t]he significance that many women attached to the patriarchal contract was evident in their construction of the ‘virtuous woman’ as the woman who complied unquestioningly with its terms.” Naila Kabeer, Ayesha Khan and Naysan Adlparvar, *Afghan Values or Women’s Rights? Gendered Narratives about Continuity and Change in Urban Afghanistan*, IDS Working Paper, Volume 2011 No 387, p. 13.

<sup>77</sup> Human Rights Watch, “I Had to Run Away,” *The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for “Moral Crimes” in Afghanistan*, March 2012, p. 91.

<sup>78</sup> Shakeela Abrahamkhal, *Justice Minister Apologises for Derogatory Remarks on Women Shelters*, TOLO News 25 June 2012. <http://tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/6661-justice-minister-apologises-for-derogatory-remarks-on-women-shelters>. Retrieved on 26 July 2012.

<sup>79</sup> Afghan Women’s Network, *UN SCR 1325 – Implementation in Afghanistan*, 31 October 2011, p. 36. The report is available at [http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/AWN\\_UN-SCR1325ImplementationinAfghanistan.pdf](http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/AWN_UN-SCR1325ImplementationinAfghanistan.pdf).

<sup>80</sup> Human Rights Watch, “I Had to Run Away,” *The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for “Moral Crimes” in Afghanistan*, March 2012, p. 93.

<sup>81</sup> Associated Press, *Acid Attack Keeps Afghan Girls Away from School*, 14 November 2008, [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27713077/ns/world\\_news-south\\_and\\_central\\_asia/v/acid-attack-keeps-afghan-girls-away-school/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27713077/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/v/acid-attack-keeps-afghan-girls-away-school/). Retrieved on 27 July 2012.

<sup>82</sup> As a rule, authorities have failed to ascertain what kind of gas has been used, how the attack has been carried out and, consequently, also to punish perpetrators.

<sup>83</sup> No “night letters” were among the threats reported in this particular context but such letters, slipped through the front door during the night, still seem to be the preferred method of intimidation among the Taliban.

Other prominent women who have been killed include Sitara Achakzai, a member of the Kandahar Provincial Council, who was gunned down on 12 April 2009 by two unknown men on a motorbike; Zakia Zaki, head of the Afghan Peace Radio in Parwan, who was shot to death in her bed on 6 June 2007 in the presence of her children; and Shaima Rezayee, a 24-year-old TV broadcaster, who was shot to death in her home on 18 May 2008. Suspected perpetrators vary, including the Taleban, warlords and close relatives, but the common feature is that no one has been sentenced for any of these crimes.

## Rape

Rape inside marriage is not a recognised concept in Afghanistan, as the presumption is that a wife should be sexually available to her husband according to his wish<sup>86</sup> (while a husband should also spread his sexual attention equally if he has multiple wives). This view was instituted in the Shia Personal Status law signed by President Karzai in 2009, which regulates marriage, divorce and inheritance for the Afghan Shia population (estimated at around 20 percent of the total) but is relevant beyond the sectarian divide. Rape outside marriage, however, is considered a serious crime – not least by the Taleban, who, i. a. by restricting the mobility of women, wanted to create a “secure environment where the chasteness and dignity of women [might] once again be sacrosanct.”<sup>87</sup> In fact, the Taleban movement arose as a reaction against the anarchy spread after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 by the warring Mujahedin leaders. Mass rape took place during this period.<sup>88</sup> As such, their intervention was generally welcomed by the public – until the extent and brutality of Taleban oppression was felt.

The legacy of human rights violations preceding the 2001 international intervention has been extensively investigated by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in its report “A Call for Justice” published in January 2005.<sup>89</sup> It found that atrocities “of an enormous scale” had been committed in Afghanistan: “Out of over 2 000 focus group participants, over 500 referred to killings among their relatives. Almost 400 had experienced torture

and detention either themselves or in their immediate family.”<sup>90</sup> The report went on to state: “There was some variation, in that more men than women recalled crimes in the Soviet-Communist period, whereas more women recalled crimes during the Mujahedeen period. Male and female respondents reported the same percentage of violations during the Taliban period (lower than the other two periods).”<sup>91</sup> Thus, while Mujahedin were responsible for much direct violence against women, the violence coming from the Taleban was more indirect, for instance through preventing women from feeding themselves and their families, with the result, among other damages, that more forced and underage marriages took place as an economic solution.<sup>92</sup>

As several of the warlords implicated in human rights abuse had by 2005 already risen to positions of power, the AIHRC report landed with great difficulty in the Afghan debate and was hushed up in official fora. It was originally intended to provide a basis for a following transitional justice process, advocated by Afghans and supported by internationals. However, in spite of the fact that an overwhelming majority of Afghans were in favour of bringing war criminals to justice, to date this process has not set off. The five-point action plan elaborated on the basis of the report and adopted by the government, spanning a period of four years, has expired without being extended.<sup>93</sup>

On the contrary, in what appears to be a quest for short-term stability rather than long-term reconciliation, an amnesty law was passed by the Afghan parliament in 2007, promoted by a coalition of powerful warlords and their supporters who wanted to prevent the prosecution of individuals responsible for large-scale human rights abuses in the preceding decades. This “National Reconciliation, General Amnesty and Stability Law” states that all those who were engaged in armed conflict before the formation of the interim administration in Afghanistan in December 2001 shall “enjoy all their legal rights and shall not be prosecuted.”<sup>94</sup> After a wave of national and international protests, President Karzai promised not to sign the law. Still, it was published in the official gazette in 2009 and is thus valid (and must somehow have been signed). According to the AIHRC report, the fact that “[m]any persons who committed gross human rights

<sup>82</sup> Zabihullah Ehsas, *Girls' School Principal Shot Dead*, PAN 11 August 2012.

<sup>83</sup> Abdul Mueed Hashemion, *Women Affairs Director Killed in Bomb Attack*, PAN 13 July 2012, and Amie Ferris-Rotman and Mirwais Harooni, *Afghan Teen Murder Spotlights Growing Violence against Women*, Reuters 16 July 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/16/us-afghanistan-women-killing-idUSBRE86F0CD20120716>. Retrieved on 26 July 2012.

<sup>84</sup> *Women, policemen among 11 killed*, PAN report on 28 July 2012.

<sup>85</sup> The latter two incidents have been widely reported by national and international media. This applies also to the murders mentioned in the following paragraph. For a more detailed account of these crimes, see Human Rights Watch, “*We Have the Promises of the World*,” *Women's Rights in Afghanistan*, December 2009.

<sup>86</sup> As stated in the Hadith Collection by “Imam” Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ismail Bukhari, whose rendition of hadiths is considered authentic by conservative mullahs: “Your women are your fields, therefore go to your fields as you please.” Vol. 2, p. 729 (Kitab Tafsir, chapter 579, Hadith 1641).

<sup>87</sup> Nancy Hatch Dupree, *Afghan Women under the Taliban*, in William Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, Hurst and Company 2001, pp. 145-166.

<sup>88</sup> Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), *A Call for Justice – A National Consultation on Past Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan*, 25 January 2005, p. 4. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/47fdad50.html>.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>91</sup> According to marital traditions in Afghanistan, the groom has to pay a bride price, often higher the younger the girl.

violations remain in power [...] has provoked a profound disappointment in Afghans together with an almost total breakdown of trust in authority and public institutions.”<sup>95</sup>

Still today, the Taleban are not known as rapists. When Afghan women fear sexual attacks outside of their homes, they have other perpetrators in mind: neighbours, bandits, militias linked to warlords or created by the international coalition in order to maintain security on local levels – or even the police. Consequently, the international community finds itself largely on the wrong side of this subject – or, at least, has little moral high ground to rely on.

## Afghan perceptions of the international role

While a number of international contributions have been made towards increasing the protection of Afghan women, e.g. through the education of midwives or the opening of more shelters, the fact remains that, on an overall level, insecurity has increased in Afghanistan during the last decade of international intervention and women are the first group to be negatively affected by lack of security.<sup>96</sup> In the eyes of many Afghans, this development is interpreted as a consequence of the presence of foreign troops, since these troops are the primary reason for the activity of opposing armed groups. Paradoxically however, the exit of the international troops also creates fear: “Who will then protect us against the Taleban?”

***“I have two nightmares – one is that the American troops leave and the other is that the American troops stay.”***

- Afghan expatriate

The ongoing transition period has already affected women’s mobility<sup>97</sup> and women are among those most vocally advocating the (presumably lost) cause of a prolongation of massive international military presence beyond 2014.

In the ongoing conflict, the international troops support the government side, while parts of the Afghan public see the government as a danger on a par with, if not worse than the opposing armed groups. Predatory government officials, corrupt policemen and unruly militias used to supplement the Afghan National Army (ANA) or the Afghan National Police (ANP) contribute to this perception. Civilian casualties, which until 2012 were increasing year by year,<sup>98</sup> insensitive night raids, Quran burnings and other misbehaviour by international troops have led to a change of attitude, compared to the first years of the intervention when the international troops were largely welcomed. An Afghan interpreter working with the Swedish troops in Balkh, a relatively peaceful province, recently stated: “Most Afghans do not understand the purpose of the foreign presence and do not support Afghans working with the ISAF troops.”<sup>99</sup>

Aid programmes and projects aiming to increase the protection of Afghan women are dwarfed by this overall development – which is not to say that these interventions are not welcomed. In some ways they have led to structural changes, for instance by educating girls, increasing the life expectancy of women and making them visible in public life. But progress is still perceived to be precarious. Setbacks, and even reversal, of these improvements cannot be excluded in the coming phase, following the troop withdrawal.

There are also complaints that the international community does not fully understand the extent of the threats that active women are facing in Afghanistan. For example, endangered activists who want to go abroad for protection often encounter difficulties in speedily getting visas. At the same time, the fact that endangered female activists who cannot go abroad do not receive government protection on a par with male colleagues in the same situation is perceived to be accepted by the international community without much ado. Another complaint concerns the ease with which international funds have been spent on women’s projects without enough transparency or follow-up. Badly conceived projects and incidents of corruption have fed into men’s feelings that women are unduly privileged by the international actors and created a dangerous brew of suspicion and envy, possibly resulting in backlash. The other side of the coin is a feeling of undue

<sup>95</sup> Afghan Women’s Network, UN SCR 1325 – *Implementation in Afghanistan*, 31 October 2011, p. 38. The report is available at [http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/AWN\\_UN-SCR1325ImplementationinAfghanistan.pdf](http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/AWN_UN-SCR1325ImplementationinAfghanistan.pdf).

<sup>96</sup> Notably, the law contravenes UNSCR 1325, which in its paragraph 11 “*Emphasizes* the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls, and in this regard stresses the need to exclude these crimes, where feasible from amnesty provisions.”

<sup>97</sup> Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), *A Call for Justice - A National Consultation on Past Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan*, 25 January 2005, p. 17. Since the presentation of this report, confidence in the government has been further eroded, as the government has largely failed to live up to the “expectation that public institutions will be transformed in order to make a meaningful change to the daily lives of people through protecting the people from abuse and providing effective services [...] [i]n particular those institutions that have a direct impact on the fundamental human rights of Afghans, such as the judiciary, prosecutor, police and army”. Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>98</sup> In a conflict analysis initiated by Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, it is found that “[t]he perception of [security of] women and men differs significantly, and women have a much more negative view of present and future security, which indicates that women are those who first are affected by violence. This is more pronounced in more violent districts.” Björn Holmberg and others, *Strategic Conflict Analysis of Afghanistan*, Swedepace and Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU), 19 January 2012, reference number 2011-000560, p. IV.

<sup>99</sup> In the Afghan Women’s Declaration from the international conference in Bonn in December 2011, it is stated: “Women from the first round of transition provinces confirm that their mobility has been impacted [...]” Paragraph 9. The Declaration is available at <http://www.boell.de/downloads/2011-12-afghans-womens-declaration.pdf>

<sup>97</sup> That fact that UNAMA has been able to demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of civilian casualties are caused by the Taleban does not always have the warranted impact, as people still tend to see the whole conflict situation as a consequence of the presence of foreign troops.



entitlement among women's groups that could serve to undermine serious efforts.

The general understanding is that there has been a negative development in the international engagement in women's protection issues over the last few years. The lack of international reaction to the Ulema statement in March 2012 was often mentioned as a case in point. Even though there may have been tacit diplomatic interventions, publicly there was silence. More international support is also seen as needed to avoid back-sliding on progressive measures such as the new EVAW law.

## What could the international community do?

While mass rape of women is not known to have taken place in the ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan, protection issues remain very relevant. There are a number of things which could be done in order to increase the protection of Afghan women. One of the root causes of the disempowerment of Afghan women is lack of education. Illiteracy entails a lack of control over one's own life. The ability to read and write constitutes basic empowerment and more still needs to be done on that score. In spite of the unprecedented expansion of girls' schools, illiteracy among women is still estimated to be as high as over 85 percent and over half of all girls still do not go to school.<sup>100</sup> Women who can contribute to their families' income are likely to receive better treatment in their own homes than women who are financially entirely dependent. Contributions to the education sector thus continue to be crucial.

Maternal mortality in Afghanistan remains among the highest in the world, with an estimated 500 deaths per 100,000 live births, or one pregnancy-related death every two hours<sup>101</sup> In many cases, it is a consequence of under-age marriages resulting in premature pregnancies. But it also reflects the lack of medical services, as well as women's difficulties in accessing these services. According to statistics, 60 percent of child births are still unattended – since services are available

in most towns, this figure means that in the countryside practically all child births take place without assistance.<sup>102</sup> The scope of the problem warrants classification as structural violence against women. Contributions to sexual and reproductive health remain very important.

The justice sector is central and one where international commitment was slow in taking off. While not discounting important interventions to improve women's access to justice, e.g. by the opening of Family Response Units across the country and the training of more women police officers, the corruption within the formal justice sector seems to have reached such a level that it cannot be easily reversed.<sup>103</sup> Contributions to promoting a more enlightened informal sector, using traditional shuras or jirgas, are therefore regularly discussed but remain controversial and are seen by many as a way to avoid building a proper judiciary. There is also fear that ongoing attempts to formalise the informal justice mechanism will result in legitimising anti-women practices. However, informal justice mechanisms should not be confused with justice according to Sharia laws, which are already incorporated as a pillar in the Afghan system. More progressive interpretations of the Sharia law could be propagated by less conservative religious circles in Afghanistan and support to these efforts could come from less conservative Muslim countries. In this context, it is notable that many women's organisations now call for support and training in mastering religious law.

Specific efforts should be made to equalise the legal marriage age of 16 for females<sup>104</sup> and 18 for males – and, at least, the set standard should be respected. The law against forced marriages should be implemented. Also, the issue of transitional justice has been allowed to slip off the agenda far too easily<sup>105</sup> – the international community should revert to it and more pressure should be applied. The fact that, unlike other countries with a recent past of human rights abuses, no victims' organisations have been formed in Afghanistan illustrates the prevailing atmosphere of putting a lid on any attempt to deal with the issue – it does not mean that wounds are healing by themselves.

<sup>98</sup> Article in the Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet, 30 July 2012, Author's translation.

<sup>99</sup> Statistics in Afghanistan are difficult to ascertain. According to the CIA World Fact Book 2012, adult literacy rates are 43.1% for men (over 15) and 12.6% for women (over 15). Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals Report 2012 states that, overall, only 17% of men and 6% of women (over 25) had any access to formal education until recently. According to figures quoted in, i.a., the World Bank report *Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014* (May 2012), 72 million children were enrolled in school in 2011, 68% of all boys and 44% of all girls.

<sup>100</sup> This figure was reported by the Afghanistan Mortality Study 2010 carried out by the Ministry of Health. It implied a significant reduction of maternal mortality since 2005, when a UN study put the figure at 1 800. BBC News Asia, 30 November 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-15942940>. Retrieved on 26 July 2012.

<sup>102</sup> Figure obtained from the Country Director of UN Women, interviewed in Kabul.

<sup>103</sup> A 2010 study by UNODC, cited by Human Rights Watch, found that judges and prosecutors occupied the fourth and fifth place respectively, among the categories of government officials reported to most often demand (as well as receive) bribes. (Police officers came first and over 25 percent of the people surveyed reported that they had paid a bribe to a police officer on at least one occasion in the last 12 months.) Human Rights Watch, *"I Had to Run Away": The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for "Moral Crimes" in Afghanistan*, March 2012, p. 86.

<sup>104</sup> If parents or a judge consent, exceptions can be made for females to marry at 15.

<sup>105</sup> Already during the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002, delegates with known records of human rights abuses were included in spite of regulations against such participation, without much in the way of protest from the international community. The same breach of regulations occurred at the Constitutional Loya Jirga in 2003. Neither have provisions in the Election Law aiming to exclude candidates affiliated to parties with military wings been effectively implemented. Cf. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), *A Call for Justice - A National Consultation on Past Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan*, 25 January 2005, p. 43. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/477dfad50.html>.

# Sweden's National Action Plan

Among the first countries, Sweden published its National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in 2006, covering the period 2006-2008. In February 2009, the second NAP for the period 2009-2012 was finalised.<sup>106</sup> It defined three overriding goals:

1. "A considerably larger proportion of women to participate in international peace-support and security-building operations, within the framework of regional and international organisations, and operations to be implemented with a gender perspective in order to increase their effectiveness.
2. The protection of women and girls in conflict situations to be strengthened and based on analysis in which women participate actively.
3. Women in conflict areas to participate fully and on equal terms with men at all levels in mechanisms and institutions for conflict prevention, crisis management, peace-building, humanitarian operations and other initiatives during a post-conflict phase."

The NAP is global in nature. There is no specific action plan concerning Afghanistan.<sup>107</sup> Still, Afghanistan is highly relevant to the NAP, providing an example of a range of interventions in the political, military and development assistance fields.

On a general level, Swedish ambitions regarding the implementation of UNSCR are high. In the National Action Plan it is stated that "Sweden will continue to be at the forefront in terms of both national implementation and action to move developments forward at international level." When it comes to implementation on the ground in Afghanistan, however, this proves to be quite complicated. As found in this report, results are mixed.

## Contextual complications

What Afghanistan also provides, however, is a problematic environment for the lofty goals of the NAP. Consider the following:

**Sweden is a small actor in Afghanistan**, providing less than one percent of the international troops and ranking as number

15 among the international assistance donors.<sup>108</sup> Consequently, it has limited possibilities to crucially influence the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan. It could (and, in fact, does) enhance its influence by being particularly creative and strategic in its action. It could also (and, in fact, does) link up with like-minded actors. But the action would still remain marginal and the circle of like-minded countries would still remain small. The notion of Sweden's limited influence is a notoriously difficult sell to the Swedish public and it also clashes with the very *raison-d'être* of an action plan, intended to provide a road map on how to achieve desired goals, in this case the strengthening of the participation and protection of women in Afghanistan. A realistic discussion on what Sweden could actually achieve is overshadowed by the political need to manifest a palatable and efficient-looking course of action. This creates a gap between rhetoric and reality which risks generating cynicism.

**With regard to participation**, the Afghan interpretation of gender equality generally differs from the underlying assumption of the Swedish NAP that women and men could – and should – carry out the same tasks, that women should "participate fully and on equal terms with men at all levels" of all actions. In Afghanistan, however, it would be more a question of women participating and contributing on the basis of their womanhood, i.e. the difference between the gender roles, rather than the equality between the genders, would remain in focus. While gender mainstreaming as interpreted in the West would normally be based on an analysis of the different roles of women and men in society, it still reflects the idea that men and women can do the same things, that exclusion of women from certain areas would be discrimination and should be amended – not the idea that men and women have parallel but equally valuable roles. There is still a long way to go for Afghans to buy into that western concept of gender equality - and not much will to do so. Even women's organisations tend to stress the importance of women mainly in the perspective of their different experience and ability, e.g. as "messengers of peace." Within this conceptual framework, women can also stay aloof from the violence and crimes against human rights inherent in armed conflict, i.e. retain a certain moral high ground. Thus, western field advisers trained to promote

<sup>106</sup> Available at <http://kvinnaillkvinna.se/sites/default/files/HP1325%202009-2012%20final%20engelsk%20version.pdf>. Retrieved on 26 August 2012.

<sup>107</sup> So far, the only country to have developed a separate strategy for Afghanistan is the United Kingdom. See Annette Jansen, *Enhancing the Cumulative Impact of 1325 - Efforts in Afghanistan*, An Oxfam Novib Commissioned Study, p. 36.

<sup>108</sup> Björn Holmberg and others, *Strategic Conflict Analysis of Afghanistan*, Swedepace and Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU), 19 January 2012, reference number 2011-000560, pp. 1-2.

gender equality are likely to come up against formidable obstacles in the Afghan reality.

***When it comes to protection***, the most striking characteristic of the Afghan situation is the extreme vulnerability of the Afghan women and the fact that domestic violence forms such a large part of the total picture. Even in Sweden, it is very difficult for outsiders to impact the situation inside people's homes, let alone to transcend the huge barriers preventing such action in a country like Afghanistan, where the concept that "my home is my castle" is thoroughly entrenched and graphically illustrated by the walls surrounding family homes – and where domestic violence is largely accepted as normal, even by its victims. Secondary action, e.g. to prevent child marriages, provide women with education, and improve their access to justice seems to offer the most practicable ways to improve the situation – but slow and not spectacular in the short run, and as such running counter to political needs to present bold action and quick results.

On the other hand, looking at external, non-domestic violence against women, the fact that the international intervention of which Sweden is part maintains and supports the government means that it is not neutral in today's situation of increasing violence from several quarters. It is part of the government side and that side has become increasingly compromised since 2001, while the armed conflict has also spread and intensified. From the start, the invading US-led coalition allied itself with Afghan warlords recruited to do its bidding on the ground, thus re-empowering elements which had then been largely counted out and which were tainted by war crimes in the preceding decades. Today, many of these warlords occupy central positions in the Afghan state institutions, and they also dominate the High Peace Council instituted to handle the peace process. This development has been, if not applauded, at least tolerated by the international community as a whole. Having experienced this evolution, it is not far-fetched for the Afghan public to conclude that the foreign military intervention has, at least partly, served to deepen insecurity, rather than increase stability. As an ISAF contributor, Sweden is naturally included in the picture. The initially relatively peaceful northern region, where Sweden established its PRT in 2006, has also been increasingly drawn

into the armed conflict. Whatever the reasons for the intensification of the conflict, Afghans are unlikely to conclude that foreign troops have brought peace, as presumably they were meant to. And with the increased insecurity comes a backlash affecting Afghan women, both in terms of participation – mobility is becoming more difficult – and in terms of protection – militias and local police forces are potential perpetrators of violence, rather than guardians of security.

Going beyond the immediate goals of the NAP and ***looking at the regional situation surrounding Afghanistan***, the picture becomes even more complex. For Sweden, the intervention in Afghanistan is massive – but it targets Afghanistan almost as if it were an island, or at least it stops at its borders. The difficulties inherent in Afghanistan's geostrategic position between rivalling neighbours beset by problems have largely been overlooked in the documents governing Swedish action in Afghanistan.

# Sweden and resolution 1325 in Afghanistan

## Political action

As the last of the Scandinavian countries, Sweden only opened a full-fledged embassy in Kabul in 2008. Before that, during a number of years after the international intervention in 2001, relations with Afghanistan were maintained via side-accreditation of the Swedish ambassador in Islamabad, while a Sida-run office in Kabul dealt mainly with humanitarian and development aid. When the embassy opened, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan had been active on the ground for over 25 years. Even today, when asked about Sweden, more Afghans will be aware of the “Swedish Committee” than of Sweden’s official presence. The SCA has managed to balance its activities impartially through different political phases and remains one of the largest NGOs active on the Afghan countryside. Its development work still earns Sweden as a nation a fair amount of credibility.

As previously noted, the massive foreign presence in Afghanistan today leaves Sweden in the role of a minor actor.<sup>109</sup> Still, together with the Nordics and a few other like-minded countries, it can form a bloc with a distinct voice in the international dealings on Afghanistan. But even such a bloc cannot bridge the large gap in influence between the United States and its closest allies on one hand, and the rest of the international community on the other. In matters related to UNSCR 1325, however, the Nordics generally have a good reputation among Afghan activists as countries which are more inclined than others to push this agenda. Appreciation of Nordic and Swedish action in the political context was frequently voiced during the interviews, while the overall effect of such action was still questioned. Internally, on the ground in Kabul, the cooperation among Nordic countries was also reported to be good, although Denmark has a slightly different profile than the others when it comes to NATO-related issues.<sup>110</sup> The EU, acting on political matters through its Special Representative’s office in Kabul, also enjoys a relatively good reputation on UNSCR 1325-related issues, though, over the years, it has varied with the profile of different representatives. Thus, Sweden has several options for action via different constellations and the extent to which these options are utilised largely depends on individual

embassy officials, as the pressure from Stockholm reportedly is seldom felt.

Among the Nordics, the country which stands out is Finland. The Finnish government has initiated a twinning project with the Afghan government on “Women, Peace and Security”, the ultimate goal of which is to support the Afghan government in its efforts to work out a National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 that will incorporate existing policies and address remaining gaps. The process initiated is an extensive one, involving awareness raising and the strengthening of political will both inside the government institutions and through a series of consultations across the provinces. Afghan ownership is central to the project, which could serve to bridge the often criticised gaps between elite women activists in Kabul and disempowered women in the countryside. Unlike, for instance, the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA), an extensive document edited by international consultants and launched in 2008 but poorly implemented, the NAP is meant to be widely based, and to include proper budget and time lines, as well as mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation – which means that working it out is a time-consuming and cumbersome process. According to plan, the international lead has been handed over to UN Women, with continued Finnish assistance. While some women activists voiced scepticism regarding this move, the Finnish view is that, in the long run, it would be politically unfeasible not to have the relevant international organisation in the lead. UN Women is reported to have gone through a bad spate in Kabul but now to be slowly getting on its feet again.

Swedish support to the elaboration of the Afghan NAP has been limited. According to Swedish diplomats, the embassy simply does not have the resources to engage actively. (However, the Finnish embassy is smaller than the Swedish one – ultimately this may be a question of priorities, dependent on political will and push from the respective governments.) Nor is the SCA, which is generally regarded not to be in the forefront on gender issues, among the international NGOs currently rounded up by the Afghan Ministry for Foreign Affairs to support the process. While, thus, Sweden’s influence on the NAP process is marginal, it also remains to be seen if

<sup>109</sup> Sweden provides less than one percent of ISAF troops and ranks as number 15 when it comes to development aid (but higher, number eight, in humanitarian assistance). Björn Holmberg and others, *Strategic Conflict Analysis of Afghanistan*, Swedepace and Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU), 19 January 2012, reference number 2011-000560, pp. 1-2.

<sup>110</sup> A former Danish prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, is currently serving as Secretary-General of Nato. As the only Nordic country, Denmark was part of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom fighting the Taliban after the 9/11 attacks. The Danish troops have been concentrated in Helmand in the Afghan south, where the armed conflict is at a much higher level than in the north and northwest (where Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian troops are concentrated), and Denmark is reported to be the country carrying the highest casualties per capita of the troop-contributing countries in Afghanistan. Among the Nordic countries, Sweden and Finland have not joined NATO.

this process will fulfil the game-changing purpose lined out for it. If not, the Swedish prioritisation of other contributions to UNSCR 1325-related areas, may turn out to have served a better purpose.

After a first visit to Afghanistan soon after the fall of the Taleban in 2001 by the then minister for migration and development cooperation, Swedish high-level visitors were scarce during a number of years. Later, the opening of a Swedish-led PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif in March 2006 entailed visits by the minister for defence and, after a change of government later that year, the number of ministerial visits increased, particularly by the minister for foreign affairs, Carl Bildt. The extent to which these visits have promoted UNSCR 1325-related issues is, however, deemed by most observers to be marginal. Afghan women leaders have seldom been included in the programme. However, in connection with a March 2012 visit days after the *Ulema* statement had been issued, Bildt did meet with representatives of the women's affairs commission of the parliament, including its chair Fawzia Koofi. Otherwise, in the Swedish governmental division of labour, international gender issues seem to have been delegated to the minister for development cooperation (and UNSCR 1325 seems to be treated as a gender issue, not as a matter of security policy).<sup>111</sup> This minister, however, has not been in Afghanistan since an initial visit in 2007.

It follows that the Swedish political dialogue on UNSCR 1325 can hardly be deemed to be very strong, although as part of the Nordic and/or EU group, Sweden still enjoys a good reputation on this score. To the extent that Sweden itself has earned respect in this context, it seems to have been based largely on individual initiatives, which makes it vulnerable to the high turn-over of officials in Afghanistan (albeit not as high among diplomats as among the military). The Swedish profile could possibly have been strengthened, had an ambassador with special responsibility for UNSCR 1325 been appointed in Stockholm, but these plans were scrapped at an early stage. On the other hand, such an appointment might have served to further deepen the confusion already at hand when it comes to the responsibility for Afghanistan in the Swedish government. Several ministries as well as government agencies are involved and, in times when Afghan

issues are high on the media agenda, meetings and instructions dealing with Afghan affairs tend to become unwieldy due to the number of interested parties wanting to have their say. In addition, a strong Swedish tradition of consensus decisions serves to dilute positions.

On the level of the ministry of foreign affairs, there is a similar lack of focus, from where political issues can be effectively pushed. At least two departments (the one for Asia and the one for security policy) and three ambassadors deal with Afghanistan (one in Kabul, one who is heading the TST in Mazar-e-Sharif and a Stockholm-based special envoy covering Afghanistan and Pakistan). Several other embassies and delegations are also involved. Consequently, coordination tends to be complicated and the sheer number of players makes it difficult to react fast to upcoming events. The dialogue between the centre in Stockholm and the periphery in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif is also patchy, as is the communication between the different offices in Afghanistan.

## Military action

Sweden decided to join the International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, mandated by the UN in December 2001, at an early stage and in 2002 dispatched a number of intelligence officers to Kabul (which was then the only place where ISAF was mandated to work). The decision was a logical consequence of the wish on the part of the government to be regarded as an active member of the UN, a constructive member of the EU, and a country which fit into the good books of NATO even though it was not prepared to join it as a member. The Swedish military forces were also in the process of transforming from a role primarily geared towards protection of the homeland to a more international one in the sphere of crisis management and peace-building. This process was linked to a reshaping of the recruitment, going from a conscripted army to a professional one. In addition to the worthy cause of liberating Afghans from the Taleban regime and building a better society, military as well as civilian leaders were keen to get some practice in the area of nation-building in a post-conflict country. Afghanistan offered a

<sup>111</sup> It is also notable that, in the Swedish embassy setup, reporting on gender issues is not part of the political officer's mandate but is generally done by officials who have their background in Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

testing ground, legitimised by the international community, for new roles and responsibilities in a changing world. In any case – and this is something Sweden shared with most troop contributors – the decision to join ISAF was not primarily founded on a profound analysis of Afghanistan and the possibility to turn that country into a model democracy, nor on an extensive consultation inside Sweden, including for instance the expertise on Afghanistan available inside the SCA.

Naturally, disappointments were to follow, especially after the Taliban resurgence in the middle of the decade which turned the post-conflict situation around to something which looked more like pre-conflict. At the same time, since March 2006, Sweden had expanded its role – again without a wide consultation outside of military and government circles – to take responsibility for a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Mazar-e-Sharif, covering four provinces in the north of Afghanistan.<sup>112</sup> The contingent gradually grew and in 2012 included around 500 men and women. From this peak, the countdown is starting with the withdrawal of around 100 persons by the end of 2012, and by mid-2014 there will be a maximum of 200 Swedes, primarily engaged in military training and support of the Afghan National Army.<sup>113</sup>

Since its inception in 2007, Sweden has also contributed to EUPOL, the police support mission set up and led by the European Union, a body that encountered great initial difficulties but is now starting to be more functional, albeit hampered by, i. a., security requirements that make its operations slow, cumbersome and costly. Some 20 Swedish police officers are working within EUPOL and, in August 2012, a Swede, Åke Roghe, took up his position as head of the mission.<sup>114</sup>

### ***The Provincial Reconstruction Team/Transition Support Team***

Large investments in infrastructure have accompanied the military presence, notably through the build-up of Camp Northern Lights (CNL) on the outskirts of Mazar-e-Sharif, which will now have to be dismantled in, again, a major financial and logistical undertaking. Thus, the military

participation has entailed large costs but in terms of human sacrifices, Sweden has suffered less than comparable troop contributors. Still, so far, seven persons working for the Swedish Armed Forces have died in Afghanistan, five Swedes and two Afghans. Unlike other countries, these deaths have not led to a major debate on the purpose and usefulness of having a military presence in Afghanistan but been largely accepted as a regrettable consequence of decisions made in democratic order. In a recent survey, Sweden stood out as the European country where a relatively large proportion of the population, 48 percent, supports continued military presence in Afghanistan – compared to a European average of 29 percent.<sup>115</sup>

Once the military presence was established in Mazar-e-Sharif, the Swedish government wanted to show its good will by also contributing to development efforts in the four provinces covered by the PRT. Partly, this was a response to initial criticism of the Swedish presence coming from provincial authorities and power-brokers and thus part of “force protection.” But there were also genuine wishes among the Swedes who were put into contact with Afghan realities to do something useful for the people they met. Their dilemma was enhanced by the fact that their Finnish colleagues in the PRT<sup>116</sup> were more generously endowed with funds for local projects, while practically the only budget lines available for this type of assistance in the Swedish system are provided by the development cooperation budget. Officials dealing with aid, it turned out, were not willing to run the errands of the army. The SCA was also anxious to keep a distance to the Swedish military presence, in order to protect its function as an impartial actor, and thereby also its employees. (Among SCA members, there was opposition to Sweden’s military presence, as well as proponents in favour of this presence and the organisation had decided to stay neutral on the issue.)

The discussion between military and development officials on how aid funds should and could (according to internationally agreed standards) be used was heated over a number of years but subsided once the government, after initial resistance from Sida, managed to direct ear-marked development funding amounting to one third of the total budget for Afghanistan to the PRT-covered provinces. Still, the aid

<sup>112</sup> These are Balkh, Samangan, Jowzjan and Sar-e-Pul.

<sup>113</sup> According to information from the Swedish Armed Forces in September 2012, under the prevailing circumstances it has been deemed unfeasible to include Swedish women in the Operational Mentoring and Training Teams (OMLT), which are the main instrument for training and support of the Afghan National Army.

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/7256/a/196726>.

<sup>115</sup> In addition, twice as many Swedes, six percent, as average Europeans, three percent, were in favour of increasing the troops. *Transatlantic Trends 2011 Partners*, p. 23. The report also states: “Sweden’s first year in the survey revealed that the country’s public opinion stood apart from other EU countries on a number of issues. The Swedes were the most likely to approve of their government’s handling of foreign policies and the least likely to be affected by the economic crisis. Compared to other Europeans, the Swedes were more willing to maintain troops in Afghanistan, more supportive of the intervention in Libya, and more likely to promote democracy in the Middle East and North Africa.” Pp. 1-2. Available at [http://www.gmfus.org/publications/\\_TT/TT2011\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://www.gmfus.org/publications/_TT/TT2011_final_web.pdf). Retrieved on 14 September 2012.

<sup>116</sup> The PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif is a joint Swedish-Finnish undertaking but the lead has remained in the hands of Sweden, which also provides the bulk of the troops.

process remained abstract and slow to many PRT officials wanting quick impact on the ground. Partly due to the quick turn-over of military personnel, a complete understanding between these two branches of government may never have been reached – but the possibilities to cooperate and reinforce each other's actions without mixing them up, were increasingly exploited. According to the development strategy for Afghanistan, the aid focus on northern Afghanistan will be enhanced during transition and beyond but it remains to be seen whether the aid presence in the north can survive the exit of the troops.

Judging from a number of conversations over the years, as well as interviews done for this report, the Swedish contingent enjoys a good reputation inside ISAF, as a collaborative and highly professional partner. If it is deemed to have a special profile, it would be as especially competent on gender and UNSCR 1325-related issues. In this area, Sweden as an individual country, as well as the Nordics as a bloc of countries, is perceived to have taken the lead within the international community. The fact that the PRT was provided with a civilian leadership and relabelled as a Transition Support Team (TST) in March 2012 was not deemed by interviewees to have involved much substantive change but was seen rather as a way to align it with the ongoing process of gradual transfer of responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces.

### ***Gender Field Advisers***

On the military side of the implementation of UNSCR 1325, the most tangible action is the insertion of Gender Field Advisers (GFA) into the different contingents, with the main task of mainstreaming the gender perspective throughout military action. In order to effectively cover the whole contingent, GFAs appoint Gender Focal Points (GFP) among the participating soldiers. The GFAs were included in the decision-making circle surrounding the field commander, thus ensuring that the perspective of both men and women are taken into consideration in the planning of every military operation. In practice, however, some GFAs reported difficulties in asserting themselves in the decision-making process,

especially in periods of armed clashes when traditional military arguments tended to take over. Not all GFAs had felt the support of the field commander, a factor which was deemed crucial to their effectiveness also by the vast majority who had encountered no problem in this regard. Another problem reported was a substantial gap between an understanding leadership and the bulk of the common soldiers still looking on these issues as peripheral, if not as a cumbersome expression of political correctness aloof of harsh military realities.

In addition to the main task of improving the gender quality of internal military decisions, GFAs are free to take external initiatives promoting women's rights or, more particularly, the objectives of UNSCR 1325. In general, however, GFAs deemed this to be better done through civilian personnel – but sometimes GFAs cooperated in this area with the civilian political, police and/or development advisers also present in the PRT. As described in the interviews, the few initiatives carried out varied substantially, as did their relevance to the objectives of UNSCR 1325. Recurrent efforts concerned promotion of women inside the Afghan security forces, e.g. by ensuring that women officers were given more prominent roles in different contexts and thus made more visible as actors, in the hope that this would have consequences for the way they were viewed by male colleagues. Other action had facilitated networking between Afghan women, through transport and other provisions. Initiatives in cooperation with other military contingents were also reported. For instance, Swedish GFAs (who had the contacts but no money) had served to link up Female Engagement Teams<sup>117</sup> provided by the US (who had the money but no contacts) with local actors when they first arrived in the northern areas.

In efforts to enhance the visibility of Afghan female actors, Swedish military representatives encounter much the same difficulty as international diplomats – that of having rather little to show for themselves. On average, women constitute approximately 8-10 percent of the Swedish contingent to Afghanistan,<sup>118</sup> which compared to other troop-contributing countries is not a low figure but remains far from the desired gender balance (which would ideally entail a participation level of 40 percent by the underrepresented gender). Perhaps even more importantly, the portion has not changed much

<sup>117</sup> NATO describes the Female Engagement Teams as follows: "The FETs are an initiative implemented in 2010 by the United States Marine Core [sic] under the US-led counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom. Female-only teams are being fielded to engage with the local population, particularly Afghan women who, due to social customs, rarely engage with male soldiers. The US Marine Corps has 16 FETs based in and around Helmand province, Afghanistan. Another four are British-led. The FETs are being run independently of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)." *Engaging Women on the Frontline*, 18 July 2011. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_76542.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_76542.htm). Retrieved on 30 August 2012.

<sup>118</sup> Ten percent was a figure received from the Swedish Armed Forces in August 2012. During a meeting called on 5 September 2012 by the armed forces to evaluate experiences from gender work in Afghanistan, eight percent was the figure given for the two contingents in 2011.

during the last years. Also, as testified during the interviews, most of these women tend to stay at the camp doing different kinds of administrative work rather than being part of military operations on the Afghan ground.<sup>119</sup> In the beginning, during 2006, a female-only Military Observation Team (MOT) consisting of three women was operating on an experimental basis but was later replaced by Mixed Engagement Teams (MET) with both male and female members. Among the obstacles reported by interviewees, the lack of female interpreters stands out as a major and persistent constraint in the work to reach out to Afghan women.

The turn-over of military personnel in Afghanistan is quick. Contracts run for a six-month period and are rarely prolonged – returning for a second contract period seems to be more common. To establish lasting and trustful relations with Afghan counterparts is not possible during these circumstances but, to some extent, the problem could be diminished by a systematic transfer of responsibilities and contacts, allowing incoming personnel to build on what has been previously achieved. However, according to interviewees, this was sometimes also patchy and problematic. For instance, in assessing the impact of Swedish gender-related action on the population concerned there is still no established base-line to depart from. The same lack of continuity and systematic action seems to exist on other levels. Coordination of GFAs of different nationalities posted in the same region was reported to be lacking and communications with ISAF headquarters in Kabul had sometimes been difficult.

On the external level, the Swedish delegation to the NATO headquarters in Brussels also plays a part in the context of Swedish military policies in Afghanistan. In line with Sweden's international gender profile, the delegation has been active in pushing UNSCR 1325-related issues. On 28 March, the Swedish ambassador, together with a number of colleagues, signed a letter requesting NATO "to maintain Gender Advisors throughout the duration of the ISAF-mission." The letter went on to state that "Gender Advisors should also be an integral part of any possible post-2014 NATO-led mission in Afghanistan."<sup>120</sup>

On an overall level, UNSCR 1325-related military action in

Afghanistan is a work in progress, providing lessons learned to the Swedish armed forces, now for the first time given an opportunity to systematically apply policies in an ongoing operation, rather than sustainable results for Afghan women. This is also in line with the policy adopted within the Swedish armed forces to view UNSCR 1325 as an instrument to obtain operational efficiency on a tactical level rather than an issue of gender equality and human rights. In this way, the participation-related parts of the resolution are prioritised before its protection elements and the resolution is understood as potentially transformative, a way of changing traditional perceptions of security and nation-building into a more inclusive manner of dealing with these issues, thereby promoting sustainable peace. This is in itself achievement and a result of persistent lobbying inside the Swedish army.<sup>121</sup>

In line with Sweden's ambition to be in the forefront of the international community – in the words of the National Action Plan, "[i]t is a natural part of the Swedish Government's ambitions that Sweden should continue to lead the way in efforts to implement Resolution 1325"<sup>122</sup> - a Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations was inaugurated outside Stockholm in January 2012, with the aim of building capacity and providing training on an international level, to various defence organisations.<sup>123</sup>

While the interpretation of UNSCR 1325 guiding the work of the Swedish Armed Forces, is indeed progressive within the context of western political and military thinking, it also means that concrete assistance to Afghan women is given less prominence. They may see Swedish women being active in military operations (although this is still unlikely) and they may be put into direct contact with female soldiers but, in terms of concrete benefits, there is not much in it for them.

### ***Swedish military action as seen by Afghan women***

The main yardstick by which to measure the success of the Swedish military intervention in northern Afghanistan should logically be the degree of security obtained in the region. In a general sense, however, security is clearly more

<sup>119</sup> During the meeting mentioned in the preceding fn, it was indicated that around one third of the female soldiers participated in operational activities.

<sup>120</sup> Letter dated 28 March 2008 and addressed to the Secretary General and SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe), signed by the ambassadors of Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and the United States.

<sup>121</sup> Information obtained through interviews.

<sup>122</sup> The Swedish Government's action plan for 2009–2012 to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, Stockholm 2009, p. 5. Available at <http://kvinnaillkvinna.se/sites/default/files/HP1325%202009-2012%20final%20engelsk%20version.pdf>. Retrieved on 26 August 2012.

<sup>123</sup> More information is available at: <http://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/swedish-armed-forces-international-centre/centre-for-gender/>.



precarious today than it was when the PRT was created six years ago in what was then seen as a relatively quiet corner of Afghanistan. The same development applies to all of Afghanistan and points to the conclusion that the idea to stabilise the country by military means may have been wrong in the first place. On the other hand, we do not know what the development would have been without the military intervention – maybe the Taliban would still have been in power and, especially for Afghan women, their reign would have meant continuous oppression. However, one factor that stands out as an active contribution to increasing insecurity, actual as well as potential, is the build-up of locally based paramilitary forces with rudimentary training to which ISAF has actively participated, in the hope of achieving better coverage and effectiveness in stabilising increasingly restive areas. In the north, the dominant such force is the Afghan Local Police (ALP), in mid-2012 numbering around 12,000 armed persons with a training period of three weeks.<sup>124</sup> But, since 2011, there is also another auxiliary police force, the Critical Infrastructure Police (CIP), set up by NATO's Regional Command North.<sup>125</sup> As research shows, such interventions are risky in terms of changing local balance of forces in unintended ways, which lead to more, rather than less unrest.<sup>126</sup> Arming more people in Afghanistan is also an obvious risk, particularly in the perspective of international military drawdown and exit. These factors point to the conclusion that, on balance, it is doubtful whether Sweden can be said to have actually contributed to build stability.

On the grass-root level, the perceptions of women interviewed in Mazar-e-Sharif of Swedish troop contributions relevant to them reflect the patchiness and lack of continuity of these contributions, as well as the multitude of actors on this scene. Several examples mentioned as outcomes of the Swedish military presence were, in fact, projects by organisations other than the Swedish PRT. Others were indeed the doings of the PRT but were one-off events which had not been followed up. One interviewee said that she had been invited to a dinner by the Swedish PRT, during which promises were made to assist women, but that was now three years ago and since then nothing had happened. Another mentioned a workshop in the beginning of May, mainly on the importance of more women joining the police force, which was to be

followed by “more assistance to women” (but in that case only a couple of months had passed without further action).

Projects which had left a mark included assistance to female entrepreneurs – fabrication of cooking-pots was mentioned, a project which was now self-sustained (but turned out not to be supported by Sweden). Efforts to raise awareness regarding the negative effects of forced marriages was said to have had good results in Jowzjan and Samangan, where security was better than in other areas. On the wish list of things that had not been done but should be, training courses and higher education figured high: “Why are there no scholarships for Afghans to go to Swedish universities?”

One aspect which, due to its sensitivity, was not discussed but remains controversial is the relationship between Swedish PRT leaders and the governor of Balkh province, Mohamed Atta. Although often praised for the economic progress and general uplift taking place in Balkh, before he became a politician cum businessman, Atta was one of the more prominent warlords in Afghanistan. To maintain positive relations with such an actor should be out of character for Swedish policies, which, however, have been aligned with provincial Realpolitik without much discussion. Consequently, a prominent feature in what the people of Balkh see of a military contingent mainly hiding behind the barbed-wired walls of its base camp, are the military convoys carrying high-level Swedish representatives to talks with the governor, generally ending in hearty handshakes in front of the local TV cameras.

In spite of these problematic aspects, the overall perception of the Swedish military presence was positive: “Compared to other provinces, the PRT is more accepted here,” one participant stated and another added: “You are the only ones that people don't complain about.”<sup>127</sup>

## Development action

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Swedish development aid to Afghanistan has steadily increased. Today, Afghanistan is the second largest recipient globally of bilateral aid – and

<sup>124</sup> The goal is to reach 30,000. Figures from interviews.

<sup>125</sup> According to the New York Times, “[s]ome members of the force are former militiamen and thugs known as much for extorting money from ordinary citizens as for intimidating insurgents and upholding the law”. *Afghanistan to Disband Irregular Police Force Set Up Under NATO*, New York Times 26 December 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/27/world/asia/afghanistan-to-disband-critical-infrastructure-police.html#>. Retrieved on 9 September 2012.

<sup>126</sup> See for instance, Lefèvre, Mathieu, *Local Defence in Afghanistan, A review of government-backed initiatives*, AAN Thematic Report 03/2010, and Giustozzi, Antonio, and Reuter, Christoph, *The Insurgents of the Afghan North, The rise of the Taliban, the self-abandonment of the Afghan government and the effects of ISAF's 'capture-and-kill campaign'*, AAN Thematic Report 04/2011, both published by the Afghanistan Analysts Network and available at [www.aan-afghanistan.org](http://www.aan-afghanistan.org).

<sup>127</sup> This stands in contrast to the situation during the first years of the PRT presence, when the author encountered harsh criticism of the lack of money spent on development by the Sweden, i.a. within the Provincial Council. At some points, Governor Atta publicly voiced similar criticism, and this seems to have enhanced the wish to build good relations among a number of successive Swedish contingent commanders.

the largest in Asia. During 2011, around 1,034 million Swedish crowns (approximately 150 million US dollars) out of the development assistance budget were disbursed in Afghanistan.<sup>128</sup> With increases in allocations already planned (from 560 million Swedish crowns in 2012 to around 600 million in 2013 and 620 million in 2014),<sup>129</sup> and barring a substantially worsened security situation, Afghanistan will become the largest bilateral recipient country in 2013. Through a unique agreement across the line between the political blocs, Sweden has also been able to commit 1.2 billion US dollars for the “transformation decade” following the 2014 troop withdrawal, i.e. covering the period 2015-2024.<sup>130</sup> This was in response to appeals for long-term commitments made at the Tokyo conference in July 2012 and is intended to provide an incitement for other donors to follow suit. If that works out, it enhances Sweden’s significance as a donor beyond actual disbursements. Still, the fact that Afghanistan is big for Swedish assistance does not mean that Sweden is big for Afghan recipients. It also does not mean that development aid dominates Sweden’s total expenditure in Afghanistan, as the cost for the military engagement remains substantially larger than the aid disbursement.<sup>131</sup>

Especially, it does not mean that disbursement connected to UNSCR 1325 is big in relation to total expenditure. But if, as we have seen was the case in the Swedish armed forces, the resolution is interpreted as involving a change of the mindset characterising security policy, rather than limited to the protection of women and promotion of their rights, its implementation is not primarily about spending money. It also tricky to define which aid items would qualify as part of the implementation of UNSCR 1325. It could be interpreted in a broad sense, involving the empowerment of women (the prevention/promotion pillar, cf. p. 6), in which case both priority sectors for Swedish development cooperation – democracy, human rights and gender equality and education, respectively – would be included.<sup>132</sup> The current development cooperation strategy for Afghanistan is based on such an inclusive interpretation of the resolution, when it is stated that “[t]he dialogue should focus on gender-related violence and the ability of women to enjoy their economic and political rights. This includes expanded opportunities for girls to receive an education [...]”<sup>133</sup> Within a narrower framework, the Swedish

priorities for the work to promote women’s rights are well aligned with UNSCR 1325: “1) women’s participation and influence, 2) sexual and reproductive health and rights, and 3) measures to prevent gender-based violence.”<sup>134</sup> Sexual and reproductive health and rights include maternal health, which qualifies as UNSCR 1325-related if, as is proposed in this report, the high incidence of maternal mortality is seen as structural violence towards women. In terms of Swedish aid, that would include another rather large chunk of the total.

Strictly calculated, however, UNSCR 1325-related expenditure from the aid budget remains limited, centred around an allocation of 20 million Swedish crowns to UN Women,<sup>135</sup> as compared to total expenditure in Afghanistan of over 2,660 million crowns.<sup>136</sup> Sweden is a relatively large donor and board member of UN Women, which would be one reason why this channel has been prioritised in spite of its reported difficulties in meeting administrative requirements. These difficulties have hampered the rate of disbursement. (For the period 2009-2011, 50 million Swedish crowns – over seven million US dollars – have been allocated to UN Women in Afghanistan.)

According to the development cooperation strategy adopted for the period 2012-14, the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and its follow-up resolutions is to be a priority issue in the development dialogue between Sweden and Afghanistan.<sup>137</sup> In practice, however, the right resources are not in place to effectively push this agenda and the dialogue depends on what is foremost in the minds of those in charge of it, i.e. seldom the participation and protection of women. Security matters in the traditional sense of the term tend to crowd out other aspects, particularly those seen as less urgent. The participation of women is seldom deemed to be urgent, thus not considered – and, in the long run, this could lead to less inclusive security solutions and potentially more conflict, enhancing this pattern in a negative spiral.

As on the political arena, in order to strengthen the impact of the Swedish voice, cooperation with like-minded countries is needed. Here, Nordic cooperation is deemed to be the most useful constellation. Since 2009, the Nordic embassies in Kabul have developed a Joint Nordic Gender Action Initiative aiming to give them the lead on gender equality issues within

<sup>128</sup> Figure received from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in September 2012.

<sup>129</sup> Disbursements and bilateral allocations are not synonymous. The figures are affected i.a. by the amount of humanitarian aid being disbursed in response to emergency appeals, as well as support via the EU and the UN.

<sup>130</sup> Figure received from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in September 2012.

<sup>131</sup> Calculation based on i.a. a memorandum, 2012:765, from the support services of the Swedish parliament. Figures for both military expenditure and aid disbursement vary in comparison to allocations and are difficult to calculate in a precise way. For instance, expenditure for salaries of employees of the armed forces serving in Afghanistan is not included (as these persons would be on the salary lists in any case). On the assistance side, expenditure for humanitarian aid naturally varies with the incidence of humanitarian crises. Normally, there are also large carry-over reservations on the aid budget. Over the years, the relationship between military and development expenditure has slowly evened out, as the development share has grown. During 2011, it amounted to approximately 60-65 percent of the security-related expenditure.

<sup>132</sup> So far, apart from a project to train lawyers through the International Legal Foundation – Afghanistan, Swedish contributions to the justice sector have been concentrated to EUPOL.

<sup>133</sup> Revised development cooperation strategy Afghanistan, January 2012 – December 2014, p. 5. Available at [http://www.swedeninafghanistan.se/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=EJIKUH\\_lpJQ%3d&tabid=189](http://www.swedeninafghanistan.se/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=EJIKUH_lpJQ%3d&tabid=189). Retrieved on 9 August 2012.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>135</sup> Among additional contributions, an Afghan NGO, Women for Afghan Women, has received substantial sums for strategic work on a shelter for abused women.

<sup>136</sup> This calculation relates to 2011 and is based on sources mentioned in preceding footnotes.

the donor community. Effectiveness is to be increased, for instance by a division of labour between the Nordic countries enabling them to make proper use of the task forces and coordination groups which have proliferated across the cooperation sector.<sup>138</sup> Joint action with non-Nordic donor countries has also taken place, e.g. when a letter was addressed to the World Bank in June 2010 pointing to the lack of gender strategy within the management of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), a major channel for aid funds from Sweden and other Nordic countries.

Conditionality and international push will probably need to be stepped up in order to pursue UNSCR 1325-related issues on the international agenda during the upcoming era of military drawdown and exit. If short-term stability needs have been dictating most of the international action in Afghanistan until today, a change is hardly to be expected during a period which promises to be even more turbulent. However, conditionality regarding women's participation is not new in Afghanistan. The National Solidarity Programme (NSP), the largest development project in the country, posits women's participation as a central condition when distributing block grants for rural projects. An example of how this conditionality is applied in practice is offered by an SCA-run programme in the north of Afghanistan, where a number of villages are provided with development projects according to their own prioritisation – but only if women constitute half of the membership of the Community Development Councils (CDC) making those decisions. In one of the villages, this condition was not accepted and the project consequently withdrawn. In the best scenario, this will lead to discussion inside that village, possibly resulting in a reassessment of the decision and, ultimately, of the role of women in the decision-making process. However, as NSP experience shows, this type of conditionality is not enough to achieve substantive participation of women. Many other ingredients are necessary for success, such as cautious targeting of women, measures to ensure their security, skilful negotiation with power-brokers, the building of community trust and skilled process facilitation at the village level. Other variables at play touch upon i. a. ethnicity, geographical location and local customs, the family status and educational background of the women concerned, the possible influence of insurgent forces,

religious leadership and prevalent interpretations of Islam, as well as the presence of strong women leaders.

As we have seen, Sweden has declared that it will gradually increase its development assistance to Afghanistan in the coming years and will maintain a substantial aid presence in Afghanistan until at least 2025. In the overall picture, however, the money flowing into Afghanistan can be expected to be substantially reduced with the exit of the troops (which now generate a lot of expenditure on the Afghan ground). It remains to be seen whether this is good or bad for the country and, in particular, for the agenda promoting women, peace and security. Until now, throwing money at Afghan problems has not always been productive but rather had a number of negative side-effects, such as feeding the corruption that now permeates the society. As already mentioned, implementation of UNSCR 1325 is not primarily about spending money and the possibility exists that it could even be facilitated if part of the financial flow dries up, possibly forcing women's organisations to step up internal cooperation and coordination. However, left to its own devices, the Afghan government cannot be expected to advance this agenda – even if the 2014 election brings positive change. International political pressure must be maintained and enhanced. The power of the purse must be applied.

## Looking beyond the international exit

Sweden's military performance on UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan has been appreciated by Afghan women but has been concretely relevant to them only to a limited extent. What will remain of Swedish efforts to facilitate networking between women's organisations and to raise awareness of women's role within the Afghan security forces after the exit of the troops, is an open question. In the end, Afghanistan seems to have been more relevant to Sweden's work on UNSCR 1325 than the other way around. Unfortunately, this situation is symptomatic for Afghanistan's problems. Much of the international as well as regional activity *in* Afghanistan is not *on* Afghanistan, but rather an outflow of other interests.

<sup>137</sup> Revised development cooperation strategy Afghanistan January 2012 – December 2014, p. 5. Available at [http://www.swedeninafghanistan.se/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=EjIKUH\\_lpJQ%3d&tabid=189](http://www.swedeninafghanistan.se/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=EjIKUH_lpJQ%3d&tabid=189). Retrieved on 9 August 2012.

<sup>138</sup> For more information, see *Norad and Sida, Gender Review Report*, Royal Norwegian Embassy Afghanistan, Norad Report 14/2011 Discussion.

Participants at a workshop in Liechtenstein formulated it as follows: “What the international community [has] been doing since 2001 [has] been as much about itself and its various domestic political realities as about Afghans and Afghanistan.”<sup>139</sup> It is true, as is often said, that Afghanistan is a fragmented country – but much of that fragmentation comes from outside.<sup>140</sup> The international intervention after the fall of the Taleban is no exception. The slicing up of the country into different PRT areas and the dividing up of the international “lead” for different key sectors between different donor countries may have been a practicable way to solve pressing problems, but it did not serve to unite the Afghan population and bridge the gaps between different ethnical and religious affiliations. Instead, these actions resulted in a weakening of the government of Afghanistan and may have been part of the reason why this government gradually lost its credibility.

On the other hand, government corruption also plays a big role in this development. By either tacitly accepting it or actively feeding into it through massive flows of money channelled, in many cases via contractors, without sufficient control, the international community has been party to normalising corruptive practices. Today, the government is seen as reflecting national interests only to a limited extent – it is rather thought of as one interested party among others, constantly juggling its way forward through deals and appeasement. Women are not among the groups influential enough to be appeased. As far as women’s rights are concerned, the government now seems to be willing to reverse progress rather than push it forward. Still, western donors and troop contributors continue to base their actions on the assumption that the formal government structure enjoys full legitimacy.

After a series of flawed elections, by and large accepted by the international community, it is extremely important that the presidential election coming up in 2014 represents a turning-point. It should be held on time and should involve not only a free and fair procedure on the day of the election but also a free and fair debate leading up to that day. It is an ominous sign that, in the Tokyo Declaration, the Afghan government commits “to conducting free, fair, transparent, and inclusive elections in 2014 and 2015, in which all the

people of Afghanistan participate freely without internal or external interference” – but in the accompanying (and more binding) Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, the ambition has been reduced to the setting of a “goal” to achieve “credible, inclusive and transparent” elections.<sup>141</sup> As female candidates are usually at a disadvantage in terms of access to resources, they should be particularly facilitated and protected. While the international community should stay out of the political process itself, it should strive to ensure that – in spite of security challenges connected with the troop exit – the 2014 election is given the potential to signify the take-off of a broad democratic development, including measures to strengthen democratic institutions and create the necessary space for women to play their part in society.

Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan is particularly difficult as it touches on the very root of the conflict. Liberation of women in the western sense is seen as *casus belli* by the opposing side – western values is what they are, in fact, fighting to keep out. Pushing these values in an insensitive way could easily become counterproductive and hurt the women’s cause more than promote it.<sup>142</sup> Notably, there is now a growing demand on the part of women’s organisations to learn more about Islamic law. This is likely to reflect not only the fact that Afghans, women as well as men, are deeply religious but also a sense that Islamic law, if properly applied, can serve the women’s cause in getting rid of some particularly egregious practices.

Western donors will obviously not be the right quarter to provide expertise on Islamic law. It is probably a good option for the West to take a step back after the active phase of the military intervention is terminated, recognise that mistakes have been made and assume a more supportive role in the continued struggle for stability and democracy in Afghanistan. At the same time, the need for development assistance will continue to be huge and provide donors with some scope to influence developments as well as improve their performance with regard to coordination and systematic action, avoiding the one-off projects and wastage of money that have characterised much of the aid intervention so far. The phasing out of the military component of the international intervention could, in fact, create more leverage for political

<sup>139</sup> Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University, *Summary Report, Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Afghanistan*, January 2012, p. 3.

<sup>140</sup> In “A Call for Justice”, the AIHRC reports: “Almost two thirds (63%) of the respondents felt that the conflict in Afghanistan was not primarily ethnic in nature, but that ethnicity was manipulated and used by commanders (and external powers, including Iran and Pakistan).” Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), *A Call for Justice - A National Consultation on Past Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan*, 25 January 2005, p. 11. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/47fdad50.html>.

<sup>141</sup> *The Tokyo Declaration, Partnership for Self-Reliance in Afghanistan, From Transition to Transformation*, published by the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 9 July 2012, paragraph 12 in the Declaration and paragraph 11 in the Framework respectively. Available at <http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/11196>. Retrieved on 9 September 2012.

<sup>142</sup> Interviewees testified that the term “gender” is now used as a curse word in Afghanistan.

dialogue and development cooperation. When resources dry up, conditionality could work better in the sense that commitment to bench-marks and development goals could be taken more seriously by all actors involved.

Empowerment of women in terms of access to education and health will remain a prerequisite for progress along the lines of UNSCR 1325. At the same time, if a transformation of society is to be achieved, the need to have men increasingly involved will grow. In a more relaxed atmosphere, when the armed conflict has subsided, it may be easier to make a case for the advantages, even for men, of less restricted gender roles – for instance, when it involves shared economic family responsibilities.<sup>143</sup> In any case, such a transformation will take time. It should be kept in mind that Afghanistan is still partly a pre-modern society, which, in the words of one interviewee, “we have been trying to drag by its hair into post-modernism, skipping the modern phase.”

Among pundits, there is a lot of pessimism concerning the future of Afghanistan post-2014. A relapse into civil war is often seen as inevitable. Progress made by, not least, the Afghan women during the last decade would then be swept away. While such a development unfortunately cannot be excluded, it is striking that pessimism seems to be stronger among international observers than among the Afghans themselves. Afghan interviewees did indeed express fear for the future following the exit of the international troops but did also, to an even larger extent, express a strong fighting spirit and willingness to work for change. The critical mass of active women and political will may not be strong enough to make a difference today, but it may be too strong to silence in a lasting manner.

## Measuring the impact of the Swedish NAP

The current NAP has been prolonged until 2015. The Swedish government recently reported that it had completed the process to elaborate a set of indicators to measure the success of the Swedish NAP on the national, regional and global levels.

These indicators will also be used when a new NAP for the coming period will be worked out.

In the yearly reports on what has been done to implement UNSCR 1325 submitted by relevant ministries and agencies, there has been much emphasis on advocacy, recruitment and training aspects, with a bearing mainly on Swedish actions to promote UNSCR 1325-related issues in national, European and global fora, increase the number of women involved in relevant institutions and missions and to spread knowledge on the resolution and what it means in practice, i.e. action pertinent to the overriding goal number one of the Swedish NAP (see p. 26). Quite often, especially in the earlier reports, action to promote gender equality issues in general is subsumed into action related to the specific goals of UNSCR 1325.

Thus, the bulk of the action is still centred on Sweden itself and the international fora in which Sweden is active. The goal tends to be defined in terms of the number of women recruited in a certain context, rather than the effects of these efforts on the ground in the conflict-ridden areas (in this case Afghanistan). But there are also examples of Swedish action in international fora with a bearing directly on Afghanistan, notably pushing for UNSCR 1325-related aspects in the UNAMA mandate, as well as in the declaration issued after the NATO summit in Chicago in May 2012. However, so far, overriding goals number two and three, which deal with protection and participation of women in the areas of conflict, do not figure prominently in the implementation reports. In the few cases where such effects are actually reported, they tend to be bordering on the trivial (e.g. arranging for separate sanitary areas for men and women or arranging a seminar for Afghan women).

For the purpose of this report, the goals defined by Afghan women have been deemed to be the most relevant indicators for an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Swedish NAP in Afghanistan. In a number of documents, but especially in “UN SCR 1325 – Implementation in Afghanistan”, published on 31 October 2011,<sup>144</sup> the Afghan Women’s Network (AWN) has elaborated a set of recommendations for “the International Community and Donors”.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Cf. p. 18 on the stress connected to the breadwinning role in times of economic upheaval.

<sup>144</sup> The report is available on [http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/AWN\\_UNSCR1325ImplementationinAfghanistan.pdf](http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/AWN_UNSCR1325ImplementationinAfghanistan.pdf).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-45

- Support Afghan civil society and women activists in particular by pressing on the Afghan government to include their voices on policies, participation at the decision-making table, and key concerns on the peace, reintegration and reconciliation processes.
- Support the GoA in implementation of the NAPWA, EVAW, and other positive gender policies.
- Support and strengthen programs that provide capacity building and technical assistance to the justice and security sector in better implementation of protection and prevention of violence and abuse of women and girls.
- Support Afghan women's groups, the AIHRC, other human rights groups, and Afghan civil society to be a voice in bringing peace and justice.
- Support women's groups through financial and technical resources to expand participation in the peace process in the provinces.
- Insist that financial incentives to communities to support the reintegration of former fighters and communities also support the empowerment and development of women in the communities.
- Make women's meaningful participation in the decision-making bodies a precondition for funding peace, reconciliation, reintegration, and transition processes and programs.
- Ensure the funding for peace, reconciliation, reintegration, and transition processes benefit families, communities, and women rather than individual ex-combatants.
- Urge the Government of Afghanistan to repeal of the Amnesty Law and the Shia Personal Status Law, and to refrain from supporting future laws and policies that violate the Afghanistan Constitution and international human rights commitments.
- Support the GoA and civil society through policy, technical, and financial resources to consult with districts and provinces across the country with discussions on an inclusive NAP on UN SCR 1325 creation process."

Many of the recommended actions fit well into Swedish policies and are in line with objectives stated in the development cooperation strategy. For instance, Sweden would agree, in general terms, that women's voices should be heard at the decision-making tables, that positive gender policies should be implemented and laws contravening human rights commitments should be repealed, that civil society should be supported and the provinces be included in the peace process, as well as in the process to elaborate an Afghan NAP. Sweden remains less involved in the justice and security sectors but to the extent that the Swedish armed forces could

influence the inclusion of women in the programmes carried out in this sector, it would be prone to do so. The problem lies more in making all this happen on the ground.

Thus, what stands out on these scores is not a lack of political will, but the gap between goals and reality. To some extent, this gap follows from limitations imposed on Sweden by, above all, two of the problematic circumstances described above:

- Sweden is a small actor in Afghanistan
- Sweden participates on the side of the government of Afghanistan

### *The way forward*

In order to have some clout, Sweden has to cooperate with other actors, the Nordic countries in particular or other EU members. Such cooperation and coordination could also help to streamline the dialogue with the Afghan government, by reducing the number of actors demanding attention to their favourite themes. Within that framework of cooperation, more consistency should be applied when it comes to sticking to agreements. This goes for donors and their pledges, as well as for the government side, which should not be let off the hook when contravening its international commitments, e.g. in the human rights area. The coming Swedish NAP should put more emphasis on these two scores.

Looking to the future, circumstances will change considerably with the exit of most of the ISAF troops, including the Swedish ones. The prospects for peace and stability to be achieved beyond 2014 are extremely uncertain and pessimism is spreading among most parties concerned, notably the women's organisations. In its Position Paper issued on 6 October 2011, the AWN has issued three more specific recommendations for the "International Community beyond 2014 [...]:

- International aid beyond 2014 must have a clear gender allocation, specifying that a percentage of the aid [...] will go to women-focused projects and initiatives, either through the Afghan government or the local non-government organizations.

- The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) should have a stronger mandate to monitor the transition and peace processes. This mandate should include advancing coherence and consistency among the various processes with a special focus on ensuring Afghan women's participation. This has the added benefit of preventing aid from being used for supporting extremist elements.

- Women's organizations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as a bridge between communities on both sides of the border, should be engaged in a regional people-to-people dialogue supported by the international community. The region [will] achieve peaceful relations with international diplomatic pressure alone. The access and independence of many women's groups provides an immense peace-building resource that has been underutilized."

The third recommendation reflects the fact that, beyond transition, the peace process in Afghanistan will be largely in the hands of its surrounding region. Many Afghan women activists have direct experience from Pakistan, having lived there as refugees during a number of years. They also know that Pakistani women face much the same problems as they do themselves, especially in the border areas,<sup>146</sup> and that the implementation of the recommendation to build cross-border links between women's organisations would benefit Pakistani women as well and thus be geared towards a better regional security.

As transpired during the interviews, the second recommendation about the role of UNAMA reflects a degree of discontent with UNAMA action on UNSCR 1325-related issues, where for instance the EU Special Representative for Afghanistan, as well as individual EU member states, have been seen as more proactive. Ideally, the United Nations would have filled a role as counterweight to NATO but instead the tendency is to see the UN as part of the west. For UNAMA, working with the government has involved a difficult balance, in some cases leading to internal conflicts. Ultimately, however, as one UNAMA interviewee stated: "We are dependent on the government."

For Sweden, the most relevant and immediately feasible of

these recommendations appears to be the first one, to specify a gender allocation in its assistance. As an active UN member, Sweden could also, in cooperation with other countries, push for a strengthened post-transitional role for the UN in Afghanistan, coupled with a more UNSCR 1325-related mandate (recommendation number two). This is in line with the goal stated in the development strategy to "strengthen UNAMA's role as an important actor in civilian interventions and donor coordination"<sup>147</sup> and is something that Sweden has, in fact, already been doing. On the regional level, on the other hand, although Sweden should explore ways to act in a regionally more cohesive way, it can hardly be in the forefront of action (recommendation number three). The same goes for another recommendation in the "Afghan Women's Declaration" from the Bonn conference in December 2011, reflecting the shift in the balance of interests looming at the horizon:

- "Afghan Women further appeal to Islamic countries to promote improvements in Afghan women's skills and expertise in Islamic law and jurisprudence in their development and diplomatic engagements in Afghanistan. These skills and qualifications are necessary for women to work in high level positions in the judiciary."

In the coming phase of Afghan development, it may be useful for western countries such as Sweden to recognise that their chance to fundamentally change the Afghan society has elapsed and thus, in order to make a difference, their role needs to be strategically more refined. One limited but crucial action in line with this retrenchment is also formulated in the Declaration:

- "Women's Rights Defenders and Human Rights Activists are at an increasing level of threat as political settlements take shape in Afghanistan. Afghan women call on the United Nations and International Human Rights Organizations to formulate emergency and long-term protection strategies to support Women's Rights Defenders at risk."

On a more specific level, as it is obvious that the Afghan government is unable to protect women human rights defenders who are under threat, international protection could be extended to them in a more systematic way. In addition to regular asylum, a system to grant them temporary asylum

<sup>146</sup> For instance, in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) on the Pakistani side, only around three percent of the girls are educated. Dawn.com, *Literacy in Restive FATA in free fall*, 23 April 2011. <http://dawn.com/2011/04/23/literacy-in-restive-fata-in-free-fall/> Retrieved on 31 August 2012.

<sup>147</sup> Revised development cooperation strategy Afghanistan, January 2012 – December 2014, p. 4. Available at [http://www.swedeninafghanistan.se/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=EjIKUH\\_lpJQ%3d&tabid=189](http://www.swedeninafghanistan.se/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=EjIKUH_lpJQ%3d&tabid=189). Retrieved on 9 August 2012.





could be organized, along the lines of the programme to protect controversial writers implemented by some Swedish cities.<sup>148</sup> The possibility of extending such a programme to also include women whose safety is endangered in Afghanistan could be examined.

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<sup>148</sup> The most well-known example of this programme is the offer of the Swedish city of Uppsala to receive and finance the Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin during a limited period of time.

# List of interviewees

## In Stockholm

Susanne Axmacher	Swedish Armed Forces
Anna Björsson	Former Gender Field Adviser in Mazar-e-Sharif, Swedish Armed Forces
Charlotte Forsdyke	Ministry of Defence
Åsa Gustafsson	Embassy of Sweden in Kabul
Helena Hoffman	Former Gender Field Adviser in Mazar-e-Sharif, Swedish Armed Forces
Elisabeth Härleman	Sida
Petter Höjem	Researcher
Eva Johansson	Sida
Svante Kilander	Former Ambassador of Sweden in Afghanistan
Lisa Lindberg	Ministry of Defence
Marie Nilsson	Sida
Louise Olsson	Folke Bernadotte Academy
Sofia Orrebrink	Former Program Officer, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
Torbjörn Pettersson	Former Ambassador of Sweden in Afghanistan
Ulrika Rosenkilde	Former Gender Field Adviser in Mazar-e-Sharif, Swedish Armed Forces
Urban Rådestad	Former Gender Field Adviser in Mazar-e-Sharif, Swedish Armed Forces
Magnus Stuxberg	Ministry for Foreign Affairs

## In Helsinki

Oili Alm	Finnish 1325 Network
Fatima Ayub	Consultant
Heli Kanerva	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Sari Kuovo	Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN)
Nargis Nehan	Equality for Peace and Democracy (EPD)

## In Kabul

Ghezal Adalat	UNAMA
Heela Barakzai	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
Shukria Barakzai	Member of Parliament
Ahmad Shaheer Anil	Afghanistan Public Policy Research (APPRO)
Steve Brooking	UNAMA
A. Heather Coyne	UNAMA
Lubna Ehsan	UNAMA
Magnus Forsberg	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
Wazma Frogh	Women, Peace and Security Research Institute, AWN
Merja Färm	Embassy of Finland
Eidi Genfors	Embassy of Sweden
Ingibjorg Solrun Gísladóttir	UN Women
Selay Ghaffar	Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA), AWN
Sheeba Harma	Oxfam

Monisa Sherzada Hassan	Secretariat of the High Peace Council
Nicholas Haysom	UNAMA
Fiona Hodgson	Afghanistan Public Policy Research (APPRO)
Ana Hozyainova	Afghanistan Public Policy Research (APPRO)
Stella Makanya	UNAMA
Nader Nadery	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)
Col. Sayed Omar Saboor	Ministry of Interior
Zemarai Saqeb	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
Sima Samar	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)
Mahbouba Seraj	Afghanistan Support Project, AWN
Manohar Shenoy	Oxfam
Bandana Shrestha	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
Deborah Smith	UN Women
Andreas Stefansson	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
Annelie Stråth	Embassy of Sweden
Guillaume Teerling	Office of the Special Representative of the European Union for Afghanistan
Vygaudas Usackas	Special Representative of the European Union for Afghanistan
Mathew Varghese	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)
Rachel Wareham	National Democratic Institute (NDI)

## **In Mazar-e-Sharif**

Akiko Ahl	Political Adviser, Transition Support Team
Salamat Azimi	Aryana (NGO)
Nafisa Gheyasi	Principal of Hashem Barat girls' school
Nasrin Hoseini	Development Adviser, Transition Support Team
Håkan Lundberg	Gender Field Adviser, Transition Support Team
Homa Omar	Afghan Business Women Office
Nilofar Sayar	Women and Youth Support Center Afghanistan (WYSC)

## List of acronyms

AAN	Afghanistan Analysts Network
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
APRP	Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
CDC	Community Development Council
CIP	Critical Infrastructure Police
CNL	Camp Northern Lights
EUPOL	European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan
EUSRA	Office of the Special Representative of the European Union for Afghanistan
EVAW	(Law on the) Elimination of Violence against Women
FET	Female Engagement Team
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
HIA or HIG	Hizb-i-Islami Afghanistan / Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin
HPC	High Peace Council
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MET	Mixed Engagement Team
MOT	Mobile Operational Team
NAP	National Action Plan (for UNSCR 1325)
NAPWA	National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OMLT	Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
SEK	Swedish crowns
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
SNTV	Single Non-Transferable Vote
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TST	Transition Support Team
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution



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Swedish Committee for Afghanistan