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## **Afghanistan : Local women aid workers must be released**

*The release of a United States aid worker in Afghanistan is an important development, but Taleban must immediately release her seven female Afghan colleagues who are believed to remain in detention, Amnesty International said today.*

*The seven Afghan women and 71 year old Mary MacMakin from the United States were arrested along with eight men on 9 July by Taleban officials. All of them work for the organization Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Support for Afghanistan (PARSA) of which Mary MacMakin is the director. The men were released immediately after their arrest and brief detention at the Kabul House of Juvenile Delinquents.*

*The women were arrested around the same time the Taleban reportedly issued an edict ordering all Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to lay off all female staff working in Afghanistan. According to reports Mary MacMakin has been given 24 hours to leave Afghanistan or face deportation after her release.*

*"Solidarity with local women who are under attack from the discriminatory policies of the Taleban is the need of the hour," Amnesty International said, "At a time when humanitarian assistance is so important to provide for the needs of the general population, the dismissal of female employees involved in relief operations will further exacerbate human suffering in Afghanistan."*

*Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of the remaining seven women, who it believes are prisoners of conscience held solely on grounds of gender and for not complying with Taleban gender policies.*

The human rights organization is also concerned that the seven Afghan women are likely to become forgotten prisoners of conscience amid media attention mainly focussing on the US aid worker.

The Taleban authorities have reportedly said that Mary MacMakin was involved in anti-Islamic activities and that incriminating materials were found in her possession.

Amnesty International is calling on the Taleban to end all policies that are discriminatory towards women and allow them to participate freely in society.

### **Background**

In recent years the Taleban have imposed harsh repression on women including restrictions on movement, employment and education. The release of Mary MacMakin comes after US protests against the arrests and following meetings between United Nations representatives and the Taleban to discuss the issue.

PARSA is a small NGO that works mainly with Afghan war widows, training them in basic skills such as weaving and embroidery so that they can support themselves and their families.

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