

Stop violence against women

Afghanistan – abduction and rape at the point of a gun

“ The first thing they do is rape the girl to stop her family seeking justice... When a girl loses her virginity she has no value. Usually, when families find that their girls have been raped by gunmen, they themselves ask them to marry their daughters... The Nijrab district is under the control of gunmen who kill people and rape and abduct the girls. No one stops them. ”

Seventeen-year-old Zarmina (not her real name) was abducted by three armed men from her aunt's home in Kapisa province in May 2004. Her uncle was shot and wounded as he tried to stop the men. Zarmina was returned to her parents in Kabul after they filed a complaint with the authorities, police, courts and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. She said she had refused to marry one of the gunmen, and fears they could track her down in Kabul.

The culture of the gun is deeply embedded in Afghanistan. Women and girls are at risk of abduction, sexual violence and intimidation as lawlessness spirals. Despite the ending of 23 years of conflict, a glut of weaponry remains in the hands of civilians, including ex-combatants. Rape, forced marriage and the trafficking of women and children are rife.

The transitional government in Afghanistan has failed to provide security or to impose its rule throughout the country. Private armies and armed groups pose a constant threat. Powerful warlords and officials with a record of human rights violations flaunt their impunity with further abuses. Armed factions wield authority over provincial leaders and their security forces.

The government's pledges to protect women's rights have proved empty promises. As security deteriorates in the south and east, international aid workers cannot reach women in need of support. Rape and sexual assault continue to be used to subjugate women and dishonour their communities. In some regions, women feel that the insecurity and the risk of sexual violence is greater than under Taleban rule.

The survivors of sexual violence often do not speak out. They face the very real danger of being killed by relatives for being seen as dishonouring the family or for “immoral” behaviour. Most never receive justice for the crimes against them. Informal justice systems discriminate against women. Traditional councils of men, sitting as courts, frequently agree to an exchange of girls in settlement of family or tribal feuds. Very young girls are sometimes married off to much older men.

No figures exist for the number of women abducted, raped or killed by armed groups, but the threat alone limits women's rights and freedoms. The lack of security for girls and women is cited by their male relatives as grounds for denying them access to education and jobs.

Without the disarmament of armed groups and former combatants, the authorities leave women on their own to face the violence. However, despite threats against them by traditionalists, women in Afghanistan are joining forces to assert their rights and claim new freedoms. The government and the international community must ensure their voices are heard.

[Photo captions]

Cover photo: A woman walks past an army tank in Kabul. © Steve Dupont

Left: Afghan women's rights activists protest in Pakistan. © RAWA

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Support our campaign: together we can make a difference

Take an interest:

Find out and monitor how your community, government, police, security forces and courts respond to violence against women and girls.

- **Take a stand:**
Speak out about violence against women. Challenge prejudiced or dismissive attitudes.
- **Take action:**
Join our global campaign for women's right to freedom from violence and discrimination.

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In the home and in the community, in times of war and peace, millions of women and girls are beaten, raped, mutilated and killed with impunity. Join Amnesty International's campaign to demand action by governments, communities and individuals to stop violence against women throughout the world.

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Together we can make our voices heard

Join us in pressing the Afghan authorities and the international community to ensure security and justice for the girls and women of Afghanistan.

Urge the Afghan Transitional Administration to:

- publicly and unequivocally condemn all violence against women, particularly by armed groups accelerate the process of disarming and demobilizing former combatants and armed groups end impunity for members of armed groups and other perpetrators by investigating reported incidents of violence against women promptly and impartially, and by bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international human rights standards honour its commitments under international human rights treaties to incorporate into national law and fully implement international legal provisions relevant to the protection of women's rights

Send your appeals to: President Hamid Karzai, Islamic Transitional State of Afghanistan, Presidential Palace, Gul Khana Palace, Kabul, Afghanistan

Urge your own government to:

- ensure that the protection of girls and women is made an integral part of the reconstruction process being undertaken by the Afghan Transitional Administration with the support of the international community
- ensure that women are allowed to play their full part in the reconstruction process

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What you can do

Join Amnesty International and become part of a worldwide movement campaigning for an end to human rights violations. Help us to make a difference.

Take action on Amnesty International's website at web.amnesty.org/actforwomen/actnow-index-eng

Make a donation to support Amnesty International's work.

Want to know more?

Contact the Amnesty International office in your country at the address in the box (right), if there is one.

Or contact

Amnesty International's International Secretariat in London:

Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom

Or visit Amnesty International's website at www.amnesty.org/actforwomen

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