Women Rebuilding Afghanistan

Building the Future with Women: The Challenges of Reconstruction of Afghanistan

Post Mission Report
Afghanistan Women Council (AWC)
Montreal, October 2002

Fatana Said Gailani
Chair Person AWC

Motherland, National Unity, Human Rights
Women Rebuilding Afghanistan

A conference on “Women Rebuilding Afghanistan” held from 23 to 25 October 2002 in Montreal city, Canada. The conference, which concentrated on the role of Afghan women in rehabilitation of their country, was organized by Solidarite Union Cooperation Organisation (SUCO) and Development and PEACE. The main objective was to exchange information and views with Canadian NGOs and to examine how they can cooperate in terms of the rehabilitation of Afghanistan. Moreover, the activity provided the opportunity to raise awareness among the Canadian public on Afghanistan situation.

The Chairperson of the Afghanistan Women Council (AWC), Ms Fatana Gailani was one of six Afghan women representing NGOs working for Afghanistan who attended the conference. These representatives addressed issues such as sustainable security, peace and stability, the plight of refugees and their return to Afghanistan, education and the role of NGOs in reconstruction of Afghanistan. The representatives sought the full support, solidarity and commitment of the international community, donors, the Canadian government and the people to help them in the reconstruction of their country.

During the conference, the Afghan women met with the Minister for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Director of South Asia Division, and his team, and the civil servants of the CIDA ministry. The Afghan delegation briefed both CIDA and Foreign Affairs on the current situation of Afghanistan, to include women, security, refugees and the role of NGOs and their immediate needs and how they can contribute in rebuilding Afghanistan.

The AWC Chairperson stressed that security as a high challenge in order to resume her activities in Afghanistan. She briefed the Canadian government associated representatives on the current situation in Afghanistan and her organization’s activities, including: human rights, women’s rights, education, health, humanitarian activities and advocacy for democracy in Afghanistan. Ms. Gailani and her organization have been commended for their outstanding work with refugees, women rights and human rights.

At the invitation of Mr. Jim Karygiannis, MP, Scarborough-Agincourt, the delegation traveled to Toronto to meet with Afghan Canadian Society on 29 and 30 October 2002. Various meetings, discussions, tours and dinners were arranged by SUCO, Southeast Asian Community Center, Afghan Canadian community in solidarity with the Afghan women to welcome them in Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto. Participants were briefed on the situation in Afghanistan and the work of the NGOs in terms of the rehabilitation of Afghanistan. Issues, such as security, women’s situation, education, refugees and returnees and the roles of NGOs and donors were the major items on the agenda for discussion in this forum.
Security and Political Situation

The security situation remains a major concern in Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan. Warlords are still in power and people fear breakdown of the fragile security arrangements. As a result, many returnees are returning from Afghanistan back to Pakistan. Undoubtedly, the absence of a national army detracts significantly from the capacity to establish reliable security throughout the country.

The presence of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is inadequate for the real need. Too much focus has been given to Kabul city for the last one year and the remainder of the country derives no appreciable benefit. Expansion of the ISAF to other regions is considered crucial if sustainable security is to be achieved. The simultaneous development of an all Afghan army would address the concerns associated with long term ISAF presence and would satisfy the Afghans’ desire to realize their own national army in full control.

The promises made by Mr. Karazi to the representatives of the emergency Loya Jirga have not been implemented - reduction in the size of Cabinet (it has actually been extended), employment opportunities for eligible people, taking power from the warlords, freedom of various political parties, immediate rehabilitation, improving the security situation of the country and addressing human rights and in particular women’s rights.

It is particularly important for donors and NGOs to determine innovative strategies on how to spend money and to work effectively while there are still warlords in power. There is a lack of trust among donors and the current government in Afghanistan. Rehabilitation cannot be capably undertaken in this environment. It has been almost more than a year that nothing constructively done in Afghanistan.

Nothing has been done to bring national figures into government positions. The absence of intellectuals, and civil society from Afghanistan make the peace process very slow. It is very important for any government to include a wide variety of people in the government and peace process to make it more sustainable and effective.

Issues of landmines and cluster bombing affect the capacity of women NGOs to expand their activities in Afghanistan, and have a negative impact on the return of refugees. Although the NGO participants admitted that it was not secure to go to Afghanistan, it was clear that the risk must be taken if they are to have any chance in participating in the process of rehabilitation.

Women Situation

The situation of women and girls has improved somewhat since the fall of Taliban. In some parts of the country, they can only get out of their houses and have the ‘option’ to wear their veil “Chadari”. Unfortunately, the world media only focuses on this issue and tends to undermined other values. It is sad to learn that over the years, women’s role and their contribution to peace building and reconstruction have been under-utilised and lacks recognition at community, national and international levels. Women must be participative in the social, political, and economic arenas.
Unfortunately, in the current government structure, women are not fully represented at any levels.

Women have limited access to health, education and employment. Facilities are very limited and the NGOs who are involved in these fields and the government do not have the capacity to address the shortfall. In some parts of Afghan cities, people have no access to basic human rights. Due to various reasons, it is very difficult and sometimes impossible to mobilise women.

Poor gender policy in government and even lack of opportunity for Afghan women in the United Nations Agencies and both international and national NGOs has relegated women to non influential positions such as secretaries and receptionists. There is lack of recognition for the potential and skills of these individuals in the system and there is no opportunity for women to build on and increase their capacity in various fields. Women must be trained for and brought into decision-making levels in all sectors. There should not be any restriction on employment of Afghan women at any level.

Awareness programmes and vigorous advocacy are needed to work on the political participation of women. This provides that women, on an equal basis with men, are entitled to vote in any election, run for election to any office and hold any public office or exercise any public function under national law.

Through the struggle of Afghan women over the years for their rights, their voices have been heard in multiple venues and now they feel that they should be recognized as essential participants in the prevention of armed conflict and violence and reconstruction in post conflict society.

Education

Higher Education Center (Teacher Training Institute):

Since the Government of Pakistan closed down the Afghan universities in Peshawar in August 2002, which were established for higher education of Afghan refugees, advanced education for Afghans has virtually halted. As the number of refugees is still the same as before and the demand for higher education is great, the AWC has opened a center for refugees to continue higher education, class 13 and 14, for 300 Ariana High School graduates. The Government of Spain funds this project. The center was established to provide effective support and assistance to Afghan refugees in Pakistan to prepare them for university education when they return to Afghanistan.

In order to run this center more effectively, the Chairperson of AWC urged CIDA to provide additional funds.

It was agreed by all participants that education must remain high on the top agenda for any government in Afghanistan. Education is the main area requiring funding in recognition of the long-term process involved. Now, when there is access to education as a fundamental right for every Afghan girl and boy, more schools should be built and new curricula must be developed to remain abreast of modern techniques and thinking.
There is a significant lack of professionally qualified Afghans in the country. In addition to attracting their return for short-term effect, there is a clear need to address the longer term. More teachers, materials, and books are required. In turn, the fundamental element of security and stability remains paramount.

Refugees and Returnees and Return of NGOs

The AWC recently opened its office in Kabul to help the needy people inside Afghanistan. However, the AWC Chairperson, Ms. Gailani stressed that the ground is not ready yet for her organization to work at full capacity in Afghanistan. The organization is monitoring the security situation in and outside Kabul city in order to be able to quickly respond when circumstances permit.

Apart from other activities of the AWC in Peshawar, mainly targeted at refugees, the AWC recently open two centers to assist refugee women and children:

- Mental Health Center – Psychiatrists Patients
- Higher Education Center

The AWC established the first Mental Health Clinic on September 2002 to treat psychiatric patients, which include Afghan children, and women who suffer from acute, pre-acute and primary depression. So far, about 500 cases have been diagnosed and 167 of them have been treated. The staff at this clinic consists of two Afghan doctors, two nurses, one administrator, a pharmacist and guard. The AWC believes that establishing a clinic to such needy refugees is critical to re-establishing basic human rights.

In terms political, women rights, and human rights, the AWC introduced Zan-e-Afghan publications in 1994. Initially, it was published in two languages “Dari and Pushto”. Since 2002, the magazine has been published in English to target donors, the international community and NGOs.

The Afghan refugee situation and the NGOs working for them inside and outside Afghanistan should be taken into consideration to accord with the realities of the tenuous security situation. There are almost 1.8 million refugees still living in Pakistan. Currently, UNHCR is repatriating refugees from Pakistan and Iran on a voluntarily bases. However, there have been conflicting reports regarding the number of refugees repatriated to Afghanistan. Numerous refugees are skeptical of statements attesting to government stability. In the meantime, the government of Pakistan has demolished camps and pushes refugees to return to Afghanistan. In other words; refugees are virtually forced to go back to their country. On their arrival in Kabul, most of them live in one container with two to three other families. Clear evidence of inadequate capacity to provide basic needs. The UNHCR and other agencies should work on this issue before repatriating these people.

The Chairperson of the AWC urged the Canadian government to open their door to accept the refugees who cannot go back to their country for various legitimate reasons. Many refugees are still reluctant to return to Afghanistan and they have their own well-founded reasons for not doing so. Mainly, these reasons extend to discrimination on the basis of religion, gender and ethnic background. This reluctance to return is strengthened by reports of violations of human rights among some of the
returnees. There is a need to establish a monitoring system by UNHCR in cooperation with government inside the country to prevent such violations.

Another issue, which dissuades refugees from returning to Afghanistan is the landmine and Unexploded Ordinance (UXO) contamination in various parts of the country. Although there are a number of national NGOs operating under the United Nations Mine Action Programme (MAPA) umbrella, the demand is greater than the capacity. The effort to increase the capacity of the demining programmes all over Afghanistan should be reviewed. Almost 70% of Afghan people used to work in the agricultural sector land before the war. Subsequently, these lands were mined and heavily contaminated with UXO. Some of these refugees lost their families as a result of mines and a large number have been maimed. Confidence among refugees has been seriously affected.

**Donors and their Contributions**

Canada (CIDA) has been one of the major and 10 top donor countries. CIDA contributed CA$ 100,000,000 to reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan until the end of March 2002 at the Tokyo conference. Out of this amount, CA$ 15,000,000 is for relief and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. CIDA works with all its partners to ensure coordination among all donor countries. Donors, including CIDA, take different approaches in terms of their contribution. CIDA has been working for so many years to work on integrating women organizations. For instance, food and nutrition for widows in Kabul, with WFP, health and child issues with UNICEF, Canadian red cross, demining activities and mine awareness with UN-MAPA. In terms of security, Canada contributed 1,500 soldiers to fight against terrorists in Afghanistan.

An effective monitoring system to evaluate how money is spent and its impact and continuous assessment NGO programme policy and implementation is necessary. This will facilitate improvement and general efficiency.

Representatives of CIDA at the conference mentioned that the funding priorities in their programme covered seven sectors: legal political rights, security and protection, social and culture, education, economy, health, and information. They have urged the various NGOs to focus on these issues, while designing their projects.

A Canadian embassy has not been established in Kabul, however, CIDA has opened an office in Kabul city for better coordination and communication with various partners in Kabul.

**Summary**

Security remains one of the fundamental issues for the women of Afghanistan. Creation of an Afghan national army is very necessary now. Experience demonstrated that Afghans do not tolerate the presence of foreign troops on their soil for long periods. The ISAF should be replaced by a United Nations peace-keeping mission for sometime. The United Nations must take the lead for demilitarization and put pressure on warlords to discard their weapons and respect the rights of citizens. The flow of weapons from the neighboring countries must be stopped. To this end, there is a
critical need for a monitoring system at the borders to monitor and disrupt the flow of weapons.

The promises, which were made at the Bonn conference as a valuable and acceptable agreement to the Afghan people, must be implemented soon. Afghan people accepted the six months transitional government in the hope to have a democratic election soon, where people will have chance to elect their own representatives in government. Intellectuals and national figures are excluded from this process. The people of Afghanistan desire to have an elected and democratic government free of warlords with the full support of the silent majority. This seems to be the only solution to realize meaningful rehabilitation.

Women are the ones who have suffered significantly through the decades of war. Women are the one who lost their husbands, brothers, children and families. The crimes and atrocities against women of Afghanistan not only happened during the Taliban regime, but warlords have been equally involved and must carry the blame accordingly. If one looks back on Afghan history, women have been used and abused for various reasons in order to create an obstacle to their advancement. Women cannot simply delete from their memories such terrible experiences. Women have demonstrated that, despite the hardship and tough policies of various governments over the year, they have kept the struggle to bring peace, security, justice and democracy. Women used to be teachers, doctors, nurses, Members of Parliament, and civil servants. This means that Afghan women are capable of doing great things if the opportunity is given to them.

The Chairperson of AWC urged Afghan women to unite for the national interest and work together for one common objective to meet all the challenges of rebuilding their country and to make Afghanistan a peaceful place for our children.

Now, women of Afghanistan are potentially stronger than ever. No one can deceive them anymore. In other words, Afghan women now are aware of women's rights, human rights and their own rights. That is why over the years, the majority of women NGOs are working on human rights, and women rights awareness. Women believe that through a democratic government they can achieve full rights, protection and full participation in the country.

Adequate resources must be pre-positioned and stockpiled to provide returnees with the basic elements necessary for rehabilitation at family and village level. Returnees must be confident of their security and the preservation of their basic rights. In the interim, assistance by the UN and NGOs to refugees who are still living in the camps must be provided. Grounds for their return must be established before their repatriation. A Human Rights monitoring system to provide for the protection of the vulnerable should be established to encourage return.

Landmines and UXO clearance must be accelerated to develop returnee confidence and to decentralize the city oriented resettlement.
The AWC and women NGOs hope that Canada will remain one of the major donors for Afghanistan and will continue to work closely with all partners to rebuild Afghanistan. Canada is encouraged to support projects for women organizations, youth and employment, advocacy and awareness and the conduct of relevant conferences and fund raising activities. By opening a CIDA office in Kabul, women organizations hope to have close contact with one of Afghanistan’s strongest supporters. Improved communication and cooperation is needed with all partners and organizations working for peace building and rehabilitation.

Donors should focus more on the long-term programmes for Afghanistan. There is no short-term solution and there is no room for short-term commitment. The international community should not leave Afghanistan and Afghan people alone. It is time to involve Afghan people, including women, in the process of rehabilitation of their country, to ensure sustainability of the process. Donor countries are urged to consider funding projects and agencies based on gender balance at beneficiary and implementation levels. It is necessary to develop indigenous capacity at all levels.

The Canadian government and the people promised their help and support to Afghan people and in particular for women of Afghanistan. It is hoped that SU CO and Development and PEACE will work together with Afghan women organization to do more advocacy for their sustainability.

Afghanistan Women’s Council believes that it is through networking and coalition that women meet to develop strategies, gain energy, drive for peace, promote their rights, and increase their participation at local, national, regional and global levels. Women can be divided but they can still work together.

Recommendations

Security and Political Situation

- Demilitarization of warlords at local and national levels.
- Expansion of ISAF to all regions of Afghanistan in the short term but replace them with UN peacekeepers in the medium term.
- Establish a neutral Afghan National Army as soon as possible.
- Stop the flow of weapons into Afghanistan from neighboring countries and establish a commission to monitor the borders in order not allow any weapons at any time.
- Establish a natural and independent national human rights commission in the country.
- Identify intellectuals and national figures and encourage their full participation at various government levels and Afghan diplomatic missions.
• Bring the criminals who committed atrocities against women and girls in Afghanistan to justice.

• Screen political figures and warlords to determine if they committed any crime or atrocity against their own people.

• Establish long term rehabilitation projects so that the warlords’ minds divert from killing and looting to the rehabilitation of their country.

Women Situation

• Include talented women in all political, social development and economic areas in local, national and international levels.

• Keep the gender balance at all levels of governments, United Nations, International and national NGOs.

• Build Afghan women’s capacity and refine their skills.

• Promote women’s political awareness, and human rights advocacy.

• Establish a strong and practical network among all Afghan women NGOs to work more effectively for peace building.

• Provide full access to women’s health, education and employment

Education

• Establish and rebuild more schools in both urban and rural areas.

• Advocate a sustainable and long term commitment for a robust education system in Afghanistan as one the first and most important elements of rehabilitation.

• Support the education projects for refugee girls and boys in Pakistan.

• Provide school materials for students and training opportunities for teachers.

• Introduce new curricula through the education ministry for schools and higher education centers.

• Introduce human rights, and women rights awareness in the new educational system curriculum.

• Introduce technology in the new curriculum for schools and higher education institutes.

Refugees and Returnees and NOGs Return
• Reinforce the critical need for a conducive security situation in Afghanistan for the return of refugees and NGOs.

• Establish development projects for the return of refugees in urban and rural areas in Afghanistan.

• Establish different offices (UNHCR, Office of Human Rights Commission, and national human rights commission) in various parts of Afghanistan to monitor the situation of refugees and their needs and ethnically motivated human rights violations.

• De-mine the high priority areas such as residential and agricultural areas for refugees to return to their homes.

• Provide proper shelters for refugees who are still residing in the neighboring countries, particularly in Pakistan.

• Increase health and education centers in refugee camps in Pakistan.

• Provide the refugees with their basic human rights, such as health, education, food, shelter and humanitarian assistance.

• Put pressure on the host government in order not to push refugees to go back to Afghanistan until the elected government is effectively in place.

• Release more funds for the NGOs who are currently working in Pakistan for Afghan refugees.

• Resettle those refugees who cannot go back to Afghanistan to other countries.

**Donors and their Contributions**

• Establish a monitoring mechanism to regularly evaluate the various NGOs and their partners and the impact of their projects

• Empower more women organizations in terms of capacity building so that they have the ability to directly submit their projects and communicate effectively.

• Provide funds to United Nations Agencies and International and National NGOs based on the gender balance.

• Support various initiatives and projects by women organization

• Release funds for awareness activities such as women rights, human rights, and political awareness.

This report does not necessarily address the views of the other NGO representatives at the conference. Please consult the AWC if you would like to use this report as a reference.
Further information about the Afghanistan Women Council (AWC) can be obtained from the following contacts:

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G.P.O. Box No. 1215, Peshawar, Pakistan

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Mobile : 92- 300-9599422
Web page : [www.afghanwomenssupport.org](http://www.afghanwomenssupport.org)
[www.afghanistanwomenconcil.org](http://www.afghanistanwomenconcil.org)

Mental Clinic : 92-91-828082
MCH Clinic : 92-91-812115
Center for Higher Education : 92-91-823829
Ariana High School : 92-91-828054

**Kabul Office:**
Qala e Fatullah, Shahr e Naw, Nazo Ana Hospital

Telephone : 31222

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**Annex 1**

**Itinerary and Programmes**

22 October 2002 Arrival in Montreal, Canada

23 October 2002 Various Interviews with Canadian newspapers, TV, and Afghan Canadian newspaper and Radio.

Evening Discussion session by Afghan women NGOs to Canadian and Afghan people in Montreal on general situation of Afghanistan and in particular women and girls situation.

24 October 2002 First day of conference Women Rebuilding Afghanistan.

25 October 2002 Round table discussion and meeting with various Representative of Canadian NGOs, CIDA, Rights and Democracy, South Asia Partnership Canada, SUCO, Development and Peace, IMPACT, Canada Red Cross, MDM, MSF, Women for Women, and Care Canada.
Evening

Breifing by Afghan delegation to Afghan community and tea was arranged by the Afghan Women group, and Southeast Asian Community Center in Montreal city.

26 October 2002

Tour of city of Montreal to see how Canadian women in Montreal work together for their safety and security in Montreal city, and take part in each level of planning for of the city.

Evening

Dinner was arranged to welcome Afghan delegation by Afghans from Montreal and Afghan Women Association of Toronto in Montreal city.

27 October 2002

Dinner was arranged in honour of Afghan delegation by Mr. Amir Qadir, President of SUCO.

28 October 2002

Morning

Departure to Ottawa

Noon

Arrival in Ottawa, and lunch was arranged by SU CO and Development and Peace.

Afternoon

Meeting with Ms. Susan Whelan Minister of CIDA, James Junke, Director of South Asia Division of Foreign Affairs and his team, and CIDA civil servant in Ottawa Attended one session of Parliament on Afghanistan in Ottawa.

Evening

Dinner by an Afghan family in Ottawa to welcome Afghan women in Ottawa.

Evening

Departure to Montreal.

29 October 2002

Meeting with Director of Rights and Democracy in Montreal city.

Afternoon

Lunch was arranged by Ms. Sonia and Ms. Rita from SU CO. Gifts were given to the Afghan women NGOs participants by SU CO.

Late Afternoon

Departure for Toronto

Evening

Arrival in Toronto.

30 October 2002

Interview by Canadian Television (CTV am) in Toronto with Ms. Fatana Ishaq Gailani, Partowmeena Hashimi, and Ariana Yaftali.
Tour of Toronto City and lunch by Afghan Canadian Society of Canada.

Briefing on the current situation of Afghanistan to Afghan Canadian community, and Canadian NGOs by Afghan delegation.

Distribution of certificate of appreciation to Afghan women delegation in recognition of their hard work by Mr. Jim Karygannis, MP, Scorbrough-Anigent.

Dinner in Toronto by Mr. Jim Karygannis, MP, Scorbrough-Anigent.

31 October 2002  Departure to Montreal and then Pakistan.

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Annex 2

Afghan Women NGOs Participants


2. Ms. Partawmina Hashemee, Director, Afghan Women’s Resource Center (AWRC).

3. Ms. Shima Muktar, Deputy Director, Afghan Women’s Resource Center (AWRC).

4. Ms. Khursheed Noori, Chairperson, the Executive Committee of Afghan Women Network (AWC).


6. Orrzalla Ashraf, Director, Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA).


Annex 3

Ms. Gailani urged Afghan Women for Unity in Their National Interests

Montreal (27 October 2002):-The conference on rebuilding Afghanistan and the role of Afghan women in rehabilitation of their country which was organised by Solidarite Union Cooperation Organisation (SUCO) and Development and PEACE was held from 23 to 25 October 2002 in Montreal city of Canada. One of the main objectives of this conference was an exchange of information and views with the Canadian NGOs and how they can cooperate with each other in terms of rehabilitation of Afghanistan in future.

The Afghan women from six NGOs representatives working for Afghanistan participated in discussions to address issues such as sustainable security, peace and stability, the situation of refugees and their return to Afghanistan, which are the main concerns in terms of rebuilding Afghanistan. They urged the international community, donors and the Canadian people for their fully support, solidarity and commitment to help them in the reconstruction of their country.
The Chairperson of Afghan Women Council (AWC), Ms. Fatana Gailani said that the international community should not stop their support to Afghans in this crucial moment. For instance, the United States promised the military operation would be short and only target the terrorist camps, but unfortunately, it went behind what was promised. They destroyed Afghanistan in the name of Al-qauida, and innocent people faced the consequences, got killed and injured. They must help Afghan through political process and dialogues to make a national government, as the Afghans are not ready to accept another war, lose of their lives and bloodshed again.

In terms of full return of Afghan refugees and NGOs from the neighboring countries, it seems that security and stability remain a major concern. Ms. Gailani said that the ground is not ready yet for her organisation to work in full capacity in Afghanistan. Her organisation is monitoring the situation in and outside Kabul city in terms of security and it is not yet satisfied for Afghans, she said. Therefore, she urged that Washington and Moscow that they must bring changes in their foreign policy in order to sustain peace, and security, which is not only benefit the Afghans but the entire world.

The promises made by Mr. Karazi to the representatives of the emergency Loya Jirga in Kabul city have not been implemented yet, such as reduction in the size of Cabinet, it has been extended largely, employment opportunity for eligible people, taking power from the warlords, freedom of various political parties, immediate rehabilitation, security situation of the country, Human Rights and in particular women's rights. These all promises were just said, but none of them has been implemented yet. It is worth mentioning that the Karazi government in Afghanistan has not earned the full trust of Afghan people yet, said Ms. Gailani.

However, Ms. Gailani promised that her organisation is fully ready to work side by side with the international community and Karazi government to bring security and peace, elected government, justices to rebuild a new Afghanistan.

Ms. Gailani also urged the Afghan women to be united for their national interest and work together for one common objective to meet all the challenges in terms of rebuilding of their country, and make Afghanistan a peaceful place for our children and future generation.