



## Afghan Female Leaders Secure Commitment from Dutch and European Institutions

Afghan Female Leaders visit to Europe 26-29 November 2012



# **GENDERCONCERNS** *INTERNATIONAL*



**WEEKREPORT**  
26-29 NOV**2012**



## Introduction

Gender Concerns International, in partnership with Afghan Women Network and supported by the EU, organised a four day visit of a delegation of prominent Afghan women including two Members of Parliament from 26-29 November, 2012. This report details the main activities of the visit which included constructive discussions with Dutch and European Parliamentarians about the importance of female leadership in Afghanistan post 2014 pending the potential withdrawal of international troops and the expected presidential elections.

The Afghan delegation consisted of MPs Fatima Aziz from Kunduz province, and Aziza Jalis from Sare Pul, Afifa Azim, General Director of Afghan Women Network and Shukria Hassani, representative of the Regional, Gender, Development and Conflict platform.

The female leadership program was organised as part of the Rehbar project, a joint venture by Afghan Women Network and Gender Concerns International. The Rehbar Project, (meaning 'leader') focuses on strengthening and enhancing the effectiveness of the female leadership cadre among women's organisations, civil society organisations and parliamentarians in Afghanistan.

## **“Rest assured we will continue our commitment to the women in Afghanistan” – Thijs Berman, European Parliament**



Gender Concerns International on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> November, arranged a special session on female leadership in Afghanistan with the Delegation for Relations with Afghanistan at the European Parliament, in Brussels.

The meeting between the delegation for relations for Afghanistan, and the Afghan Delegation of female leaders secured commitment from the European Parliamentarians to monitor the situation of women in the country when the international troops are expected to withdraw in 2014.



Chair of the delegation for relations with Afghanistan for the European Parliament, Thijs Berman, said the visit of the Afghan women was an excellent initiative of Gender Concerns International. "Rest assured we will continue our commitment to the women in Afghanistan, with legislature and development aid in the next seven years" he said. He spoke of setting up a Euro Afghan parliamentary committee. In the following months a video conference will be organised between European Parliamentarians and Parliamentarians in Kabul.



The main speakers at the special session on gender were the Afghan MPs, Director of Gender Concerns International, Sabra Bano, the Ambassador of Afghanistan to Belgium, Homayoun Tandar and representatives from the European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan, The East West Institute, and the European External Action Services.



MP Fatima Aziz said she was concerned that the gains made in the past 10 years by women in Afghanistan would not be carried forward once the international troops withdrew in 2014. “We need to have a firm commitment that the situation in Afghanistan will be closely monitored and evaluated so that the new administration will fully embrace the participation of women in the democratic process,” she said.

She called for more country-wide capacity building programs for women. “They will be very useful in giving an opportunity to all women to fight for their rights as well as their participation in many different fields,” she said.

“Women today face more challenges in different areas like education, social, professional, cultural, and governmental life, women leaders not only struggle for their women’s rights but also fight for their nation’s rights, against discrimination and inequalities,” she said. All agreed that a fruitful exchange of information between European and Afghan women parliamentarians on how to support women must be on the future agenda.

Ms Aziza Jalis, MP from Sare Pul, expressed her concerns about the need for effective security to protect women in Afghanistan during this vital transition. “We need a safe place to meet” she said. Afifa Azim from Afghan Women Network agreed with the need to protect women leaders before, during, and after the presidential elections in 2014.

The Afghan Ambassador to Belgium Homayoun Tandar highlighted during the Brussels meeting that power relationships needed to be changed between men and women, not everything happened in Kabul, it is country wide, he said.

“We need women to change this balance. Women need to be appointed as leading heads of authority in provinces for greater gender balance. This balance has to be maintained as it is vital for the future of





society.” He promised to look at a parliamentary alliance between European and Afghan parliamentarians.

Sabra Bano, Director of Gender Concerns International, said the visit of Afghan women leaders had highlighted the need for greater effective cooperation and coordination within Afghanistan. She also asked for clarity on NATO’s gender policies post 2014.





### *Dutch parliamentarians from Foreign Affairs Committee welcomed Afghan delegation of female leaders*



**Tweede Kamer**  
DER STATEN-GENERAAL

On Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November, Gender Concerns International organized a meeting with representative parliamentarians from the Foreign Affairs Committee. The meeting was held to discuss the Dutch government's position towards women in Afghanistan post 2014.

Afghan delegation of female leaders spoke over the importance of supporting female leadership in Afghanistan post 2014. The meeting further discussed the situation in Kunduz and the Dutch government's role in the province. The meeting highlighted the benefits of the Dutch government's support as well as the need to continue working and promoting women's rights in the province. Ms Eijssink further made reference to Ms Sabra Bano's contribution to the debate in Parliament. Ms Sabra Bano was invited by the parliament to provide a gender expertise on the parliamentary debate on Kunduz on January 2011.

Representative parliamentarians of the Foreign Affairs Committee supported The Afghan delegation in continuing their commitment to women in Afghanistan post 2014. Dutch parliamentarians introduced the Multi-Party Gender Initiative to include a gender perspective on future policy decisions, an initiative that will be closely monitored by Gender Concerns International.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands

Representatives of The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at a meeting, organised by the coordinator for Afghanistan, Carlyn van der Mark (Gender Concerns International) in close cooperation with Cecile van Manen, (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) took place with The

Afghan delegation on Wednesday, 28 November. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MFA, also agreed to a monitoring system post 2014. The Afghan delegation and Gender Concerns International met the Director of the Stabilization and Humanitarian Aid department, Joost Andriessen and proposed the following actions in the country:





- more projects for women's training
- support women's councils
- building schools and hospitals for women
- factories where women could work to support families
- economic emancipation
- program for justice
- monitoring support from the MFA



Lars Tummers, the Dutch diplomat coordinating MFA work in Kunduz, spoke of 2014 as the 'magical year.' "Despite the withdrawal of international troops the support will remain for Afghanistan, the question remains in which form," he said.

A further meeting with the Dutch Government's Afghanistan task force discussed the future role of NGOs and women's organisations in the country and the support needed to create a viable future there for women.



Director of Gender Concerns International, Sabra Bano highlighted the importance of *resources*, *recognition* and *respect* for women's organisations. The Afghan delegation underlined the need for supporting women within the justice system and monitoring any contentious law matters.

The meeting was of the view that a bottom up approach is needed to support women regarding the Rule of Law. Elders, governors and men in hierarchical positions should recognise women's rights to the fullest extent and respect a formal legal framework.



## Afghanistan 2014 and Beyond

A public event, *Afghanistan 2014 and Beyond: Female Leadership and Confronting Challenges* was held in The House of Europe in The Hague on 29 November 2012. The event was organized by Gender Concerns International. A total of 60 participants from governmental, international organisations and other influential bodies attended the event, which addressed the importance of female leadership in Afghanistan when the international troops potentially withdraw in 2014, and the expected parliamentary elections.



Key speakers were the four Afghan female leaders: MPs Fatima Aziz from Kunduz province, and Aziza Jalis from Sare Pul, the General Director of Afghan Women Network Afifa Azim and Shukria Hassani, representative of Gender, Conflict and Development Platform, Director of Gender Concerns International, Sabra Bano, Caecilia Wijgers, Rule of Law Advisor in Kunduz province from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Marit Maij, member of the Dutch Parliament for the Labour Party PvdA, Dieny Scheffer, chairwoman of Nederlandse Vrouwen Raad (Dutch Women's Council), Theo Koele, Diplomatic Editor of the Volkskrant, and Ambassador of

Afghanistan to the Netherlands, H.E Enayatullah Nabel.

The head of the European Commission, Representative in the Netherlands, Marie Gatta, in the opening address spoke about the significance of improving leadership in society through non-discrimination.

Director of Gender Concerns International Sabra Bano, in a speech on female leadership and confronting challenges in Afghanistan said it was necessary to give women respect, resources and recognition and not negotiate away women's rights after 2014.

Rule of Law Advisor for Kunduz, Caecilia Wijgers, from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the keynote speech said the Dutch government was committed to supporting women in Afghanistan post

2014. The event followed a discussion by the four Afghan female leaders that discussed the challenges and the expectations of the international community.



Dutch MP (Labour Party), Ms Marit Maij, above left, outlined a multi-party initiative where nine Dutch political parties are incorporating gender issues in their policies.

Such policies will ensure the recognition of the important role of women in conflict and transition such as in Afghanistan and promote their participation in democratic processes including

political and economic.



They will also support women working in small businesses in rural industries such as agriculture.

A panel discussion was led by Theo Koele, Diplomatic Editor of the Volkskrant. Mr Koele interviewed Fatima Aziz, MP from Kunduz and Dieny Scheffer chair of NVR (Dutch Women Council). The event concluded with the final speech by H.E Enayatullah Nabel, Afghan Ambassador to the Netherlands providing an Afghan government perspective.

## **Launch of International campaign to support Afghan Women**

Gender Concerns International in partnership with Afghan Women Network, NVR (Dutch Women's Council), Women for Water Partnership and African Sky, organized a meeting, initiated by Gender Concerns International, to discuss the launch of a joint international campaign to support women in Afghanistan with reference to the events leading to 2014.

The commitment was made during a conference with all four women organisations to discuss the future of Afghan women with the two female parliamentarians and two female leaders.

### The Campaigns Focus:

- The campaign's focus will be to support women in Afghanistan with reference to the events leading to 2014.
- More targeted approach in respecting and supporting a formal legal framework
- Female Parliamentary Committee
- Follow up of Euro Afghan parliamentary committee
- Follow up on multi gender initiative



The result of this meeting was that Dutch women organizations should continue their support to the women in Afghanistan and for the future cooperation of women's organisations worldwide. Guests agreed to meet and discuss future joint activities and regarding the launch of an international campaign, suggested: *Women in Afghanistan 2014*.





## Agreed Conclusions

- The week of building capacity organised by Gender Concerns International, was very successful and the skills exchange opportunities provided by Gender Concerns International have led to fruitful results. The result of the meetings at the European Parliament was a secured commitment to Afghan women and Afghanistan itself post 2014 elections including setting up a Euro Afghan parliamentary committee and a video conference. These will be organised between European parliamentarians and Parliamentarians in Kabul.
- Commitment was also achieved by the Afghan delegation and Gender Concerns International at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A multi party gender initiative encompassing gender issues on all levels such as political and economic was initiated by the representative of the Dutch Labour Party. Moreover, the Dutch Ministry promised support to remain in Afghanistan, despite the withdrawal of international troops from the country. Supporting women in regard to the Rule of Law was also agreed to with a system of monitoring that would achieve a sound legal framework, ensuring equality of all genders.
- During the '*Afghanistan 2014 and Beyond*' event in The Hague, speakers agreed that the role of the international community is crucial to establish the development of women so they had the ability to participate in national affairs. The support of European organisations and institutions was also secured.
- An expert meeting after the event consolidated this idea of future cooperation of women's organisations internationally. The female representatives of Dutch civil society and development organisations have offered Afghan parliamentarians follow up international lobbying activities for women's rights.





- Gender Concerns International has met its objectives on capacity building by facilitating a week long skills exchange program. It has won the commitment of some key international players (The European Parliament, Dutch institutions and civil society). It is now time to work on implementing these results and continue supporting Afghan women with the help of European institutions and organisations.





### **GCI Tunisia**

7 impasse nr. 1  
Rue 8840 Centre Urbaine Nord  
P.O. Box nr 105 – 1003 Cite  
El Khadra Tunis, Tunisie



### **GCI Libya**

Sharah Absulsalam Ben Yunis  
Nofleen, Tripoli  
P.O. Box nr 818  
Algeria Square  
T: +218 (0)21 3400696



### **GCI Afghanistan**

Karta Parwan Square  
House #22, Kabul



### **Headquarters:**

### **GCI The Netherlands**

Raamweg 21-22  
2596HL The Hague  
T: +31 (0)70 444 5082

