

## Press Release

### Open letter to Merkel and Steinmeier

### Womens' rights must be made the focus of politics in Afghanistan!

**17. April 2009. Against the background of worldwide protests against the signing of the Shiite Family and Personal Status law which debases women, *medica mondiale* demands that the German government gives womens' rights a central role in their Afghanistan strategy. In an open letter to the Federal Chancellor Merkel and Foreign Minister Steinmeier *medica mondiale* insists on decisive intervention on the part of German politics, in order to prevent the passing of the Law in its current form.**

“In the last five years, the protection and support of women and girls during the rebuilding in Afghanistan has completely slipped into the background as far as German and international decision makers are concerned. If a rebuilding inside the society is to take place, it is essential that the rights of Afghani women are finally permanently strengthened”. Monika Hauser, Executive Board member of *medica mondiale*.

*medica mondiale*, in a letter to Merkel and Steinmeier today, emphasised the need to keep a critical eye on the further development in the Family and Personal Status Law so as not to allow the Afghanistan government to “sit out” the scandal, commented Selmin Caliskan, Head of the department Politics and Human Rights at *medica mondiale*. On the eve of a meeting between President Hamid Karsai and representatives of the Afghan Civil Society Network Government representatives should exert influence on the Afghani government. During the meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> April which is about the announced examination of the Law, - the German government must make clear the possible negative effects on international cooperation in case the Law is implemented.

Long overdue is an interdepartmental concept from the German government, for a 10 – 15 years rebuilding programme which involves women and girls in the core areas of education, health, peace and rebuilding processes based on the concrete implementation of UN resolutions 1325 and 1820.

“Had women and girls been a central part of the international Afghanistan engagement in the previous 7 years, there would have been no intensifying of the climate for putting through womens' rights. The international community, through ignorant behaviour has connived in the passing of such a Law, for which many womens' rights activists, through their courageous and public stand for womens' rights live in fear of their lives”, explained an Afghani member of *medica mondiale* in Kabul.

In *medica mondiale's* opinion, the violence against western development aid workers and the rejection of womens' rights as purely western values was fostered in the last four years by insufficient rebuilding, growing poverty, and NATO bombings of civilians. “This has contributed considerably to the deterioration of the living situation of women“, declared Monika Hauser.

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Several paragraphs of the Law caused worldwide dismay at the beginning of April because they damaged the rights of women, anchored in the Afghani Constitution. Among other things, the Law lays down that women should be sexually available for their husbands at any time, opening the door to rape in marriage. Furthermore it forbids women from working without the permission of their husbands, from leaving the house except for medical or other emergencies, and awards custody of children solely to fathers or grandfathers in the event of a divorce.

Through determined negotiations with the Ministry of Justice, the High Court and Imams in the last two years, Afghani womens' rights organisations have succeeded in having several paragraphs hostile to women removed from the Law.

**Contact:**

medica mondiale e.V

Britta Amarin

Press and Public Relations

Hülchrather Str. 4

50670 Cologne

Fon: +49-221-93189825

Fax: +49-221-931898-1

[presse@medicamondiale.org](mailto:presse@medicamondiale.org)

[www.medicamondiale.org](http://www.medicamondiale.org)

*medica mondiale* has committed itself to helping women and girls in war and crisis regions for more than 15 years. The organisation sees itself as Lawyer for the rights and interests of women who have survived sexualised war violence. As well as gynaecological care, psychosocial and legal support, *medica mondiale* offers programmes for secure livelihood and does political human rights work.