



## COUNTRY SECTION: Afghanistan

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## OVERVIEW OF THE AFGHANISTAN LEGAL SYSTEM

Afghanistan is at a crossroads in its struggle for peace and good governance. A growing women's movement has been at the helm of many positive developments for women's rights, yet these developments remain vulnerable in the face of the country's deeply uncertain political future.

Afghanistan is a party to numerous international agreements and Afghanistan's Constitution specifically stipulates that "the State shall observe the United Nations Charter, inter-state agreements, as well as international treaties to which Afghanistan has joined, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Article 7).

However, Afghanistan's legal system is in transition and, as of 2011, approximately 700 laws need to be revised or reviewed in order to bring them into compliance with the Afghan Constitution and with international treaty laws. There is also some ambiguity around the place of Islamic (sharia) law in the legal system. Customary law is prevalent and often curtails women's rights. The rule of law remains weak – as a result, women's newly gained rights continue to be fragile.

## THE HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The Taliban took power in Kandahar in 1994, in Herat in 1995 and in Kabul in 1996, until their ouster in 2001. This period represents an unprecedented degree of institutionalised gender discrimination. Women were stripped of all of their rights in law and in practice, and denied any place in the public sphere. Yet the extreme discrimination under the Taliban lay in sharp contrast to previous eras of Afghanistan's history, when women enjoyed freedoms well beyond many of their counterparts in the region. However, even during times of progress for women, there existed tensions between reformists and religious conservatives.

In Afghanistan, sharp differences exist in the status of women in rural and urban areas, and between different regions of the country. As a country with over a dozen ethnic groups, some 40 languages spoken, two major Muslim sects (Shias and Sunnis) and some religious minorities (Hindus, Sikhs, Baha'is and others) there is much diversity in the cultural make-up of Afghanistan, which impacts on the perceptions of women's roles in society. For example, tribal customs that often curtail women's rights are practiced differently from province to province.

The period since the fall of the Taliban government in December 2001

to the present represents a decade of transformative change for Afghan women. While progress has often been inconsistent and many of the major achievements of the last decade are vulnerable given Afghanistan's ongoing instability, change has nevertheless been sweeping. From being denied any participation in the social, economic and political life of their country, Afghan women have carved out new spaces for themselves in public life. This, together with information technology, the young age of the population<sup>1</sup>, and the return of refugees from abroad, has led to changing perceptions about women's roles in Afghan society.<sup>2</sup> However, there is still resistance in various political spaces, notably from religious leaders (for example, the 3,000 or so mullahs who make up the Ulema Council), Islamists, conservative MPs, and other power brokers.

## **INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS**

### **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979 (CEDAW)**

CEDAW is an international treaty that requires states to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Afghanistan signed CEDAW in 1980 without any reservation, but only ratified it in March 2003. Afghanistan has not signed the Optional Protocol.

Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports to the CEDAW Committee, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations. To date, the Afghan Government has not submitted any reports to the CEDAW Committee. Its first report was due one year after ratification, in 2004, and another should have been submitted by 2011. In response, several women's organisations came together to form a CEDAW Initiative Committee (CIC) in Afghanistan, which is currently chaired by an independent NGO, Humanitarian Assistance to Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA), and has 20 member organisations. The CIC is working to prepare a Shadow Report on Afghanistan's progress on meeting the requirements of CEDAW.

### **Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR)**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all human beings regardless of sex, race, colour, language, religion or distinction of any kind. It was formulated shortly after the establishment of the United

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Population Fund estimates for 2010 put the number of Afghans under the age of 24 at 65%.

<sup>2</sup> Asia Foundation's 2010 Survey of the Afghan People, 87% of respondents countrywide agreed with statement, "Women should have equal opportunities like men in education" (93% of women agreed and 82% men).

Nations. Afghanistan was one of the countries that voted in favour of the adoption of the UDHR. More recently, the Women's Political Participation Committee, a coalition of some 200 women's and civil society organisations, referred back to the UDHR in a statement during the London Conference in 2010, where the international community met to discuss progress in Afghanistan's reconstruction and democratisation.

### **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 (ICCPR)**

The ICCPR deals in detail with the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human rights and guarantees basic civil and political rights to all persons, "without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, [or] sex..."<sup>3</sup> These rights include, amongst others, the right to life, freedom of movement, equality before the law, right to privacy, freedom of religion and the right to participate in public affairs, including the right to vote. Enforcement of the ICCPR is monitored by the UN's Human Rights Committee, which can request reports from states at any time. Reports are typically submitted every four years. Afghanistan ratified the ICCPR in 1983. However, since Afghanistan has not signed the First Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, the Human Rights Committee cannot receive complaints to determine when provisions of the ICCPR have been violated in Afghanistan.

### **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966 (ICESCR)**

The ICESCR articulates important rights including the right to work and the right to fair wages and equal pay for equal work for women, the right to an adequate standard of living including adequate food, clothing and housing, the right to enjoyment of the highest standard of health and the right to education. Enforcement of the ICESCR is monitored by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a body of 18 individual experts. State parties are obliged to submit regular reports.

Afghanistan ratified the Covenant in 1983. The Afghan Government submitted a report in May 2010 describing progress in key areas such as the adoption of the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law, the reform of the Shia Personal Status Law, and the adoption of the Media Law to protect journalists from intimidation. In response, the Committee raised their concern about the ongoing violations of women's rights in the public and private spheres, about corruption, human trafficking, and the lack of protection for street children and orphans. The Shia Personal Status Law was specifically raised as a threat to women's rights by the Committee.

<sup>3</sup> ICCPR, Article 2(1)

## **1993 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment 1984 (CAT)**

The CAT is an international human rights instrument which aims to prevent torture around the world and requires states to take effective measures to prevent torture within their borders. Rape as an act of torture has been affirmed by successive UN Special Rapporteurs on Torture. Afghanistan is a party to this Convention but has not signed the Optional Protocol.

## **Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC)**

The CRC applies to all children and prohibits discrimination against girls. Afghanistan ratified the CRC in 1994 and has acceded to the two Optional Protocols to CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and child prostitution and pornography. Afghanistan did not submit its first report under the CRC until 2009, an event that was seen as an important step forward in improving the country's protection of children's rights. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child made its concluding observations to the report in 2011. One of the observations was that Afghanistan has not sufficiently integrated the provisions of the CRC into its domestic law, and the enactment of a comprehensive Child Act was recommended. The other main area of concern was discrimination against girls, specifically girls' lack of access to health and education, and the need to raise the minimum marriage age for girls to 18, in line with the minimum age for boys.

## **International Instruments on Women and Conflict**

Afghanistan is a party to the Geneva Conventions, which are four treaties and three protocols that constitute the basis of international humanitarian law with regard to the impact of war on people, including the protection of non-combatants (civilians), prisoners of war, wounded or sick fighters, and medical personnel. The Geneva Conventions expressly forbid any discrimination on the basis of sex. The Fourth Geneva Convention (on the protection of civilians in war) specifically notes that "women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault" (Article 27).

In addition to the Geneva Conventions, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security was unanimously adopted in 2000. It is binding upon all UN member states. The resolution calls for women's full and equal participation in the achievement of peace and security, including women's equal participation in decision-making processes for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict. It also highlights the need for

measures to protect women and girls from sexual violence in the context of armed conflict.

Afghanistan has not yet launched a national action plan on UN SCR 1325. The Afghan Government has included nine women in the 69-member High Peace Council; however, the women members are reportedly marginalised on the council and there has been criticism in civil society and in the Afghan media that women's presence is only tokenistic. For example, the female council members did not participate in talks in early 2011.

### **Using UNSCR 1325 as an advocacy tool**

The Afghan Women's Network has worked to raise awareness among its member organisations of UNSCR 1325 and what it requires from the Afghan state. As the Afghan Government sought to enter into negotiations with the insurgents in 2010, AWN and others were advocating for a peace process that would be inclusive of women.

### **Other International Instruments**

Afghanistan also ratified the Refugee Convention 1951 and the Refugee Protocol in 2005. Afghanistan further signed the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court in 2003.

### **Use of Special Procedures – the Human Rights Council**

Another mechanism for the enforcement of human rights law is the use of special procedures initiated by the UN Human Rights Council in response to specific country situations or particular human rights issues. Afghanistan has been the subject of 14 special procedures or visits by Special Rapporteurs. For example, in July 2005, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Yakin Erturk, undertook a mission to Afghanistan<sup>4</sup>. Her report found that while some significant improvements had been made since the fall of the Taliban in addressing violence against women, overall, "the situation of women remains dramatic and severe violence against them all-pervasive".

<sup>4</sup> A previous Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, also undertook a mission to Afghanistan during the Taliban era, in 1999, and her findings were detailed in a 2000 report (UN Ref: E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.4).

## DOMESTIC LAWS

Afghanistan remains in a transitional period in the development of legislation pertaining to women's rights. Many laws are in the process of being updated, however several important pieces of legislation have already been adopted that together strengthen provisions for gender equality and can serve as important advocacy tools.

### The Constitution

Afghanistan's new Constitution, adopted in 2004, guarantees equality between men and women (Article 22). However, some critics argue that this guarantee was weakened by Article 3, which states that, "No law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam". As Natasha Latiff, a legal scholar of Islamic law notes, "Allegiance to the Islamic faith does not necessarily have to be antithetical to gender equality. But when inspired by political or cultural dogma, Islam can be misinterpreted to preserve the kinship structure in Afghanistan, which is exclusively patriarchal."<sup>5</sup> From a women's rights perspective, much depends on who is empowered to access and interpret religious texts and scholarship. All too frequently, women have been excluded from the process of deciding which interpretation of Islamic law should prevail. Thus, the many possible meanings of "provisions of the holy religion of Islam" can be both a tool for arguing for stronger protection of women's rights on the basis of Islam, as well as a threat if those provisions are determined by power holders who do not want to see women's rights strengthened.

### Gender Equality

#### **The National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA)**

Afghanistan has a 10-year national strategic plan to mainstream gender across government departments, launched in 2008<sup>6</sup>. NAPWA sets out the steps which need to be taken in order to realise the commitments of the Afghan Government to gender equality, as set out in the Constitution, CEDAW, and the Millennium Development Goals. NAPWA also builds upon the goal expressed in the country's official development strategy, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, for "women and men [to] enjoy security, equal rights and equal opportunities in all spheres of life".<sup>7</sup> The plan outlines action in six areas: security; legal protection and human rights; leadership and political participation; economy, work and poverty; health; and education.

5 <http://natashalatif.com/2008/12/01/a-breakdown-of-cedaw-2/>

6 Access NAPWA's full text here: [http://www.unifem.org/afghanistan/media/pubs/08/NAPWA\\_EN.php](http://www.unifem.org/afghanistan/media/pubs/08/NAPWA_EN.php)

7 Afghan National Development Strategy, p.14.

## Violence against Women

### The Penal Code 1976

Afghan criminal law is regulated by the 1976 Penal Code. Under the Code, Rape is categorised under the crime of zina (sexual intercourse outside of marriage) rather than as a distinct offence. Forced marriage is a crime but depends on a victim filing a complaint, while child marriage is not an explicit offence under the criminal code. Violence against women is criminalised; however the penal code requires a complaint from a victim. There are also no standards or procedures in place for prosecuting VAW cases which weakens the force of the law - domestic violence cases are infrequently prosecuted. When cases do make it to court, male perpetrators are often excused if their abuse was seen as a response to a wife's "disobedience."

### The Rule of Law versus Customary Law

There is little observance of codified laws, even among police and judges. For instance, when a woman or girl runs away from home (such as to escape abuse or forced marriage), police and courts typically treat this act as a crime, although there is no such legislation criminalising running away from home.

When the International Development Law Organization convened 200 participants to review gender and the criminal justice system in Afghanistan in 2006, among other recommendations they called for legal reform to the criminal code that would:

*'Explicitly state that Article 130 of the Constitution of Afghanistan, 2004, does not allow arrest for, or criminal conviction or prosecution of, acts not criminalized by a law as defined by Article 94 of the Constitution. This should be reinforced by sanctions for police, prosecutors, and judges who disregard the Constitution in this regard. Also, explicitly state that compensation will be awarded to any individual who is unjustly detained or prosecuted as contemplated by Article 55 of the Constitution'.<sup>8</sup>*

### The Elimination of Violence Against Women Law

Several members of parliament and women's rights activists succeeded in advocating for the adoption of a law specifically intended to protect women from violence, the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law. This came into force in 2009. EVAW aims to end "customs,

<sup>8</sup> Technical Workshop: Gender and Criminal Justice in Afghanistan, 15-16 May 2006, Kabul. Recommendations and Summary of Discussion, p.5.

“customs, traditions and practices that cause violence against women contrary to the religion of Islam”. The law criminalises specific forms of violence against women and more clearly defines rape as a crime. It also imposes a minimum sentence of two years imprisonment for anyone marrying a girl who is under the age of 15 years. The ERAW Law has been used to bring attention to the issue of VAW. For example, an ERAW Consultative Group facilitates the coordination of stakeholders working on VAW, and the UN in Afghanistan has established an ERAW Special Fund. During the 16 Days of Activism for the Elimination of Violence against Women in 2010, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan worked with religious scholars to run a campaign in Laghman province to raise awareness of the ERAW Law. They distributed copies of the law and mullahs were asked to talk about the law in their sermons at local mosques.

## **Marriage and Family**

### **Civil Code 1977 and the Marriage Law of 1971**

On paper, family law in Afghanistan is drawn from this legislation, and is considered to be in accordance with Hanafi jurisprudence, the theological school of Islamic law that Afghanistan subscribes to. However, in practice, there is little awareness of the provisions of the code among the general population and the protections it provides to women’s rights. Consequently, customary practices often regulate family and marriage practices. For example, according to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, while the minimum marriage age by law is 16 for girls, in practice the majority of girls are married at a younger age. Further, there are very few family law courts outside of Kabul, which make legal protection inaccessible to the majority of women and girls in the country. Finally, the lack of documentation of birth, marriage, divorce and death in Afghanistan is a critical hindrance to securing women’s rights under family law. Most women do not have marriage certificates, making it difficult to seek a divorce in court, and do not have any citizenship papers to prove their identity or age.

## **OVERVIEW OF GENDER MACHINERY**

A number of institutions are in place to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.

### **Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MOWA)**

After the fall of the Taliban regime, MOWA was established and became part of the executive of the Interim Administration. This Ministry has 9 central departments and 34 provincial departments. The first procedural

regulation of MoWA states that: 'MoWA has the responsibility over implementation of political and social policy of the government in order to secure and expand legal rights of women and ensure the rule of law in their lives within its activity area.'<sup>9</sup> Since 2009, an Advisory Board, which includes women from politics and civil society, has been in place to provide advice to MoWA.

### **Gender units within Ministries**

Designated gender units have been created at the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, the Ministry of Economy as well as in the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission. Gender focal points also exist within most ministries.

### **National Gender Machinery Secretariat**

The Ministry of Women's Affairs set up a coordination office to steer activities in the gender divisions. The National Gender Machinery Secretariat is a forum for all gender units aiming to strengthen the actors involved and to improve coordination among them. It is designed to be an information bank on governmental gender policy.

### **Gender Budgeting**

The Ministry of Finance has created a department for gender budgeting that also advises other ministries on gender budgeting.

## **EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN**

Civil society has blossomed in Afghanistan, and includes an active women's movement. There are hundreds of women's organisations, ranging from grassroots cooperatives to large national organisations seeking reform at the national level. There are a variety of ideologies at play in the women's movement, from groups that advocate secularism to those who want to use progressive interpretations of Islamic texts and laws to call for more rights for women. Some groups were established during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and many emerged from women's organising in refugee communities in Pakistan during the 1980s and 1990s. After the fall of the Taliban, many of these groups moved to Kabul and began providing services, as the refugee populations decreased.

9 Decision No. 3 of 05.04.2004 of Ministers' Council, and approved by Decree No. 26 of 24.05.2004 of President of Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, Article 3.

Other organisations have been established only recently, some in partnership with supportive organisations abroad. Major cities such as Kabul, Mazar-i-sharif, Jalalabad and Herat are home to many organisations. However, some regions are currently extremely dangerous environments for women's organisations, and there is little open organising taking place and few services available to women and girls in these areas. Women's organisations overwhelmingly rely on foreign donors for funding, and many belong to international networks where they collaborate across borders in seeking gender reform. Funding levels from international donors are gradually beginning to decrease, and it remains to be seen how different organisations will meet the challenge of sustainability in the years to come.

The future of the women's movement and their agenda for action hangs precariously in the balance as Afghanistan faces an uncertain future a decade after the ousting of the Taliban. Afghanistan is not a post-conflict state; a war rages on and outspoken, prominent women often end up in the cross-fire. Prominent female politicians have been assassinated or survived targeted attacks, and female activists, elections workers, and media personalities have been murdered. Women's organisations face restricted access to many areas where they are unable to make much-needed services available to women. The ongoing violence restricts women's mobility and reduces the visibility of women's organising and advocacy efforts, as women human rights defenders receive threats from Taliban representatives, and have to keep their efforts hidden to protect themselves, their colleagues and their families. Security is an ever-present concern for women's organisations and for activists, and the security situation is always evolving and difficult to predict.

The two case studies below offer examples of how advocacy has been used by civil society, even in the face of this insecurity, to push for change to protect the rights of women.

### **Example** **Protecting Women's Shelters**

Safe shelters for women fleeing violence are relatively new in Afghanistan, with the first shelters opening in the last decade, as a result of the hard work of several pioneering women's organisations. As of 2011, approximately 15 shelters are in operation in a country that has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the world<sup>10</sup>. However, in February 2011, the fledgling shelters' network was threatened when the Afghan Government

<sup>10</sup> Some quantitative data on domestic violence in Afghanistan can be found in the report published by Global Rights, *Living With Violence: A National Report on Domestic Violence in Afghanistan*: [http://www.globalrights.org/site/PageServer?pagename=www\\_asia\\_afghanistan](http://www.globalrights.org/site/PageServer?pagename=www_asia_afghanistan)

announced their plans to seize control of the independently established and operated shelters, and place them under the Ministry of Women’s Affairs.

The Government planned to impose a set of rules and regulations that would place women seeking security in the shelters at further risk, including requiring women to plead their cases before an eight-member government admissions panel (of representatives from different ministries) and to undergo a forensic medical exam to determine whether the applicants were guilty of prostitution or adultery, in which case women who were seeking safe shelter could end up in prison. Under the proposed regulations, women would be denied the right to leave the shelters without permission and if a woman’s family came to claim her she must be handed over to them – a rule that would hand women back to their abusers.

The women’s organisations operating shelters and advocating against violence against women in Afghanistan worked together to fight the proposed regulations, mobilising quickly in a short period of time. Women for Afghan Women launched an online petition appealing to President Karzai, which garnered over 4,000 signatures. Coverage appeared in the Afghan and international press, and women activists were able to secure a statement of support from the US State Department. MPs were invited to visit the shelters to see that they are securely and responsibly run, and are not “brothels”. Women’s organisations reached out to allies around the world, and also worked collaboratively to coordinate their efforts, planning actions over email lists.

The pressure worked and the government dropped the proposed regulations. Instead, it was agreed that MoWA would form a joint committee with the women’s organisations to monitor the quality of shelters, as well as to establish new shelters where needed. Those working in the shelter network have continued, however, to vigilantly monitor the situation and are working to build understanding among government officials as to the purpose of women’s shelters and the need to safeguard their independence.

### **Example** The Shia Personal Status Law

The Afghan Constitution specifies that Shias, who constitute approximately 30% of the population, have the right to their own family law, in line with Shia jurisprudence (Article 121). Around 2007, a Shia religious cleric named Mohammad Asif Mohseni, one-time leader of an armed resistance faction called Harakat-i-Islami, led the drafting of the

Shia Personal Status Law (SPSL). The drafting process excluded women and largely lacked transparency. For example, the bill was not reviewed article-for-article in the Wolesi Jirga, the lower house of parliament, and there was no consultation within the broader Shia community.

The contents of the SPSL were extremely discriminatory to Shia women, severely restricting their freedom of mobility and requiring them to obey their husbands. Women would require the permission of their husbands to work outside the home, to study, or to leave the house. The SPSL specified the sexual obligations of wives to their husbands, including an obligation not to refuse sex. The marriage age for girls was set at 9, and the age of children when custody is granted from the mother to the father in the event of divorce was set at 2 years of age for boys and 7 years of age for girls.

Several MPs allied with civil society organisations to delay a vote on the Bill in early 2008 so they could press for changes to the Bill's text. They managed to get revisions included based on other Shia jurisprudential sources that raised the marriage age to 16 for girls and 18 for boys, and raised the age for paternal custody of boys to 7 years and 9 years for girls. However, much of the Bill that became law remained highly discriminatory. It was only after the law entered into force that women's organisations turned to the international media, who reported on the "Rape Law" just as donor governments to Afghanistan's state building effort were assembling in London for the G20 conference in the spring of 2009. The response was swift international condemnation from donor governments and pressure on the Karzai government to repeal the law.

Afghan women MPs worked together with civil society activists to appeal for reform of the law and to propose progressive revisions. Institutions such as the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and the Kateb Institute of Higher Education convened Shia religious scholars to draft revisions that were in line with Shia jurisprudence and which upheld women's rights according to international human rights law. A group of young Shia women also independently organised themselves to inform other women about the discriminatory content of the SPSL by canvassing Shia neighbourhoods and handing out flyers. In April 2009, young women held a public demonstration in front of Mohseni's mosque complex in Kabul. While many of the women who participated were physically assaulted or threatened, the protest garnered significant media attention and was a highly visible demonstration of the women's refusal to accept one man's interpretation of laws that would govern their lives.

Ultimately, by July 2009, the Ministry of Justice completed a review of

the law and removed 12 of the most contentious articles. However, discriminatory elements remained in the text. In response, a coalition of women's organisations and other civil society groups wrote an open letter to the President's office arguing that many of their recommendations had not been taken into account. The president nonetheless approved the revised version without further changes and the new SPSL law came into force on July 27, 2009. The outcome was bittersweet. While the women had worked together across sectarian lines, formed effective alliances with female politicians, made enormously strategic use of the media, and succeeded in reforming some of the law, not all of their demands were met. This highlights the on-going influence of the conservative religious clergy on law-making in Afghanistan and the challenges this presents for women's organisations.

## CONCLUSION

Many Afghani women are concerned that hard-won gains for women will be negotiated away should the Taliban return to power in whole or in part as part of a political settlement to end the insurgency. There is an increasing sense within Afghan civil society that the international community wishes to disengage from Afghanistan before peace has been truly consolidated, leaving women vulnerable in the face of potential reversals of progress in human rights and democratic freedoms. Afghan women also face the legacy of the institutionalised misogyny of the civil war years of the 1990s and the Taliban government of 1996-2001, and still contend with attitudes and behaviour from men who are resistant to women's expanding roles in public life. Thus, while far-reaching changes have occurred in the status of women throughout the last decade, much work remains to be done and women's organisations need to be able to rely on continued international support networks in their advocacy efforts.