

WOMEN ADVOCATES CALL ON AFGHAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO CONDEMN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE NAME OF ISLAM

Advocacynet
News Bulletin 37, May 23, 2005

Washington, DC: Shocked by the recent stoning of a 25 year-old women for adultery, twenty six Afghan women's groups have called on Afghan scholars and religious leaders to oppose acts of violence against women that are justified in the name of Islam.

The demand was one of several that were issued after a May 5 rally in the Afghan capital of Kabul. The rally brought together over 200 women and was coordinated by the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), a partner of The Advocacy Project.

"As protectors of Islamic Sha'ria, scholars and religious leaders must put an end to actions against human beings that are taken in the name of Islam," says the petition. It also calls on the Afghan government to better protect civil society and take steps to expand the justice system into isolated regions of the country.

The May 5 rally was provoked by two acts of extreme violence against women. On April 21, Bibi Amina, a 25-year old married woman, was stoned to death in Spingul, a valley near Faizabad, the provincial capital of Badakhshan. According to reports, Amina was sentenced to death for adultery by the community council or shura, which comprises village and religious leaders. She was dragged from her parents' house, buried up to her chest, and stoned to death by several men, including her husband. Her male friend was sentenced to 40 lashes.

In a second violent attack against women, three women aid workers were found hanging in the town of Pul-e-Khumri in the northeastern province of Baghlan on May 2. One of the women had worked for the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC).

The stoning of Bibi Amina was particularly harsh given that she had sought to divorce her husband on grounds that he could not support her. The man only returned from Iran recently after spending five years abroad.

The brutality of the killing has shocked Afghan women advocates who have insisted – in the face of some skepticism from their Western counterparts - that Islamic law is compatible with universal rights protecting women.

In fact, all agree that Islamic and secular law were both ignored in the Amina case. Under Afghan law, the husband's complaint should have been registered with the local authorities and investigated by the prosecutor. The case should have gone before the local court, not the shura, and the accused woman guaranteed a fair trial and legal defense.

According to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Islamic law permits stoning for adultery, but also requires that four “honest and impartial” men be eye witnesses to the adulterous act. There were no eye witnesses in this case.

Following an international outcry over Bibi Amina’s murder, the government arrested seven of those involved, including her own father. But other villagers expressed support for the stoning, showing how difficult it will be to introduce the rule of law into villages like Spingul.

This, in the view of women’s groups, underscores the importance of countering the view that Islam tolerates violence against women – an approach that can best be reinforced by religious leaders.

- See a legal analysis of Islamic law and the Bibi Amina murder, in [issue 2](#) of ‘Gender Advocacy in Afghanistan’ a monthly publication of UNIFEM
- Read the [diaries of AP consultant Mary Moore](#), who worked with AWN during 2002/2003.