



gender action for peace and security

Response to DFID Consultation on Afghanistan Country Action Plan

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; **Widows for Peace through Democracy**³ and **International Rescue Committee**⁴ 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 response. 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) Strengthen the accountability of the Afghan National Government on their commitments to gender equality and women's human rights
- (ii) Prioritise and support Afghanistan with their implementation of UNSCR 1325
- (iii) Increase direct resources to local women's civil society organisations
- (iv) Increase accessibility of the education sector for girls, strengthen the capacity of women teachers and ensure gender sensitive curriculum
- (v) Incorporate a gender perspective into the work Provisional Reconstruction Teams and ensure clear budget lines for relevant gender sensitising activities
- (vi) Urgently prioritise the integration of a gender perspective into Security Sector Reform to safeguard women's human rights
- (vii) Support and promote the rights of the most marginalised of women, particularly widows, in Afghanistan

“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”⁵

1. Strengthen the accountability of the Afghan National Government on their commitments to gender equality and women’s human rights

1. The 2008 Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) provides a roadmap for various sectors of the government to bring about changes for women, but the political will and budget to ensure its implementation has to date been limited⁶. Many of the governmental benchmarks that relate to gender mainstreaming are ‘*vague, highly ambitious and as such largely unachievable*’ (AREU, 2008, p.6⁷). In addition, there is no information currently available about the budget allocation for the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) or for the work of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. There are therefore concerns that sufficient national budgets and/or the political will to ensure reforms are carried out will not be available for crucial ongoing work that promotes women’s human rights in Afghanistan. Despite the international community’s recent commitment to gender equality work in Afghanistan⁸, ensuring a sufficient budget or measurable benchmarks for this work was not made a necessary condition of the international aid pledged in Paris in June 2008.

2. Without the needed resources and political will, UN SCR 1325 will not be implemented in Afghanistan. Yet DFID’s currently provides 80% of its assistance directly to the Government of Afghanistan⁹ without ensuring clear targets and indicators to measure progress on gender equality and women’s rights.

GAPS recommends that DFID:

- Work with the Afghan government to set clear targets and indicators to measure progress on gender equality and women’s rights in Afghanistan
- Ensure sufficient budgets are made available for the implementation of the NAPWA, not limited to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs.

2. Prioritise and support Afghanistan with their implementation of UNSCR 1325

“Women are not only victims of war, but are central to creating the conditions for lasting and inclusive peace”¹⁰.

3 GAPS welcome’s the UK Governments efforts so far in the implementation of UNSCR 1325, particularly the jointly produced UK National Action Plan¹¹ by FCO, DFID and MOD. GAPS also recognises the importance of HMG’s financial support for implementation of Resolution 1325¹². However, GAPS agrees with DFID when it notes that “**UNSCR 1325 implementation by both the UN and Member States needs to go much further,**”¹³ particularly in the context of Afghanistan. Without the needed resources and political will, UN SCR 1325 will not be implemented in Afghanistan.

4. 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.

5. 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.** 1325 is not simply about numbers of women in parliament it is about transformation of conflict through gender sensitive peacebuilding. 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 their work is gender sensitive in the areas of politics, education, judicial reform, security services and livelihoods become a reality.¹⁴

GAPS specifically recommends that DFID:

- Ensures clear budget clear lines set aside for SCR 1325 related activities.
- Supports women's organisations to work with Afghan government on National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 for Afghanistan.

3. Increase direct resources to local women's civil society organisations

6. GAPS welcomes DFID's promise to help build the capacity of civil society to manage violence conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction.¹⁵ GAPS also welcomes DFID's support of a five-year women's empowerment programme from 2005-10¹⁶, implemented by WOMANKIND Worldwide and their support of UNIFEM in Afghanistan for training and advocacy for increased participation of women in electoral processes.¹⁷ However, overall, the UK provides 80% of its current assistance, estimated to be £107 million in 2007-8, directly to the Government of Afghanistan. **Most worryingly only a tiny proportion 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.**

7. **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.

4. Increase accessibility of the education sector for girls, strengthen the capacity of women teachers and ensure gender sensitive curriculum

8. While good progress has been made in supporting the education sector, with around a third of 5.4 million pupils being girls, there are significant challenges yet to overcome. Afghan literacy rates remain among the lowest in the world, with the problem particularly

acute for women and girls¹ especially due to high dropout rates. In Kabul, the poverty of female headed households, especially those headed by widows, forces withdrawal from school for child labour. There is also a serious shortage of teachers, particularly in rural areas where less than a third of teachers are female. Women teachers are critical actors in education processes and they have the **potential to make a major contribution to long-term peacebuilding and reconstruction** processes. As they can be important advocates for children, raising awareness in the community of their needs for time, attention, adequate clothing, food and health care.

9. At this time of transformation and development in Afghanistan, the **quality of education** that is provided for girls is critical. If education is to fulfil its potential to contribute to social transformation in Afghanistan, **gender concerns – beyond access to education for girls – need to be integrated** across the education sector, with particular attention to teacher training and curriculum development. In terms of reversing the social exclusion of women and girls, the act of attending school is highly significant. However, new opportunities to access education, including non formal provision (e.g. home-based schooling programmes) are critical and must be linked to concrete strategies to ensure girls have equal opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills in higher education, in the job market and political participation at all levels. Lastly, DFID must also support the GoA to tackle early and forced marriage which is one of the primary reasons for girls dropping out of education.

National Solidarity Plan (NSP)

10. A number of British NGOs have built up a strong level of trust with local communities and play an important role in designing and delivering education initiatives, such as community-based and home-based schooling. The NSP has been an important mechanism for supporting this and is having a positive impact in communities engaged community-driven reconstruction.² However, there are concerns around the lack of limited participation of women in these decision-making processes. DFID should ensure that NSP established Community Development Councils give equal weight to men and women and encourage a gender sensitive approach to their work.

GAPS recommends that DFID:

- Increases the numbers and strengthens the capacity of women teachers in line with SCR 1325 and the long term participation of women in peacebuilding
- Ensures gender sensitive teacher training programmes are a key DFID priority
- Scales-up funding to support implementation of a gender sensitive national education strategy and enhances coordination with NGOs to help in the recruitment / training of more women teachers. (50% of should be women)
- Strengthens protection for education for women and girls by working with women's NGOs and others to develop strategies to maintain education.

5. Incorporate a gender perspective into the work Provisional Reconstruction Teams and ensure clear budget lines for relevant gender sensitising activities (BAAG Report)

11. British Provincial Reconstruction Teams¹⁸ (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-

¹ By some estimates literacy rates are around 50% for men and 20% for women, with percentages lowering for women and girls in rural areas. Womankind (2008)

² To date, almost 20,000 villages in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan have been in this programme.

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**. 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.¹⁹ However, **it is clear that PRTs lack gender strategies and women have not been effectively consulted with respect their work**.

13. **PRTs should consult Afghan women in local government, communities and NGOs²⁰**. Afghan women demand a voice in security, development and reconstruction²¹ and PRTs must be more transparent and accountable to the people of Afghanistan²². Incorporating gender policies into PRT strategies and operations would help to ensure that women are targeted beneficiaries of PRT’s programmes²³. PRT commanders should understand that **incorporating gender policy in their strategies and operations will lead to operational effectiveness and influence operation success**. Given HMG’s commitment to 1325 through its NAP, the Stabilisation Unit should provide 1325 and gender training of its PRT staff in Afghanistan and there should be clearly allocated Stabilisation funds to carry out consultations with women in Afghanistan.

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:

- Provides pre-deployment gender training to all PRTs staff to ensure they are sensitive to the needs of men and women alike.
- Allocates funds for consultation processes with Afghan women to ensure PRTs have a clearer idea 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* and NGOs at a local and 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.

6. **Urgently prioritise the integration of a gender perspective into Security and Justice Sector Reform to safeguard women’s human rights**

There is currently pervasive gender based violence in Afghanistan – the vast majority of this violence is perpetuated against women and it encompasses high rates of forced and early marriage, domestic violence, honour killings and sexual violence²⁴. Despite these crimes, women and girls in Afghanistan currently have little recourse to justice. There is **only one family court in the whole country** based in Kabul, traditional justice mechanisms – *jirgas* - are ineffectual at safeguarding women’s human rights, there is **only one woman sitting on the Supreme Court** and women are poorly represented within the police department. **Women in**

Afghanistan can not be empowered to participate safely and freely unless violence against women is addressed.

UN SCR 1325 states that all parties are bound to take measures that ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the police and the judiciary.

GAPS recommends that DFID:

- Provide 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.

In addition, DFID should work with the Afghan government to:

- Pass the new law that will tackle violence against women (VAW) in Afghanistan that is currently awaiting parliamentary approval.
- Develop 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.
- 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 and war crimes relating to sexual violence against women and girls, and to exclude such crimes from amnesty provisions.
- Support more women judges to sit on all types of courts, including the Supreme Court, which interprets the Constitution
- Prioritises human security for women in relation to their access to formal, participatory and representative judicial mechanisms – provide more family courts and provide training to those distributing justice at a local level on women’s human rights.
- Raise awareness of women’s human rights, as outlined in the Constitution, the new marriage contract²⁵ and under Islam²⁶.

7. Support and promote the rights of the most marginalised of women, particularly widows, in Afghanistan

Widows are the poorest of the poor and suffer extreme neglect, marginalisation and abuse in Afghanistan. There are no reliable statistics, and the gap in data on widowhood issues is one of the major obstacles to any concrete actions being taken by either the GoA or the international community. **It is estimated by NGOs that, in Kabul alone, there are at least 70,000 widows and wives of the missing.** These women – many of whom are still children – have been widowed through several periods of armed conflict and suffer extreme discrimination. (It is thought that 70% of Afghan street children are children of widows.) NGOs report that coping strategies include withdrawing children, especially girls, from school, child-labour, prostitution, drug-smuggling, “selling girl children” and now suicide by self-immolation.

Supporting widows by providing literacy training and income-generating programmes (e.g. laundries, bakeries) do not necessarily focusing on empowerment and rights issues and access to justice. It is **essential that work is done to promote the status of widows** and supporting their crucial roles in the reconstruction of their communities, and as sole supporters of the young generation. This should be a vital priority for DFID for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. Gathering statistics on widowhood across

the country is difficult due to the security situation.²⁷ However, widows themselves, if properly supported, can help fill the gaps in data through “mapping and profiling” projects.²⁸ Furthermore, Afghan widows have yet to organise themselves so as to articulate their needs and describe their experiences and roles. It is vital that widows are supported to “band together” so that their voices are heard and they can be represented in decision-making.²⁹

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

- Provides institutional support for women’s NGOs (including widows’ associations), and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs for a collaborative programme to gather statistics and conduct a survey of women’s status situation, needs and roles
- Recognises widows human rights and widows’ key roles in social and economic reconstruction in Afghanistan
- Supports, both in terms of finance and capacity, 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 **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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Mark A. Drumbl, (2004) p.1 "Rights, Culture, and Crime: The Role of Rule of Law for the Women of Afghanistan", *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, Vol. 42, No. 2,

⁶ See the Afghan Research Evaluation Unit (2008), 'Moving to the Mainstream: Integrating Gender in Afghanistan's National Policy': www.areu.org.af

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ The Paris Declaration (2008) made by the International Community states 'We committed to support the implementation of the National Action Plan for Women'.

⁹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200607/ldhansrd/text/70516w0001.htm> This contribution was estimated to be as large as £107 million in 2007-8.

¹⁰ 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/pccruconsultationresponse.pdf

¹¹ The 2006 UK National Action Plan sets out specifically how the UK aims to ensure the implementation of SCR 1325.

¹² 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

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

¹⁴ Womankind Worldwide (2006) *Taking Stock: Afghan women and Girls Five Years On*. P. 8, Womankind, London

¹⁵ Department for International Development Policy Paper (2006) *Preventing Violent Conflict*, p. 26 DFID, London

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Lord Hansard Text, 16 May 2007 (Column WA37)

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ Afghan Women's Perception of NATO, Audrey Roberts, July-Aug 2007

²¹ *ibid*

²² Advocacy Project Blogs, Audrey Fellow (18th July 2007)

²³ 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)

²⁴ See WOMANKIND Worldwide (2008), 'Taking Stock: Afghan Women and Girls Seven Years On': www.womankind.org.uk This report states that in Afghanistan over 87% of women are affected by domestic violence, at least 60% of marriages in Afghanistan are forced and 57% of girls are married by the age of 16. The report draws attention to growing rates of self-immolation by women and girls trapped in violent relationships. Sexual violence during the many years of conflict was widespread.

²⁵ The 2007 marriage contract, or *Nikah Nama*, has the potential to end child marriages and empower women's legal status. The contract calls for the registration of marriages and fixes the legal age of marriage for girls at 16, yet this has not yet been finalised and there is little awareness about, or implementation of this new legal instrument.

²⁶ Promoting awareness of women's human rights under Islam has proven an effective way for NGOs to work with local communities and households to tackle violence against women and to promote women and girls social, civil and political participation.

²⁷ The Afghan Ministry of Women has had to postpone its plan to undertake a survey of women's status, due to lack of adequate funding

²⁸ Mapping and profiling has been done by local NGOs elsewhere offering a model of good practice (e.g. in Nepal by Women for Human Rights Single Women's Group WHR-SWG).

²⁹ Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD) is helping to establish a Kabul Widows' Association (KWA) in November, 2008, as the first step in realising a National Federation of Afghan Widows which would then be a member of both a regional (SANWED) network and the international one of WPD