

# Islamic Republic of Afghanistan



Form of Government: Unitary Presidential Republic, President Hamid Karzai (2014 election results in dispute)

Women's Participation: Women represent approximately 27% of both the lower and the upper parliamentary houses including a 25% quota in the lower house. As of 2013, there is a quota of 20% women in provincial councils.

Population: 31,108,077 (2013)

## Context & Background to the Conflict

The citizens of Afghanistan have witnessed power struggles in their home country for several decades. Prime Minister Mohammad Sardar Daoud Khan seized power in 1973 in a non-violent coup. Daoud abolished the monarchy, abrogated the 1964 constitution and declared Afghanistan a republic with himself as President and Prime Minister. In 1978, leaders of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) overthrew Daoud's government in a pro-soviet coup.

Although they introduced more secular laws and took several measures in favor of women's rights, including banning forced marriages, giving state recognition of women's right to vote, and introducing women to political life, the party was plagued with infighting and opposition. In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and unleashed further conflict with the rise of various Mujaheddin fighters backed by the US, Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia and Iran. By 1985 nearly half of the Afghan population was displaced. The Mujaheddin formed an alliance to fight the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and succeeded in pushing the Soviets out by 1989. But the end of the occupation gave rise to a civil war against the government and fragmentation within the alliance. The violence, destruction, and rape continued unabated until 1996 when the Taliban emerged seizing control. At first the Taliban were welcomed for restoring order but their hardline approach to Islam included banning women from work and introducing Islamic punishments such as stoning to death, quickly made them unpopular. The Taliban also allowed Al Qaeda to use Afghanistan as a base. In the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks on the United States, the US and its allies launched their attack on Al Qaeda and the Taliban leadership. US and European leaders used the Taliban's violence against women as an excuse to justify the attacks on the country. In December 2001, after the Taliban government was toppled and the new Afghan government under Hamid Karzai was formed, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established by the UN Security Council to help assist the Karzai administration and provide basic security to the Afghan people.

While significant changes have come since 2001, the country has been plagued with insecurity, the costs of war, ongoing government corruption, an ever-growing drug trade, and the Pakistani-backed Taliban insurgency. This lack of security has severely impacted all the Afghan people, but has had a disproportionate effect on women and girls. Since the Bonn Agreement, some advancements have been made, especially in education. The approval of a National Action Plan for Women (NAPWA) introduced policies and programs to promote women's equality in Afghanistan especially in public life. The constitution calls for increased representation of women in politics including a 25% parliamentary quota.

## Inclusion of Women in the Peace Process

Women-led organizations in Afghanistan have pushed hard for inclusion in the peace process. Although women are not by any means equally represented, the efforts of civil society have not been fruitless. After much pressure, women represented 6 out of 60 delegates at the 2001 Bonn Conference. They have gained increased representation at each subsequent assembly of national leaders. In response to the Bonn Agreement to form a Transitional Authority, political and tribal leaders called an Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002. Thanks to the advocacy efforts of Afghan women's NGOs, women represented 12% of the delegates at the Jirga, which laid the foundation for greater participation of women. This meeting also led to the drafting of a new Constitution, which calls for a quota of 25% of women in parliament. In addition, women represented 20% of the Constitutional Drafting and Constitutional Review Commissions, 20% of the representatives at the Constitutional Loya Jirga, and almost 17% in the Meshrano Jirga, the upper house.

In June 2010, women participated in the National Consultative Peace Jirga (NCPJ), discussing the future of the peace process in Afghanistan. There were approximately 1600 delegates, representing parliament, civil society, tribal leaders

and even refugees living in Iran and Pakistan, and about a quarter of them were women. Despite the presence of women at the Jirga, gender issues were not adequately addressed. The key outcome of the Jirga was the creation of the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) in October 2010. Only nine of the 70 members on the peace council are women. According to one female HPC member, women on the HPC and the Provincial Peace Councils (PPC) have been marginalized from main consultations due to persistent traditional religious and cultural views.

Despite the gains that have been made in incorporating gender awareness into governmental policy and the institutional framework, women continually face an uphill battle. Reports showed that women were excluded from the government delegations that attended the 2010 London Conference, addressing issues pertaining to women's rights. On March 2, 2012, the Ulema Council, a government appointed group of 150 leading Muslim clerics, issued a statement supporting a conservative interpretation of Islamic law, which would require women to wear the veil, forbid them from mixing with men in places of work or education, and prohibit them from traveling without a male chaperone. Afghan women are concerned that their rights will be traded away during negotiations with the Taliban in an attempt to appease conservative stakeholders. Although the Afghan Government has claimed that all negotiations must include respect for the constitution and women's rights, they have not made this a requirement to any settlement. Furthermore, the insurgents have not made an official statement on their views on the participation of women at the negotiating table.

#### Timeline of Events

- Oct 2001** - US-led bombing of Afghanistan begins following the September 11 attacks on the United States
- Dec 2001** - A meeting of four anti-Taliban ethnic factions results in the Bonn Agreement, which establishes an interim government with Hamid Karzai as interim head, and establishes the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA)
- June 2002** - Loya Jirga (grand council) elects Hamid Karzai as interim head of state until 2004; women 12% of representatives
- Jan 2004** - Loya Jirga adopts new constitution providing for a strong presidency; also includes equality for women and a 25% quota for women in the national parliament and provincial/district assemblies, but also gives greater respect to Islamic law
- Sep 2005** - Afghans vote in first parliamentary elections in more than 30 years
- 2007** - Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) (2008-2013) requires implementation of gender mainstreaming themes in all government ministries and agencies, as well as throughout the entire process of development in Afghanistan
- 2008** - National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan set out an operational framework for achieving gender equality within the greater agenda of ANDS
- 2010** - Parliamentary elections gave Afghan women a larger percentage in Parliament than is required by the constitution
- July 2010** - President Karzai introduces Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) at the Kabul International Conference on Afghanistan; Palwasha Hasan (a representative from civil society who had been elected by representatives of Afghan women to attend the conference) lobbied beside other Afghan women for a resolution stating that the "people of Afghanistan demand a just peace which can guarantee the rights of all citizens in particular women and children"
- July 2012** - Tokyo Framework: Kabul pledged to improve governance, enforce rule of law, protect human rights, including ERAW
- July 2013** - National Assembly passes electoral law reducing provincial seats allocated for women from 20 to 25 percent
- April 2014** - Presidential and provincial elections; Karzai could not run due to term limits; first official results due from Elections Complaints Committee (ECC) on July 2

#### Key Players

Afghan Government	Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA)
Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)	International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)
Afghan National Police (ANP)	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)
Afghan Local Police (ALP)	

*Insurgent Groups:* Taliban (among the most important stakeholders in discussions concerning the role of women in peace and reconciliation) & Mujahedin party of Hezb-i-Islami

#### Relevant Documents

- Afghan National Development Strategy (2008-2013), [www.undp.org.af](http://www.undp.org.af)
- The National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA)": The Government's Main Vehicle for Implementing Policies and Commitments to Advance the Status of Women. 2007-2017.
- High Peace Council Peace Process Roadmap to 2015
- Joint Declaration of High Peace Council and Civil Society Organizations, September 26, 2013. <http://cpau.org.af>