Forgotten Heroes

Afghan Women Leaders Killed in Impunity
Ignored in Justice

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To every Afghan woman and girl killed for her desire to work, achieve and thrive.
Executive Summary

Taliban fighters, unknown armed groups and foreign forces in Afghanistan have killed, wounded and violated the rights of Afghan women but have not been held accountable.

The number of civilian casualties of war in Afghanistan has consistently hiked over the past decade but the victims have only remained in numbers. Figures compiled by Afghanistan Rights Monitor (ARM) indicate that over 10,000 Afghan civilians have lost their lives in armed hostilities since 2008. The number of those maimed and wounded is unknown but estimated at over 20,000 people.

Women have made big part of the civilian casualties. Many of the women victims were killed by improvised blasts, suicide attacks and aerial bombardments. Some were specifically targeted for their work and ideals.

Most civilian casualties and other war-related crimes have been attributed to Taliban insurgents. However, as this report evinces other armed actors are also increasingly involved in atrocities against noncombatants in general and women in particular.

This report highlights 10 cases of prominent Afghan women assassinated by different known and unknown actors. Among these martyred women were women’s development activists, a doctor, two journalists, a provincial lawmaker, a teacher, and a police officer. None of them had a direct role in the war and other factional fighting in Afghanistan.

The Afghan Government launched symbolic investigations into some of the reported cases only as long as the media showed interest but has left every case incomplete. It appears that justice has been overlooked. The virtual impunity in which armed and criminal groups killed these women, have left devastating psychological consequences for other aspiring Afghan women and girls. It has also contributed to a rise in attacks and intimidations against women that are engaged in prominent activities such as media, politics and public affairs. One recent example is the controversial murder of Anisa, a young girl, in Mahmood Raqi city in Kapisa Province.

The Government has failed or shown no interest in honoring the ultimate sacrifices these and other Afghan women have made in pursuit of their legitimate aspirations. Despite
widespread protests, President Hamid Karzai has named public places after his favorite warlords and has earmarked state funds to commemorate their death anniversaries. In tribute to slain Afghan women, however, President Karzai has shown no interest.

The Afghan Government does not keep records of civilian female government employees who have been targeted for their work. This lack of reliable data and information has resulted in a general lack of awareness about the gravity of the problem. It has also decapitated projects – both by government and donors - to honor the work, families and sacrifices of the martyred Afghan women leaders.

This report only provides an incomplete picture of the plight of women and girls in Afghanistan. It strives to attract attention to fundamental risks the Afghan women are facing and the inability and/or unwillingness of the Government to hold women’s rights violators accountable.

As Western states wind down their engagement in Afghanistan and talks with Taliban leaders are being pursued, there must be efforts to end the killing, harassment and restrictions that Afghan women face. Women cannot and must not be targeted in impunity. It is time for the Afghan Government and its allies go beyond condemnation statement and take action against women’s rights violators.

The report also calls on Afghan people - men and women alike - to protect their leaders who work in ensuring a better life for them and the future generation. Local communities have a critical role in ensuring safety and security of women. We therefore call on community leaders to ensure a better and more secure environment for women to work and for girls to pursue education.
Who are the victims?

A closer analysis of the ten assassinations highlighted in this report, reveals that Taliban assassins targeted women in more high-profile and authoritative positions. This is particularly evident in the cases of Safia Amajan, Malalai Kakar, Sitara Achakzai and Hanifa Safi – all assassinations claimed by or attributed to Taliban. Taliban spokesmen reportedly told journalists that the main motive for the assassination of these women was their affiliation with the Afghan Government.

Whilst under international laws, deliberate and systematic attacks on noncombatants and civilian employees and contractors of a warring party (including the government) could be described as war crimes and crimes against humanity, it is the Taliban’s policy to target everyone affiliated with the Afghan government.

Women working for the Afghan Government, meanwhile, are more vulnerable to attacks and intimidations than men. Compared to women, male officials often receive more discretionary security arrangements provided by the government and/or NATO-ISAF i.e. armored vehicles, blast-resistant offices and intelligence alerts.

Afghanistan National Directorate of Security (NDS) has foiled numerous plots which allegedly aimed to assassinate prominent male officials. However, women officials are largely considered to be soft and easy targets for insurgents and other criminal groups.

In the absence of an effective and competent security system, most female officials and activists rely on personal risk mitigating strategies. To avert risks, most women prefer undertaking low-profile activities, downgrading the austerity and scale of their activities and in extreme circumstances suspend
projects and activities. Some even quit jobs in order to avert targeted violence against their respective families.

Who are the killers?

As is the case in the overall civilian casualties of war, Taliban insurgents have assassinated and perpetuated the killing of more women leaders than any other warring party or criminal group. The Taliban brazenly and rather shamelessly accepted responsibility for at least four of the ten cases highlighted in this report.

As Afghan and American officials peruse a political deal with Taliban insurgents in order to end the conflict, we are concerned that the very assassins of many Afghan women could be offered a blanket amnesty.

A reintegration commission of the High Peace Council (HPC) alleges that over 4,500 “former insurgents” have laid down arms and joined the so-called “peace process”. There could be Afghan women’s assassins among the current or future reintegrated insurgents. We fear the government would overlook this fundamental problem in the peace talks process.

Killers of the four women leaders are yet to be known. Zakia Zaki, Sima Akakhel, Sangha Amaaj and Belqis Mazlomyar were shot dead for unclear or at least ambiguous motives. It is very disappointing that the Afghan Government, despite its strong legal and political obligations, has either failed or demonstrated no willingness to properly investigate these and numerous other cases of prominent women murdered.

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<th>Parties blamed</th>
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The government’s inability and/or unwillingness to prosecute murderers and implement the rule of law, has created a terrifying environment of impunity for violence against women. In October 2012 when Taliban attackers shot Malala Yousofzai, a teenage Pashtun education activist in Swat,
President Hamid Karzai swiftly issued press statements condemning the attack and later sent letters to Pakistani politicians calling for genuine action to stop attacks against education in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

However, Afghan Government has done almost nothing inside Afghanistan to effectively prosecute the murderers of Afghan women and girls. President Karzai has been asking foreigners to do the sort of things – ostensibly to help peace and stability in Afghanistan – which his government refuses to undertake.

To keep his warlord allies satisfied, Mr. Karzai has compromised justice and accountability. In some cases the so-called ‘unknown armed men’, the second largest responsible group for the killing of women leaders and activists, are hidden behind some of the most powerful warlords who are well represented in the government.

An American army sergeant recklessly shot dead a prominent female obstetrician and her 18-year-old son in Wardak Province on 21 July 2011. It was highly expected that the U.S. Government would handle this murder case more effectively and appropriately than the Afghan Government. Sadly, Sergeant Walter Taylor, who killed Aqila Hekmat and her young son, has been exonerated by a Pentagon court.

Taliban, criminal groups and in some instances U.S.-NATO’s counterterrorism and counterinsurgency have posed risks and problems for the Afghan females who seek education and work outdoors. As you will read in the following pages, Afghan women leaders have paid ultimate sacrifices in dealing with these risks.
Aqila Hekmat was saving lives and treating diseases prior to her death in indiscriminate shooting by a U.S. army sergeant. Hekmat was an obstetric specialist in a country where thousands of mothers and infants die every year due to a painful shortage of healthcare providers, particularly female obstetrics.

She was a source of hope for numerous patients – mostly pregnant women – in Ghazni Province where she worked at a state hospital and where shortage of female healthcare providers is more severe than other parts of Afghanistan. Aqila was also a source of inspiration for her children and for young girls in Wardak and Ghazni provinces who looked at her as a role model.

On Thursday 21 July 2011, Dr. Aqila, her husband, her 18-year-old son Nasratullah and another relative were in a car and on their way to Kabul when a roadside bomb reportedly went off. Paranoid by the explosion, several U.S. soldiers, that were patrolling the area, started indiscriminate shooting at passengers and people nearby. The circumstances of a post-blast “firefight”, as alleged by U.S. military sources, are vague and could not be substantiated independently.

Aqila was killed by gunshots fired by Walter Taylor, a US army sergeant. Taylor was quoted in the media as saying that he mistook Aqila for a Taliban combatant.

Aqila’s young son, Nasratullah, was also killed in the same incident. It appears that after Nasratullah was shot dead, Aqila barged out of the vehicle waving and pleading to U.S. forces to cease fire. Despite the fact that she posed no hostile signs, Aqila was shot and killed.
Neither Aqila nor her deceased son demonstrated any signs of combat or hostility when they were killed. Both were recklessly fired upon, according to Aqila’s family.

Aqila’s killing took place in impunity. A symbolic procedure of homicide charge was dropped and Sergeant Taylor was exonerated in August 2012. Some in the U.S. even criticized an investigation into Aqila’s killing saying that a “Sergeant First Class was sold out to appease Afghans”.

Aqila and Nasratullah’s case exemplifies the mordant lack of justice delivered by the U.S. in Afghanistan. Sergeant Taylor is the killer of at least one civilian person in Afghanistan but he is considered a war hero in the U.S. and this shows the dangerous and worsening divide between Afghans and Americans. Unfortunately, as with other criminal cases attributed to U.S. and other NATO soldiers in Afghanistan, the Afghan Government has neither registered a lawsuit against Sergeant Taylor nor has demanded ethical and financial compensations for Aqila’s bereaved family.
BELQIS MAZLOMYAR, originally from Pachirwagam district of Nangarhar, was shot dead by her step-brother during a local elder’s meeting at the Shaikh Misri returnees’ camp, a temporary settlement for returnees located in Surkhrod District of Nangarhar Province.

Married and having five children, Belqis was a dedicated and influential woman leader at her community. She was a representative in her refugee community and was well-known among local refugees for her activism and representation of refugee women. Her strong dedication for her community also enabled her to become a contractor for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Belqis was able to attract a lot of humanitarian development organizations to her community and encouraged them to help the returnees with various support activities. For instance, with her help, the Shaikh Misree returnees’ community managed to get six water wells. Safe drinking water saves lives in rural Afghanistan.

She also helped widowed women with NGO sponsored income-generating projects which enabled them to open their own shops in the community. With her help, the community managed to get a health clinic, a school and other literacy programs.

When local people saw her activism and dedications, they agreed to elect her as their local council leader. This gave more
opportunity and support for Mazloomyar’s larger goal i.e. demanding government for this informal settlement to become a small returnee’s township, an action not favored by land-grabbers and warlords who eyed the area with ‘high potential for businesses.

In a statement issued by Kai Eide, the former head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), a day after her murder it was mentioned that her murderer had not been identified and motives for her killing were unclear. A while later, Sayed Ali Akhbar, district governor of Surkhrod, said that two suspects, both relatives of Mrs. Mazloomyar, had been detained. No further follow up has been made on the murder case thus far.

According to one local female leader in Nangarhar Province, Belqis was eager to empower the community and particularly the female headed households. She wanted to ensure fair treatment and equal opportunities for women. However, this was not tolerated by local warlords and land grabbers. At least two local sources said that powerful men affiliated with a so-called “land mafia” motivated Belqi’s step-brother to kill her. Sadly the crime was executed as Belqis was chairing a local council.

Belqis is survived by her five children. Her eldest daughter, who was eleven years old, is at her final year at a local high school. She is so passionate about the cause her mother pursued that she wants to follow up her mother’s path.
HANIFA SAFI, director of women’s affairs department of Laghman Province, lost her life after a bomb, improvised under her car, exploded on 13 July 2012.

Born in 1961 in the northern Balkh Province, Safi was a woman of courage and leadership by nature. She spent most of her life teaching girls at schools in the north of the country and was appointed head of women’s affairs department in the eastern Laghman Province in 2004.

Hanifa was also a passionate civil society and democracy activist. She ran for the province council twice and was highly respected in Laghman Province for her genuine dedication to women’s development.

Prior to her death, Hanifa received threats from Taliban groups to quit her job and return to complete domesticity.

She defied the threats and maintained her job.

Tragically threats led to a crime on 13 July 2012 as Hanifa and her husband were travelling near Mehtarlam city, the provincial capital of Laghman Province, a bomb, which was attached under their car, went off.

Unlike their previous assassinations of women leaders, the Taliban did not immediately claim for Mrs. Safi’s death. It is believed that the Taliban did not do so in order to avert widespread public disgust for the crime as Hanifa was widely respected. The Afghan Government closed Hanifa Safi’s assassination case by saying ‘she was killed by the enemies of Afghanistan.’

On 21 August 2012, NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said in a statement a Taliban
commander who had masterminded Hanifa Safi’s assassination was arrested and handed over to Afghan authorities. It is unclear where the alleged killer has been held and what judicial procedures have been implemented to hold him accountable for his heinous crime.

Mrs. Safi’s husband, who was severely injured in the same incident which took his wife’s life, is still recovering from his deep wounds. Safi’s bereaved family told the author of this report that they were unaware of any legal procedures taken against the man ISAF said it had arrested on charges of assassinating Hanifa Safi.

As director of women’s affairs department, Hanifa used to help women and girls who faced violence, deprivations and other sorts of ill-treatment. She was known for her encouragements to women who sought official legal support through the judiciary and courts.
HAMIDA BARMAKI was a well-known law lecturer, a human rights activist and a judge in Kabul. Barmaki was one of the most prominent examples of professional Afghan women.

The 41-year-old law expert along with her husband, Masoud Yama, and their four children (Narwan Dunia, Wira Sahar, Marghana Nila and Ahmad Belal) were massacred in a Taliban suicide attack at a supermarket in Kabul city on 28 January 2011.

Barmaki had a life full of professional achievements and exceptional gains. She dedicated most her time teaching students at Kabul University’s law faculty. She also worked as a children rights commissioner at Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) where she led several projects in support of children. Barmaki also worked as a lawyer and legal specialist for various Afghan and international non-government organizations. Hamid Barmaki was also a vocal voice for women’s rights, democracy and reform.

At the AIHRC, Professor Barmaki often took critical stands on the failure of some state institutions in preventing violence against children, particularly the recruitment and use of underage boys by military groups.

As a civil society leader, Hamida initiated and engaged in numerous activities which aimed to tackle egregious human rights violations such as child marriage, domestic violence and child sexual exploitation.

Taliban and another insurgent group, Hezbe Islami Hekmatyar, claimed responsibility for the suicide attack at Finest supermarket in Wazir Akbar Khan area of Kabul city which took Barmaki and her entire family’s life. Purported Taliban spokesmen alleged that the attack targeted foreign customers in the
market. However, an overwhelming majority of those killed and wounded in the attack were Afghan civilians.

There were no legitimate military targets available in the supermarket at the time of the attack. At least two other civilians, including another female lawyer, were also killed in the same suicide attack. The deadly attack was therefore an unjustifiable act of indiscriminate violence against civilians.

President Karzai held several rounds of reconciliatory talks with representatives of the Hezbe Islami Hekmatyar (HIK) in 2011-2012 but statements issued by the President’s Office made no reference to the deaths of Barmaki’s family by alleged HIK suicide attacker.
MALALAI KAKAR, a top female police officer and in charge of female prison in Kandahar Province, was shot dead in her car as she was about to leave for her office on 28 September 2008 in Kandahar city. Her 18-year-old son, Folad Kakar, was also killed by her assailants.

"We killed Malalai Kakar," a Taliban spokesman reportedly told journalists after the incident adding that Kakar was in their “hit list” for a long time. The purported spokesman said the reason for Kakar’s assassination was her job.

Prior to her death, Malalai had received numerous threats and intimidations to quit her job. She did not.

Kakar knew she would be killed. She knew that the Taliban had unleashed a widespread assassination campaign in Kandahar Province which targeted community leaders, both men and women. Yet she fearlessly maintained her job as the face, hope and leader of Kandahar’s small female police force.

The daughter and sister of proud police officers, Malalai joined the Afghan police in 1982 – perhaps before her brainwashed young assailants were born. She was banned from work, as were all women in Afghanistan, under the Taliban’s repressive regime in 1994-2001. She was the first woman to sign up for the post-Taliban female police force in Kandahar Province. Malalai proudly served the women of Kandahar several years before her assassination.

Malalai was also a kind mother of eight children – six sons and two daughters. She was a beloved wife too. Her
untimely death ruined the extended family. “We want to study and follow the path of our mother,” Farhad, Malalai’s second eldest son, told ARM at their home in Kandahar city in September 2012.

Their mother lost her life protecting girls to go to school, but now even Malalai’s daughters find it too risky to pursue their education.

It took Taliban killers only a few seconds to assassinate Malalai Kakar. It will take generations to have another brave female police in Kandahar like her. She was killed by the Taliban and her message, her soul and her legacy has been buried in the ignorance of an Afghan Government that only rewards – dead or alive – allied warlords.
SAFIA AMAJAN served women in Kandahar Province for over four decades – first as a teacher then as women’s rights official and activist. As a teacher and headmaster at Zarghona Ana High School in 1980s – 1991, Safia helped educate hundreds of Kandahari girls. She was so dear to her students and fellow teachers that they called her Amajan – dear aunt.

Amajan did not leave Kandahar even under the worst conditions for women – 1990s. Having memorized the entire Holy Koran, she was teaching small girls Islamic studies under the Taliban when any education for girls was brutally banned.

Immediately after the Taliban when the Ministry of Women’s Affairs was established, Safia demonstrated extraordinary bravery by taking the leadership of Kandahar’s to-be-incepted women’s affairs department.

Highly respected for her religious and cultural integrity, Amajan played a pivotal role in the initial awakening of women on their civil rights in Kandahar. She strived to set up a women’s affairs department from the scratch. As she made progress, the Taliban found their draconian ideology threatened. Intimidations and threats were followed by a heinous crime on 25 September 2006 when Taliban assassins shot dead the 63-year-old Safia in front of her house in Kandahar city.

Safia’s was the first high-profile targeted killing of an active Afghan woman after the demise of the Taliban regime. A purported Taliban spokesman
shamelessly claimed credit for the assassination of Safia Amajan saying she was murdered because of her job.

Safia’s death not only shocked Kandahar’s nascent community of aspiring females but tormented her physically disabled husband and her only adopted son, Naqib. After Safia’s death, both migrated outside Afghanistan.

Safia was born, killed and buried in Kandahar city. She resisted some of the harshest spans of life there and proudly served generations of young girls and women. Safia was a genuine public servant who served humanity in one of the world’s most difficult places.
SHAKIBA SANGHA AMAAJ was shot dead over five years ago by someone who the Afghan law enforcement agencies are yet to identify. A stunningly beautiful television anchor, journalist and writer Amaaj stood up to strong social opprobrium and attracted nationwide appreciation for her very short journalistic life.

Exactly who killed Sangha and why are questions which the Afghan Government has failed to answer for over five years. Some in Sangha’s family and among her friends believe that the government, mired in corruption and abuse of authority, is unwilling to properly investigate and shed light on the circumstances of her murder.

Puzzled with the case, law enforcement authorities first arrested a suspect for several weeks in 2007 but later put Sangha’s father in jail for nine months on suspicion that he could have killed his own daughter.

Prior to her murder by gun shots on 31 May 2007 at her home in the heart of Kabul city, Sangha had received violent warnings to quit her work. Twice a grenade was thrown into her house and intimidating phone calls and threat letters were incalculable.

Sangha’s family reported almost every threat to Kabul police. The response they received was the police was vigilant. As threats escalated to grenade attacks, a local police official advised the family to move to another location in the capital city. However even a shift of their home to Kabul’s 4th District did not prevent Sangha’s heart-wrenching murder.
As Sangha used to tell her family, friends and colleagues she aspired to be a strong voice for the Afghan women. She planned to be a leader in her war-torn country through journalism. By appearing on TV and presenting current affairs shows, Sangha Amaaj inspired many young girls and women across Afghanistan.

Over five years after Sangha Aamaj’s mysterious murder, the Afghan police have completely stopped all investigations into the case. There is no official search and, therefore, penalty awaiting the murderer of Sangha Aamaj.

The fact the Government is still unable or unwilling to bring him/her to justice, has badly demoralized and disappointed the young Afghan women who wanted to follow Sangha’s path.
SITARA ACHIKZAI left the comforts of life in Europe and returned to war-ravaged Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban hoping to serve her country. She did not have a child of her own but Sitara called every younger “my daughter” and “my son”.

In 2005, Achakzai was elected to the Kandahar Provincial Council. As an elected representative in one of Afghanistan’s most war-stricken provinces, Sitara had a long list of priorities among them were the expansion of education opportunities for girls, the expansion of basic health services to women and the delivery of robust legal services to women facing domestic violence.

Similar to other active women in Kandahar, Sitara often received intimidating calls and written threats to her life – each ordering her to quit her legitimate work and return to the confinement of domesticity. She did not bow to the threats. On 12 April 2009, four gunmen riding two motorcycles opened fire on Sitara as she was getting out of her car in Kandahar city. She was killed instantly.

A purported Taliban spokesman later confirmed to journalists that the assassinators were Taliban insurgents. The only reason given for Sitara’s senseless murder was that she was working.
“I would like rather die serving my country and my people than die at a hospital in the West,” Sitara once told her mother and sister over the phone. She did the ultimate sacrifice for her country, her people and indeed for humanity.

Sitara was buried in an informal cemetery in Kandahar, her beloved native city. Her is a humble grave with no sign of the extraordinary sacrifice she made. Her senseless assailants remain anonymous and no formal investigation has been launched to identify and apprehend them. They killed Sitara in complete impunity.

There are even chances for Sitara’s assailants to sign up for the so-called “peace and reintegration process” through which their appalling crimes could be forgiven and they could even receive incentives to rejoin the society.
SIMA AKAKHEL was a principal and teacher at the Ahmad Shah Durrani Girls’ High School in Balkh Province, north of Afghanistan. Unknown gunmen broke into her house on the night of 10 August 2012 and shot her dead in front of her children. Akakhel was murdered during the Muslim holy month of Ramadhan when her father and her husband were praying at a village mosque.

Akakhel’s assassination is also shredded in secrecy. Jan Mohammad, Sima’s bereaved husband, says the couple did not have animosity with anybody. He accuses Taliban and/or Hezbe Islami insurgents of assassinating his wife because she fearlessly promoted female education.

However, unlike other targeted killing of prominent women, no insurgent group claimed responsibility for Akakhel’s murder. Local police, meanwhile, did not repudiate the possibility of criminal intent in Sima Akakhel’s death.

Apart from an initial crime scene assessment by the local police, no meaningful investigation has been conducted to illuminate Akakhel’s murder.

Akakhel’s family is both frustrated and disappointed with an alleged lack of police’s willingness to execute meaningful investigation into the principal’s mysterious murder.

“The police even told me to investigate Sima’s murder on my own,” Jan Mohammad, Sima’s husband, told ARM.
Mohammad is also a teacher. He now fears that the same criminals who murdered his wife would also target him because of his job.

As a teacher and principal of a girls' high school, Akakhel played a crucial role in delivering and promoting educational services for girls in a rural setting.

Students and teachers described Akakhel as a passionate, kind and inspiring personality. Her loss has badly damaged the morale and determination of many women and girls in Shinkai village, a remote area in Balkh District.
ZAKIA ZAKI was a female journalist based in Jabulsaraj, Parwan province. Her youngest child was only two years old and asleep in her arms when she was shot dead in an evening at her house.

The incident happened when Zaki's husband Abdul Ahad Ranjbar who also is a journalist was presenting at the radio station near their home.

Zakia was born in 1972 and was married with six children. She and her husband were running an independent radio station known as ‘Radio Solha’ or Radio Peace for a long time in Jabulsaraj. Zakia was an activist working for peace building through radio programs. She started her activities in 1999 under Taliban rule. Her family confirmed that they did not have any personal disputes with anyone who could cause such an accident.

She was also serving as school principal for a local primary school. Her radio was promoting active participation of women in the society. ‘This radio is the home for all citizens, it is only place where people can speak freely’ Zakia mentioned in one of her interviews. Zakia and her colleagues received death threats by local warlords because of her blunt speaking about human rights violations and criticizing the warlords. Zakia has become a known woman globally after UNESCO in 2005 recognized her work and announced her as one out of four well-known women.

Police investigation found a few evidences, but to this date, it failed to track down and identify the murderers of Zakia Zaki. According to one of her colleagues, six men who were arrested as suspects for this incident were released after a year. The police have indicated that the murderers were not

ZAKIA ZAKI

Name: Zakia Zaki
Job: Director of Peace Radio, Parwan
Date of Birth: 1972
Date killed: 05 June 2007
Place killed: Jabulsaraj, Parwan, Afghanistan
Reason killed: Being a female journalist
Alleged killers: Unknown gunmen
Justice delivered: Nil
more than two and they have used two types of guns for shooting. They knew very well where their target was sleeping and they did not harm anyone else in the room. All this indicates that the key target for the murder was Zakia Zaki herself. And she was targeted in cold blood.

Zakia’s work was attracting national and international attention. In May 2004 Zakia attended a Global Summit of Women on “leadership, Technology, Groth” together with a delegation led by deputy minister of women’s affairs to Seoul, Korea. She also had participated in several conferences and public events in Kabul. Besides, in her radio Zakia was promoting human rights and peace education. Zakia’s open criticism against the harmful actions of local warlords and her international recognition could be seen as the key motive for her assassination.
Conclusion & Recommendations

By presenting the profiles of the ten martyred women leaders who despite all the risks and challenges did not give up, we strive to attract domestic and international attention to the plight of Afghan women. The authors believe it is very important to honour and celebrate the sacrifices that each one of these heroic women made so the current and future generations of Afghans have a clear understanding of their true leaders.

This report is also another call for justice. It demands the assassinsators of Afghan women and their collaborators be held accountable and where possible brought to a transparent justice.

The authors recommend the following to these actors:

**For the Afghan Government:**

- Immediately launch comprehensive, rigorous and objective criminal investigations into the assassination of the ten women leaders introduced in this report as an example followed by other similar cases;
- Identify, arrest and bring to justice the killers of the reported martyred women;
- Prosecute other criminal affiliates that masterminded and contributed to these assassinations;
- Prioritize the protection of Afghan women from all sorts of violence, discrimination and intimidations, particularly when they serve as public figures;
- Ensure a safe and secure environment for active and prominent women to serve their country and pursue their professional aspirations;
- Safeguard the achievements of women and promote their causes;
- Support the families and children of the martyred women by offering them moral, political, financial and other kinds of privileges;
- Honor the sacrifices, services and achievements of the martyred women by naming public places, government institutions, school, institutions and honorary medals after them;
- Acknowledge, support and promote the services and achievements of existing women and girls in public and private arenas;
- Communicate louder, clearer and stronger to all that any kind of violence and discrimination against women will be forcefully and indiscriminately prosecuted;
- Set up a trust fund to promote the causes & memories of the slain women leaders as well as facilities opportunities for their loved ones.

**To the international community:**
• Support Afghan authorities to properly and effectively complete criminal, judicial and political cases of the assassinated women leaders;
• Contribute aid to trust fund and other mechanisms designed to support the causes & memories of the slain women leaders and their children;
• Support living Afghan women leaders in their aspirations for a better, safer and more prosperous Afghanistan;
• Advise Afghan authorities to avoid offering blanket clemency to the murderers of women leaders for political arrangements;
• Honor the slain Afghan women leaders for their extraordinary bravery and sacrifices through awards, prizes and remembrance.

To the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission;
• Set up an online database about all the Afghan women leaders killed since 2002;
• Investigate, document and publicize information about the slain women leaders;
• Publicize & highlight the legacy of every slain women leader through media and other public information channels;
• Initiate honorary medals and awards, named after the slain women leaders, to honor human rights activists;
• Lead a robust advocacy campaign to seek public recognition and support for the work of existing women leaders.

To the people of Afghanistan;
• Ensure protection of women leaders while they are working in your communities;
• Provide cooperation with women leaders when signs of threats are seen or spoken about;
• Organize or participate in advocacy demands for justice and prosecution for slain women who worked in providing better future for you and your future generations.
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