



Press release

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Global Campaign to Support Police Women in Afghanistan

The International Association of Women Police (IAWP) has launched a global campaign to highlight the risks that police women in Afghanistan take every day.

The association, which has members in 69 countries, is calling for support for police women in the country and its campaign has already gained backing from many other organisations, as well as key influencers including the UK's Baroness Fiona Hodgson of Abinger.

IAWP President Jane Townsley said: "Because women in Afghanistan choose to serve their communities by becoming police officers they are often shunned and this stigma has even led to some being abused and ultimately killed because of their work. We have also heard reports of a failure to investigate and bring the perpetrators to justice. We need to see perpetrators of these crimes being brought to justice and this publicised which sends a strong message that violence against women will not be tolerated in any circumstances.

"Our stance is that if you cannot safeguard the women in the police, how can you possibly improve the situation for women in the community? Steps must be taken to protect police women working throughout Afghanistan."

The objectives of the campaign are:

- To raise awareness of the violence and intimidation faced by women working in the Afghan National Police.
- To lobby the government in Afghanistan to put systems in place to ensure police women in the country are safeguarded
- That the Afghan National Police fully investigate all offences committed against its police women with the objective of prosecuting the perpetrators so that justice is served
- To promote better education and professional development for women working in the Afghan National Police

Baroness Hodgson said: "I have visited Afghanistan – and it is heartening to see that there has been much progress over the last 13 years – with around three million girls in education, reduced maternal mortality, and women taking their place as Parliamentarians, lawyers, doctors, journalists, teachers, business women and many other things beside – however, it started from such a low base and there is still a long way to go. In spite of all the progress, it remains one of the worst countries in the world to be a woman!

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“You cannot have women's rights if you do not have a strong police force. It is perhaps hard for us to understand as in the UK a woman can just walk into a police station, but in many parts of Afghanistan it is forbidden for a woman to talk to a man outside her family circle, and the majority of the Afghan police are male. Thus it is so important to have women in the police force there, so that women can access the law.

“These are very brave women who join the Afghan police, because in some cases their communities will reject them and subject them to violence. To date many of the women who have joined the police have either been constrained to menial tasks or they have been abused by their fellow officers. They cannot report these officers because they fear reprisals, either from their own families who may be considered that they have 'brought dishonour on the family', which means that they may be beaten, thrown out of their home or at worst, killed; or they risk being sent to prison for having engaged in 'illicit sex'.

“If the women in the police cannot be safeguarded, it will be impossible to provide access to justice for the women in the country and thus it will be hard to improve their situation. Moreover, we need to see an end to the culture of impunity and the perpetrators being held to account to send a strong message that violence should not be tolerated.

“At the moment there is only one female police officer for every 10,000 women of the population. Much good work is being done in trying to recruit more women into the police, offering good training and trying to put systems in place that will ensure their protection.

“Transformations do not occur overnight, but with time this will make a very real difference to the Afghan women. So I am absolutely delighted to support the IAWP's campaign, and to offer it all the support that I can.”

As part of her role, Baroness Hodgson set up and chairs the Afghan Women's Support Forum, with the aim of defending Afghan women's rights and promoting their future role in Afghanistan. This network creates a 'space' where people can highlight concerns, raise ideas as well connecting with others working on similar issues

At their meeting in November US-based Dr Mohammad Kharoti told the meeting about his work building schools for girls in Afghanistan, and outlined the difference it was making to the lives not just of the girls but their entire families. Another speaker, Dr Zarghuna Taraki from the UCH in London, said that shockingly there is no breast cancer screening or treatment in Afghanistan – something she is working to change.

And Mrs Townsley spoke about the IAWP and its Afghan Campaign, as well as the group's aim to send a delegation to Afghanistan in 2015. She added that literacy was a problem across the Afghan National Police force, particularly among female officers – something which needed to be addressed.

The IAWP has also advised the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on establishing a national structure for police women's councils, culminating in a workshop in Kabul in October.

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