

Afghan Women Challenge Donors to Invest in Women, through Civil Society



Kabul July 22, 2010: The Afghan women's movement and its Western allies appear to be at odds over the nature and direction of future aid for women in Afghanistan, following the international donors' conference last Tuesday.

Meeting last weekend on the eve of the conference, 200 women advocates called on donors to build reconstruction around women, and asked that funds be channeled directly to civil society

organizations. Several women later met with the US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. Their appeal appears to have fallen on deaf ears. A communiqué issued after the conference made only a brief reference to women's rights and announced that aid would be increased, but with at least 50% going through the government budget. The conference accepted a pledge by President Karzai to move against corruption and take over running of the war by 2014.

Even the Afghan government admits that some ministries have been unable to spend their existing budgets. This, coupled with the government's lack of transparency, will suggest to many that donors are more concerned about leaving Afghanistan than protecting women. Yet the needs grow more urgent with each passing day. According to [Human Rights Watch](#) the Taliban are imposing a harsh regime on women in areas they have recaptured.

Last week's meeting was organized by two Afghan NGOs - the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) and Equality for Peace and Democracy (EPD). The Advocacy Project (AP) has recruited a Peace Fellow, [Zarin Hamid](#), to work at AWN this summer.

A 5-page statement issued by the meeting acknowledges that Afghan women have made gains in the past eight years, thanks largely to the "affirmative policies" in the 2004 Afghan constitution. Still, it said, "women are under-represented in all decision-making

bodies."

This, says the statement, is unlikely to change until women are seen as an asset: "Considering women's unique experience of war and deprivation, yet emerging as survivors, women's potential and experience should be capitalized in peace-building efforts."

The statement lists over 30 specific programs and policies that would benefit women, including small-scale agriculture (such as dairy, livestock, bee-keeping); microcredit; laws to protect women against sexual harassment; "family-friendly" employment policies; and investments in education such as women-only dormitories in universities.

The statement also argues that women would be better protected if more women worked in the security sector, and if the security forces were trained to enforce the Afghan new law against violence. At least 30% of those working in peace initiatives should be women, in line with UN Resolution 1325.

Women could make a major contribution to the fight against corruption - but first they must have access to information technologies. All new laws should be gender-assessed and "local councils on gender equality" established within policy-making bodies.

The statement also faults the government for investing in traditional justice "where most of women's rights are curtailed." It urges the Afghan government to strengthen the formal justice system, by establishing family courts and training women judges.

Noting that several government ministries have been unable to spend their budgets, the statement makes a strong plea for funds to be directly managed by civil society: "It is highly important that women's organizations should have direct resource allocation and support from government and the international donor community."

- Read the [complete communiqué and recommendations](#).
- For more information [contact AWN](#).