

Response to new International Development Committee enquiry

Development Assistance in Insecure Environments: Afghanistan

Gender Action for Peace and Security UK (GAPS) was established in May 2006 to promote, support and monitor the inclusion of a gender perspective in security and peace building policies and the fulfilment of commitments made in UN Security Council resolution 1325, European Parliament resolution 2000/2025 and related instruments on women, peace and security. **GAPS coordinates the Associate Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security**, which works specifically on Afghanistan¹. GAPS would especially like to thank their members: **WOMANKIND Worldwide**²; **Women for Women International**³; **Widows for Peace through Democracy**⁴ and **International Rescue Committee**⁵ for their input into this response.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325)

GAPS will use **UNSCR 1325** as a framework for this enquiry. We will outline why the inclusion of women in reconstruction and the development process is essential and make recommendations as to how to do this. Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security is the first formal and legal document from the United Nations, **mandating women's 'equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security'**. It also calls for the specific needs of women and girls to be integrated into post-conflict reconstruction; the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence and an end to impunity, as well as measures to ensure the human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the police and the judiciary.

GAPS RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING TO DFID:

- (i) prioritise the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan
- (ii) include a gender perspective within security sector reform in Afghanistan
- (iii) urgently protect Afghan women and girls from gender based violence
- (iv) incorporate a gender perspective into the work of Provincial Reconstruction Teams
- (v) increase resources to local women's civil society organisations
- (vi) support and promote the rights of the most marginalised of women, particularly Afghan widows.

"There have not been effective challenges to many of the structural and systemic factors that conspired to create a framework of collective gender apartheid. The reality of life for Afghan women remains one of segregation and struggle within a climate of fear"⁶

(i) **Prioritise the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan**

1. Research suggests that **where there is acute gender discrimination and abuses of human rights, specifically women's rights, societies are likely to be more unstable**⁷. Gender equality leads to peace through the promotion of development and good governance. Higher participation of women in the formal economy and political arena increases competition and as a result, corruption and rent-seeking will be inhibited thus improving the quality of governance.⁸ According to several studies, good governance is an essential component for the creation of a peaceful environment. Indeed, **improving the situation for women with regards to more political and economic participation and better access to health and education improves state capacity** and good governance.

2. GAPS welcome's the UK Governments efforts so far in the implementation of UNSCR 1325, particularly the jointly produced UK National Action Plan⁹ by FCO, DFID and MOD. GAPS also recognises the importance of HMG's financial support for implementation of Resolution 1325¹⁰. However, GAPS agrees with DFID when it notes that "**UNSCR 1325 implementation by both the UN and Member States needs to go much further,**"¹¹ particularly in the context of Afghanistan.

3. Afghanistan, with the assistance of DFID, is striving to achieve a secure and lasting peace whilst also addressing its political and economic development. However, a key aspect that must be tackled is the pursuit of a **gender sensitive reconstruction and development process**, without which Afghanistan will remain politically and socially unstable. What remains absent from many interventions is a focus on enabling women to participate safely and meaningful in the post-conflict to development transition.

4. Despite major progress on paper for women's rights since the fall of the Taliban, the reality for women on the ground remains basically unchanged, particularly with regards to gender based violence and economic and political marginalisation. For example, quota systems for women MPs have enabled women to sit in the Afghan parliament, yet women MPs continue to experience verbal abuse and intimidation from male parliamentary colleagues. **It is essential that UK development assistance and strategy take into account the lack of real progress that has been made with women's rights.** Although the promotion of gender equality and awareness is complex in the context of Afghanistan, it is necessary for the achievement of sustainable peace and development. The DFID must take action to ensure women's rights in the areas of politics, education, judicial reform, security services and livelihoods become a reality.¹²

GAPS specifically recommends that DFID:

- Supports women's organisations to work with Afghan government on National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 for Afghanistan.

(ii) **Include a gender perspective in security sector reform in Afghanistan**

*"Women are not only victims of war, but are central to creating the conditions for lasting and inclusive peace"*¹³.

UK Policy Promises

5. GAPS welcomes DFID's recognition of the importance of analysing women's role in post conflict reconstruction.¹⁴ They explicitly note that *"where it is well placed to assist, the UK... will offer financial, technical and political support for strong peace processes, making efforts to ensure women are included"*¹⁵. However, as the UK recognises, women's roles remain obscured and under valued.¹⁶ Furthermore, there is little access to justice for women in Afghanistan, they are poorly represented within the police and formal justice sector institutions, they have little representation in the informal or traditional dispute resolution mechanisms and the Ministry of Women's Affairs operates at a low capacity and with minimal influence on government policy.

6. As part of DFID's role in building state institutions and promoting good governance in Afghanistan, GAPS strongly urges that women are consulted and included in security sector reform. In line with Article 1 of UNSCR 1325, which states the international community must “ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict”, **GAPS recommends that DFID:**

- Supports more women judges to sit on all types of courts, including the Supreme Court, which interprets the Constitution and currently has no female judges on the Supreme Court High Council
- Security sector reform that prioritises human security for women in relation to their access to formal, participatory and representative judicial mechanisms.
- Builds the capacity of the Afghan National Police (ANP) to provide security for women members of parliament when they travel to and from their electoral districts throughout the country as part of the parliamentary activities.
- Supports, in line with the Draft Interim National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, the reform of Afghan Government's legal and judicial systems to guarantee equality and non-discrimination as enshrined in the Constitution. This can include the development of a gender sensitive and regulatory framework including inheritance, property and labour laws.

(iii) Urgently protect Afghan women and girls from gender based violence

7. In the 2006 *Preventing Violent Conflict* paper, DFID recognises that violent conflict takes its toll on the poor and most heavily on women and children, with women and girls experiencing rape and other forms of sexual violence.¹⁷ Indeed **where abuses of human rights go unchecked and where there is a weak civil society, grievances and disillusionment and disputes are more likely to become violent. As such gender inequality must be tackled to reduce the risk of recurrent violent conflict.**¹⁸

8. **Violence against women is pervasive in Afghanistan** and an unmistakable and clear barrier to the empowerment of Afghan women and girls by impeding their health, well being, productivity and safety. Women in Afghanistan can not be empowered to participate safely and freely unless, firstly, there is a general awareness and promotion of women's human rights awarded under the constitution; and secondly, women have the capacity to challenge those long standing socio-cultural norms safely, without an increased threat of violence being perpetuated against them.

9. **NGOs have noted increases in some forms of violence against women** (honour killings and attacks on women election workers, women NGO workers, women educational workers, human rights defenders and journalists) and a continuation of other forms of violence (trafficking of women and girls and domestic abuse). Most notably there has been a worrying rise in self-immolation.¹⁹

10. Women's NGOs have highlighted how the **alternative livelihood programs have increased the likelihood of violence against women**. Too often when farmers are unable to pay their creditors, they resort to selling their daughters to pay off the debt. Evidence suggests this practice has increased for farmers who have participated in alternative livelihood programs.²⁰ The continued perpetration of and impunity around violence against women and girls is a gross human rights violation. It must be examined as a consequence of highly iniquitous power relations between men and women, which are exacerbated by the lack of rule of law in Afghanistan and the continued use of the entrenched Customary Law. These issues must be tackled immediately.

10. In line with UK NAP Action Point 9 to “promote justice for women and tackle gender-based violence in post-conflict situations” and Articles 10 and 11 of UNSCR 1325, which call for “...all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse”; and “...an end to impunity and to prosecute those

responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, including those relating to sexual violence against women and girls, and in this regard,... the need to exclude these crimes, where feasible, from amnesty provisions”, GAPS recommends DFID:

- Gives full institutional support should be given to pass the new law on violence against women (VAW) in Afghanistan.
- Develops the capacity of the Afghan National Police to be better able to tackle the issue and receive cases of VAW – including supporting the recruitment of more female police officers and developing new processes to document cases of VAW.
- Provides financial support for local women’s NGOs to collect data on VAW and to provide support services, including psycho-social support, safe houses for survivors of VAW throughout the country
- Support the reinvigoration of the National Action Plan on Peace, Reconciliation and Justice, putting an end to impunity and prosecuting those responsible for crimes against humanity; war crimes, including those relating to sexual violence against women and girls, and to exclude such crimes from amnesty provisions.
- Works with the Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army to ensure personnel in the police, army and judiciary have not previously committed human rights abuses.
- Supports the development of the Marriage Contract being debated in the supreme court.
- Studies the impact of the Alternative Livelihoods Programmes on gender relations and VAW.

(iv) Incorporate a gender perspective into the work Provisional Reconstruction Teams

Provincial Reconstruction Teams

11. British Provincial Reconstruction Teams²¹ (PRT) consist of military, political and development components, with DFID involved through the cross departmental Post-Conflict Reconstruction Group to provide personnel for the promotion of economic development and reconstruction. DFID notes that effective peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction can enable the development of new rules and institutions for managing disputes and can lead to significant social and political change.

12. GAPS observes that **the use of PRTs remains controversial, as the lines between military security work and civilian humanitarian or development activities have been blurred.** This is problematical for both ethical and operational (security) reasons, except with the proviso of last resort emergency operations, as per IASC guidelines. However, if PRTs continue to be used, it must be recognised that the nature of the process, including who is consulted and participates, will determine future success. ISAF PRT Handbook mentions the importance of PRTs “to endeavour to have a gender component” because PRT development activities are to support local priorities within the national development framework, such as ANDS.²² However, too often opportunities to involve women are not taken. Indeed, **it is clear that PRTs lack gender strategies and women have not been effectively consulted with respect their work.**

13. Civil society must be involved in implementing and monitoring PRT operations and **PRTs should consult Afghan women in local government, communities and NGOs**²³. Afghan women demand a voice in security, development and reconstruction²⁴ and PRTs must be more transparent and accountable to the people of Afghanistan²⁵. Incorporating gender policies into PRT strategies and operations would help to ensure that women are targeted beneficiaries of PRT’s programmes²⁶. PRT commanders should understand that **incorporating gender policy in their strategies and operations will lead to operational effectiveness and influence operation success.**

14. *In line with Articles 4, 5 and 17 of UNSCR 1325, which demand “...the expansion of the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel”; “...to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations,” and “...the reporting..[on] progress on gender mainstreaming through peacekeeping missions and all other aspects relating to women and girls”, GAPS recommends DFID:*

- Increases the number of women represented in PRTs to enable them to interact with local women.
- Ensures PRTs recognise the role of local civil society and consult with them on best practice in relation to gender mainstreaming within development projects.
- Ensures women are included in development of PRT projects, through consultation with women's *shuras* at a local level, and women's NGOs at a national level.
- Makes the realisation of women's human rights a benchmark of success in PRT missions in Afghanistan through monitoring factors such as women's participation in political bodies, property rights, employment rights and incidents of violence against women.
- Provide all PRT personnel receive at least 3 days pre-deployment gender training before they leave for Afghanistan.

(v) Increase direct resources to local women's civil society organisations

Direct Budgetary Support and the impact of the decline in direct core funding on NGO activity

15. GAPS welcomes DFID's promise to help build the capacity of civil society to manage violence conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction.²⁷ GAPS also welcomes DFID's support of a five-year women's empowerment programme from 2005-10²⁸, implemented by WOMANKIND Worldwide and their support of UNIFEM in Afghanistan for training and advocacy for increased participation of women in electoral processes.²⁹ However, overall, the UK provides 80% of its current assistance, estimated to be £107 million in 2007-8, directly to the Government of Afghanistan, with only 20% of assistance going to the provincial level and through NGOs. **Most worryingly none of the UK's direct government funding is reaching the grassroots women's movement in Afghanistan which is suffering from a serious lack of financial resources.**

16. The **decline in core funding for NGO work exacerbates the security risks NGOs face** as the cost of security for staff and program participants is not adequately covered by donors. The importance of security precautions cannot be over-stated. Donors must understand this and adapt their expectations accordingly. For example, security guards are a necessity and their presence should not be limited by budgetary restrictions on overhead expenses.

17. **It is vital that smaller and less powerful and visible civil society groups are supported, especially local women's NGOs.** Women's civil society organisations are essential for the promotion of good governance and the social, political and economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. Women's groups are vital for holding the Afghan government to account; for providing essential service provision in areas of health and education and for pushing for needed legal reform. GAPS recognises the crucial work of women peacebuilders in Afghanistan, whose efforts include the prevention of the restoration of Department of Vice and Virtue; the development of a new Violence against Women Law; monitoring human rights abuses and pressurising the Afghan government to ensure freedom of speech.

GAPS recommends that DFID:

- Supports the creation of an enabling environment of security and rule of law to allow civil society, particularly local NGOs and local journalists working on women's human rights issues, to work safely and effectively towards the promotion of human rights issues.
- Financially supports grassroots women's organisations to help enact the new VAW law and to advocate for the full implementation of the new marriage contract.
- Ensure financial support to cover security for NGO programme staff.

(vi) **Support and promote the rights of the most marginalised of women, particularly widows, in Afghanistan**

18. Widows are neglected in Afghanistan. **It is estimated that in Kabul alone there are at least 60,000 widows³⁰ and CARE Afghanistan estimates there are over one million widows in Afghanistan.** These women - young, middle aged and old - have become widows from the time of the Soviet Invasion, under the Taliban, as a result of the invasion of 2003, and now under the occupation and insurgency. Many widows returned from the refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran unable to find housing and raise their children. It is thought that 70% of Afghan street children are children of widows.

19. It is the **essential that work is done to promote the status of widows**, protecting them from abuse and supporting their crucial roles in their families and communities. This should be a vital priority for DFID for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. Gathering statistics on widowhood across the country is very difficult due to the security situation. Despite this, the Ministry for Women's Affairs is intending, resources being available, to conduct a survey on women's status, situation, income, health in 2008.

20. In line with UNSCR 1325 that highlights "*the need to consolidate data on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls*", **GAPS recommends:**

- Institutional support for NGOs and the Ministry of Women's Affairs to gather statistics and conduct a survey of women's status and situation
- Recognition of widows human rights and widows' role in social and economic reconstruction in Afghanistan
- Support of widows organisations, particularly in the creation of a National Federation of Afghan Widows Organisations.

Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) members are: WOMANKIND Worldwide, Widow for Peace through Democracy (WPD), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Women for Women International, International Alert, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), United National Association – UK, UNIFEM UK, Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP), Shevolution and Project Parity, Soroptimist International (SI).

End Notes

¹ The **Associate Parliamentary Group** on women, peace and security is a tripartite forum with input from parliamentarians, civil servants and civil society. The APG subgroups work on Iraq, Afghanistan, widowhood in context of conflict and gender training of peacekeeping troops.

² **WOMANKIND** has been supporting women in Afghanistan since 2003. Their programme covers Kabul, Jalalabad, Mazar and Peshawar where they work in partnership with three Afghan women's organisations to promote women's civil, social, economic and political participation and to address issues regarding violence against women.

³ **Women for Women International-Afghanistan** is a chapter of Women for Women International, registered in 2002 with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Past and present locations served include the provinces of Afshar, Balkh, Dashti Barchi, Herat, Kabul, Kamari, Kapisa, Khairkhana, Mazar-e-Sharif, Parwan, Shari-naw, Shina, and Wardak. The main office is in Kabul. Currently, 3,310 women participate in WWI – Afghanistan's yearlong program, and 10,727 women have been served since program inception, benefiting almost an additional 54,000 family and community members. Program participants include widows, single heads of household, returnees, IDPs, and the physically challenged.

⁴ **Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD)** is an umbrella organisation for widows associations and organisations across South Asia, Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East. WPD establishes networks to exchange information and good practice and highlights the roles / needs of widows to governments, donors and the international community.

⁵ The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** is one of the largest and longest-standing NGOs working in Afghanistan and has been working there since 1988. They run programmes on governance, education and child protection, vocational education and training and HIV.

⁶ Mark A. Drumbl, (2004) p.1 "Rights, Culture, and Crime: The Role of Rule of Law fro the Women of Afghanistan", *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, Vol. 42, No. 2,

⁷ Caprioli, Mary (2003) Gender Equality and Civil Wars, CPR Working Paper No. 8, World Bank <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCPR/214578-1111996036679/20482367/WP8trxtsep3.pdf>

⁸ Bussmann, M (2007) *Gender equality, good governance, and peace*, University of Konstanz http://www.sgir.org/archive/turin/uploads/Bussmann-Bussmann_Turin.pdf

⁹ The 2006 UK National Action Plan sets out specifically how the UK aims to ensure the implementation of SCR 1325.

¹⁰ DFID helps gender advisers make a difference in UN peacekeeping missions and also funds the NGO working group on SCR 1325 in New York, to guarantee continued monitoring of implementation of UNSCR1325

¹¹ Department for International Development Policy Paper (2006) *Preventing Violent Conflict*, p. 13 DFID, London

¹² Womankind Worldwide (2006) *Taking Stock: Afghan women and Girls Five Years On*. P. 8, Womankind, London

¹³ Response to Post Conflict Stabilisation: Improving the UK's Contribution— a consultation on United Kingdom strategy and practice and establishment of a post conflict reconstruction unit. (2005) www.thewnc.org.uk/pubs/pcruconsultationresponse.pdf

¹⁴ DFID refers to research on Central Africa that recognises peace agreements, post-conflict reconstruction and governance do better when women are involved: Department for International Development Policy Paper (2006) *Preventing Violent Conflict*, p. 20 DFID, London

¹⁵ Department for International Development Policy Paper (2006) *Preventing Violent Conflict*, DFID, London

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 20

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 7

¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 6-7

¹⁹ Womankind Worldwide (2006) *Taking Stock: Afghan women and Girls Five Years On*. p. 7, Womankind, London

²⁰ Research carried out by Women for Women – Afghanistan (2007)

²¹ There are 13 different nations running the 25 PRTs in Afghanistan in 34 provinces, most of which execute short-term development projects in addition to main task of supporting provincial authorities in improving security. As of 26 May 2007, there were over 7,500 PRT development projects worth over \$630 million. The purpose of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) has been to extend the authority of the Afghan Transitional Administration across the whole country, in order to help facilitate local stability and security, and to facilitate reconstruction and development in the areas to which they are deployed. Operationalising Gender in Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan through Engagement with Afghan Civil Society – Recommendations Submitted by the Afghan Women's Network, Audrey Roberts, AWN.

²² *ibid*

²³ Afghan Women's Perception of NATO, Audrey Roberts, July-Aug 2007

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Advocacy Project Blogs, Audrey Fellow (18th July 2007)

²⁶ PRTs and Gender Policy Working Group, 18 June 2007 (Attended by representatives of Ministry of Women's Affairs, Afghan Women's Network, GTZ, the Asia Foundation and NATO)

²⁷ Department for International Development Policy Paper (2006) *Preventing Violent Conflict*, p. 26 DFID, London

²⁸ This is a £500,000 initiative is focused on promotion women's equal participation in governance; building awareness of women's rights among civil society and policy makers; and on providing educational, health, community and psycho-social support to those women affected by violence and conflict.

²⁹ Lord Hansard Text, 16 May 2007 (Column WA37)

³⁰ Research carried out by Widows for Peace through Democracy.