



# AFGHAN WOMEN AND THE UNITED NATIONS

2011

## UN Women working for Afghan women

Women and girls are more active in Afghanistan's public life than they were ten years ago



Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all of the UN agencies and programmes working in the country.

"Women's strength, women's industry, women's wisdom are humankind's greatest untapped resource," UN Women Executive Director Bachelet said.

Afghan women's rights remain vulnerable despite their progress in the past decade. Violence in the conflict affects women in most parts of the country, and harmful traditional practices continue to affect women's ability to enjoy their rights.

Many girls in Afghanistan face obstacles to attend school, and this lack of access to education is among the root causes affecting their progress. Illiteracy – which is common among 90 per cent of girls in the country – is directly correlated to violence against women. Cut off from education, and married at a young age, these underage marriages and pregnancies among girls contributes to Afghanistan's very high death rate among young mothers in birth – the second worst rate in the world.

"Since 2001, the life of women has changed but Afghan women are still experiencing deadly challenges. Change takes time and the United Nations is determined to support Afghanistan's women and girls for as long as it takes," said Christine Ouellette, country director in Afghanistan for UN Women.

Of the 249 Members of the newly inaugurated Parliament, 69 are women. Of the nearly seven million children enrolled in schools, over 37 per cent are girls, and nearly a third of the 170,000 teachers are women. Female doctors and police officers - while not common – are working.

And the United Nations is working to help families, communities and the government ensure that Afghan women and girls can continue to help build the nation in the years ahead.

"UN Women" was launched in February of this year to lead the UN's global effort to work with women and men all over the world for the empowerment and equality of women. UN Women is also based in Afghanistan, working with the Government as well as civil society and communities.

At the global level, UN

**“Since 2001, the life of women has changed but Afghan women are still experiencing deadly challenges. Change takes time and the United Nations is determined to support Afghanistan's women and girls for as long as it takes”**

Women works to formulate new policies and global standards on equality and women's rights, and to monitor and support member countries in their efforts to meet those standards.

The new head of UN Women, former President of Chile Michele Bachelet, said her priorities for the first 100 days of the new institution are to expand women's voice, leadership and participation, end violence against women, strengthen implementation of women's peace and security agenda, and

make gender equality a priority for national and local governments.

In Afghanistan, these priorities translate into promotion of women's access to justice; support for the implementation and expansion of the Law on Violence against Women (EVAW); supporting the Government in implementing the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA); and strengthening the work of UN Women.

These priorities are supported by the efforts of the United Nations

### Inside Stories

Law on Elimination of Violence against Women gains momentum

See pages 2-3



UN: Maternal mortality a top priority for 2011

See pages 4-5



Girl Power: Equal access to education and opportunities

See pages 6-7





# Implementing the Law on Elimination of Violence

## Harmful traditional practices violate the law and are often inconsistent with Islamic teachings

“The citizens of Afghanistan, men and women, have equal rights and duties before the law ”

Article 22, Constitution of Afghanistan

“And whoever does good deeds according to his capacity while he believes in Allah and His Messenger, will be welcomed into Paradise. They will never be wronged, not even as little as the speck in a date stone. There is no distinction between male and female ”

Holy Koran, Al Nisa, Verse 124

The rights of Afghan women and girls are protected under Sharia Law and the Constitution of Afghanistan. The Law on Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW), enacted by the Government of Afghanistan in August 2009, fights against customs, traditions and practices that cause violence against women contrary to the religion of Islam.

In July 2010, President Hamid Karzai and other participants in the Kabul Conference publicly reiterated “the centrality of women’s rights, including political, economic and social equality, to the future of Afghanistan,” and vowed within six months to implement the EVAW law and the National Action Plan for Women.

The EVAW law provides women and girls with the legal tools to fight against abuse in the courts. Under the EVAW law, anyone who commits crimes against women and girls (including husbands, uncles, parents or parents-in-law) can be punished by imprisonment.

The EVAW law states that violence against women includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse, deprivation of property and inheritance, denial of access to health, education and work, and crimes related to forced marriage. In Islam, marriage by definition is a voluntary union of



two people. Mutual consent or *Ijab-o-Qabul* is a prerequisite.

According to a 2010 report by the agency UN Women, almost one-third of Afghan women are exposed to physical and psychological violence and nearly one-fourth suffer sexual violence – usually from their husbands or in-laws.

As many as 80 per cent of Afghan marriages are forced - the majority before the girl turns the legal age of 16, according to the agency UN Women. Such early

marriages lead to other problems. Young wives often become pregnant before their bodies and minds are sufficiently mature. Afghanistan is one of the world’s deadliest countries for would-be-mothers: every 30 minutes an Afghan female dies from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, according to Government figures.

Even when the mother and baby survive, a married girl with a child is unlikely to attend school. Only 37 per cent of girls have access to education keeping the literacy rate among Afghan women as low as around ten per cent.

The United Nations is working with the Government to give force to the EVAW law, and raise awareness about its importance. A Special Violence against Women Unit has been created in the Attorney General’s office with nine prosecutors to enforce the law. The Government has also created a national Committee on Elimination of Violence against Women and provincial-level committees that have been established in most provinces.

“As long as women and girls are subject to practices that harm, degrade and deny them their human rights, little meaningful and sustainable progress for women’s rights can be achieved in Afghanistan,” said Georgette Gagnon, UNAMA’s director of human rights.

### Underage marriage

In more than half of all marriages in Afghanistan, the girl is under the legal age of 16, according the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and UN Women. In a recent study of 200 married girls, 40 per cent were married between the ages of 10 and 13, 33 per cent at the age of 14 and 28 per cent at the age of 15.

Widespread illiteracy and nationwide poverty are among the main causes of and challenges to eradicating underage marriage. The practice of selling young girls as wives entrenches their inferior status as commodities to be traded, not human beings with equal rights. High prices for brides encourages poor families to sell their daughters to older men. Marrying off the girls in the family can also offset the costs of finding brides for the boys.

In some particularly poor areas the value of girls is measured as even less. In these areas girls sometimes get traded for livestock. In one case, in Badghis, a girl was exchanged



“As long as women and girls are subject to practices that harm, degrade and deny them their human rights, little meaningful and sustainable progress for women's rights can be achieved in Afghanistan”

for a vehicle. There are also cases where girls are married-off to settle loans, such as debts after a bad harvest.

Such arrangements usually produce misery for the married women and girls. Up to 70 per cent of registered cases of violence against women have their origins in early marriages, according to AIHRC.

### Baad

A girl married through *baad* “is never respected by her family as they associate her with her male relative who committed the crime and accuse her equally of being a criminal. The girl is treated like a servant as a means of revenge. Sometimes she is forced to sleep with the animals in the barn.”

- Women in Faryab province

Under *baad*, girls are given away by communities or relatives to settle crimes such as murder, rape, adultery or instances where women have run away. In theory, the honour of the family is restored by creating a common interest and “mixing blood.” But the family that receives the girl often punishes her for the crime and she can face a lifetime of violence and abuse.

### Self-immolation

“Young women married to old men, sold, swapped for sheep or even opium...under pressure from abusive husbands and mothers-in-law they sometimes go to mullahs and community councils to ask for help, but even there they face humiliation and abuse,” said the doctor in charge Afghanistan’s only special burns unit at the Herat Regional Hospital.

The burns unit handled between eight and ten cases each month last year, up 40 per cent from 2009. About 2,400 women annually set themselves on fire across the country due to depression caused by acts of violence against women, according to Government figures.







### Imprisoned for "running away"

"I am a mother of two. I ran away from Kandahar to Kabul. I have been here for two years."

-Prisoner in Pul-e-Charki prison in Kabul where 91 women lived, many with their children

Out of 10,500 prisoners and detainees in Afghanistan, 300 are women and half of them are detained for "crimes" such as

"running away".

"Running away" is not a crime under Afghan law but law enforcement authorities often arrest, jail or prosecute girls for running away. Sometimes these women are charged with intention to commit *zina* - sexual intercourse outside of marriage - even though *zina* has not actually occurred.



### Widows and inheritance rights

Harmful traditional practices also curtail women's rights after their husbands die. Widows are considered property of their in-laws, and risk losing their children and their inheritance if they do not remarry within the family.

"When my husband died, my in-laws forced me to leave the house, which was actually in my *mahr* (dowry). Since I was an illiterate woman, I didn't know if I had any legal rights," said Amida a mother of six whose husband was killed in a suicide attack.

A local civil society

organization started a women's group in the district, and as neighbour encouraged Amida to join.

"After I joined the solidarity group, I learned about my Islamic and legal rights. Then I went to the Family Court and demanded my property. The *shura* referred me to legal aid and I received a free lawyer who defended my cases. As a result, I got my house back."

Amida has now finished high school and is helping her daughters get an education. She works with the same organization that helped her through legal aid, and is advocating for greater women's access to education and clinics.

Amida said legal protection is key for women's rights. The lawyers who defended her case utilized the Afghanistan Constitution and the EVAW law which criminalises both forced marriage and denial of inheritance.

### Provincial prosecution for violence

"Women in Afghanistan went through a lot of misery. They had to bear the burden of a dismal situation created by men. Deceased children, lost husbands, hungry family - it all fell on their shoulders. However, I am convinced our women are very capable. I would like to tell them to remember that they have rights. The right to study is one of the most important ones. They should strive to study, become proficient in a subject, and become successful in our society, mindful of its culture and traditions, which require striking a good balance between religion and profession."

Today, we women strive and work in these hard conditions so that young girls may one day be able to work and have a better life, and better prospects. I hope that our young women will be persistent and determined in achieving what they have aspired for. I hope they will think for themselves, and not cave under outside pressure."

Full interview on [www.unodc.org](http://www.unodc.org)

-Maria Bashir, Afghanistan's only female chief provincial prosecutor is also EVAW's greatest proponent. As of November 2010, her office had filed charges under the EVAW law in 88 cases.

**"I am convinced our women are very capable. I would like to tell them to remember that they have rights!"**



### Honour killings

"Frashta, a woman in her early 20s was forcibly married to her cousin in 2009, but ran away with another man after beatings and drugging by her grandmother and stepfather. Police arrested Frashta for intent to commit *zina* and sentenced her to five months imprisonment. Following her release, her great uncle shot and killed her during a "reconciliation" dinner. The great uncle, grandmother and two other women were arrested and await trial."

- Parwan province

Most killings target women and girls who refused to enter into arranged marriages or who had relationships that the family considered inappropriate.

Former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women Rashida Manjoo called honour "a magic word that cloaks the most heinous of crimes."

### Legal help centres

In partnership with the Departments of Justice and of Women's Affairs and its local partners, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) last year set up eight Legal Help Centres in Balkh and Herat to provide legal protection and support to victims of domestic violence.

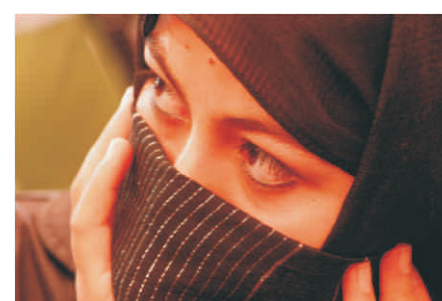
The Centres trained more than 100 paralegal volunteers - who in turn trained more than 7,000 villagers and community leaders - on basic legal issues, including the rights of women and gender-based violence.

Since the establishment of the Legal Help Centres, more than 100 cases of violence against women have been registered each month. Of these, 40 per cent of those relating to early and forced marriages have been resolved.

Among them the case of Suraiya (not her real name) who was sold at the age of seven.

Beaten by her husband and his family, she was finally able to run away at 16 and returned to her father's house. She was forced to go back to her husband's home, where she was beaten and thrown on to the street. The Legal Help Centre registered her case, lodged a formal complaint with the police and monitored her case until her husband and father-in-law were imprisoned for three years.

- Balkh Province, northern Afghanistan



### TO REPORT ANY OF THESE CRIMES:

A victim of violence or her relative can file a complaint with the police; courts; Human Rights office of the Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Women's Affairs; Attorney General's Office, especially the Special Violence Against Women Unit; Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission or non-governmental organizations.

**Afghan Women's Network  
Counseling Hotline  
at 0752007171**



# Improving the health of mothers and infants

The United Nations in Afghanistan has prioritized the health of new mothers and infants as one of its main goals for the year

Improving the health of birthing mothers and reducing the death rate of newborn children is one of the five top priorities for the United Nations in Afghanistan in 2011. Working with communities, civil society and the Government to help Afghans achieve this demonstrates the UN's commitment to protecting human rights of all Afghans, including those most vulnerable. Nine out of ten women in Afghanistan give birth without the help of a trained attendant. Better maternal healthcare will result in saving the lives of Afghan women and newborn children, and in helping them live more healthy and productive lives.

## Healthy women, healthy families

Afghanistan is one of the deadliest places in the world to give birth. One in every 11 women risk dying from complications related to pregnancy, and an estimated one out of every 20 babies born dies within the first month.

Lack of access to health facilities in rural areas and lack of female health personnel, especially midwives, remain the main obstacles to lowering the maternal mortality and infant death rate. Only one-third of pregnant women receive pre-natal care and only 14 per cent of births take place in the presence of a skilled attendant. Insecurity, lack of infrastructure, lack of awareness about the dangers during pregnancy, childbirth and post-partum, and associated factors such as early marriage, the high number of pregnancies per woman and inadequate nutrition make things worse.

Some traditions also bar women from using health services, such as *pardah* or shame of delivering in public spaces, lack of permission from men to travel and travel costs for the man to accompany his wife as her *mahram*.

President Hamid Karzai highlighted the need to address challenges to maternal and child mortality at the Kabul Conference in July 2010, and at the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2010 where he recommitted to reducing child mortality and improving maternal mortality by 2020, in line with UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

UN agencies working to support the Government deliver better services to improve maternal health and reduce deaths of newborn children include the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UNAIDS, together with the World Bank.

## "Waiting" for delivery

Afghan women living in remote rural areas often need to travel long distances to give birth. Maternity Waiting Homes are planned in each provincial hospital to provide accommodation for high risk patients who travel with accompanying family members and have no alternative means to stay in the expensive urban centre. Construction has been completed for six maternity Waiting Homes in Kandahar, Badakhshan, Bamyán, Laghman, Kunar and Herat with more than 900 women and newborns benefiting from the services, according to UNICEF.



## Afghan women serving Afghan mothers and infants

New midwives hold candles at their graduation ceremony from the Faizabad Community Midwifery Education Programme. Nearly 90 girls and women completed the 18-month training since the programme started in 2005 in the northern province of Badakhshan which once had the highest incidence of maternal mortality ever recorded in history: 6,500 deaths out of every 10,000 live births.

The midwife graduation is part of a nationwide effort to make maternal health facilities, infant care and family planning available in rural and remote areas.

"We are about to start the fifth season with 21 educated girls enrolled from 19 districts of the province," said the Head of the Faizabad Community Midwifery School, Syram Sadat.

In Paktya, 92 women from 13 districts within the province and also from neighbouring Ghazni and Paktika completed the same type of training and are now working in the regions.

Among them is Sefat Bibi, whose new role as a midwife changed her life.

"I had been mistreated, threatened and beaten by my poor and disabled husband, but then I completed the community

midwifery training. Now I receive not only a salary and privileges, and great respect from my spouse, but I also serve my country-women to save their lives," Bibi said.

Out of the 9,000 midwives needed to cater to all Afghan women, about 2,350 are actively working. An additional 800 students are training in midwifery institutions around the country as part of a rapid mobilization effort to deploy skilled birth attendants - recognized by the country's National Midwifery Education Accreditation Board - to remote areas where health facilities are more than a three hour walk.

The Ministry of Public Health, with support from UNICEF, UNFPA and other partners, operates Community Midwifery Programmes in Bamyán, Faryab, and plans to start ones in Kandahar.

In addition, WHO and UNICEF assisted the Ministry of Public Health to improve Emergency Newborn and Obstetric Care services by training 400 midwives and doctors in emergency care and supplying equipment and medicines to maternity hospitals.

In Faryab, Bamyán and Badakhshan, UNFPA and its implementing partners also support mobile health units for the provision of reproductive health services. Midwives are part of the mobile teams.

## Fighting malnutrition among mothers and children

Poor nutrition is a significant contributor to maternal mortality and infant death. More than 18 per cent of pregnant women are malnourished and more than one-fifth of nursing mothers are underweight, according to a joint survey by the Afghan Ministry of Public Health and UN agencies.



Many women's diets lack key vitamins and minerals, so nearly half of women of childbearing age are iron-deficient and 75 per cent have iodine deficiencies. Overall infant and young child feeding practices are poor, and more than half of children under five-years of age are chronically malnourished, stunting their physical and mental development and leading to undernutrition-related diseases.

The World Food Programme (WFP) provides lifesaving nutritional support to pregnant women, new mothers and children under five through its supplementary feeding programme, which is active in 13 provinces. This year, WFP will feed around 55,000 pregnant women and nursing mothers, and 62,000 children.



## Young brides at higher risk

Physically premature pregnancies are the leading cause of death in girls aged 15 to 19 worldwide, especially significant in Afghanistan where 40 per cent of girls under 18 are married. The direct causes of maternal death are haemorrhage, sepsis, pregnancy-induced hypertension, and obstructed labour. Nine out of ten women in Afghanistan give birth without the help of a trained attendant, meaning these complications are often deadly. While poor health care and lack of access to trained birth attendants are factors, physical immaturity is the main killer, according to UNICEF.

“We treat pregnant mothers as young as 12 years of age,” said a midwife at Malalai Maternity Hospital in Kabul, one of the leading medical institutions in the country.

The teenage pregnancy rate in Afghanistan is one of the highest in the world, at 150 per 1,000 people, according to UN Development Programme (UNDP). Most girls in Afghanistan get married with little or no information on family planning or safe motherhood. Afghan women average more than six children and only 15 per cent of people use some form of birth control, according to UNICEF.

With the Government in the lead, UN agencies and programmes have ongoing campaigns to educate young girls and expand access to reproductive health services throughout the country, including into remote regions to reach nomad Kuchi groups and internally displaced persons.

## Housecalls to immunize infants



Thousands of women vaccinators and volunteers go house-to-house to administer vaccinations for polio, tetanus and other life-threatening diseases to infants and small children. The pre-filled needle and syringes can be used with minimal medical training in remote communities.

“An estimated 180,000 infants miss out on routine vaccination in Afghanistan every year,” said Peter Graaff, WHO Representative in Afghanistan. “Some of those who are not immunized live in insecure areas. They lack access to basic health services. Others are not immunized due to little awareness of the importance of immunization.”

The vaccination campaigns are led by the Afghan Ministry of Public Health, with support from UNICEF, WHO and its partners.

Six rounds of special polio Immunization Days in recent years reached nearly eight million children under five years of age.



## Changing behaviour in communities

Women in a Village Health Committee (VHC) have planned an awareness campaign in Parwan province with messages to motivate their neighbours to adopt healthy behaviours. Since 90 per cent of births happen at home, these committees have a major impact on how pregnant women take care of themselves and their children.

The Ministries of Public Health, Education and Rural Rehabilitation and Development, with support from UN-Habitat and UNICEF, are implementing a behaviour-change communication strategy in Bamyan, Herat, Nangarhar, Parwan and Logar. The project aims to promote health, education and well being of children and their families and increase the participation

of Afghan youth, women and men in the development and advancement of their country.

Nearly 1,500 VHC workshops have been held so far across Afghanistan with more than 4,500 women participants.



A woman leading a prenatal class in Kabul in the 1960s.

## Preventing parent to child transmission of HIV

At least 630 positive cases of HIV/AIDS have been documented in Afghanistan, according to the National Aids Control Program (NACP). Low levels of surveillance and testing, and high levels of taboo and stigma associated with the disease make it almost impossible to figure out the actual cases but UNAIDS reported that it is likely in the thousands, with the highest risks in Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad.

Since 2003, the Ministry of Public Health has worked with UNICEF and its partners to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and its contributing factors and risks. A national strategy for preventing transmission from parent-to-child is now underway which includes spousal counselling and testing, and better use of existing voluntary confidential counselling and testing and anti-retroviral therapy.



# Bringing and keeping girls and women in school

In the past decade, thousands of girls enrolled in school; and thousands of women enrolled in vocational training, learned new skills and inspired their communities

The sharp rise in the number of women and girls enrolled in schools is one of Afghanistan's most powerful symbols of change. Whereas ten years ago girls few attended classes, these days they make up over 37 per cent of the more than seven million students enrolled in schools, including about 26,000 children enrolled in government-run kindergartens.

But stark disparities in girls' enrolment rates still exist. While in provinces such as Herat and Badakhshan there is near parity, in the south, in Uruzgan there are only two girls for each ten boys in school. In Zabul there is only one girl student for every 10 boys, according to the Ministry of Education. The percentage of teachers who are women also varies by region. Altogether nearly 45,000 women teach in public schools. Females make up 73 percent of the instructors in Kabul and 51 percent in Balkh, but only four percent in Uruzgan and one percent in Paktika.

Low enrolment rates by girls have several main causes: poverty, poor security which makes it risky for girls to attend classes, and patriarchal cultural norms. To dispel traditional beliefs that stand in the way of girls attending school, in Paktya province girls and women attend workshops on education in Islam.

The Government, the United Nations and their partners are working to overcome these challenges. It is the theme for this year's International Women's Day: Equal access to education, training and science and technology: Pathway to decent work for women.

## Widows training to be tailors

Sakeena, one of 1.5 million widows in Afghanistan, sells eggs to pay the costs of travel to a tailoring training centre.

"I am so happy to have this golden opportunity to learn a skill and to stand on my own legs to support my children and poor family," she said.

"The main purpose of the course is to provide tailoring skills to help women become self-sufficient and lead an honourable life in the society," said Haleema Khazan, Director of Women's Affairs in Paktya, which coordinates the three-month training for widows, orphans and other vulnerable women.

About 140 women are enrolled. Upon completion, they receive sewing machines, irons and scissors.



Stories and Photos  
by the United Nations  
Read more at  
<http://unama.unmissions.org>



Here is a sample of some of those activities:

In the Central Highlands, after some elders and religious leaders completed literacy classes, they became eager for their family members, including their daughters-in-law and grand-daughters, to learn to read and write. In addition to supporting traditional schools, UNICEF, UNESCO and their partners continue to support community-based schools and classes held in informal settings and remote areas.

UNICEF is also working with the Afghan Teacher Education Department and the

Ministry of Education, exploring ways to raise the number of female teachers and introduce the teaching of menstrual health and hygiene to girls.

The World Food Programme's (WFP) Food-for-Education programme encourages school participation by providing in-school snacks and hot meals. In some areas, girls receive a take-home ration of vegetable oil as an incentive to their families to send them to school. This year the WFP will distribute this incentive to about 600,000 families.



## Schools reopen in Kandahar

Thousands of girls have reportedly enrolled in the past year in Kandahar province where 120,000 boys and 42,000 girls are enrolled in 234 functioning schools, according to the provincial director of education.

The reopening in Kandahar and neighbouring provinces is led by the Ministry of Education officials, with support

of local councils and tribal elders, and in partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO.

Training centres also reopened giving young women the opportunity for higher learning.

"I am acquiring my higher education in ACCC (a non-governmental management computer centre). It is not easy, for girls, to acquire education in Kandahar city. However, thanks to my family, who provided me with full support. I am now able to support my family and contribute to the local economy in Kandahar. My message for women is that they should fight for their rights to education," said Yalda, a Kandahar resident.

"Women should fight to get their rights without fearing anyone. They have to continue to fight for their rights to education. Women's role is pivotal in the rebuilding of the country and in contributing to its economic development," said Ehsanullah Ehsan, Head of ACC.

## Women as peacemakers in provinces

Afghanistan's High Peace Council was established in October 2010, following the Consultative Peace Jirga. The 1,600 members of the Peace Jirga – including about 300 women – agreed that the Council be established to help lead national efforts to achieve peace.

The Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Program is setting up councils at the Provincial level under the leadership of governors. The hope is that, as in the High Peace Council, women will play an important role.

At the High Peace Council's request, the United Nations created a group of experts known as the Salaam Support Group to provide technical and

logistical assistance for the Council's work.

"UNAMA's support to the High Peace Council is consistent with its Security Council mandate to assist the Government and the people of Afghanistan in laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development," said Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan.

Afghan women have a vital role to play to help achieve peace, and to help ensure that all Afghans can both contribute to achieving peace and benefit from it. Afghan women have been active in the peace efforts since their participation in the 2001 peace negotiations in Bonn.



## If they did it, you can do it too



### Women in business

In the past decade, more women learned new skills, entered the workforce and inspired their communities to become more self-reliant. About 43 per cent of women in Afghanistan work, according to the UN International Labour Organization (ILO).

Often, women's first steps into the work force begin with learning read and write. Under the guidance of the Government's National Literacy Strategy, UN agencies and programmes reached more than one million youth and adults in nearly all provinces. About 60 per cent of the participants are women.

The literacy programmes include a community banking element. Women in more than 6,500 Self Help Learning Groups in 20 provinces collected nearly Afs 27million, about USD 600,000, which is reinvested back into the communities.

### Women in the medias speaking for a nation

In one of the more conservative regions in Afghanistan, a woman's voice is discussing early and forced marriages, self-immolation cases and the exchange of a woman to settle a criminal case. Radio Zohara is on the air.

The station is one of four women-run radios in the country - Voice of Afghan Women in Kabul, Radio Rabia Balkhi in Mazar-e-Sharif and Radio Sahar in Herat- and one of six in the region where women are the top boss of the newsrooms.

"I am sure that the women have a brighter future in Kunduz. I see their wide participation in the field of media," said Radio Zohra's director, Najeyah Khodayar.



Studying medicine in the 1960s and today



To help women attending literacy programmes and vocational training, WFP provides food rations. More than 120,000 trainees - mostly women - who learned trades last year such as beekeeping, weaving and carpentry received food rations to feed an additional 600,000 relatives.

Increasingly, women are also creating businesses. A backyard poultry project overseen by the Government and implemented by the Food Agricultural Organization (FAO) created 13,000 small scale poultry farms in eight provinces. Similarly, about 1,500 families in rural areas are taking part in a dairy project.

Women are also working as day labourers. In one community in Herat, women are hired to separate saffron robes from flowers. Saffron is increasingly being used as a legal alternative to opium.

An elderly woman said that during the winter, saffron processing helps her buy bread for the family, "This is a very good job. It keeps the women busy and puts more to work. Those who cultivate ask neighbours to share work and receive home pay. Some women established the Herat Women Saffron Cultivation Association to enable women to cultivate saffron and help their families."

Radio Zohra is on air for 15 hours a day with music and programmes including "Women and Society," a popular show with young women who are invited to call in to the station.

"Radio Zahora gave me an identity and fame in society, and I am extremely happy to contribute to the freedom and the peace process in my country," said Samia, a newscaster at the radio.



### Pioneer photojournalist

"Sometimes the only way to get a true Afghan story is to have an Afghan woman take the photos.

When I go to the provinces, some of the women say to me that they would like to be like me; literate, travel and see many places and to be working. I tell them to study and help their male family members understand how important that is to them.

I think Afghan women should not be sleeping now. There are reports everywhere that the rights for women are changing, but it is only happening in the big cities. But in the provinces, they are still not aware of the freedoms they have."

Full interview on [www.warshooter.com](http://www.warshooter.com) - Farzana Wahidy, 26 year old, is the first Afghan woman to photograph Afghanistan for international news outlets.



### Women in politics

Afghanistan's Lower House of Parliament, the Wolesi Jirga, convened in January with 69 women among the 249 Member of Parliament. A record number of 406 women candidates ran for office.



### Women in security

The first unit of 29 women cadets who graduated from Afghanistan's army training centre in Kabul now work in the Afghan National Army (ANA). New female recruits are being trained in other provinces, including Helmand.

Women are also part of the police force. Their presence makes it easier for survivors of violence to report traumatic experiences, the agency UN Women said.



### Women in technology

Students at the Herat Technical Institute are learning to use cameras to plan roads and run generators donated by UNAMA.

"Now I can work to learn with the actual devices. Before I only read about these devices, but now some of them are available and I can try to know them better," said Adele, 21, one of the 570 students studying energy and construction at the Institute.

### Women in the arts

"Oh! We are surrounded here, we have no way out, but we have two choices either to surrender or to withstand. This might be the last time for us to decide whether to struggle or surrender. That is what I say. You have your own choice."

So is the climax of the fifty-minute play, *Stones and a Mirror*. Written and directed by 24-year-old Monireh Hashemi, the play tells the stories of women who fled to the Bamyán Mountains to commit mass suicides as a result of cruelty by the political leaders of the time.

"I depicted women's escapes in the play," Hashemi said. "Women flee from themselves, from their society and all the unjust but institutionalized beliefs existing towards women in Afghanistan."



# Supporting women in Afghan peace efforts

The participation of women and girls in today's Afghanistan is more crucial than ever in shaping the nation of tomorrow



by **Staffan de Mistura**  
Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Afghanistan

Women in Afghanistan are taking their places at all levels of society, as the stories in this special edition of "Afghan Women and the United Nations" show. All Afghans should be proud of national women's strength, commitment and contributions to the betterment of this country. However progress achieved by Afghan women in the past decade is vulnerable. It is up to all Afghans to make certain that the urgent strides for reconciliation, political stability and peace are made keeping women's and girls' human rights at the centre of agreements.

Peace remains the main objective for Afghans and the United Nations family in 2011. All parties now realize that there can be no military-alone solution to the armed conflict. There must be dialogue with all parties involved leading to a political solution for long-term peace. This is increasingly urgent, as the toll of the long conflict hurts families and communities across the country. For security gains to be sustained, Afghanistan requires a political vision that is articulated, driven and owned by the Afghans. Women comprise more than half of the population in Afghanistan - they must actively participate and be directly represented in discussions and dialogue.

Ten years ago, the United Nations Security Council passed the historic Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. This Resolution guides the work of the UN and its Member States in conflict-affected countries. The resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction, and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all related efforts.

It also calls on all parties to a conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Afghanistan is one of the oldest UN Member States, since 1946, and so has also made this commitment under Security Council Resolution 1325.

In addition to security and political stability, one of the five other priorities for the UN this year is stability of the home by strengthening maternal and newborn health. Pregnant women are more likely to die in Afghanistan than in almost any other country in the world because there are not enough skilled medical attendants and the hospitals are few and far between. Children left without mothers start their lives deeply disadvantaged for caring, health and education.

Part of the challenge of combating

and promotion; 2) sub-national governance and the rule of law; and 3) sustainable livelihoods. Together, these five priorities reflect the UN's focus on supporting the people and Government of Afghanistan in both the immediate need to achieve peace and the building blocks to ensure that peace can be sustained over the long-term.

As the stories in this issue illustrate, Afghan women are working to represent their communities – both at the local level in District Development Councils and at the national level in Parliament. Women are judges and lawyers, police officers and members of the security forces, medical doctors, nurses and midwives, teachers and students, artists, business-women, government officers and NGO workers.

The Afghan women in these stories are role models for today's children and the future leaders of this country.

“It is up to all Afghans to make certain that the urgent strides for reconciliation, political stability and peace are made keeping women's and girls' human rights at the centre of agreements”

maternal mortality is traditional practice and violence against women. In 2009, the Government enacted the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW law) which represents a major step forward in the legal protection of women's rights, and which the United Nations strongly supports.

The United Nations' priorities to support Afghan-led efforts to assist women and children now have a new champion. In February this year the UN took the historic step of establishing UN Women, a new global organization to lead worldwide efforts to protect and promote the equality of girls and women, including in Afghanistan.

In addition to the priorities of dialogue and peace, and maternal and newborn health, the United Nations family in Afghanistan in 2011 has set three further major priorities: 1) human rights protection

Women are the cornerstone of family life, and at the hub of Afghanistan's proud Islamic religious and cultural heritage and ways of life. It is especially important that children - particularly girls - are treated in a way that they can contribute as full citizens of a peaceful and developing Afghanistan. Afghan women of all ages have a huge contribution to make to building lasting peace and development. The wisdom of elderly women, the strength and experience of women in their middle years, and the energy, education and enthusiasm of young Afghan women are great assets for the country.

I am pleased to introduce this special edition of "Afghan Women and the United Nations" and especially pleased to dedicate it to the efforts of girls and women who contribute to a peaceful, developed and prosperous Afghanistan.



"I am a flight attendant. If I did it, You can do it too"

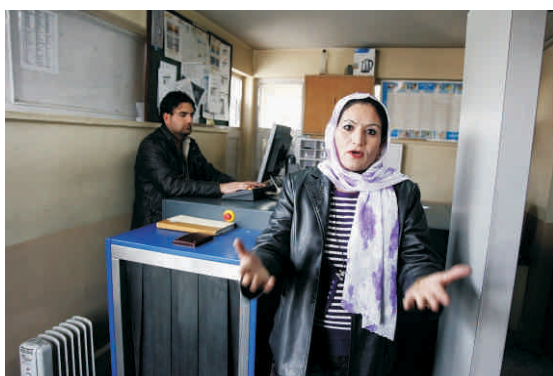


"I am pharmacist, If I did it, You can do it"

## If they did it, you can do it too



"I am a manager. If I did it, You can do it"



"I am a security officer. If I did it, You can do it"

## UN on RTA

UNAMA produces a weekly radio show on a wide range of topics. Afghanistan Today (Afghanistan Emroz) is broadcast on the national broadcaster RTA (Radio Television Afghanistan) every Saturday at 8 pm.

UNAMA co-produces two regular television shows with RTA.

CSA: Crime Scene Afghanistan (Dar Jostejoi Haqayegh) is an award-winning crime and investigation series broadcast every Thursday at 9pm on RTA.

Mirror of the City (Aine Shaher) is a current events show that airs every Sunday at 9pm.