



A NEW VOICE FOR AFGHAN WOMEN

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF
WOMEN LAWMAKERS IN AFGHANISTAN

Copyright © 2011 EastWest Institute

The EastWest Institute is an international, non-partisan, not-for-profit policy organization focused solely on confronting critical challenges that endanger peace. EWI was established in 1980 as a catalyst to build trust, develop leadership, and promote collaboration for positive change. The institute has offices in New York, Brussels, and Moscow. For more information about the EastWest Institute or this paper, please contact:

The EastWest Institute
11 East 26th Street, 20th Floor
New York, NY 10010 U.S.A.
1-212-824-4100
communications@ewi.info,

www.ewi.info

A New Voice for Afghan Women

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE
OF WOMEN LAWMAKERS
IN AFGHANISTAN





Introduction

This report summarizes the discussions held at the International Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women MPs in Stabilizing and Transforming Afghanistan, organized by the EastWest Institute and the Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention, and hosted by the European Parliament in Brussels on December 7th, 2010. The meeting brought together over seventy leading lawmakers from Afghanistan and Pakistan, and representatives from the Muslim world, alongside experts and officials from Europe and the United States. The aim: to find ways to enhance the role of women lawmakers in Afghanistan's political processes.

The views presented in the report are those of a select group of senior Afghan, Pakistani and international politicians and officials who attended the conference. While the recommendations and conclusions reflect positions that were agreed upon by all participants, the report on the debates proper neither reflect a consensus view nor pretends to fully capture all variations of opinions expressed in the discussions. It tries to capture, however, the predominant views of the participants. EWI is solely responsible for the content as well as any omissions or errors in this report.

State of Play

In UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1888 and 1889, the United Nations declared that women's active participation in conflict resolution is essential for building peace and stability. In September 2010, ten years after the passage of 1325, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said in a call to action, "We must put women at the front and centre of peace processes -- in negotiation and mediation, post-conflict governance and reconstruction." Beyond whatever contribution women can make in ending conflicts, their participation in peace processes and decision-making helps ensure their continued political representation, and prevent the passage of discriminatory legislation.

In Afghanistan, the active participation of women in ongoing peace and stabilization efforts is crucial, and appropriate: Coalition Forces made women's rights a policy goal for their intervention in 2001, framing the war against terror in part as a fight for Afghan women's empowerment. At the time, three decades of conflict and five years of Taliban rule had completely disenfranchised Afghan women, who previously had the right to vote and hold office. After the Taliban regime collapsed, Afghan women got the chance to reclaim their rights as active citizens in governance and take a role in reconstructing their country. Constitutional changes gave women and men equal rights and responsibilities before the law. Women were appointed to prominent positions in the government and gained reserved seats in the Parliament and other political bodies.

Ten years after the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan continues to face great obstacles to peace and stability. Despite the national and international community's rhetoric on the importance of strengthening the role of Afghan women leaders, Afghan women are still far from having a place at the decision-making table. Numerous cultural, political and economical challenges persist that risk reversing current gains:

> In a traditional patriarchal society like Afghanistan, the concentration of executive power in the hands of men makes it difficult for women to be considered credible political actors. Even if they are elected, men tend to assign them a lesser role in political decision-making and almost no role in security-related processes. Although women are formally represented in some of the decision-making bodies, they are only very rarely involved in relevant decision-making processes, and ain visiting delegations outside Afghanistan. As a Pakistani lawmaker pointed out, during the recent conference on Strengthening the Role of Women MPs in Stabilizing and Transforming Afghanistan (December 2010) “It is incredible, but the first time I met an Afghan female MP was in Brussels. I didn’t meet them in Islamabad, because our female colleagues are never part of visiting delegations.”

> Islamic fundamentalism and a particular interpretation of the Koran among certain influential religious leaders pose a serious threat to women’s active engagement in political life. They can and do shape public opinion in a way that endangers women’s security and active political engagement, as seen in the 2009 and 2010 elections, where women were the most vulnerable campaigners, and faced serious security threats including night calls and letters, and physical attacks. Some campaigners were even killed.

> The recent “reconciliation talks” intended to bring the Taliban back into Afghanistan’s political structure have raised many questions: namely, will the Taliban accept the achievements of the Afghan Constitution, including those provisions granting women the right to an education, right to move freely and participate in society, and the right to participate in decision making bodies. The constitution also guaranteed women seats in the National Legislative Assembly. As the government gears up for peace talks with the insurgents, Afghan women fear they will lose the gains of the last ten years. Renewed suppression of women’s participation in political processes and decision-making bodies must not be the consequence of the reconciliation.

To safeguard the achievements of the past ten years, women must be more actively included in all relevant Afghan decision-making bodies, and provided with the political leverage to take part in political debates beyond gender specific issues, particularly reconciliation. Advancing women’s role as full actors in the political game is a necessary part of the ongoing reform process and a key way to help bring peace and stability to the country. It can be done by:

Building strong international support from lawmakers worldwide

The international community of lawmakers can offer crucial support to women parliamentarians in Afghanistan. Afghan women lawmakers are rarely offered the chance to be in the spotlight, and the coalition countries rarely make them part of their political agenda. Their voice is heard all too rarely by lawmakers in Europe or the United States.

Members of the international community, and in particular lawmakers of the coalition countries, can and should play a bigger role in directing political attention to Afghan women lawmakers' role in the ongoing stabilization and peacebuilding efforts, and provide them with a network of support. As a Swedish MP pointed out, "It is difficult to be a parliamentarian without a network."

Enhancing regional cooperation

Afghan and Pakistani women lawmakers have a shared agenda and commonly shared concerns, such as a deep interest in the peaceful resolution of the Afghan conflict. There is a clear interest from Pakistan and other countries in the region to improve the security situation in Afghanistan.

Women lawmakers from Muslim backgrounds, particularly from neighboring countries, are well-placed to understand and relate to the challenges faced by their Afghan peers. Developing a strong regional support group for Afghan lawmakers would contribute to sharing information and best practices from legislative processes in neighboring states, allowing Afghan women MPs to access knowledge and political influence that would otherwise take years to acquire. A regional support network would help strengthen the role of Afghan women lawmakers in policy debates.

Afghanistan remembers better days for women empowerment. It is said that during the 60s Afghanistan had more women in parliament than the U.S. had in the Congress at the time.





Voice of a Lawmaker

Shinkai Karokhail has been a member of the Afghan Parliament's lower house, the Wolesi Jirga, since 2005. In December 2010, she attended the EastWest Institute Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women MPs in Stabilizing and Transforming Afghanistan, where Afghan women lawmakers shared experiences and lessons learned with colleagues from Pakistan and other Muslim countries, as well as lawmakers from the West.

For many participants, the conference highlight was chance to listen to Shinkai Karokhail and her Afghan peers describe the challenges of running for office and governing in a country traditionally ruled by men.

"When I ran for the first time for Parliament, none of my family members supported me, and my brother was very upset with me," said Karokhail. "My husband was also against me running for Parliament, and told my children that because I love power and I want to get involved in politics their life is in danger."

Karokhail said that when she ran for office a second time, in 2010, her husband used the tense security situation as an excuse to take her children out of the country. Still, she says that some progress has been made, and traditional thinking is being changed:

"When I run for the second time for Parliament, I got the support of more people, even of very traditional men, in remote villages. And although there were warlords and businessmen competing with me - people with a lot of money that could easily buy votes - I won and they lost. There is definitely a change starting to take place."

But this new support for women lawmakers is tenuous, according to Karokhail "It is essential for women to have access to power and to decision making positions, especially in a country like Afghanistan. Otherwise we will be easily overlooked by men, and our achievements from the past ten years will be lost."

Challenges

At the EastWest Institute's Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women MPs in Stabilizing and Transforming Afghanistan, participants identified the following challenges and agreed on concrete recommendations to improve the current situation:

Lack of female representation at the decision-making level

Women elected on reserved seats are often perceived as passive players and relegated to token positions. Countries in the coalition forces, particularly the United States, have usually opposed quota systems for this reason. But perhaps because the U.S. framed the intervention in part as a bid for women's rights or perhaps because it is generally a good way to ensure women's representation in decision-making forums, the U.S. did not oppose the introduction of quota systems in the Afghan government.

Still, the Afghan quota system seems to apply only to the Parliament, and there is a stark difference in the number of women appointed in other decision-making positions. As of January 2011, there was one woman minister and one female mayor. Only 5.4% of judges were women, and there was no female representation in the Supreme Court High Council. If women are not in leadership positions, they cannot safeguard newly-acquired rights or bring significant change to the current political and legislative set-up.

Recommendation #1: The international donor community should incorporate quota conditions into concrete requests for the Afghan government, and ensure the respect of these quotas in all programs. Financial restrictions may be applied for lack of compliance with donor requests.

Lack of political leverage

In the last ten years, Afghan women have made impressive political gains, including reserved quota seats in the Wolesi and Meshrano Jirga, the Peace Jirga and the High Peace Council. But this participation forced by the quota system alone does not result in political influence. For example, women members of the High Peace Council were not included in the first crucial visit of that body to Pakistan. The guarantee of the number in Parliament is a huge benefit; unfortunately, quotas don't always change the substantive agenda in Parliament or in any other political body. Women must have not only reasonable access to positions of power, but also be perceived as equal actors in the political process. This requires visibility in political topics other than those of a mere gender specific nature. Women must be perceived as genuine actors in all relevant political issues.

Recommendation #2: The international community can and should support the Afghan government in implementing the international conventions already ratified that uphold women’s important contribution to peace processes, and strengthen women’s active political participation.

Lack of support networks

Afghan women’s entrance to Parliament has been met by a series of challenges, including social structure barriers, psychological and physical violence, not to mention the presence of warlords inside and outside Parliament. In Afghanistan, parliamentary candidates run independently, relying on the moral and financial support of their family and tribes. Given a deeply conservative social context, many women are unable to obtain the support of their families and tribes during the parliamentary term. As an Afghan MP said at the Conference on the Role of Women MPs, “We do not have political parties to support us, thus we still need the support of the international community, in order to take our rightful place at the decision-making table.”

This problem remains largely invisible outside of Afghanistan, as the security situation and debate on transition has diverted the international community’s attention away from women politicians. Women lawmakers in Afghanistan need support from the international community, which can and should continue pressuring the Afghan government to fulfill its obligations to involve them in security debates.

Recommendation #3: Members of Parliaments from neighboring countries and the Muslim world, as well as lawmakers worldwide, should establish a strong international support network for women MPs in Afghanistan, with a focus on security issues.

Women concerns in ongoing reconciliation talks

Afghan leaders have used the unstable security situation as an excuse for not allowing women to assume leadership positions. And it is true that former warlords and extremist politicians have threatened violence should women be given prominent roles. Furthermore, the prospect of a political settlement with the Taliban raises serious concerns about whether the past decade’s achievements on women’s political participation can be safeguarded. To ensure that these democratic achievements are not traded away in ongoing negotiations, the concerns of women must be taken on board.

Recommendation #4: Lawmakers worldwide should continue pressuring the governments of the coalition forces to ensure that negotiations for peace in Afghanistan do not abandon women’s rights.

Division and lack of coordination within the Parliament

To prevent passage of discriminatory laws, women in the Afghan Parliament need to participate actively in fundamental decision-making. This requires the presence of independent female figures with political consciences, capable of changing the mindsets of their colleagues, family and society. Therefore, it is essential for the newly elected women lawmakers to be able to overcome any tribal, ethnic, or family allegiance that could hinder the development of significant legislative changes. Their success will depend on them attaining a critical mass, through effective networking among themselves and across party lines, as well as with the media and civil society. This is women lawmakers' biggest opportunity to prove that their presence is not symbolic -- that they are in Parliament as full-fledged actors of the legislative process.

Recommendation #5: Afghan women lawmakers have to overcome any tribal or cultural divides that hinders the development of coalitions and alliance-building, and strategically join hands to ensure women's active participation in all decision-making processes. This could be done by reestablishing the Women Parliamentary Caucus that was set-up for a short period in the previous parliamentary term. The Pakistani experience in organizing and running such a forum can provide a useful model.



“The international communities are helping, but I request help from the international community for the education and capacity-building.”

Dr. Husn Banu Ghazanfar,
Minister of Women Affairs, Afghanistan

< Pictured here with Afghan President Hamid Karzai

Next Steps

Participants at the International Conference on the Role of Afghan Women MPs (European Parliament, December 2010) have agreed on a series of concrete follow-up actions. These will be undertaken with the support of the EastWest Institute's Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention, to help Afghan women lawmakers increase their political leverage:

1. Establish and run a series of regular meetings between Afghan, Pakistani and regional women lawmakers. These meetings will promote information sharing and cooperation on security issues at the regional level, and should also serve as the basis for a regional network of Parliamentarians;
2. Establish an international support network for female MPs, with a focus on security issues, that shares information and experience with Afghan colleagues;
3. Organize a series of regular policy briefings and advocacy opportunities with regional and international lawmakers, government officials, the media, and Parliamentary committees in Pakistan and the broader region to strengthen the communications and networking capacity of Afghan women lawmakers.



EWI BOARD OF DIRECTORS



OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

Francis Finlay (U.K.)

EWI Co-Chairman
Former Chairman,
Clay Finlay LLC

Ross Perot, Jr. (U.S.)

EWI Co-Chairman
Chairman, Hillwood Development
Company, LLC;
Member of Board of Directors, Dell, Inc.

Armen Sarkissian (Armenia)

EWI Vice-Chairman
Eurasia House International
Former Prime Minister of Armenia

OFFICERS

John Edwin Mroz (U.S.)

President and CEO
EastWest Institute

Mark Maletz (U.S.)

*Chair of the Executive
Committee of EWI
Board of Directors*
Senior Fellow, Harvard
Business School

R. William Ide III (U.S.)

Counsel and Secretary
Partner, McKenna Long
& Aldridge LLP

Leo Schenker (U.S.)

EWI Treasurer
Senior Executive
Vice President, Central
National-Gottesmann, Inc.

MEMBERS

Martti Ahtisaari (Finland)

Former President of Finland

Jerald T. Baldrige (U.S.)

Chairman
Republic Energy Inc.

Thor Bjorgolfsson (Iceland)

Chairman
Novator

Peter Castenfelt (U.K.)

Chairman
Archipelago Enterprises, Ltd.

Maria Livanos Cattai (Switzerland)

Former Secretary-General
International Chamber of Commerce

Mark Chandler (U.S.)

Chairman and CEO
Biophysical

Michael Chertoff (U.S.)

Co-founder and Managing Principal
Chertoff Group

Joel Cowan (U.S.)

Professor
Georgia Institute of Technology

Addison Fischer (U.S.)

Chairman and Co-Founder
Planet Heritage Foundation

Adel Ghazzawi

Managing Director
BV Group

Melissa Hathaway (U.S.)

President
Hathaway Global Strategies, LLC;
*Former Acting Senior
Director for Cyberspace*
U.S. National Security Council

Stephen B. Heintz (U.S.)

President
Rockefeller Brothers Fund

Emil Hubinak (Slovak Republic)

Chairman and CEO
Logomotion

Wolfgang Ischinger (Germany)

Chairman
Munich Security Conference

Haifa Al Kaylani (U.K.)

Founder & Chairperson
Arab International Women's Forum

Donald Kendall, Jr. (U.S.)

Chief Executive Officer
High Country Passage L.P.

Sigrid R. v. C. Kendall (U.S.)

Zuhai Kurt (Turkey)

CEO
Kurt Enterprises

James A. Lash (U.S.)

Chairman
Manchester Principal LLC

Christine Loh (China)

Chief Executive Officer
Civic Exchange, Hong Kong

Ma Zhengang (China)

President
China Institute of
International Studies

Michael Maples (U.S.)

Former Executive Vice President
Microsoft Corporation

Francis Najafi (U.S.)

Chief Executive Officer
Pivotal Group

Frank Neuman (U.S.)

President
AM-TAK International

Yousef Al Otaiba (U.A.E.)

Ambassador
Embassy of the United Arab
Emirates in Washington D.C.

Louise Richardson (U.S.)

Principal
University of St Andrews

John R. Robinson (U.S.)

Co-Founder
Natural Resources Defense Council

George F. Russell, Jr. (U.S.)

Chairman Emeritus
Russell Investment Group;
Founder, Russell 20-20

Ramzi H. Sanbar (U.K.)

Chairman
Sanbar Development Corporation, S.A.

Ikram Sehgal (Pakistan)

Chairman
Security and Management Services

Kanwal Sibal (India)

Former Foreign Secretary of India

Henry J. Smith (U.S.)

Chief Executive Officer
Bud Smith Organization, Inc.

Hilton Smith, Jr. (U.S.)

President and CEO
East Bay Co., Ltd.

William Ury (U.S.)

Director
Global Negotiation Project
at Harvard Law School

Pierre Vimont (France)

Ambassador
Embassy of the Republic of
France in the United States

Alexander Voloshin (Russia)

Chairman of the Board of Directors
OJSC Uralkali

Charles F. Wald (U.S.)

Former Deputy Commander
U.S. European Command

Zhang Deguang (China)

President
China Foundation for
International Studies

Zhou Wenzhong (China)

Secretary-General
Boao Forum for Asia

NON-BOARD COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Marshall Bennett (U.S.)

President
Marshall Bennett Enterprises

John A. Roberts, Jr. (U.S.)

President and CEO
Chilmark Enterprises L.L.C.

J. Dickson Rogers (U.S.)

President
Dickson Partners, L.L.C.

George Sheer (U.S.)

President (retired)
Salamander USA & Canada
Founder & CEO
International Consulting Group, USA

CHAIRMEN EMERITI

Berthold Beitz (Germany)

President

Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und
Halbach-Stiftung

Ivan T. Berend (Hungary)

Professor

University of California
at Los Angeles

Hans-Dietrich Genscher (Germany)

*Former Vice Chancellor
and Minister of Foreign
Affairs of Germany*

Donald M. Kendall (U.S.)

*Former Chairman & CEO
PepsiCo., Inc.*

Whitney MacMillan (U.S.)

*Former Chairman & CEO
Cargill, Inc.*

Ira D. Wallach* (U.S.)

EWI Co-Founder

DIRECTORS EMERITI

Jan Krzysztof Bielecki (Poland)

Chief Executive Officer

Bank Polska Kasa Opieki S.A.
Former Prime Minister of Poland

Emil Constantinescu (Romania)

*Institute for Regional Cooperation
and Conflict Prevention
Former President of Romania*

William D. Dearstyne (U.S.)

*Former Company Group Chairman
Johnson & Johnson*

John W. Kluge* (U.S.)

*Chairman of the Board
Metromedia International Group*

Maria-Pia Kothbauer (Liechtenstein)

Ambassador

*Embassy of Liechtenstein
to Austria, the OSCE and the
United Nations in Vienna*

William E. Murray* (U.S.)

Chairman

The Samuel Freeman Trust

John J. Roberts (U.S.)

Senior Advisor

*American International
Group (AIG)*

Daniel Rose (U.S.)

Chairman

Rose Associates, Inc.

Mitchell I. Sonkin (U.S.)

Managing Director

MBIA Insurance Corporation

Thorvald Stoltenberg (Norway)

*Former Minister of Foreign
Affairs of Norway*

Liener Temerlin (U.S.)

Chairman

Temerlin Consulting

John C. Whitehead (U.S.)

*Former Co-Chairman of Goldman Sachs
Former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State*

* Deceased



Founded in 1980, the EastWest Institute is a global, action-oriented, think-and-do tank. EWI tackles the toughest international problems by:

Convening for discreet conversations representatives of institutions and nations that do not normally cooperate. EWI serves as a trusted global hub for back-channel “Track 2” diplomacy, and also organizes public forums to address peace and security issues.

Reframing issues to look for win-win solutions. Based on our special relations with Russia, China, the United States, Europe, and other powers, EWI brings together disparate viewpoints to promote collaboration for positive change.

Mobilizing networks of key individuals from both the public and private sectors. EWI leverages its access to intellectual entrepreneurs and business and policy leaders around the world to defuse current conflicts and prevent future flare-ups.

The EastWest Institute is a non-partisan, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with offices in New York, Brussels and Moscow. Our fiercely-guarded independence is ensured by the diversity of our international board of directors and our supporters.

EWI Brussels
59-61 Rue de Trèves
Brussels 1040
Belgium
32-2-743-4610

EWI Moscow
Sadovaya-Kudrinskaya St.
8-10-12, Building 1
Moscow 123001
Russia, 7-495-691-04949

EWI New York
11 East 26th Street
20th Floor
New York, NY 10010
U.S.A. 1-212-824-4100

www.ewi.info