

Policy Position Paper

2015 is a crucial year for women's rights in Afghanistan, as the country enters the 'Transformation Decade'. Advances in women's rights, during the last fourteen years must be maintained and strengthened during the next period of political transition, building on **President Ghani's public statements and support for women's rights**ⁱ. Against this backdrop, the UK has a unique part to play as one of the largest aid donors to Afghanistan. **The Senior Officials Meeting, and annual review of the UK National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 this autumn mark key moments to measure progress, and step up UK support for women's rights in Afghanistan.**

Significant gains have been made by Afghan women since 2001. This progress is thanks to the tireless efforts and bravery of Afghan women and girls who have fought for their rights to education, political participation, and public office, frequently in the face of death threats and fatal attacks. There has also been progress for Afghan women in domestic legislation and policy. In 2003 the Government of Afghanistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)ⁱⁱ and in 2009 the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Law was passed by presidential decreeⁱⁱⁱ. The Government of Afghanistan launched its first National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in June 2015.^{iv} However, despite the passing of CEDAW and EVAW, these are not yet consistently and effectively enforced.

The UK National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security launched in June 2014, includes Afghanistan as a focus country. The Afghanistan country implementation plan includes indicators for women's political participation and influencing roles in the peace process, and protection of women human rights defenders amongst other areas.^v The UK Government in conjunction with GAPS and Women for Women International, supported a civil society consultation with Afghan civil society groups and women's rights organisations to inform the development of the UK NAP at the end of 2013.^{vi} The next parliamentary annual review of the UK NAP Afghanistan implementation plan will take place in autumn 2015.

The UK government has committed to putting women and girls at the heart of their development and humanitarian assistance through initiatives such as the *Call to Action to Protect Women and Girls in Humanitarian Emergencies*^{vii}. This has been further strengthened through the passage of the International Development Gender Equality Act 2014^{viii} which requires UK development and humanitarian assistance to be assessed against the promotion of gender equality and gender-related differences. Specifically in relation to Afghanistan, **the UK has recognised the need to support women and girls' participation in politics and peace processes and announced in 2013 that violence against women would be a country strategic priority**^{ix}. The FCO has committed to supporting the reform and/or removal of discriminatory laws and policies in Afghanistan and to tackling the root causes of violence against women and girls through challenging societal attitudes, behaviours, and practices.^x

Commitments to Women's rights were made at the London Conference on Afghanistan (LCA) in 2014, including strengthening the implementation of Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Law, and women's economic empowerment.^{xi}

Recommendations to the UK Government

- 1. Ensure that women's rights are prioritised at the 2015 Senior Officials Meeting on Afghanistan, including violence against women, women's participation in the police force and women's participation in peacebuilding at all levels.**

2. **Implement the actions on Afghanistan listed under the four pillars of the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, through dedicated financing, transparent reporting, and in consultation with local civil society groups. This should include action on violence against women, women's participation in the police force and women's participation in peacebuilding at all levels.**
3. **Support the Afghan government to implement legislation and policies to end violence against women (EVAW) by implementing DFID's commitment to EVAW as a strategic priority in Afghanistan through a clear timetable and budget. This should include supporting comprehensive, coordinated and decentralised data-capturing.**
4. **Provide accessible long term funding for Afghan civil society, women human rights defenders who stand on the front line in the fight for gender equality, including in ending violence against women and promoting women's role in peacebuilding**

These actions should include:

- UK support for **women to comprise at least 30% of Afghan delegates in decision-making processes** at all levels.
- **Supporting implementation of the Afghan National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security.**
- Along with other international actors, the UK government should **prioritise support and resources to women human rights defenders** in insecure and volatile areas of the country and should work with the Government of Afghanistan to **support a collaborative and enabling environment for women human rights defenders.**
- **Supporting the Afghan government to increase the number of women in the police force** by tackling the barriers to female recruitment and take steps to ensure their safety and protection from discrimination. There should be increased resourcing of police Family Response Units, improved working conditions and career development.
- **Supporting more effective awareness of and training on human rights and women's rights for all Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) personnel.** The UK and its allies can help achieve this partly through specific donor funding for promoting women's rights and participation in the ANSF, increased support through multilateral actors such as EUPOL, maintaining effective gender advisors in the Resolute Support mission, and through training and female participation at the Afghan National Army Officers Academy.
- **Encouraging improved vetting, oversight and accountability mechanisms for all the ANSF, applied to the ALP and other irregular forces by working with the Afghan government to create** well-publicised, transparent, and independent mechanisms for investigating complaints and providing reparations that are easily accessible for both men and women.
- **In line with DFID's commitments under the Call to Action on VAWG in Emergencies and the UK International Development Gender Equality Act, the UK should promote women's agency and gender-based violence in humanitarian action** through its bilateral funding and contributions to pooled funds in Afghanistan. Building on good practices from Yemen, Jordan and elsewhere, the Humanitarian Country Team and the UN Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan should integrate specific indicators to promote gender sensitive programmes and the access of women and girls to assistance and protection.
- **Supporting programming which promotes positive attitudes to gender equality among men and boys.**

ⁱ <http://president.gov.af/en/news/47135>

ⁱⁱ CEDAW - States Parties: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en

ⁱⁱⁱ Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 1 August 2009

^{iv} <http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/launch-ceremony-of-the-national-action-plan-on-unscr-1325-women-peace-and-security>

^v [UK NAP on UNSCR 1325 – Country Implementation Plan](#)

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- ^{vi} <http://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/NAP-Afghanistan-Workshop-Report-Final-03032014.pdf>
- ^{vii} <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/greening-girls-and-women-must-be-kept-safe-in-emergencies>
- ^{viii} <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/9/contents>
- ^{ix} Speech by Justine Greening, 4th March 2013; [DFID Strategic Vision for Girls and Women; Operational Plan 2011-2016: DFID Afghanistan](#)
- ^x [FCO Human Rights & Democracy Programme Strategy](#)
- ^{xi} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/communique-from-the-london-conference-on-afghanistan>