



Reconstruction in Afghanistan – not without women!

medica mondiale – unconditional support for women and girls

Beatings, verbal abuse, threats, forced labor in her own family or in somebody else's.

Being given away as reparation payment to end conflicts between families, having to marry against her own will, not being allowed to marry according to her wishes.

Not being allowed to see her own family, being mutilated and tortured, burnt and killed, driven to suicide, married while still a child, having to give birth while still a child.

Forced to give birth to one child after another under life threatening conditions, not getting medicine, not receiving medical care without the permission of a male family member.

The last in the family to get something to eat, not allowed to be seen in public, forced into prostitution by her family.

Kidnapped by militias, raped, kept as a sex slave, traded to other men in exchange for animals, homeless and forced to beg as a widow.

Threatened with death when working as a teacher, nurse, doctor, or politician, wearing the burka, not being allowed to work or to go to school, being thrown into prison for

running away, not being able to press charges.

All of this is everyday violence against women and girls – also in Afghanistan. Often enough to drive a woman “crazy”.

medica mondiale is active against this violence. The work began in 1993 with Monika Hauser's engagement during the war in Bosnia. Today medica mondiale works in Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosova, and Liberia and supports women's projects in many more countries.

medica mondiale offers medical and psychosocial support to women who survived sexualized violence. In addition, medica mondiale works as a advocate for women: With political lobbying the organization fights for an end to human rights violations against women. Women and girls need to be able to speak out; perpetrators need to be punished.

Security for Afghan women and girls?

After the fall of the Taliban six years ago expectations were flying high—but actual changes after years of military presence were limited. There is much talk about military mandates and the need to use the military and weapons, in particular for the freedom of women. But military security alone does not make much difference for women and girls. They need comprehensive protection against attacks from within the family and in public.

In Afghanistan the needs of women for the most part are still considered unimportant—with few exceptions.

Do women and girls feel safer since the fall of the Taliban? Can they go safely to school and work, even if not veiled? Can girls continue to go to school when they were married under age? Can women travel in safety and without a male escort? Do they feel safe at home with their husbands and his family? Do women have anybody they can trust? Can they go to university, choose their partner, or plan their lives according to their own wishes? Can they fight for their rights in court? Do they have a place to go to after being in prison on charges of so-called moral crimes and rejected by their families?

If women press charges against a violent husband, can they be sure that they won't be raped at the police station? Can they feel safe in parliament and later at home when they speak out against ruling warlords?

The answer is “no”. The violence experienced during the war years, renewed insecurity, and the absence of the rule of law has turned most women into prisoners of misogynistic traditions in their own homes and leaves them dependent on a man and his family.

medica mondiale in Afghanistan

Through medical, psychosocial and legal aid, medica mondiale wants to support Afghan women and improve their position in society in the long term. Since 2002 medica mondiale supports women and girls in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, and Kandahar. It is planned that from 2009 the Afghan staff will run the project independently as a national organization. At present three international and about 70 local staff work in Afghanistan.

medica mondiale's work in Afghanistan is comprehensive: The organization helps women with medical and psychosocial problems, works for legal equality of women through a legal aid project, has built a network to protect women and girls, and through human rights work lobbies nationally and internationally for more rights for Afghan women.

The psychosocial project trains psychologists, social workers, and midwives from public and non-governmental organizations in working with traumatized women. In addition, medica mondiale's Afghan counselors offer group and individual psychosocial counseling through the Women's Garden, a women-only project in different parts of Kabul and in the two women's prisons of the city. If needed women are referred to additional resources.

In the health project Afghan expatriate women doctors train hospital personnel in trauma work and psychosomatics. The goal is to introduce a trauma-sensitive medical approach to the public hospitals of Afghanistan and to secure appropriate treatment for women, in particular patients who experienced violence.

Through the legal aid project 14 Afghan lawyers in Kabul, Herat, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif fight for fair trials for women in prison. medica mondiale trained the lawyers in legal defense. They now provide women with legal counsel and representation or legal defense in court, and support women through the process of mediating referrals to shelters and the often difficult reintegration of women into their own families.

In collaboration with other organizations medica mondiale has built a network of shelters in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif that offers protection against violence, trafficking, forced marriage, and arbitrary arrest. medica mondiale promotes this work by training shelter staff.

medica mondiale works within a framework anchored, on one hand, by networking women's organizations and, on the other,

by lobbying legislative bodies in local communities and the national government to acknowledge women's rights as human rights. Lobbying aims to promote women's equal participation in all social and political processes, and to defend women's rights against fundamentalist tendencies. This includes consultation with legislative bodies as well as research and awareness campaigns on violence against women.

medica mondiale's engagement in Kabul, Herat, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif is effective in particular because it combines direct support of women with sustained lobbying and public relations work. As a result, medical care for women has improved: for example, in 2003 the government finally decreed that life-saving emergency surgery, such as Cesarean section, could be provided without the consent of a male family member.

A 2005 study put forced marriage of girls on the public agenda, which resulted in a political task force and national action plan on the issue. In 2006 a medica mondiale study addressed for the first time the extent and causes of self-immolation among women and girls. Following this research an action plan on awareness raising and prevention of self-immolation emerged at an international conference in Kabul.



Staff at the opening of the mediation centre in Walayat prison in May 2007. © medica mondiale

In 2007 lobbying focused on the right to health and the consequences of violence for women and girls' health. All medica mondiale projects aim at a public presence of women in Afghan society.

medica mondiale's demands

In the fall of 2007 the German federal government proposed a new concept for Afghanistan. medica mondiale identified strategic recommendations for politicians and decision-makers based on the organization's experiences of working in the country of the past five years on how to provide sensitive and effective support for women and girls in Afghanistan.

Protect women against violence!

Protection against structural and domestic violence needs to be at the top of the agenda. In Afghanistan family violence is shockingly common and rarely punished because it is perceived as "normal". Violence includes the killing of women or girls and often pushes women into suicide. The international community needs to understand violence against women as a serious security issue. Domestic violence prevents women and girls' participation in democratic processes, forces them into unwanted and often much too early marriages, and interferes with access to education, work, and proper health care.



An Afghan woman in a prison cell.

© Ursula Meissner/medica mondiale

How?

- Offices or agencies that offer advice to women should be funded and supported with appropriate expertise.
- The network of shelters for women fleeing violence needs to be expanded.
- Government, politicians, teachers, mullahs, and members of non-governmental organizations need to denounce violence against women publicly and educate the population about peaceful conflict resolution.
- An emergency fund for women in prison should be created to support basic survival through providing food, medicine, firewood, and the like.

Train female police officers!

More female police officers should be trained so that violence against women does not proceed with impunity. Germany has assumed considerable responsibilities

for training the Afghan police force and continues to lead these efforts since the EU took over police training. German trainers should train Afghan police in regard to women's rights and promoting the development of women-friendly structures. This should include sending more female personnel to Afghanistan.

At the same time more Afghan women should be trained as police officers because to this day women in crisis cannot rely on proper support from local police. Distrust of male police officers is rampant based on their reputation as being corrupt and abusive. Too often women who have sought police protection were instead beaten and sent back home. Finally, more female police officers will also increase women's public presence as representatives of state power.

How?

- Afghan police should be trained in women's human rights and the responsible authority should ensure changes in existing structures.
- When recruiting female police officers responsible officials should consult civil society organizations.
- There should be a country-wide campaign to recruit women into the police force.
- Existing domestic violence units in the police force should get more support from experts in this area.

Punish crimes against girls and women!

In Afghanistan men enjoy de facto immunity from violence against girls and women in the private sphere. The economic and social interests of the family – connected to keeping peace in the community – always take precedence over the prosecution of sexual crimes and other violent crimes against girls and women. At present justice continues to be the privilege of other family members, while there is no justice for the girl or woman who has been violated. However, justice should not be sacrificed in the name of so-called peace in the family or the community.

How?

- The United Nations should demand that the Afghan government implement CEDAW—the U.N.'s international agreement on women's rights.
- Donor countries should demand and monitor the implementation of Afghanistan's national action plan on violence against women and girls.
- Professional development should educate the justice system about human rights violations against women and girls.



A lawyer of medica mondiale in a conversation with a judge. © Sven Hansen

Punish war criminals!

Late in 2006 Afghan President Karzai presented an action plan on “peace, justice and reconciliation”, which included punishment of war criminals. However, in March 2007 Karzai signed into effect an amnesty for war criminals that ended prosecution by the state. From then on, only private individuals could press charges against perpetrators. According to Afghan human rights groups the majority of victims of war in Afghanistan are women. Considering the unequal power relations between women and men in Afghanistan privately brought charges against war criminals are highly

unlikely. For example, a woman needs four male witnesses to prove rape and would still then be accused of indecent conduct. The repercussions: Her family and friends will renounce her, she will be ostracized from society and her livelihood will be threatened. Many women have been killed because they named perpetrators.

Members of the Afghan parliament and about 100 non-governmental organizations that are part of the Afghan Civil Society Forum have protested sharply against the amnesty law. This amnesty contradicts international donor concepts such as the Afghanistan Compact, the Afghan National

Development Strategy, and several international conventions (Rome Statute, Geneva and the Hague Conventions, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).

How?

- The German federal government and the international community should pressure President Karzai to take the action plan seriously and implement it.
- The German federal government should take Afghanistan to the International Court for violations of the international conventions listed above. The goal: Revoke the amnesty law.
- Independent courts should punish the war criminals; women-specific expertise should be integrated into the prosecution of gendered war crimes.
- The German federal government should lend political support to members of the Afghan parliament who work for women's rights.

Women in the peace assembly!

Only one woman participates in the peace assembly – the Peace Jirga – and she is a member of a warlord group. Other representatives are from Pakistan, the Taliban, and the Afghan government. Despite pledged support from President Karzai civil society has not been represented at the peace assembly.

How?

- The “Third Line” – an association of men and women who do not sympathize with the warlords in Afghan parliament – should be supported internationally.
- Female members of the society should participate in the peace assembly.
- UN-Resolution 1325 for women, peace and security should be implemented so that women are present at the negotiating tables.

Reconstruction instead of armament!

The situation of women is a good indicator of progress in the civil reconstruction of Afghanistan: the mortality rate of mothers is among the highest in the world, about 80 percent of women and girls are forced into marriage, and over half of the female prisoners are locked away for “moral crimes”- alleged adultery or running away from home, stripped of their human rights, and stigmatized by society.

Politicians on all sides of the political spectrum invoke the presumed improvements in the lives of Afghan women and girls in public debates about the justification for military armament; for example in the decision to use German Tornados and the participation of German troops in the American anti-terror campaign Operation Enduring Freedom.

So far, however, aggressive military strategies against terrorism have brought women only one result: a dramatically worsening security situation that has forced more and more women and girls into their homes while turning them into targets of fundamentalist zealots.

Extremists, too, instrumentalize the issue of women in their fight against what they see as an occupation by NATO troops. A particular thorn in their side is the small successes women have achieved over the past years, mainly in education and political participation. Extremists distort these de-



Civil reconstruction must have priority – Maria Zemp, a trainer of medica mondiale, in a conversation with an Afghan midwife.

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velopments for propaganda purposes when recruiting fighters against the NATO presence. This has consequences: The majority of victims of international NATO bombing raids are civilians, not terrorists.

As a result the Afghan people trust Western forces less and less. In addition, the increasing militarization of Afghan men means that women encounter more and more armed men in private and in public. The consequences for women and for reconstruction are disastrous.

At present the German government spends more than 530 million Euros each year on military operations. Less than a quarter of that amount is available for civil reconstruction. In 2007 only 1.7 million Euros were earmarked for promoting women’s rights and supporting women in health care and educational systems.

Many organizations working in Afghanistan are calling for a fundamental change in strategy: Peace, reconstruction, and development will be only possible when the spiralling of military force ends and a stronger civil reconstruction effort replaces the predominance of military conflict resolution.

How?

- Operation Enduring Freedom turned out to be counter-productive; rejected by the Afghan population it should be ended as soon as possible.
- The German action plan for civil crisis prevention that proposes stronger civil interventions should be implemented.
- Budget plans and funding strategies should reflect a move away from the predominance of military intervention. The ratio of civil to military expenditure needs to increase in favor of civil interventions.
- The reconstruction budget needs to include visibly increased allocations for the promotion of women's rights and the expansion of direct services for women in health care, legal, and education systems; these areas should receive priority in the spirit of 'gender budgeting'.
- There should be better financial and professional support for projects working

on women's and human rights and promoting the political participation of women.

- International and Afghan organizations need more financial support to promote and strengthen civil society in Afghanistan. Such funds should go directly to the recipient organizations; the government – due to corruption and cooption by warlords – is not likely to distribute the funds appropriately.
- The close link between peace and the prevention of renewed violence against women and armed violence should finally be acknowledged in national and international strategy papers.
- Top priority should be given to efforts to reeducating boys and men. Preventive measures against domestic violence, intra-family conflict and armed violence should be introduced, taught and supported.



medica mondiale – Working for the future of Afghan women
Help us to take action!

Imprint: medica mondiale e.V. | Hülchrather Straße 4 | 50670 Köln
Tel.: +49 221 931898-0 | info@medicamondiale.org
www.medicamondiale.org

Editorial: Britta Amorin

Text: Britta Amorin | Selmin Caliskan | Bele Grau

Pictures: Cover and Reverse: Sybille Fezer | further picture credits
in the inside pages

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