

AFGHAN WOMEN DENOUNCE 'UN-ISLAMIC' ATTACKS AGAINST WOMEN AND LAUNCH 13-POINT PLAN TO IMPROVE SECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN

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Kabul, Afghanistan: Shocked by the recent murder of a leading women's rights activist and the growing use of suicide bombing as a political weapon, Afghan women have called on the Afghan government and the international community to take 13 steps to improve security and protect women. Otherwise, they warn, the gains made by women in Afghanistan over the past five years will be lost.

The 13 steps include guards for community leaders, reparations for the families of victims of terrorism, intelligence training for Afghan police, and a salary increase for Afghan police and security. Afghan women advocates are also calling on their allies in international civil society to lobby foreign governments and agencies.

The demands were presented at a public demonstration on Thursday by four leading Afghan civil society groups – the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), Agency Coordination Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), Afghan Civil Society Forum (ACSF) and the Foundation for Culture and Civil Society (FCCS). AWN is a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP).

The meeting was prompted by the recent murder of Safia Amajan, a prominent advocate for women's rights and 65 year-old grandmother who headed the department for women's affairs in Kandahar province.

Mrs. Amajan's murder has shocked women in Afghanistan and convinced many advocates that opponents of freedom and democracy in Afghanistan are determined to remove women from public life. "The killing of a respected, hardworking and dedicated woman such as Safia Amajan forces us to ask ourselves if the progress made over the last five years has been worthless," said a statement from Thursday's meeting.

The demonstrators also used the event to protest against the rapid deterioration of security throughout Afghanistan, and the indiscriminate damage done by suicide bombs, which they described as "new to the Afghan political landscape."

The statement reads: "Our government and the many international actors working in Afghanistan have made many promises yet we still live in constant fear. Our police, our military, our legal system and our government offer no protection from our enemies. Acts of terrorism, wrongfully carried out in the name of Islam, are, for the first time in Afghan history plaguing our streets, schools and government buildings.

"Suicide bombs and politically motivated attacks render innocent men, women and children fearful as they leave their homes for school and work. Public servants – men and women

dedicated to the reconstruction and future of Afghanistan – risk being killed for their ideas and work. Our brave, courageous elected officials – men and women chosen by us, the people of Afghanistan – live under constant threat of harm.”

Faced by such a threat, the meeting issued a 13-point action plan that calls for:

- Drivers, bodyguards, and technology for community leaders and officials;
- Financial support for the families of terror victims;
- International aid to address the root causes of social insecurity and terrorism;
- Military intelligence training for Afghan police and security officials;
- Increased salaries for Afghan police and soldiers;
- More professionalism in the Afghan police;
- More effective lobbying by international human rights organizations;
- Intervention by international actors to enforce international laws;
- Effective policing of borders with “neighboring countries that support, harbor and encourage terrorism;”
- Swift action against terrorists, regardless of the political cost;
- The speedy and effective prosecution of terrorists;
- The punishment of corrupt officials;
- Compliance with international human rights law.