

REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE

**WOMEN AT THE FLASH POINT: 2010 AND BEYOND
WOMEN'S VOICES FROM AFGHANISTAN
AND THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES**



JANUARY 14TH, AT THE PEACE PALACE, THE HAGUE

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Introduction

On 14 January 2010 Gender Concerns International (GCI) organized a conference entitled “Women at the Flashpoint: 2010 and Beyond - Women’s Voices from Afghanistan and the Neighboring Countries” that took place at the Peace Palace in The Hague. It was organized as a follow-up to the Kabul Conference in July 2009 to raise attention about the plight of women in the conflict zone of Afghanistan and its neighboring countries, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, India, and Tajikistan.

The conference was opened by Ms. Sabra Bano, Director of Gender Concerns International and the moderator was Ms. Alice Bouman-Dentener from the Dutch Women’s Council (NVR).

Prior to the conference the second stakeholders meeting of the Regional Gender, Conflict and Development (RGCD) Platform took place at the Gender Concerns International office from 12 - 13 January. The main objective of this strategy meeting was to identify in more detail the priority areas of action and the supporting institutional structure and resources for the RGCD Platform in the next three years and to prepare for the The Hague Conference and other key events that will take place in 2010; such as the international conference on Afghanistan on 28th January in London, Peace Jirga, Kabul Conference, the Beijing-plus 15 year review, the 10-year anniversary of the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Parliamentary elections in Afghanistan planned for September 2010.

The RGCD Platform members underpinned the need for a regional women’s “force and network” to support the socio-economic and political roles of women in the peace, security and development processes in Afghanistan and the neighboring countries and they have agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding.

The public conference on 14 January was attended by more than 200 participants from various governments, non-governmental and international organizations and movements. Key Note speakers, Ms. Melanne Verveer, US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues and Mr. Bert Koenders, Minister for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands met to exchange greetings and discuss the participation of women in the decision-making processes of the region.

Ms. Sabra Bano welcomed the guests and explained the rationale and the international context for the event and for the establishment of a regional women’s platform. Minister Bert Koenders’ opening statement stressed the Dutch government’s commitment to gender equality and to supporting women in their vital contribution to the peace, security and development of Afghanistan. Ambassador Verveer gave the keynote speech, which emphasized the US government’s commitment to women’s roles in supporting the peace, security and development efforts of the Afghan government and its people. Deputy Minister.

Strategy Meeting with Representatives of the RGCD Platform

Prior to public event the regional women representatives took part in a two days interaction strategy meeting, which took place at the office of Gender Concerns International on 12 -13 January.

One of the key issues of the strategy meeting was to formulate the recommendations for upcoming International Conference on Afghanistan in London. Further issues discussed were a multiyear plan of action for the RGCD Platform and the role of Gender Concerns International in highlighting the gender dimension of the Afghan conflict at the European and the international level.

At the strategy meeting, 'The Hague Recommendations' were drafted and it was agreed that these recommendations should be presented to British Ambassador Paul Arkwright at the Peace Palace Conference.



Regional Strategy Meeting on 13 January 2010

The Hague Recommendations

I. Women's Participation in the Peace and Security Process

- Given that peace is defined beyond the military structures of the police, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community should ensure that peace, security and development are provided in a more comprehensive form, especially considering the special needs of women and children.
- The international community should insist on the participation of women representatives in the Afghanistan and regional delegations in any future peace negotiations (international and national) and ensure that there is space in the negotiations to hear their opinions and needs.

- That those international women organizations that have been working closely with Afghan and regional women and women's organizations should be given representation in international forums and negotiations. The inclusion of international women's organizations must be visible and should be an integral part of the Afghan and regional gender-focused policy and implementation strategies of the international community.

II. Women's Political Participation

- The Government should strengthen its current efforts to increase the percentage of qualified and committed women in political leadership and decision-making positions, in conformity with the targets set in the Afghan National Development Strategy, and the international community should strongly advocate this objective with the Government.
- The capacity of the Parliament should be strengthened to better understand and support gender matters in order to effectively monitor and hold accountable the executive agencies of Government, for example, special training programs for women parliamentarians need to be put in place.
- Election monitoring from a gender perspective is an important tool in securing women's electoral participation. The international community must support and encourage international and regional women's joint election monitoring missions in upcoming elections in the region.

III. Women's "Fair Share" of Development Assistance

- The international community should allocate at least 40% of its development funds to women-specific development priorities. The increased development resources should be allocated specifically to local and international organizations and networks that have women and development *as a core activity*.
- That the Regional Platform will form an international women's committee to ensure that the above-mentioned resources are allocated to women of the region and that there is a sound monitoring and reporting system in place for this process. *Resources must be available to increase women's advocacy and organizational capacity.*
- The international community should make stronger efforts to mainstream gender concerns in all the programmes/projects that it supports in Afghanistan and its neighbors. *This work can be done through direct funding available to core women organizations.*

IV. Women and Security

- Given that security has many complex dimensions (physical, psychological, societal and military), the Government with the support of the international community, is urged to speed up the formulation of a national action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 which can then constitute the framework for development assistance to women in Afghanistan.

V. Cross-Cutting Recommendations

- The Government of Afghanistan and the international community should pay special attention to capacity development needs, to affirmative action and to special protection measures for women and children. The regional platform members and Gender Concerns International can assist in identifying these needs.
- Efforts in advocacy for improving the situation of women in Afghanistan and its neighbors need

to be continued and linkages between the women of the region and their international partners need to be continuously strengthened. *Women's international organizations should be given enough direct resources to help them forwarding the international gender agenda.*

- It is proposed that the United Nations assign a special rapporteur for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of UNSCR 1325. This rapporteur should be supported by the Regional Platform and Gender Concerns International for the region consisting of Afghanistan and its neighbors.

Presentation of the film “Kabul Point”



Watching of Kabul Point Film

The conference began with the viewing of the short film “Kabul Point”, marking the formal establishment of The Regional Gender, Conflict and Development Platform at the Regional Stakeholders meeting in Kabul in July 2009.

The Kabul Declaration (attached as appendix to this report) formulated and agreed upon at this meeting reflects the deep commitment of the stakeholders to advocate for women in this conflict zone, who are completely left out of the socio-economic and political development process.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN SPEECHES

Full speeches are included as appendices to this report.

Gender Concerns International Director Sabra Bano:



Director Sabra Bano welcoming guests at the Peace Palace

The film was followed by a welcome speech by Sabra Bano, Director of Gender Concerns International. She noted with deep satisfaction that the large and high-level attendance at this meeting endorsed the fact that gender concerns are common concerns and that everyone attending cares about global injustices. Clearly this indicated a firm and visible support for this initiative from a wide range of organizations and individuals.

She stated that the aim of the conference was “to strengthen the voice of the women of the region. A voice, that has been there since many decades and has been effective locally.” She stressed that there is an urgent need for the voices of women from this region to be carried beyond the local confines and that they make regional and international linkages with women and other supportive individuals and organizations.

She further added: “To my understanding, within the context of joint efforts of the international community to bring security, stability and development in the region, the need to facilitate the process of linkages and networking among regional women’s organizations and international women’s support groups is vital in contributing to the effective, timely and sustainable developmental interventions in the region.”

Ms. Bano articulated that this was the reason for organizing the Regional Stakeholders Meeting in Kabul resulting in The Kabul Declaration and the formation of The Regional Gender, Conflict and Development Platform, for which Gender Concerns International is functioning as the International Secretariat to support its activities.

“With this mandate Gender Concerns International promised to organize a follow-up meeting in The Hague after 6 months of the Kabul Conference. Today’s public meeting is a fulfillment of that Kabul commitment” she explained.

She further stressed that this Conference is “not just an event, it is a process”. And that since 2005 Gender Concerns International is engaged with gender and democracy initiatives in the Middle East and in South Asia. The launch of our initiative ‘**Women at the Flash Point 2010 and Beyond**’ to highlight the gender dimension of Afghan conflict internationally has been genuinely supported. And for that support and encouragement I would like to thank both regional and international organizations, individuals and the diplomatic core. Ms. Bano also mentioned that the launch of this initiative is backed up by a Plan of Action and Advocacy for 2010 and Beyond, including a target to bring a sizeable representation of women at the negotiation table while issues of Peace, Security, Development and Resource Allocations are discussed. At this point this plan was highlighted at the screen. (The plan is attached as appendix.)

Tomorrow in Brussels Deputy Minister Kakar will be inaugurating our new office and launching the campaign ‘Women at the Flash Point 2010 and Beyond’. Our regional delegates will have important meetings at the European Commission, European Parliament and European Council.”

Referring to the upcoming London Conference of 28th of January, Sabra Bano added: “ever since we learned of The London Conference, we have been engaged in linking The Hague Gender Conference to The London Conference. I have written a letter to Prime Minister Brown in this regard that has been handed over to Ambassador Paul Arkwright of British Embassy last December. The Ambassador has also kindly agreed to receive our recommendations today at the end of the conference.

This is not all; we are putting this forward through some high level advocacy in Washington and London. We appeal to the London Conference Content Prep Committee to give due attention to The Hague Recommendations. More than ever before we need support for core, gender based, women led initiatives and your support is determinant for the sustenance of these initiatives.

Minister of Development Cooperation in the Netherlands Bert Koenders:



Minister Bert Koenders delivering the Opening Statement

Mr. Koenders, Minister for Development Cooperation of The Netherlands stated vigorously that “Women are indispensable to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, yet in recent years the number of women working in the public sector there has continually declined from an already low level. This has to change”.

The minister acknowledged the progress in Afghanistan over the last few years but also the many challenges that still remain: “Afghanistan is still one of the poorest countries in the world, with the lowest levels of education and the highest levels of maternal mortality, as well as rampant crime and insecurity, widespread corruption and many other governance issues. The forthcoming conferences, in London in two weeks time, and in Kabul later this year, will have full agendas on issues of security, governance, cross-border issues and implementation of the Afghan government’s programmes. And we should not forget the parliamentary elections in the spring.”

The importance of today’s conference, according to Mr. Koenders lies in its focus on the role of women in Afghan society and their contribution to reconstruction and development. He stated: “There is one area that calls for serious ambition and determination. That is women’s rights. I am very concerned that the position of women is not centre stage anymore. This is the reason why we are there. We cannot accept that women are once more marginalized, as happened under the

Taliban. However difficult the circumstances may be, in terms of security or social standards, we may not put women's rights on hold until the situation eases."

He praised the courage and the determination of Afghan women and pledged the support of The Netherlands to the women of Afghanistan in their endeavor to work towards a better, more stable and more prosperous society, to participate in building their society and to make their voices heard. He furthermore referred to the Human Right Watch report 'We have the promises of the world' on women's rights in Afghanistan, by saying: "From this report, we learn that, after initial positive steps, there have been more steps backwards than forwards in recent years in the position of women in Afghanistan. The few women in public positions are unsafe. The equally worrying conclusion of this report is that Afghan women feel abandoned by the international community. They see that violence against women still goes unpunished".

"We have to do something about this" he said, "And we have to do it fast. It is our moral obligation and a commitment the international community has made. I intend to keep this promise. In the Netherlands, we have set up a National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325. This Plan is primarily a framework for cooperation to step up efforts to secure active participation in peace and reconstruction processes, to include gender perspectives in peace missions, to improve access to justice for victims of sexual violence, and to report and punish all those who commit these crimes."

Referring to his meeting with Ms. Melanne Verbeke, the US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, he stated: "Therefore, as the Dutch and US governments agree, women should be put at the "heart of Afghan development policy". In pursuance of this objective, the Dutch and US governments plan to co-organize a seminar soon on how to join forces to improve the situation of women in Afghanistan.

Minister Koenders concluded with the National Action Plan 1325: "The Dutch action plan is a truly national plan: it has been signed by both civil society organizations and the government, and we have all agreed on a number of action points. This has the advantage of making us jointly accountable for fulfilling our commitments. In fact, this conference and the previous conference organized by **Gender Concerns International in Kabul** in July last year are good examples of what we are trying to achieve with our Dutch National Action Plan. That is to help women in countries like Afghanistan to sit at negotiation tables that decide on their countries' future.

In a recent session of the Dutch Parliament I announced that the Netherlands will make a great effort to support the Afghans in drafting their own Afghan National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325 or something of that kind. As one of the signatories of the National Action Plan, I have pledged to work towards more equal representation of women in negotiations and reconstruction processes."

American Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues Melanne Verveer:



Ambassador-at-Large Melanne Verveer delivering her Keynote Speech

Melanne Verveer thanked **Gender Concerns International** for organizing a conference that was urgently needed. She stated that “The major economic, security, governance and environmental challenges of our times cannot be solved without the participation of women at all levels of society. Investing in women is one of the most powerful forces for reshaping the globe and, as yet, one that is still significantly untapped.” She quoted Secretary Clinton in saying that “Until women around the world are accorded their rights and have opportunities for education, health care, gainful employment, global progress and prosperity will have its own glass ceiling.”

Ambassador Verveer furthermore stressed that there is a strong correlation between the situation of women and the prosperity of a country. “Where women are oppressed, governance is weak and extremism is more likely to take hold. Therefore the status of women is a bellwether for the viability of a nation and raising their status will help keeping states from failing and terrorists from succeeding. It is apparent that no country can get ahead if half of its citizens is left behind.”

Ambassador Verveer saluted the Dutch government for its global leadership on development assistance, for its commitment to women's rights and women's progress around the world, and

for its contributions to security, stability, humanitarian relief, reconstruction and development in Uruzgan Province.

The women's ambassador elaborated on the importance of participation of women at all levels of society. "Investing in women is one of the most powerful forces for reshaping the globe and, as yet, one that is still significantly untapped," she proclaimed.

Through concrete examples from US development initiatives, she illustrated the four investments in women that produce significant dividends for all of society: investment in education, in women's economic participation, in women's leadership and in women's active role in peacemaking, peace negotiations and work on post-conflict reconstruction, without which the peace is less likely to hold.

Ambassador Verveer dwelled on Security Council Resolution 1325 addressing women, peace and security: "After almost a decade since its adoption, there has been little progress in recognizing the important role women need to play in this area. As foreign ministers and other leaders gather in London at the end of this month to discuss progress in Afghanistan, the voices of women need to be heard, because Afghan women are critical to their country's future."

She showed her admiration for Afghan women who in remote provinces were running for provincial councils in numbers that exceeded the quota for women's seats: "They wanted to be part of the local decision-making and to make a difference – to be agents of change – no matter how tough the odds. The U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan addresses security, economic development, social development, good governance and rule of law. It recognizes that women have to be part of the process to rebuild Afghanistan, alongside the men."

With a new USD \$27 million fund for small flexible rapid-response grants the United States target to empower Afghan women-led NGOs at the local level and to build their skills: "These kinds of investments are creating a better tomorrow for all the people of Afghanistan."

Ambassador Verveer concluded by saying: "The challenges Afghan women still face, however – in education, in health, in safety and freedom from violence and in reclaiming the rights to political and economic equality guaranteed them in their country's Constitution – are significant. But perhaps no challenge is greater than to ensure their voices remain heard. That's what you're doing here. We are here to listen to their voices and to raise our own voices in support of Afghan woman and others like them who are advancing progress, peace, and justice around the world. In so doing, they will create a better world for all."

Afghan Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs Palwasha Kakar:



Deputy Minister Palwasha Kakar speaking on the Regional Context

Ms. Palwasha Kakar, the Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs in Afghanistan, described the progress made in women's development in Afghanistan since the Bonn conference of 2001: "The political and social participation of women has increased first with the participation of women in the emergency Loya Jirga and later with the increased participation of women in parliamentary and provincial elections. There was also a huge increase in the percentage of girls and women going to schools and universities as well as an increase of women participating in the work place." Referring to the achievements of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, she noted that the ministry finalized, in consultation with civil society, a national action plan for women for the next ten years.

However she noted that, despite this progress and looking at the overall situation of women especially in the rural areas, their situation has not improved significantly and there is a lot more that needs to be done. More attention and resources need to be given to increasing their participation in education, in providing opportunities to improve income, in the provision of basic infrastructure, and in the political and decision-making processes.

She appreciates the support of the international community towards the country's efforts to improve the situation of women and children. And she pledged her support for the work of the women from Afghanistan and its neighboring countries: "I have personally been involved with this regional platform since the Kabul meeting" she said, "and I very much support the idea of a regional exchange of experiences and lessons learned among women NGOs in the region. I would like to ask the international community both in the west and in the region to also support this worthwhile initiative."

Panel -1, Challenges and Action Plan 2010 and Beyond

Ms. Anis Haroon, Chairperson of the National Committee on the Status of Women (CEDAW) in Pakistan presented the problems facing women in the region on behalf of the RGCD Platform. She mentioned extremist movements, the lack of support from governments at national and local levels and the often inappropriate support from the international community.



Anis Haroon, Chairperson CEDAW, Pakistan

She further emphasized the fact that women are not being included nor consulted in the development planning process, for example in Pakistan, a large proportion of development funds is pouring into maintaining security and the social sector is neglected. The issues of human rights, women's empowerment, social justice, education, health, social protection and legal rights have "taken a back seat".



Regional Women's Representatives giving their statements

The RGCD Platform members represented by Anis Haroon (Pakistan), Afifa Azim (Afghanistan), Taqdees Gillani (Pakistan/Kashmir), Nazokat Kasimova (Uzbekistan) and Muborak Sharipova (Tajikistan) presented their plan of action and challenges as a follow-up from the Kabul Declaration of July 2009. They stressed the need for such a regional platform of women's groups and their commitment to supporting it. The main points of the RGCD Platform are:

- Women can play a very positive role in the peace-making process.
- Currently some donor-funded projects are actually reinforcing traditional structures that work against the interests of women, for example support to the peace Loya Jirga. This trend needs to be prevented.
- More development assistance should be channeled directly to women organisations that have gender and development as their *core activity*.
- A mechanism needs to be developed and put in place to give women the role of monitoring these funds.
- More power sharing should go to women and more women should be visible in political decision-making.
- A regional approach and network should be supported, because it allows for the exchange of experiences and lessons learned among women from the region.
- The international community should play a greater role in influencing the governments of the region to implement gender friendly policies.
- The sustainable provision of development funds over a longer-term period is essential for achieving a peaceful and stable society in Afghanistan.

Panel-2, Perspective on Gender and the Reconstruction of Afghanistan; Reaction from the Regional Governments and the International Community



Reaction from the Regional Governments and the International Community

The second panel included: Ambassador Chaudhry of Pakistan, Counsel-General Dr. Jamshed of Afghanistan, Ambassador Lydia Morton of Australia and Director Koen Davidse, Head of the Department Stability and Fragile States, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In reaction to the first panel, they each expressed their commitment to improving women's lives in Afghanistan. They furthermore addressed the relevant activities of their respective governments in support of the Afghan peace process.

Ambassador Chaudhry explained the role of Pakistan in facilitating the peace negotiations. He stressed the importance of the coalition partners in keeping women's role and women's needs high on the agenda.

Dr. Jamshed detailed the efforts and achievements of the Afghan government and stressed that there is a long way to go between political agreements and intentions and changing the day to day practice of the women on the ground.

Ambassador Lydia Morton of Australia explained the cooperation with the Netherlands who have the lead in the Uruzgan operations. She furthermore stressed the commitment of Australia to support the women of Afghanistan and praised the Netherlands for its commitment to this important aspect of the peace process.

Ambassador Morton highlighted Australia's support for UNSC Resolution 1325 on women in conflict zones and how this support manifests itself in support for development cooperation projects in South Asia and specifically in Afghanistan. She stressed Australia's support for increased regional cooperation on gender issues and a regional approach to empowering women and the support for ensuring that gender remains both a focus of international discussion on Afghanistan as well as a part of Australia's operational focus in Afghanistan.

Koen Davidse addressed the importance of bridging the gap between principles and practice. Although the Dutch policy is very explicit on gender mainstreaming and women's equal participation, creating an enabling environment for women's action is not automatically on the forefront of the governments thinking. It is conferences like this that truly make you realize what women really do and what is still needed to support their efforts in practice. He reconfirmed the support of his government for this.

He said that his eyes were opened to the reality of every day and the gap between negotiating and committing on paper and what needs to be done in follow-up action to make things really happen on the ground.

After the comments from the two panels the floor was opened to the public for questions and debate. Several examples were given, confirming the importance of women's equal involvement in this process and the need for substantial support for their actions. Furthermore the plight of women in Afghanistan as well as the limited support for women's organizations in every day practice was articulated by concrete examples. The importance of women's visibility and participation in the London conference and further negotiations was underlined by the audience.

Presentation of The Hague Recommendations to Ambassador Arkwright



Director Bano presenting The Hague Recommendations to Ambassador Arkwright

After the discussion sessions, British Ambassador Paul Arkwright was kind enough to receive The Hague Recommendations that were prepared by the RGCD platform. He reassured his support to women in Afghanistan and the region and announced to public that he will transmit these recommendations to the London Conference, which will take place on 28 January. One of our main purposes in London will be to focus the international community on a clear set of priorities across the 43-nation coalition and marshal the maximum international effort to help the Afghan government deliver.

Ambassador Arkwright added: “We all agree that changes are necessary and everyone has the most eloquent ways of stating what we want our future to look like. But now it is time to act.” He said he was impressed by the participants’ passion and determination to ensure that Afghan women’s voices are heard as well as by the powerful words spoken by the founder and director of Gender Concerns International, Sabra Bano.

Ambassador Arkwright further stated that “an investment in women is an investment in our future. Women’s rights should be fully respected. But without action these words will remain just that.” Ambassador Arkwright agreed with Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, Bert Koenders that “now, we need to get the international community to act and then we will really be able to make a difference”.

The article Ambassador Arkwright wrote on his weblog after this conference as well as the article he wrote after the London Conference, are both attached as an appendix to this report.

Concluding Remarks



Ms. Chantal Gillard making concluding remarks

Parliamentarian Chantal Gillard, Spokesperson of the Dutch Labor Party (PvdA) for Development Cooperation, before concluding the Conference, requested the participants of the Conference to observe a minute of silence for the people of Haiti, who had just experienced a disastrous earthquake. Ms. Gillard presented a short overview of the points that were discussed extensively during the conference. She stated that she was pleased about the content of the conference and the interest shown by the participants of the Conference. One of the most important points that were highlighted in the discussions is the existing gap between policy and practice. Ms. Gillard expressed her hope that this conference held by Gender Concerns International will contribute to closing this gap.

Finally, Director Sabra Bano, host of the conference, thanked all speakers, guests and participants for their attention and contribution to a successful event. Furthermore she thanked the Gender Concerns International-team for organizing the conference with her. She expressed her appreciation for the results, in particular the forwarding of The Hague Recommendations to the International London Conference on Afghanistan. She expressed the hope that this would lead to an important step forward for women's inclusion in the peace process. In closing, she invited the guests to continue the conversation at the reception.

Visual Impression



Ambassador Verveer and Director Bano



Ambassador Arkwright, Minister Kakar and
Director Bano



Minister Koenders and Counsel-General of Afghanistan
Dr. Jamshed and Ambassador Chaudhry of Pakistan



Minister Koenders and Sabra Bano



Sabra Bano, Afifa Azim and Deputy Minister
Palwasha Kakar
representatives Taqdees Gillani and Muborak Sharipova



Member of Dutch Parliament Chantal Gill'ard
with Ambassador Verveer and Platform



Chantal Gill'ard, Minister Koenders
and Ambassador Verveer



Ambassador Verveer, Sabra Bano and Deputy
Minister Palwasha Kakar



Minister Koenders and Deputy Minister Kakar



Counsel-General of Afghanistan Dr. Jamshed and
Ambassador Chaudhry of Pakistan

Panel 1:



Afifa Azim of AWN (Afghanistan), Anis Haroon of CEDAW (Pakistan) and Muborak Sharipova of Open Asia (Tajikistan).



Taqdees Gillani of HOPE (Kashmir) and Prof. Nazokat Kasimova of UWED University (Uzbekistan).

Panel 2:



Koen Davidse of Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Chaudhry of Pakistan, Counsel General Dr. Jamshed of Afghanistan, Ambassador Lydia Morton of Australia



Moderator Alice Bouwman of the Advisory Board of Gender Concerns International and Secretary General of the Netherlands Council of Women (Nederlandse Vrouwenraad) with Ambassador Verveer and a participant of the conference. Peace Palace.

Audience:



Appendix I: Key Speeches

Appendix I A: Speech of Sabra Bano

Speech of Sabra Bano, 14th January 2010

His Excellency Minister Koenders, Deputy Minister Kakar, ambassador Verveer, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honor to welcome you here this afternoon... Your attendance to this event is an endorsement to the fact that gender concerns are our common concerns and that we care about global injustices but also that there is a firm and visible wide range support for this initiative.

What is this initiative?

This initiative cherishes and supports the struggle of women in conflict zones with a particular focus on Afghanistan. And while focus remains on the women of Afghanistan, this initiative is to highlight the impact of fragile peace, security and development situation of the women of those countries bordering Afghanistan, namely Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

The aim of this exercise is to strengthen the voice of the women of the region. A voice that has been there since many decades and is respected and has been effective locally. There is a need that this voice of women should come out of the local confinement and make regional and international visible linkages with women and other supportive individuals and organizations.

To my understanding, within the context of joint efforts of the international community to bring security, stability and development in the region, the need to facilitate the process of linkages and networking among regional women's organizations and international women's support groups is vital in contributing to the effective, timely and sustainable developmental interventions in the region.

For that purpose last July a Regional Stakeholders Meeting in Kabul was organized as you have just seen in the film report. The Kabul Point Meeting has brought forward two outcomes;

1-The Kabul Declaration of July 2009,

2-The Regional Gender, Conflict and Development Platform that assigned Gender Concerns International as the international secretariat to support its activities

Thus with this mandate we promised to organize a follow-up meeting in The Hague after 6 months of the Kabul conference. Today's public meeting is a fulfillment of that Kabul commitment of Gender Concerns International. .

For this meeting we have a plan of action and advocacy for 2010 and beyond including a targeted focus to bring women at the negotiation table while issues of Peace, security, development and resource allocations are discussed.

-This is just not an event, it is a process. Since 2005 we are engaged in gender and democracy initiatives in the Middle East and South Asia. The launch of our initiative to highlight the gender dimension of Afghan conflict internationally has been genuinely supported... And for that I would like to thank both regional and international support groups and individuals.

Tomorrow in Brussels Deputy Minister Kakar will be inaugurating our new office and launching the campaign ***Women at the Flash Point 2010 and Beyond***. We have important meetings at the European Commission, European Parliament and European council and the Regional delegates.

London Conference;

Since we learned of The London conference, we have been engaged in linking The Hague Gender Conference to London Conference. I have written a letter to Prime Minister Brown in this regard that has been handed over to Ambassador Paul Arkwright of British Embassy last December. The Ambassador has kindly agreed to receive our recommendations today at the end of the conference.

This is not all; we are putting this forward through some advocacy in Washington and London and also as to how to appeal to the conference content prep committee and this is where we are stuck now...

During past two days.

We need support for core gender based initiatives more then ever and your support is determinant for the sustenance of these initiatives.

I wish you a pleasant and a fruitful conference.

Thank you.

Appendix I B: Speech of Minister Koenders

Women's Voices from Afghanistan and the Neighboring Countries

14 January 2010 | Conference Women at the Flash Point, Vredespaleis, Den Haag | Minister Koenders

"There is one area that calls for serious ambition and determination. That is women's rights. I am very concerned that the position of women is not centre stage anymore. This is the reason why we are there. We cannot accept that women are once more marginalized, as happened under the Taliban. However difficult the circumstances may be, in terms of security or social standards, we may not put women's rights on hold until the situation eases."

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me here today, and thank you, Gender Concerns International for organizing this conference. It is a very important conference, because it focuses on the role of women in Afghan society and their contribution to reconstruction and development. Afghanistan tops many countries' political, humanitarian and development agendas. Enormous steps have been taken over the last few years. I have visited Afghanistan on many occasions in the past three years and I have witnessed real progress. My last visit six weeks ago was no exception. Important infrastructure projects have been completed, including dams and an irrigation channel in Uruzgan. A bazaar and manufacturing workshop is also being built. Projects like this bring essential improvements to the daily lives of many Afghans. But obviously, many challenges remain. Afghanistan is still one of the poorest countries in the world, with the lowest levels of education and the highest levels of maternal mortality, as well as rampant crime and insecurity, widespread corruption and many other governance issues. The forthcoming conferences, in London in two weeks time, an in Kabul later this year, will have full agendas on issues of security, governance, cross-border issues and implementation of the Afghan government's programs. And we should not forget the parliamentary elections in the spring.

There is one area that calls for serious ambition and determination. That is women's rights. I am very concerned that the position of women is not centre stage anymore. This is the reason why we are there. We cannot accept that women are once more marginalized, as happened under the Taliban. However difficult the circumstances may be, in terms of security or social standards, we may not put women's rights on hold until the situation eases.

Much has been done to improve the situation of Afghan women, particularly when it comes to access to health care and education. More and more Afghan girls are going to school. Since 2006, a new primary school for girls, two additional girls' secondary schools and a school for higher education for girls have been built with Dutch support in Tarin Kowt. At this moment 5000 girls attend primary education and there are 45 female teachers in Uruzgan, where there were none before. Mother and child mortality is decreasing. Today about 60% of pregnant women in Uruzgan receive pre-natal tetanus shots, up from only 26% three years ago, and there are 17 female health workers, up from only three in 2006. These are great achievements. But we have to admit that while working on these very relevant, basic and sometimes even lifesaving improvements we - the international community - may have neglected the political or leadership roles Afghan women can and should play.

However difficult and dangerous the situation, there are many brave women in Afghanistan who stand up to be counted, who do not accept a role in the margins of society. They fight for a role in government, in organizations, in companies, in the media or in schools. They are incredibly courageous. They risk their lives, since there are still forces that believe women have no right to do this.

Women like Zarghona Walizada, who started her own transport business in 2003, after returning to Afghanistan from exile. At 38, she is now the owner and director of the biggest transport company in Afghanistan, employing 450 people, of whom 449 are men. Threats are part of her life. Since 2003, 13 of her truck drivers have been killed and 36 of her trucks have been set on fire. The threats she receives come not only from the Taliban, but also from her competitors, who are convinced that a woman in business is not an option. But for Zarhona Walizada, giving up is not an option, either. I believe it to be a woman's inalienable right to have an influence on politics and society in their country. This applies to all women, even if they live in Afghanistan. Women in Afghanistan have to be more courageous and more determined to achieve things that are taken for granted in other countries.

Women like police officer Lieutenant – Colonel Malalai Kakar, head of Kandahar's department of crimes against women. In September 2008 this mother of six children, in her early 40s, was killed by Taliban rebels. 'We killed Malalai Kakar', a Taliban spokesman told the news agency AFP. 'She was our target, and we successfully eliminated her.'

And in Uruzgan there is Malalai: A common Afghan woman, born and raised in a small and poor village near to Tarin Kowt. After her husband, to whom she was married off at an early age, was killed by the Taliban, her life took a completely different turn. She promised herself she would stand up against the Taliban. She started organizing secret meetings for women, and produced anti Taliban propaganda, standing up for women's rights. This is why she got arrested by the Taliban, who tortured and sexually abused her. Subsequently, Malalai ran away to Tarin Kowt where she continued her protests. Her actions led to the founding of the first women's organization in Uruzgan, which soon counted hundreds of female supporters from the surroundings of TK. Later on, she applied for a position with the Afghan National Police. She was the first woman ever to do so. A number of women have followed her example. Nowadays, Malalai frequently gives interviews about the negative effects of the Taliban's action on the development of Afghanistan. She promised herself to continue doing so for the rest of her life. Malalai is a true Afghan heroine.

I know that all the women from Afghanistan who have come here to present their views at this conference, who speak up at other conferences and meetings, have had their share of threats and intimidation. I know that people like Dr. Sima Samar, the Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and the former minister of Women's Affairs in the Interim Administration of Afghanistan faces threats daily. I have seen that women in Afghanistan have to be more courageous and more determined to achieve things that are taken for granted in other countries. These women believe in their cause. We must believe in them. But there is more to it than it being women's right to participate. It is also a basic necessity. It is an illusion to think that we can take sustainable steps towards the stability and reconstruction of any society while excluding half of the population. It starts with the assessment of needs. As the Swedish Major – General Bengt Andersson said at a meeting here in the Peace Palace last December, 'if you only talk with 50% of the population, you will never be able to make a 100% correct assessment of a situation'. So we have to empower women, to step aside and give women space to make their voices heard. We have to enable them to make their vital contribution to creating a sustainable

peace, reconstruction and reconciliation process. More and more women in conflict areas have come to the conclusion that the only way towards peace is through investment in gender equality, and not the other way around. I agree with them.

So the women of Afghanistan deserve all our support in their Endeavour to work towards a better, more stable and more prosperous society. They deserve our support if they want to send their daughters to school, and if they want to run for high office themselves. They deserve the right to healthcare services, but also to study medicine and help other people. The women in Afghanistan deserve our support to participate in building their society. They deserve our support to make their voices heard.

Some people warn that 'you have to be aware of the local cultural context', or that 'you have to take local traditional values into account'. We know what can happen if you go along with this line of thinking for too long: you end up accepting frightful ideologies like those of the Taliban. Ideologies which exclude women from any form of public life, and deny them education, employment and participation. Ideologies that legalize violence against women. There are limits to what can be seen as 'local culture' and 'traditional values'. Cultural sensitivity is crucial, but they do not override women's rights. The limits are very clear: they have been set down in the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Afghan government ratified CEDAW in March 2003. This was a clear promise of change for the better, by both the Afghan government and the international community.

'We have the promises of the world' is in fact the title of the latest report on women's rights in Afghanistan, published by Human Rights Watch last December. The title is a quote from the Afghan activist Wazhma Frogh. She added, 'But we still wait to see what more they will do'. From this report, we learn that, after initial positive steps, there have been more steps backwards than forwards in recent years in the position of women in Afghanistan. The few women in public positions are unsafe. The number of women in the civil service has actually decreased from 31% in 2006 to 21.4% in 2009. Only about 5% of the employees in the legal system – judges, attorneys and prosecutors – are female; 0.4% of the police officers are female; 0.6% of army personnel are female, and all these women are at risk: they are constantly under threat and hardly get any protection.

Another equally worrying conclusion of this report is that Afghan women feel abandoned by the international community. They see that violence against women still goes unpunished. And it is incredibly widespread: a survey by Human Rights Watch in 2008 estimated that 87.2% of Afghan women had experienced at least one form of physical, sexual or psychological violence or forced marriage in their lifetime.

We have to do something about this. And we have to do it fast. It is our moral obligation and a commitment the international community has made.

In 2000, the international community adopted UN Security Council Resolution 1325 that guarantees women's right to participate in all decision making processes in which prevention or resolution of conflicts, or the reconstruction of post – conflict countries is being discussed.

And more recently, in October 2009, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1889, in which the international community urged "Member States, international and regional organizations to take further measures to improve women's participation during all stages of peace processes, particularly in conflict resolution, post – conflict planning and peace building , including by enhancing their engagement in political and economic decision making at early stages of recovery processes, through inter alia promoting women's leadership and capacity to engage in aid management and planning, supporting women's organizations, and countering negative societal attitudes about women's capacity to participate equally".

The Afghan government recognizes the urgency too. In a reaction to resolution 1889, the Afghan UN ambassador stated: 'Afghanistan and the international community made a promise to each other that what happened under the Taliban would never happen again. More importantly, we made the same promise to the women of Afghanistan.'

I intend to keep this promise. In the Netherlands, we have set up a National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325. This Plan is primarily a framework for cooperation to step up efforts to secure active participation in peace and reconstruction processes, to include gender perspectives in peace missions, to improve access to justice for victims of sexual violence, and to report and punish all those who commit these crimes.

The Dutch action plan is a truly national plan: it has been signed by both civil society organizations and the government, and we have all agreed on a number of action points. This has the advantage of making us jointly accountable for fulfilling our commitments. In fact, this conference and the previous conference organized by **Gender Concerns International in Kabul** in July last year are good examples of what we are trying to achieve with our Dutch National Action Plan. That is to help women in countries like Afghanistan to sit at negotiation tables that decide on their countries' future.

As one of the signatories of the National Action Plan, I have pledged to work towards more equal representation of women in negotiations and reconstruction processes. In a recent session of the Dutch Parliament I announced that the Netherlands will make a great effort to support the Afghans in drafting their own Afghan National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325 or something of that kind.

Just before this meeting I discussed these issues with Melanne Verbeer, the US Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues. I am delighted that she has come over from Washington to attend this important meeting. In her major policy speech on development last week, the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said, 'Today the United States is taking steps to put women front and centre in our development work'. Ambassador Verbeer and I concluded that we were in full agreement on this. We have agreed that I will go and discuss future lines of cooperation with Secretary Clinton before the spring. We are also happy that a gender symposium is being organized on 27th January on the eve of the Afghanistan conference in London. And we will do all we can to ensure that women have a few minutes on the conference agenda for the 28th to formally present their statement to all delegations. In the short term, I see many opportunities to fulfill the commitment arising from Resolutions 1325 and 1889. For the Afghan government, the level of women's participation in the new administration will be the litmus test.

It is a good sign that President Karzai has included three female ministers in his latest cabinet proposal, up from just one in the proposal that was sent back by parliament a few weeks ago. I hope that he will include at least one of these female ministers in his delegation to the conference in London and have her play an active role.

Another challenge, for both the Afghan government and the international community, will be the participation of women in the Afghan delegations to the forthcoming conferences on the future of Afghanistan, starting with the London Conference in two weeks time.

Experience in other countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and South Sudan show that women can play a crucial constructive role in peace processes and the reconstruction of their post – conflict countries. Take the Sudanese Women's Empowerment for Peace Platform (SuWEP). This initiative, which started in 1998, brought together women from government, civil society and the political sphere from North and South Sudan. Within a few years, these women were recognized as playing a major role in the peace process and they were invited more and more frequently to attend the peace negotiations. Eventually, in 2005, SuWEP was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

However long the road ahead may be, there are people who are a source of inspiration and hope. Afghanistan has these truly incredible examples of women who, against all odds, make a difference. Some are well known internationally, like Dr. Sima Samar. Some work in relative anonymity, like Zarghona Walizada, whom I mentioned earlier. They all pay a great price. Dr. Sima Samar, who has been recognized for her leadership and courage by dozens of human and women's rights organizations all over the world, continues her work in Afghanistan. Despite the difficulties she faces she is fully dedicated to her work. She has said in the past that her work may be only a drop in the ocean, but at least she feels that that drop is positive. She is of the opinion that if we empower the Afghan women who aspire to leadership, political and otherwise, through capacity building and moral support, more women will stand for election, start businesses and make Afghanistan a better place to live. I agree with her.

These courageous women show that change is possible, even in Afghanistan. Let us support them in their fight to make Afghanistan a better place to live!

Thank you.

Appendix I C: Speech of Ambassador Verveer

Keynote Address by Melanne Verveer

Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues

Conference on Women at the Flash Point: 2010 and Beyond –

Women's Voices from Afghanistan and the Neighboring Countries

January 14, 2010, The Hague

Thank you, Minister Koenders for your powerful statement and personal commitment to these issues.

It is fitting that we gather at the Peace Palace – the embodiment of the idea of world peace and justice – to listen to women's voices from war-torn Afghanistan and neighboring countries. I want to thank Gender Concerns International for convening this conference and for recognizing the importance of women's coming together regionally to address critical challenges that they have in common – challenges that transcend borders. There is much that can be accomplished by working together for a regional approach.

Last night I had the pleasure to meet the women who are with us from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. We came together at a dinner organized at the Parliament by Member of Parliament, Chantal Gillard, and had a productive exchange of ideas. It is also a great personal pleasure for me to be back in The Hague. The United States and The Netherlands have strong ties based on shared values. I want to salute the Dutch government for its global leadership on development assistance and its commitment to women's rights and women's progress around the world.

Since I arrived yesterday I have had excellent meetings with the Foreign Minister, the Minister for Development Cooperation and many other officials who have impressed me by their commitment to the issues that bring us together. This country has been a partner to Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban and its contributions to security, stability, humanitarian relief, reconstruction and development in Uruzgan Province and more broadly across the country have been significant. As Hillary Clinton aptly said when she came here as First Lady, "The

Netherlands has played a unique role in moving us closer to a world in which peace, justice and freedom prevail."

I am also happy that U.S. Ambassador to the Netherlands, Fay Levin, could be here this afternoon. We are proud of the leadership and commitment she brings to her position.

Let me put this issue in context.

The major economic, security, governance and environmental challenges of our times cannot be solved without the participation of women at all levels of society. Investing in women is one of the most powerful forces for reshaping the globe and, as yet, one that is still significantly untapped. Secretary Clinton, in a recent major address on international development, noted that we are focusing more on our investment on women and girls. As she has observed, “Until women around the world are accorded their rights and have opportunities for education, health care, and gainful employment, global progress and prosperity will have its own glass ceiling.”

Yet the fact remains that women are still the great majority of the poor around the globe. Girls make up two-thirds of the unschooled. Violence against women is a global scourge. The AIDS pandemic has a woman’s face. Too many women still die in pregnancy and childbirth. There are still too few women serving on provincial councils, in the halls of parliaments and at the tables of power addressing conflict resolution -- places where the decisions that affect them, their families, and societies are being made without their participation. Around the world, the places that are the most dangerous for women also pose the greatest threats to international peace and security. The correlation is clear: where women are oppressed, governance is weak and extremism is more likely to take hold. Raising the status of women would go a long way to keeping states from failing and terrorists from succeeding. The status of women is a bellwether for the viability of a nation.

It is a simple fact that no country can get ahead if half its citizens are left behind.

We know from an accumulating body of studies and research from governments, multilateral organizations, corporations and think tanks that investing in women is the single most effective development strategy that we have for poverty alleviation, economic growth and a country’s general prosperity.

Let me touch on just four investments in women that produce significant dividends for all of society:

First, investing in education for girls is the single most effective development investment a country can make. The benefits to girls and families are well documented, from better health and nutrition to delayed marriages and economic opportunity.

Second, investing in women’s economic participation is important because women drive economic growth. Moreover, they invest up to 90 percent of their earnings in their families and communities, which is two times the rate of men. Women need access to credit if they are to grow businesses. Microcredit has lifted up tens of millions of women and their families out of poverty, but microcredit is not enough – as important as it is. Women also need the ability to grow businesses beyond microenterprises into small and medium size businesses. They need markets for their products, and they need education and training. Moreover, women’s interests need to be included in overall economic policies. President Obama’s global Food Security Initiative recognizes that 60-80 percent of smallholder farmers in much of the developing world are women and that their special needs – from

land tenure and credit to participation in local decision-making – need to be taken into consideration if agriculture productivity is to expand.

Third, investing in women's leadership, especially in political participation at the national and local levels, is critical. Women's voices need to be heard, not only because they have a right to participate in the processes and decisions that affect their lives, but also because women's perspectives and experiences would benefit public policy deliberations.

Women also need to be at the table in peacemaking, peace negotiations and work on post-conflict reconstruction, or the peace is less likely to hold. Security Council Resolution 1325 addresses women, peace and security. After almost a decade since its adoption, there has been little progress in recognizing the important role women need to play in this area. As foreign ministers and other leaders gather in London at the end of this month to discuss progress in Afghanistan, the voices of women need to be heard, because Afghan women are critical to their country's future.

It is encouraging that President Karzai this week named three Afghan women with relevant experience to Cabinet positions, pending the Parliament's assent. I know that the Afghan women here are watching developments closely, as are all of us.

We must also confront the entrenched attitudes that depress women's political participation and suppress their voices in the political process. Women cannot compete for public office when they receive death threats or credibly fear for their families' safety.

Fourth, investing in programs to end violence against women is essential. Violence against women is a global pandemic. Its scope and scale make it simultaneously one of the largest and most entrenched human rights and development issues before us. Violence exacts a great toll on women in Afghanistan, Pakistan and well beyond. Violence cannot be explained away as cultural. It is criminal. Abuses not only destroy the lives of individual girls and women but rob countries and the world of urgently needed talent. I don't need to tell you that women in regions of conflict are particularly vulnerable.

I traveled to Afghanistan just before the presidential elections there to reaffirm President Obama's and Secretary Clinton's commitment to Afghan women and girls and to hear from them how they were faring. In a discussion late one evening in Kabul in which Deputy Minister of Women Kakar, who is here also, participated, an eloquent young Afghan activist pleaded, "don't just look at women here as victims, but look at us as the leaders we are."

Indeed, to visit Afghanistan is to become aware of just how capable and hardworking Afghan women are. I traveled to remote provinces where women were running for provincial councils in numbers that exceeded the quota for women's seats. They wanted to be part of the local decision-making and to make a difference – to be agents of change – no matter how tough the odds.

The U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan addresses security, economic development, social development, good governance and rule of law. It recognizes that women have to be part of the process to rebuild Afghanistan, alongside the men.

A top U.S. priority for development and economic growth is agriculture. Eighty percent of the people in Afghanistan earn their income from agriculture, yet only fifty per cent of the arable land is currently under cultivation. The key to increasing land yield is to increase skilled human capital and boost land productivity. Women are being trained for sustainable employment in farm machinery and in small business based on agriculture. Others are receiving veterinary training critical to livelihoods of families who depend on selling animals. Others are being trained in poultry businesses in villages. Programs like these are having a positive impact. As one Afghan said “It is unbelievable how our family life changed from misery to prosperity.”

In addition to help with agricultural training, Afghan women are receiving access to trade missions and other tools to benefit their businesses and business skills – tools they need to begin a small business, or to take an existing business to the next level of development. In these ways, women are improving their own lives and those of their families.

But agricultural development, business training, and microloans can only advance women’s rights so far, without a concomitant increase in political and judicial representation. That is why we have been supporting local civil society organizations in providing civic education through a coordinated approach of training, capacity building, and support for media programs, as well as training for female police officers, justice officials, civil service capacity building, and political training for female parliamentarians and their staff. We’ve supported the creation of Family Response Units that are staffed primarily by female police officers and that offer a safe place for women to report crime and seek dispute mediation. We’ve funded workshops for male and female police officers on domestic violence. During my trip to Afghanistan this past summer, U.S. Ambassador Eikenberry and I announced a new USD \$27 million fund for small flexible rapid-response grants targeted to empower Afghan women-led NGOs at the local level and to build their skills.

Our efforts focus not only on building the capacity of women and mitigating the security challenges that impede their political progress, but also on securing allies who can be influential. For example, we support programs that promote women’s rights by engaging community religious leaders and other local officials who speak out in their Friday services and other venues against violence against women. Mullahs have been instrumental in persuading husbands and fathers of women who have been recruited for midwife training to allow wives and daughters to leave home for the classes. These kinds of investments are creating a better tomorrow for all the people of Afghanistan.

The challenges Afghan women still face, however – in education, in health, in safety and freedom from violence and in reclaiming the rights to political and economic equality guaranteed them in their country’s Constitution – are significant. But perhaps no challenge is greater than to ensure their voices remain heard. That’s what you’re doing here. We are here to listen to their voices and to raise

our own voices in support of Afghan woman and others like them who are advancing progress, peace, and justice around the world. In so doing, they will create a better world for all.

Appendix I D: Speech of Deputy Minister Kakar

SPEECH BY MS. PALWASHA KAKAR, DEPUTY MINISTER OF WOMENS AFFAIRS,
AFGHANISTAN, 14 JANUARY 2010

Your Excellency Mr. Koenders,

Your Excellency Ms. Verveer,

Distinguished guests,

I am delighted to be here at this important event to discuss the prospects for women in Afghanistan and its neighboring countries. I would like to take this opportunity to convey to you some recent developments regarding the situation of women and challenges still facing women in my country. And I look forward to the continued support of the international community in supporting my country's efforts in promoting gender equality.

After the Bonn conference on Afghanistan in 2001 there has been great progress and improvement in women's lives and their political and social participation. This started with the participation of women in the first emergency Loya Jirga and was followed by the increased participation of women in parliamentary and provincial elections. There was also a huge increase in the percentage of girls and women going to schools and universities. There has also been an increase of women participating in the work place.

If you look to the Women Ministry's achievements, we finalized in consultation with civil society and approved a national action plan for women for the next ten years.

Despite this progress, looking at the overall situation of women especially in the rural areas, we can say that their situation has not improved significantly and that there is a lot more that needs to be done. More attention and resources need to be given to increasing their participation in education, in providing income earning opportunities, in the provision of basic infrastructure, and in the political and decision-making processes.

I have personally been involved with this regional platform since the Kabul meeting and I very much support the idea of a regional exchange of experiences and lessons learned among women NGOs in the region. I would like to ask the international community both in the west and in the region to also support this worthwhile initiative.

I would like to thank Gender Concerns International for hosting this important conference. I am very proud to have Sabra Bano as my friend.

Thank you for your attention.

Appendix II: The Hague Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS



WOMEN AT THE FLASHPOINT: 2010 AND BEYOND **Women's Voices from Afghanistan and the Neighboring Countries**

To be presented at the London Conference on Afghanistan to be held on 28th January 2010

At the initiative of Gender Concerns International, a Dutch NGO based in the Netherlands and in close cooperation with women NGO/CSO partners from Afghanistan and its neighbors, a **Regional Gender, Conflict and Development Platform** has been formed in Kabul in July 2009.*

The following are the *key* recommendations from the Kabul Declaration and which are endorsed by the members of the above-mentioned Regional Platform got together on 14th January at the Peace Palace in The Hague:

I. Women's Participation in the Peace and Security Process

■ Given that peace is defined beyond the military structures of the police, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community should ensure that peace, security and development are provided in a more comprehensive form, especially considering the special needs of women and children.

■ The international community should insist on the participation of women representatives in the Afghanistan and regional delegations in any future peace negotiations (international and national) and ensure that there is space in the negotiations to hear their opinions and needs.

■ That those international women organizations that have been working closely with Afghan and regional women and women's organizations should be given representation in international forums and negotiations. The inclusion of international women's organizations must be visible and should be an integral part of the Afghan and regional gender-focused policy and implementation strategies of the international community.

II. Women's Political Participation

■ The Government should strengthen its current efforts to increase the percentage of qualified and

committed women in political leadership and decision-making positions, in conformity with the targets set in the Afghan National Development Strategy, and the international community should strongly advocate this objective with the Government.

■ The capacity of the Parliament should be strengthened to better understand and support gender matters in order to effectively monitor and hold accountable the executive agencies of Government, for example, special training programs for women parliamentarians need to be put in place.

■ Election monitoring from a gender perspective is an important tool in securing women's electoral participation. The international community must support and encourage international and regional women's joint election monitoring missions in upcoming elections in the region.

III. Women's "Fair Share" of Development Assistance

■ The international community should allocate at least 40% of its development funds to women-specific development priorities. The increased development resources should be allocated specifically to local and international organizations and networks that have women and development *as a core activity*.

■ That the Regional Platform will form an international women's committee to ensure that the above-mentioned resources are allocated to women of the region and that there is a sound monitoring and reporting system in place for this process. *Resources must be available to increase women's advocacy and organizational capacity.*

■ The international community should make stronger efforts to mainstream gender concerns in all the programmes/projects that it supports in Afghanistan and its neighbors. *This work can be done through direct funding available to core women organizations.*

IV. Women and Security

■ Given that security has many complex dimensions (physical, psychological, societal and military), the Government with the support of the international community, is urged to speed up the formulation of a national action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 which can then constitute the framework for development assistance to women in Afghanistan.

V. Cross-Cutting Recommendations

■ The Government of Afghanistan and the international community should pay special attention to capacity development needs, to affirmative action and to special protection measures for women and children. The regional platform members and Gender Concerns International can assist in identifying these needs.

■ Efforts in advocacy for improving the situation of women in Afghanistan and its neighbors need to be continued and linkages between the women of the region and their international partners need to be continuously strengthened. *Women's international organizations should be given enough direct resources to help them forwarding the international gender agenda.*

■ It is proposed that the United Nations assign a special rapporteur for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of UNSCR 1325. This rapporteur should be supported by the Regional Platform

and Gender Concerns International for the region consisting of Afghanistan and its neighbors.

The Hague, 14 January 2010

**Presented by
Regional Gender, Conflict and Development Platform**

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*As signatory to the Dutch Schokland Treaty and to the Dutch National Action Plan on 1325, Gender Concerns International is committed to highlighting the gender dimension of the Afghan conflict within a broad regional context. This initiative is a direct response to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 which calls for the enhanced contribution of women in peace, security and development processes especially in conflict and post-conflict areas.

Despite the efforts of the international community to improve the situation of women in Afghanistan, there has been an absolute lack of inclusion of women's own regional and international vision at the higher policy and implementation levels. At the last International Conference on Afghanistan held in the Hague on 31st March 2009, Gender Concerns International publicly lobbied for the inclusion of regional and international women's organizations at the Hague conference. As a result and with the help of the Gender Desk at the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation and the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul a first regional women stakeholders meeting took place in Kabul from 6-7 July 2009. This meeting was attended by women NGO/CSO representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan (including Kashmir), India, Iran and Uzbekistan. The participants unanimously endorsed *a regional approach and strategy for addressing the challenges of women in Afghanistan and its neighboring countries*. At the end of the discussions the **Kabul Declaration** was drafted and agreed on by all the participants. Furthermore and in order to safeguard that the Declaration is observed a Regional Gender, Conflict and Development Platform was formed. It was then decided that approximately 6 months after the Kabul Conference a follow-up meeting should be convened in The Hague.

It is within such a context that a second regional stakeholders meeting was held in The Hague, Netherlands from 12-14 January 2010. The recommendations from this meeting were presented to the international community at a public meeting on 14 January. "At this meeting, it was agreed that the recommendations of the regional platform members would be passed to the British Foreign Secretary in anticipation of the forthcoming international conference on Afghanistan to be hosted by the British Government on 28 January 2010."

Appendix III: Press Release



The Hague, 6th January 2010

**Palwasha Kakar, Deputy Minister Women's Affairs, Afghanistan and
Melanne Verveer Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, US
Will join the conference: Women at the Flash Point: 2010 and Beyond,
Women's Voices from Afghanistan and the Neighboring Countries**

14th January 2010, 12:30 h – 16:30h, Peace Palace, The Hague

2010 is a parliamentary election year in Afghanistan. International Community needs to do more than it does now to ensure women's effective political participation in Afghanistan

Regional women delegates from Pakistan, Iran, India, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will attend the conference on the role and participation of women in peace, security and gender and development activities in Afghanistan and the region.

To Gender Concerns International it is evident that many Afghan women still live under extremely difficult conditions. The goal professed by the Afghan constitution that "the citizens of Afghanistan - whether **man or woman- have equal rights and duties before the law**" remains a very distant dream for most women. Therefore, the inclusion of women in the legislative, judiciary and executive is indispensable to the development of Afghanistan. Furthermore, **there is a lack of due attention placed on Afghan women and women active in neighboring countries** and their concerns as stakeholders in consultations on matters related to peace and security in their home countries.

This broad regional conference fills **the vacuum created by an absence of any regional consultation with or among women and it aims** to strengthen the potential of women's ability of being an actor for change. This conference is a follow-up to Kabul Conference of July 2009 and is highly important within the context of upcoming international conference on Afghanistan.

The delegates from Afghanistan and its 5 neighboring countries will be attending a closed session two days meeting. On the third day of the conference, the participants will formulate common action plans/draft conclusions which shall be discussed during the Public Meeting attended by the representatives of the International Community and other national and international stakeholders.

Please kindly note that the registration for the event is **compulsory**. To confirm your attendance you are advised to simply reply to this email rgcdp@genderconcerns.org. **Registration is Limited.**

Appendix IV: Article in News Paper Trouw (Dutch)

'Recht vrouwen Afghanistan uitgehold'

'Positie van vrouwen staat niet meer centraal'

16 January 2010

Gert Jan Rohmens

Den Haag – De internationale gemeenschap steunt de strijd van Afghaanse vrouwen voor hun rechten onvoldoende en de steun is „veel te gefragmenteerd”. Dat vindt Sabra Bano, directeur van Gender Concerns International, dat deze week in Den Haag een conferentie hield over vrouwenrechten in Afghanistan.

„Er is geen strategie, de heldere expertise die nodig is ontbreekt, en vrouwen zijn niet betrokken als er echte besluiten genomen worden”, aldus Bano. „Eigenlijk doet de internationale gemeenschap het niet beter dan een Afghaanse jirga, een besluitvormingsorgaan dat traditioneel een mannenbolwerk is.”

Een rapport van de mensenrechtenorganisatie Human Rights Watch uit december, laat weinig vooruitgang zien op het gebied van vrouwenrechten in Afghanistan, na de val van de taliban in 2001. Het aantal vrouwelijk ambtenaren neemt weer af, en de vrouwen die strijden voor meer rechten worden vaak bedreigd, en sommigen zelfs vermoord. Daders worden nooit gepakt, wat het gevoel van onveiligheid versterkt.

Minister Bert Koenders van ontwikkelingssamenwerking haalde in zijn toespraak het HRW-rapport aan. „Na de positieve maatregelen van het begin, zijn de afgelopen jaren meer stappen achteruit gezet dan vooruit, als het gaat om de positie van vrouwen in Afghanistan”, aldus de bewindsman. „Ik maak me er grote zorgen over dat de positie van vrouwen niet meer centraal staat.”

Volgens Koenders zijn er zeker ook zaken verbeterd voor vrouwen in Afghanistan. Maar we moeten toegeven, zei de minister, dat de internationale gemeenschap „de politieke of leidersrol die Afghaanse vrouwen kunnen en zouden moeten spelen, wellicht heeft verwaarloosd”.

Doordat de internationale hulp slecht gecoördineerd is, wordt er geld verspild, zegt Bano. „Er zouden betere experts moeten worden ingezet, er moet meer gedaan worden aan opleidingen en de lokale cultuur en structuur moeten meer gerespecteerd worden. Ze moeten niet zomaar decreten opleggen. En vrouwen moeten veel meer dan nu betrokken worden bij de besluitvorming op alle niveau's”.

Appendix V: Articles of British Ambassador to the Netherlands Paul Arkwright

British Ambassador to the Netherlands His Excellency Paul Arkwright wrote the following article on his weblog about The Hague ‘Women at the Flash Point: 2010 and Beyond – Women’s Voices from Afghanistan and the Neighboring Countries’ and its relevance to the International London Conference on Afghanistan:



Friday 15 January, 2010

Turning ideas into action at the London Conference

“We all agree that changes are necessary and everyone has the most eloquent ways of stating what we want our future to look like. But now it is time to act.” Powerful words spoken by the Founder and Director of Gender Concerns International, Sabra Bano, at the conference I attended yesterday on Women at the Flash Point: 2010 and Beyond – Women’s Voices from Afghanistan and the Neighboring Countries. The participants’ passion and determination to ensure that Afghan women’s voices are heard was impressive.

It was pointed out that an investment in women is an investment in our future. Women’s rights should be fully respected. But without action these words will remain just that. As the Dutch minister for Development Cooperation, Bert Koenders said yesterday: “Now, we need to get the international community to act and then we will really be able to make a difference”.

I undertook to transmit the conclusions of yesterday’s conference to the London Conference on Afghanistan, which will take place on 28 January. One of our main purposes in London will be to focus the international community on a clear set of priorities across the 43-nation coalition and marshal the maximum international effort to help the Afghan government deliver. And turning the ideas of Afghan women into action will be essential in making this aspiration a reality.

British Ambassador Arkwright also wrote the following article on his weblog after the International Conference on Afghanistan was held in London:

Friday 29 January, 2010

[London Conference: Commitment to the future of Afghanistan](#)

The London Conference on Afghanistan was held yesterday. It was hosted by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and President Karzai, with over 70 countries and international organisations present. Foreign Minister Verhagen and Development Minister Koenders represented the Netherlands.

Among other conclusions, the Conference resulted in an agreement between the Afghan government and the international community to:

- develop a plan for phased transition to Afghan government control of security, province by province;
- significantly increase the Afghan Army and Police Force, supported by the international community;
- take measures to tackle corruption;
- better coordinate development assistance;
- support the Afghan Government's Peace and Reintegration Programme, offering economic alternatives to those who renounce violence;
- increase regional cooperation to combat terrorism, violent extremism and the drugs trade.

I was particularly pleased that the [Conference Communiqué](#) highlighted the role of women in rebuilding Afghanistan, and welcomed the Afghan government's commitment to strengthen the participation of women in all Afghan governance institutions - one of the key recommendations from the recent [Gender Concern International Conference](#) in The Hague in which I participated.

The Conference was an impressive demonstration of the international community's commitment to the future of Afghanistan. Now comes the difficult part - implementing the agreement. That's what I and my team at the Embassy will be working on with the Dutch government in the weeks and months ahead. I hope this will include a decision soon to continue Dutch military engagement in Afghanistan, in line with decisions by other NATO Allies and partners to maintain, and in many cases increase, their military contribution there.

Appendix VI: Activities Plan 2010

Activities Plan 2010

Women at the Flash Point: 2010 and Beyond

January

- Regional Platform Strategy Meeting Session, 12-13/1

This sessions will be held before the conference “Women at the Flashpoint: 2010 and Beyond” to discuss the issues to be highlighted at the conference for the international community. The session is scheduled for 12th and 13th of January at the Conference Room at the Gender Concerns International’s Office.

- Conference “Women at the Flashpoint”, Peace Palace, The Hague, 14/1The aim of the conference is to promote the objectives of the Kabul Declaration and elaborate on the prospects for women during and after the upcoming 2010 parliamentary elections in Afghanistan, within the context of the lessons learnt during the elections of 2009.

- Meeting with European Commission and Amazone Women’s Centre, Brussels, 15/1

The meetings with European Commission and Amazone Women’s Centre in Brussels are scheduled for 15th of January, 2010. The aim of the meeting is to take the voices of women from Afghanistan and the region to the international community and put light on the women issues in the countries of regional delegates.

Policy Luncheon, Inclusive Security, Washington, 19/1

Meetings at the US State Department, Washington, 20-21/1

British Parliament, London Advocacy, 25-28/1

February

- The Post Hague and London Conference Consultation 11/2

This consultation meeting will be held in February as a follow up of “Women at the Flashpoint: 2010 and Beyond” and London Conference on Afghanistan. The aim of this meeting is to facilitate the consensus on Regional Gender, Security and Development Concerns as Hague Initiative to do the follow-up to the above mentioned conferences. The main issue is to strengthen regional and international gender concerns visibility. The core idea is to gain the support of international community for the development of the Regional Platform.

March, Afghan Women at CSW

- Women at the Flashpoint – 2: Security and Governance Concerns-Regional Platform 8/3, New York.

- The meeting “Women at the Flashpoint – 2: Security and Governance Concerns” will be held in New York on 8th March, 2010 at the event of CSW 54th session. The aim of the meeting is to highlight the impact of recent international security and governance strategies and the challenges posed to Afghan, the regional and the international women’s organizations. This event will be a follow up meeting to the conference held in The Hague on 14th January, 2010 and Kabul Conference held on 7th July, 2009.
- Expert Meeting – Briefing on 1325 and CSW with Platform VDV
- Brussels Meetings/networking

April Beijing +15 and Political Participation of Women of Afghanistan and Pakistan

- Flowers for Peace Campaign Launch

May **Flowers for Peace Campaign launch, Brussels**

Peace Jirga and Kabul Conference, international consultations

June Public Event in Brussels

Gender Concerns International plans to on hosting a debate or a conference of a large scale in Brussels in June, 2010.

Follow-up Hague Conference, Kabul

Pre-Kabul Conference: Afghan and International Women’s Joint Event. Prep-Election 2010

July – August

- Preparations for Gender Concerns International’s Capacity Building Training Program initiative and GE (Gender Election Monitoring) Mission.
- Promotion Regional Platform and work on the Secretariat

September

General Election Monitoring Mission

Gender Concerns International plans to send a Gender Election Monitoring Mission consisting of experts of various organizations to the Afghan Parliamentary Elections of September 18, 2010. They will monitor the election process, focusing on gender issues, before, during and after the election.

October

- Public Event in Brussels
Gender Concerns International plans on hosting a debate or a conference of a large scale in Brussels in October, 2010 as a follow up of the June event.
- Participation on UNSCR 1325 10 year Anniversary Review
Gender Concerns International plans to attend the meeting on the UNSCR 1325 10 years anniversary.

November – December

- Implementation of Capacity Building Training Programs for Women’s Organizational Development.

Appendix VI: Kabul Declaration



Kabul Declaration Women in Afghanistan: Regional Stakeholders Meeting 6-7 July 2009 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Gender Relevance of the Hague Declaration

The meeting was organized by the Afghan Women's Network and Gender Concerns International, with the participation of women leaders from Afghanistan, Iran, India, Pakistan and Uzbekistan. The participants discussed the relevance of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in promoting peace, stability and development in Afghanistan and the region through the increased involvement and participation of women. The group also discussed the Hague Declaration and its impact on Afghanistan.

The regional context includes the women of Afghanistan, Iran, India, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The group agreed that, considering the growing challenges for peace, security and development in Afghanistan and the region, there is a strong need for the regional approach which would also facilitate interactions among women in the region.

After intensive discussions the five country delegates present at the meeting, concluded with the following recommendations to support the peace, security and development processes in Afghanistan and its neighboring countries.

FOR AFGHANISTAN:

Women's Participation in the Peace Process

The participants agreed that peace is defined beyond the military structures of police and army and in a more comprehensive analysis, should be described as rule of law in conformity with national constitution and international human rights.

Building on this definition of peace and security, the Government and the international community should ensure that security is provided in a more comprehensive form considering the special needs and interests of women and children.

The Government and international community should ensure the implementation of international Humanitarian Law during the conflict.

In order to increase the number of women in law enforcement agencies, the Government and international community needs to pay special attention to capacity development, affirmative action and special needs and protection measures for women.

Any peace negotiations should ensure women's participation and protect the constitutional human rights of women.

Serious disarmament should be initiated by the Government and supported by the international community to mitigate the threats that prevent women's societal participation.

Women's Political Participation and International Development Assistance

The meeting agreed that in confirmation with the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS), 30% of government and political leadership positions should be reserved for women who are effective and committed to the women's cause, at all levels including at high-level leadership. The Afghan women's movement is committed to assist the Government in identifying these women.

The Government should take concrete measures to ensure the proper implementation of the ANDS in order to improve women's participation in accordance with the above- mentioned commitment.

The international community should mainstream gender concerns in all the programmes it supports and should also promote for more women's participation in senior positions in the Government.

A percentage of development funds should be agreed on for women-specific programmes and initiatives.

Civil society organisations should strengthen their capacities to coordinate and network more effectively for gender empowerment.

The capacity of the Parliament should be strengthened to understand and support gender matters in order to effectively monitor and hold accountable the executive agencies of the Government.

Security Reforms

The participants agreed that security has many complex dimensions such as physical, psychological, societal and military. Poverty aggravates insecurity in the population, including among women and children.

The Government should speed up the establishment of a national action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

The Government should, on urgent basis, initiate a national policy and mechanism to eliminate the sexual harassment in all governmental and non-governmental working, educational and public places.

The Government and international community should recognize the role of communities and civil society groups to determine and take ownership of any local development plans for creating security in their lives.

Cross-Cutting Recommendation

The regional meeting proposes to the United Nations to assign a UN special rapporteur for the monitoring the implementation of United Nations Security Resolution 1325.

Conclusions

The participants from the five countries committed themselves **to follow-up on the implementation of the above recommendations, to develop a long-term strategy and to pursue the establishment of a regional monitoring body to oversee the progress of UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan and the region.** The full support of governments in the region and of their respective international development communities would also be vital to move this process

forward in these countries' effort to achieve peace, security and development for all population groups.

Kabul, Afghanistan, 7th July 2009

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