



Justice Must Prevail: Women in Afghanistan Must Not Live in Fear

By Mark Bowden

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Just over a year ago Kabul and all of us who work here for a better Afghanistan were in shock. A young woman had been brutally beaten to death on the streets of the country's capital city. Mob justice had ripped through a crowd to kill an innocent woman: Farkhunda.

Initial reactions against the killing were muted, but many men and women, young especially, were rightly strongly against the killing and played their part in highlighting the case and violence against women in Afghanistan. Women carried the coffin of Farkhunda, determined to show solidarity.

The latest ruling by Afghanistan's Supreme Court now shows a judicial process in action. The judgement has reversed or set aside not guilty findings against police officers and civilians and convictions against police officers who received low sentences.

As a result, additional convictions and tougher sentences now look likely. The Court is demonstrating that it wishes to ensure meaningful justice. The Supreme Court has now indicated there must be higher standards for police accountability as well. And there's been a genuine review of evidence so justice can be undertaken fairly.

The hope, but also strong expectation, is that Afghanistan comes out of this stronger to see that justice is done. But also that individual police officers will be held more accountable for their actions and response for violence against women. Afghanistan's legal institutions can then address women's rights more rapidly and forcefully.

For women in Afghanistan the cry is that more still needs to be done.

As a long-standing member of the United Nations Afghanistan has committed to protect women and support the equal participation of women in all walks of life, including in conflict-prevention, peace negotiations and post-conflict processes. And under international law Afghanistan has committed to take the necessary actions to prevent, protect against and respond to violence against women.

And critically women's access to justice must be enhanced through the provision of free legal aid, court representation, and adequate protection measures for survivors, including accommodation in shelters.

The impunity that is all too often seen for violations of women's rights must end. All human rights violations must be properly investigated, prosecuted and punished by bringing perpetrators to justice.

Women continue to need protection in Afghanistan and are still vulnerable in public spaces. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that violence against women is eliminated, that women can play a full role in society, and that girls can go to school and grow up without fear.

My hope now from the tragedy of Farkhunda is that there will be more positive action and better protection for women. And that message and the resolve of the Government and the judicial systems will be heard loudly throughout Afghanistan.

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