



PETITION

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“Afghan women have the most to gain from peace and the most to lose from any form of reconciliation compromising women’s human rights. There cannot be national security without women’s security, there can be no peace when women’s lives are fraught with violence, when our children can’t go to schools, when we cannot step on the streets for fear of acid attacks.”
Mary Akrami, Director of the Afghan Women Skills Development Centre, January 2010.

**HUMAN RIGHTS MUST BE GUARANTEED
DURING RECONCILIATION TALKS WITH THE TALEBAN**

President Hamid Karzai	Minister of Foreign Affairs/ Defence/ Special Envoy
Gul Khana Palace
Presidential Palace
Kabul
Afghanistan

8 March 2010

Dear President Karzai and Minister **XX**

The Afghan government and its international partners pledged to advance women’s rights following the 2001 international intervention to oust the Taleban regime. Since the fall of the Taleban there have been some advances in respect for women’s rights and gender equality, including the establishment of the Ministry for Women’s Affairs, a Constitution that grants women equal legal status to men, improved access to education and representation of women in parliament.

These hard won gains, however, could be seriously compromised if the Government of Afghanistan and its NATO/ISAF partners weaken their commitment to protect and promote women’s rights in exchange for short-term military and political agreements with the Taleban and other insurgent groups. Afghan civil society groups, in particular women’s groups, have loudly voiced their demand that any peace talks, or “reconciliation”, must not become euphemisms for bartering away the human rights of another generation of Afghans. Policymakers have to show that they will not sacrifice the well-being of the Afghan people at the altar of political and military expediency.

Today in areas under their control, as when in government, the Taleban have severely curtailed the rights of girls and women, including the denial of education, employment,



freedom of movement and political participation and representation. The Taliban and related insurgent groups in Afghanistan have shown little regard for human rights and the laws of war, deliberately targeting civilians, aid workers, and facilities like schools (particularly girls' schools). According to UN figures, the Taliban and other insurgent groups were responsible for two thirds of the more than 2,400 civilian casualties in Afghanistan last year, the bloodiest year yet since the fall of the Taliban. Similar deals with the Taliban in neighbouring Pakistan led to increased human rights violations in areas under Taliban control and a significant escalation in conflict and insecurity.

Experience from Afghanistan, as well as neighbouring Pakistan, demonstrates that peace without justice or human rights is not real peace and could ultimately lead to further conflict. In order to ensure that human rights—and specially, women's rights—are protected, Amnesty International calls on the Afghan government and its US/NATO partners to ensure that:

- **Human rights, including women's rights, must be guaranteed and monitored in all reconciliation strategies.** Human rights, including women's rights, must be guaranteed and monitored in all reconciliation strategies. Both during any process of reconciliation and at its conclusion, all human rights must be respected and protected, and abuses must be promptly and effectively dealt with. As first step, the Afghan government and insurgent groups must both commit to Afghanistan's human rights obligations under international human rights law and domestic law.
- **Any agreement must include verifiable benchmarks for the parties' conformity with their human rights obligations,** for instance by documenting: trends in the school attendance, especially of girls; trends in women's access to health care; trends in maternal mortality and infant health; ability of aid workers and civil society activists—in particular women's human rights defenders—to operate in areas under the respective control of the parties.
- **Afghan women are meaningfully represented in the planning stages and during the reconciliation talks.** CEDAW and relevant UN Security Council resolutions, in particular Resolution 1325 on women peace and security and related resolutions must be implemented in policy and practice. Gender parity should be sought in all negotiating teams, including peace *jirgas* (tribal councils) and at the very least a 25 per cent quota for women should be set, consistent with constitutional guarantees for women's representation. The inclusion of women in the peace talks must be genuine and meaningful and their concerns fully reflected.
- **Reconciliation talks should not result in impunity for serious violations of human rights and war crimes.** The 2005 Transitional Justice Action Plan, already signed into law by President Karzai, should be reinvigorated and its recommended activities fully implemented within an agreed time-frame.



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SHEET No. _____ OF _____ SHEETS

No.	NAME	ADDRESS	SIGNATURE
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CONTINUATION SHEET

PETITION TITLE: HUMAN RIGHTS MUST BE GUARANTEED DURING RECONCILIATION TALKS WITH THE TALEBAN

25			
26			
27			
28			
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