

The Impact of U.S. Intervention on Afghan Women's Rights

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The women of Afghanistan gained worldwide attention in the mid-1990s when news reports of the ruling Taliban's treatment of women caught the eye of the international press.¹ Western feminists soon began raising awareness about what they called the "victims of inhumane gender apartheid."² For years, Afghan women languished under the Taliban, banned from the work place, relegated to their homes or, when outdoors, to the traditional Afghan *burqa*. They were denied health care, education, and the basic right to earn a livelihood. Today, the world is focused on Afghan women more than ever before as a result of the United States' "War on Terrorism." The U.S. has used the Taliban's oppression of Afghan women as one justification for fighting the Taliban.³ But how has America actually improved the lives of Afghan women? Conversely, how has it impoverished them? To answer these questions, it is important first to consider the history of women in Afghanistan. Have they always been as oppressed as they are presently? Have they enjoyed better lives in recent history? If so, what changed things? What forces fostered an environment ripe for misogynist fundamentalism in Afghanistan? What actions have Afghan women themselves taken to resist their oppression? And what hope is there for the future?

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1. John F. Burns & Steve LeVine, *How Afghanistan's Stern Rulers Took Power*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 31, 1996, available at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/howthe.htm>.
2. Press Release, Feminist Majority Foundation, *Feminist Majority Protests the Taliban's Violation of Afghan Women's Rights* (July 30, 1997), available at <http://www.feminist.org/news/newsbyte/uswirestory.asp?id=4571>.
3. See, e.g., President George W. Bush, *State of the Union Address* (Jan. 29, 2002), available at <http://www.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/index.html> ("The last time we met in this chamber, the mothers and daughters of Afghanistan were captives in their own homes, forbidden from working or going to school. Today women are free.").

In this commentary I first outline the history of women's rights in Afghanistan, emphasizing the United States' destructive role: its support of misogynist fundamentalist groups and its failure to support Afghan women. Next, I discuss the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), an extraordinary and inspiring activist, humanitarian organization that has fought the domestic and international oppression of Afghans for the past two decades despite harrowing risks and horrific consequences. RAWA's vision for Afghanistan, particularly for Afghan women, and the means its members employ to realize that vision are in stark contrast to the present international attempts at Afghan reconstruction. Only RAWA's vision offers a systemic critique of misogynist fundamentalism and its international cohorts. RAWA's vision—almost entirely excluded from present discussions of Afghanistan's future—must be the foundation of any attempt to meaningfully change the lives of Afghan women.

U.S. INTERVENTION AND AFGHAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS

It's clear that the problem women in Afghanistan face is fundamentalism itself—not just whether or not we have to wear a burqa or whether we are allowed to go to the cinema. . . . But we also know that the situation was the result of the very inhumane and unjust policies of foreign countries such as the U.S. and other Western countries, along with Russia, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which over the years gave a lot of support and help to fundamentalist groups. These fundamentalist groups became powerful, took over Afghanistan, and of course they got out of control. Perhaps the U.S. government never thought that there would be danger from its own creation; maybe it thought that the atrocities would take place only in Afghanistan, that only the women of Afghanistan would suffer, and that only things in Afghanistan would be destroyed.⁴

Fundamentalism in Afghanistan has long existed in the guise of regional warlords, righteous *mullahs*⁵ and their obedient students who have created their own perversion of Islamic law.⁶ In this section, I will show that the United States has led the campaign to arm Afghan fundamentalists and that its empowerment of these groups over the last two decades has spurred the dramatic demise of Afghan women's rights.

4. Stephanie Coop, *Sowing the Seeds of Revolution*, THE JAPAN TIMES ONLINE, Dec. 18, 2001 (quoting RAWA member Mariam Rawi), available at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/geted.p15?eo20011218a2.htm>.

5. A mullah is a traditional leader of prayer at a Muslim mosque; an Islamic priest.

6. Interview by Josh Burek & James Norton with Professor Charles A. Kimball, Chair, Department of Religion, Wake Forest University, in Winston-Salem, N.C. (Oct. 4, 2001), available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/1004/p25s1-wosc.html>.

In times of peace and conflict, Afghan women have been stripped of basic rights in the name of Islamic Sharia laws.⁷ Over the past two decades they have lost their rights to education, healthcare, and employment, their access to food and shelter, and their freedoms of association, expression, religion, and dress.⁸ As a result, today the literacy rate among Afghan women is estimated to be three percent,⁹ and the maternal mortality rate is the second highest in the world.¹⁰

However, this was not always the case. Many Afghan women remember when they could walk freely on the streets of the cities and enjoy education and vocation. As early as 1928, Queen Souriya worked to oppose Afghan traditions by opening schools for girls.¹¹ Her husband, King Amanullah, abolished child marriages, promoted universal education for girls and boys, and even imposed Western European dress codes on the population of Kabul.¹² These drastic reforms were later repealed because of vehement opposition by conservative *mullahs*, and when King Zahir Shah came to power, most Afghan women remained veiled.¹³ The *burqa* was eventually made optional in 1959 and Afghan women began attending schools and universities.¹⁴ In 1965, Afghan women were given equal rights and obligations and were allowed to vote.¹⁵ By the 1970s, fifteen percent of all legislative posts were held by women.¹⁶

In 1978, the Communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan made major reforms in marriage laws and education for women.¹⁷ However, many conservative Afghans opposed these far-reaching reforms.

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7. Jan Goodwin & Jessica Neuwirth, *The Rifle and the Veil*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 19, 2001 (describing the "religious rulings" that took away women's rights step by step), available at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/veil.htm>.
 8. PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, WOMEN'S HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN: A POPULATION-BASED ASSESSMENT (2001), available at <http://www.phrusa.org/research/healtheffects/exec.html>.
 9. Press Release, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UNIFEM Calls for \$12 Million to Support Women's Leadership in Reconstruction of Afghanistan (Jan. 24, 2002), available at http://www.undp.org/unifem/pr_afghanTokio.html.
 10. UNFPA Responds to Afghan Crisis: Relief Effort Aims to Save Womens Lives, Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan, at <http://www.unfpa.org/tpd/emergencies/afghanistan/update.htm#continued> (Jan. 2002). Sierra Leone is the only country with a higher maternal mortality rate. *Id.*
 11. PERCY SYKES, 2 A HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN 304 (1940).
 12. *Id.* at 332; Afghanistan: A Country Study ch. 1 (Peter R. Blood ed., 1997) (unpublished manuscript, on file with Federal Research Division, Library of Congress), available at <http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/afghanistan/afghanistan.html>.
 13. SYKES, *supra* note 11, at 332.
 14. James Rupert, *In Kabul, Still Veil of Fear: Even as Taliban's Grip Fades, Women Wary of Freedom*, Newsday.com, at <http://www.newsday.com/news/nationworld/world/ny-warwome282484019nov28.story?coll=ny-worldnews-print> (Nov. 28, 2001).
 15. Joan Ruddock, *Political Role for Women*, THE GUARDIAN, Oct. 20, 2001, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/waronterror/story/0,1361,577501,00.html>.
 16. Avril Stephens, *Afghan Women Looking for a Voice*, CNN.com, at <http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/11/23/afghanistan.women/> (Nov. 24, 2001).
 17. WILLIAM BLUM, KILLING HOPE 340-41 (1995).

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979,¹⁸ the opposition to women's emancipation grew stronger and gained focus. In the words of one fundamentalist: "The government said our women had to attend meetings and our children had to go to schools. This threatens our religion. We had to fight. . . ."¹⁹

Indeed, the Soviet-installed regime expanded many of the positive reforms for women's rights that were set into motion by the previous government.²⁰ However, the reforms were accompanied by fascist attempts to stifle indigenous opposition to the occupation. Many women and men were arrested, tortured, and killed by the Soviet regime for expressing opposition.²¹ "The Soviet troops and the regime they protected carried out massive repression, including systematic torture of thousands of detainees by the secret police . . . and indiscriminate bombing of rural areas."²²

The violence of this regime undermined and fueled opposition to its expansion of women's rights. In April 1979, six months prior to the Soviet invasion, seven different Afghan groups of men called Mujahadeen ("Soldiers of God") began meeting with, and receiving weapons and military training from, CIA officials.²³ Washington's aid to these so-called "freedom-fighters" consisted of billions of dollars in sophisticated weapons and small arms throughout the 1980s.²⁴ This was matched dollar-for-dollar by Saudi Arabia.²⁵ The U.S. and its ally apparently ignored the extremist ideology of the Mujahadeen, including their utter disregard for the rights of women. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Afghan warlord who received the bulk of funding,²⁶ was famous for throwing acid in the faces of Afghan women who refused to wear the veil. Even the CIA admitted to his "vicious" and "fascist" tendencies.²⁷

18. M. HASSAN KAKAR, *AFGHANISTAN: THE SOVIET INVASION AND AFGHAN RESPONSE, 1979-1982* pt.1.1 (1995), available at <http://www.afghanvoice.com/afgsovinv.htm>.

19. *Id.* at 346.

20. Glenn J. Sacks, *U.S. Policy Has Betrayed Afghan Women for 20 Years*, Glenn J. Sacks online, at http://www.glennjsacks.com/us_policy_has.htm (last visited Mar. 17, 2002).

21. AMNESTY INT'L, *WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN* (Jan. 1999) [hereinafter AMNESTY INT'L, 1999 REPORT] (referencing a 1986 Amnesty International report on the same topic), available at <http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/ASA110111999>.

22. BARNETT R. RUBIN, *AFGHANISTAN: THE FORGOTTEN CRISIS* (1996), available at <http://www.cip.fuehem.es/observatorio/informes/afghanistan1.htm>.

23. BLUM, *supra* note 17, at 344.

24. RUBIN, *supra* note 22.

25. *Id.*

26. Imran Akbar, *Gulbuddin Hekmatyar Had Links with KGB*, THE NEWS INT'L, Oct. 8, 1992, available at <http://www.rawa.org/gul-kgb.htm>; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/world/2001/war_on_terror/after_the_taliban/g_hekmatyar.stm. See also 103 CONG. REC. E2171 (daily ed. Oct. 7, 1994) (statement of Congressman Peter Deutsch, testimony before the House of Representatives), available at http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/1994_cr/pd_cong_speech.html.

27. TIM WEINER, *BLANK CHECK: THE PENTAGON'S BLACK BUDGET 149* (1990).

As Mujahadeen leaders fought the Soviets for a decade with foreign supplied weaponry, their stronghold on the Afghan landscape grew.²⁸ Women's groups like RAWA denounced the fundamentalists and their "foreign masters" and accused them of waging a war against their own people.²⁹ From 1986 to 1989, total funding to the Mujahadeen from all foreign sources was more than \$1 billion.³⁰ With the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the Mujahadeen increased their control over Afghanistan, eventually toppling the Soviet's puppet regime headed by Mohammed Najibullah.³¹ The Mujahadeen then instituted laws banning alcohol and requiring that women be veiled. Both of these new crimes were punishable by floggings, amputations, and public executions.³² The Mujahadeen laws were accompanied by horrific violence as warriors unleashed their weapons upon civilians. According to reporter John Burns in 1990, "ordinary Afghans asked . . . how the United States could allow the [Mujahadeen] rebels to fire American-supplied weapons into neighborhoods and bazaars, killing and wounding the ordinary people on whose behalf they claim to be fighting."³³ Rather than aid in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and provide security to Afghan women from the monsters they had elevated to power, the United States continued to ignore the Afghan people after the Soviet Union withdrew.³⁴ Most affected were Afghan women who now had to live under the guns and laws of the newly empowered extremists.³⁵ But the Mujahadeen warlords were not abandoned by their benefactors. As late as Spring 1992, three years after the Soviet withdrawal, U.S. weapons flowed into the hands of these misogynists.³⁶

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28. See Sultan Barakat & Gareth Wardell, *Capitalizing on Capacities of Afghan Women: Women's Role in Afghanistan's Reconstruction and Development*, Working Paper #4, (Recovery and Reconstruction Department, Int'l Labour Org., Dec. 2001), available at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/recon/crisis/download/afghanwomen.pdf> (describing phases of Afghan conflict, whereby local warlords and the Mujahadeen displaced the Soviets, and became the primary source of power in the region between 1979 and 1988).
 29. "The blow that the Soviets and their puppets failed to deal on the Afghan people, is being stricken on them by the savage and soul-destroying fundamentalists of jehadi [mujahadeen] and Taliban brands." Revolutionary Ass'n of the Women of Afghanistan, *The Burst of the Islamic Government Bubble in Afghanistan*, No. 2 (Jan. 1997) (unpublished document, on file with author) [hereinafter RAWA, *Burst Bubble*].
 30. Ahmed Rashid, *Accord on Afghanistan Overtaken by Events*, THE INDEP., May 28, 1990, at 6; David Rogers, *Aid to Afghan Rebels Wins Approval of a House Panel*, WALL ST. J., Sept. 27, 1990, at A20.
 31. RUBIN, *supra* note 22.
 32. BLUM, *supra* note 17, at 352 (detailing the new laws the "more moderate" Mujahadeen instituted when they took power).
 33. John Burns, *Now They Blame America*, N.Y. TIMES MAG., Feb. 4, 1990, at 22.
 34. Ahmend Rashid, *The Taliban and Its Regional Impact: The Implications for U.S. Policy*, 6 PROGRAM BRIEF NO. 9, 1 (a publication of the Nixon Center) (Apr. 17, 2000), available at <http://www.nixoncenter.org/publications/Program%20Briefs/vol6no9Rashid.PDF>.
 35. AMNESTY INT'L, 1999 REPORT, *supra* note 21.
 36. PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CENTER FOR GLOBAL HEALTH AND SECURITY, ISSUE BRIEF: THE WAR ON TERRORISM: THE IMPLICATIONS OF LIFTING MILITARY SANCTIONS ON INDIA AND PAKISTAN 2, available at <http://www.psr.org/s11/sanctions.html>.

On April 28, 1992, Mujahadeen factions stormed Kabul and declared themselves rulers of Afghanistan.³⁷ What followed is considered the darkest period in Afghan history, especially for Afghan women.³⁸ Civil war raged in Afghanistan for four more years, with Mujahadeen factions fighting one another for power, rocket shelling each other with little concern for civilian lives.³⁹ An estimated 45,000 civilians were killed in Kabul alone during that period.⁴⁰ As in all wars, women were affected dramatically. A 1993 report to the United Nations General Assembly said of the fighting: "Numerous cases of rape and ill-treatment by armed persons have been reported . . . women have never been treated in Afghanistan with such a lack of respect as in recent months."⁴¹

The Mujahadeen warlords were the very same men elevated to dizzying power by the United States in order to destabilize the Soviet Union. The religious fanaticism of these men had only made their battle against the Soviets more effective: a *jihad*⁴² sponsored by U.S. taxpayers would be fought to the death, between Islam and the atheist communists. When weighing the benefits of empowering these "few over-excited Islamists"⁴³ to accomplish their objectives against the heavy price being paid by Afghan women, U.S. policy makers' choice was, and remains, clear. When asked if he regretted arming and training future terrorists, Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor to President Carter, replied, "Which was more important in world history? The Taliban or the fall of the Soviet Empire?"⁴⁴

In 1996, the new generation of fundamentalists to which Brzezinski referred took over Kabul and eventually all of Afghanistan. They called themselves the Taliban and, with the full backing of Pakistan, they rolled into Afghanistan in Japanese pick-up trucks, with rocket launchers and satellite telephones, reigning in a new era of terror for Afghan women.⁴⁵ The Taliban rapidly defeated the factionalized Mujahadeen and gained control of most of the country. Ironically, the Taliban initially were wel-

37. In April 1992, Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Masood, together with Uzbek leader Abdul Rashid Dostum, took over Baghram air base, near Kabul. On the 25th of April, they entered Kabul. Tajik leader Barnahuddin Rabbani then declared himself President of Afghanistan in June 1992. MICHAEL GRIFFIN, REAPING THE WHIRLWIND: THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN 24-26 (2001).

38. *Id.*

39. *Id.* at 24.

40. *Id.* at 26.

41. *10,000 Killed in 8 Months in Kabul*, THE FRONTIER POST (Pakistan) Nov. 28, 1993, available at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/reports3.html>; James G. Ingalls, Western Interests in Afghanistan and their Consequences for Afghan People 4, (draft) available at http://www.asap-net.org/archive/new_afghan_us_1.pdf.

42. "Jihad" means striving or struggling in the way of God.

43. See, e.g., JOHN K. COOLEY, UNHOLY WARS 19-20 (1999) (citing an interview by Vincent Javert with Brzezinski from LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR). The original interview is available at <http://www.tao.ca/~solidarity/s11/brzezinski.html>.

44. *Id.*

45. AHMAD RASHID, TALIBAN: MILITANT ISLAM, OIL AND FUNDAMENTALISM IN CENTRAL ASIA 1-3 (2000).

comed in Afghanistan by the majority of the Afghan people because they were seen as an alternative to the Mujahadeen.⁴⁶ The Mujahadeen commanders lost no time in putting aside their differences to oppose the Taliban, now calling themselves the Northern Alliance. Fighting between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance continued to rage in Northern Afghanistan up until the late 2001 bombing campaign by the U.S. which toppled the Taliban.⁴⁷

During the Taliban's control between 1996 and 2001, security in Afghan cities improved drastically.⁴⁸ Bands of armed men patrolled the streets, ensuring that civilians complied with their laws.⁴⁹ While fighting still raged between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance in Northern Afghanistan, armed conflict was rare in cities under complete Taliban control, and a majority of the population was disarmed.⁵⁰ However, the Taliban rapidly showed their true colors by declaring *Sharia* laws that included a complete removal of women from society, strict Islamic dress code for men, and other ridiculous laws such as a ban on books, television, cameras, and radios.⁵¹ Faced with no way to earn a living, Afghan women silently wasted away inside their homes, depressed and suicidal.⁵² Many women turned to beggary and prostitution to survive.⁵³ Shazia, a thirty-seven year-old Afghan refugee who became a prostitute so she could afford medication for her sick child revealed that most of her customers were Taliban soldiers.⁵⁴ Under the Taliban, one half of the population virtually disappeared from society, appearing in public only under the shroud of the Afghan *burqa*.

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46. *Id.* at 2 (mentioning Afghans' hopes that Taliban control would be more like Afghanistan's leadership before 1979).
47. Pamela Constable Washington, *Many Witnesses Report Massacre by Taliban*, WASH. POST FOREIGN SERVICE, Feb. 19, 2001, at A25 ("The Hazara people of Yakaolang have seen much death, destruction and duplicity in the past several years as civil war has raged around them, with the ruling Taliban militia and its armed opponents [Northern Alliance] fighting for control of their region of north-central Afghanistan."); Dexter Filkins & Carlotta Gall, *A Nation Challenged: The Siege, Surrender of Taliban Begins at Final Northern Stronghold*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 25, 2001, at 1A (heralding the end of the Taliban regime).
48. *We Felt Safer Under Taliban, Say Kabul Residents*, HINDUSTAN TIMES, Jan. 25, 2002, [hereinafter *Taliban Safer*], available at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/unsafe.htm>; Suzanne Goldenberg, *Gun Terror of Kabul's Liberators: Northern Alliance Militia Loot and Plunder in Defiance of New Government's Deadline to Disarm*, THE OBSERVER, Jan. 13, 2002, available at <http://rawa.fancy-marketing.net/na-gun.htm> ("Loathed though they were for their repressive regime of religious zealotry, the Taliban earned the grudging respect of Afghans for their success in maintaining law and order, and guaranteeing security on the streets."). See also RASHID, *supra* note 45, at 1.
49. *Id.*
50. RASHID, *supra* note 45 at 1.
51. *Id.* at 93, 115.
52. *Id.* at 108-09.
53. *Newshour With Jim Lehrer: Women in Afghanistan* (PBS television broadcast, Nov. 21, 2001). Transcript available at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/july-dec01/afghanwomen_11-21.html.
54. WOMEN AND WAR (dir. Meena Nanji, Nov. 2001). Meena Nanji is an independent filmmaker who has twice visited RAWA in Pakistan and filmed the group's activities. She is currently working on a documentary about Afghan women.

Even after 1996, outside powers continued to shape Afghanistan's future. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates rushed to recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.⁵⁵ All three countries are close allies and major weapons customers of the United States. U.S. policy in the region was driven by U.S.-based oil company UNOCAL's hopes of building an oil and gas pipeline from Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean.⁵⁶ The Taliban remained in power, waging battle in the North against the Northern Alliance, and enforcing their medieval laws on civilians, until the bombing campaign of the U.S. toppled them in late 2001.

AFGHAN WOMEN'S STRUGGLES CONTINUE

[I]t is so unfortunate that all of the attention toward Afghanistan came just after the 11th of September. Before that it was the largest forgotten tragedy in the world. . . . We welcome the combat against terrorism and in fact this combat should have started years ago in terms of preventing incidents like 11th September. . . . [O]bviously the people of Afghanistan . . . have been the victims of the same hands for years, which never received any attention But this combat against terrorism cannot be by bombing this or that country.⁵⁷

It is, of course, richly ironic that the first achievement of the war on terrorism has been to install in Kabul the Northern Alliance, for whom terrorism has been the entire line of business and way of life for more than 20 years.⁵⁸

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States lost no time in launching an extensive and aggressive bombing campaign against Afghanistan ostensibly to root out suspect Osama bin Laden, who was thought to be hiding in the caves of Afghanistan under the protection of the Taliban. The worst victim of this bombing campaign was the Afghan civilian population.⁵⁹ Each week several instances of "errant

55. *Crisis of Impunity*, 13 HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH REPORT 1, 16 (July 2001), available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/afghan2/Afghan0701.pdf> [hereinafter *Crisis*]. See also *supra* note 43, at 145; RASHID, *supra* note 45, at 58.

56. RASHID, *supra* note 45, at 163 ("[T]he strategy over the pipelines had become the driving force behind Washington's interest in the Taliban.")

57. Sonali Kolhatkar, *Afghanistan: Twenty Years of Brutal War*, Z MAG., Jan. 2002, at 36-37 (quoting from an interview by Sonali Kolhatkar with RAWA Member Tahmeena Faryal).

58. Andrew Murray, *This Must Be the End*, THE GUARDIAN (London), Nov. 16, 2001, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/waronterror/story/0,1361,595483,00.html>.

59. Susan B. Glasser, *Afghans Live and Die With U.S. Mistakes: Villagers Tell of Over 100 Casualties*, WASH. POST, Feb. 20, 2002, at A1 (reporting on U.S. bombing casualties in situations where more civilians died than did Taliban soldiers), available at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/100killed.htm>.

bombs" hitting villages full of people were reported. Reports of the civilian death toll range from 1000⁶⁰ to 4000.⁶¹

The broader consequences of the deadly bombs on the Afghan people were predictable: starvation, homelessness, displacement and other traumas of war continue to afflict women and children at a fatal pace.⁶² When President Bush addressed the nation on January 29th, he claimed that "our nation has . . . destroyed Afghanistan's terrorist training camps, saved a people from starvation, and freed a country from brutal oppression."⁶³ However, an examination of news reports from Afghanistan contradicts his claims. During the bombing campaign, it was the U.S. alone who hampered efforts to transport aid to Afghans. Aid agencies implored the U.S. to pause in the bombing to allow food distribution.⁶⁴ Five countries offered to send international troops to provide security for food delivery to populations at risk of starvation.⁶⁵ In both cases, the United States refused to allow the act of feeding Afghans to interfere with its bombing campaign.⁶⁶ The lives of millions of Afghan men and women were risked, and final numbers of how many died in rural areas and hard-to-reach mountain villages will never be known.

President Bush's claim to have "freed a country from brutal oppression" is also highly questionable. According to a recent AFP report, "[j]ust 10 weeks after the Taliban fled Kabul city, Afghans are already starting to say they felt safer under the now-defeated hardline militia than under the power-sharing interim administration that has replaced it."⁶⁷ Afghan women are once more fearful to leave their homes as reports of rapes increase in areas where factional fighting is occurring. BBC reporter Zubeida Malik reported recently from Afghanistan:

Noor, a doctor in a women's hospital told me, "it isn't safe for women to go out now" Afghans are now making their way to the border with Pakistan at Peshawar and Quetta in their thousands. It's not just U.S. bombing they are trying to escape, but the looting, killing and rape that has been un-

60. *Afghans Are Still Dying as Air Strikes Go On. But No One Is Counting*, THE GUARDIAN (UK), Feb. 12, 2002, (citing Carl Conetta of the Commonwealth Institute's Afghan civilian death toll figures), available at <http://www.refuseandresist.org/newwar/021202bombings.html>.

61. Press Release, Common Dreams, 3,500 Civilians Killed in Afghanistan by U.S. Bombs (Mar. 16, 2002), available at <http://www.commondreams.org/news2001/1210-01.htm>.

62. Amnesty Int'l (New Zealand section), OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT, available at <http://www.amnesty.org.nz/Publicdo.nsf/bf25ab0f47ba5dd785256499006b15a4/19ea55f5787204abcc256ae5007177ce!OpenDocument>.

63. President George W. Bush, *supra* note 3.

64. Press Release, Oxfam Int'l, Time is Running Out (Oct. 17, 2001) (on file with author).

65. *White House Says No International Peacekeepers in Afghanistan Until War Ends*, ASSOCIATED PRESS, Nov. 30, 2001, available at <http://multimedia.belointeractive.com/attack/middleeast/1130white.html>.

66. *U.S. Air Strike Destroys U.N. Food Convoy in Afghanistan*, HINDUSTAN TIMES, Nov. 12, 2001, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/nonfram/121101/dLAME53.asp>.

67. *Taliban Safer*, *supra* note 48.

leashed upon them. The retreat of the Taliban has led to the return of the warlords and of ethnic rivalries.⁶⁸

The warlords are also hijacking relief convoys and stealing food meant to aid starving Afghans.⁶⁹

As a result, aid agencies are seeing more, not fewer, refugees flowing into Pakistan after the fall of the Taliban.⁷⁰ Women are particularly vulnerable among refugees as a significant number are single mothers who care for several children. Among the refugees interviewed by Human Rights Watch in November 2001, was B.J., a widow who, with her five children, fled U.S. bombs two weeks earlier. She told Human Rights Watch that bombs fell near her house and many people were killed and injured. Her brother-in-law died in Kabul when a bomb hit his house, and one of his daughters was injured in the head and her hand was broken. "I am going to the new camp because my children are very hungry and they have nothing to eat. I can't work, I have no choice, I must go. . . . I have no husband to go and ask questions for me. . . . We think we may not be safe there. We will have to escape if it is not safe."⁷¹

The violence suffered by Afghan women as a result of the U.S. military action may not be limited to the bombings' direct effects now that the Northern Alliance has regained power. The Northern Alliance claims that they have changed their stance on the issue of women's rights, despite their documented crimes against women from 1992 to 1996.⁷² Even if the security situation in Afghanistan stabilizes, what kind of a future awaits Afghan women in terms of basic access to health and education? Under Northern Alliance rule, just prior to the fall of the Taliban, Afghan women were barely better off than under the Taliban.⁷³

Today Afghanistan is governed by a delegation heavily tilted toward the Northern Alliance, led by Hamid Karzai, who was hand-picked by the U.S. during negotiations in Bonn, Germany late last year.⁷⁴ Delegates in

68. Zubeida Malik, *Better the Devil You Know?*, THE ECOLOGIST, Feb. 2002, available at <http://www.theecologist.co.uk/article.html?article=227>.

69. C. J. Chivers with Elizabeth Becker, *Aid Groups Say Warlords Steal as Needy Wait*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 4, 2002, available at <http://college3.nytimes.com/guests/articles/2002/01/04/892837.xml>.

70. National Council of Churches, *Pakistan is Seeing More, Not Fewer Afghan Refugees*, CWS Reports, National Council of Churches News, Jan. 25, 2002, at <http://www.ncccusa.org/news/02news7.html> (last visited Mar. 17, 2002).

71. *Pakistan: Refugees Not Moving Voluntarily. Testimony from Refugees in New Jalozai and Kotkai Camp, Pakistan*, Human Rights Watch, Dec. 5, 2001, at <http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/12/afghtestimony1205.htm> (last visited Mar. 17, 2002).

72. *Crisis*, supra note 55, at 21-22. Note that the Northern Alliance initially called itself the United Front.

73. David Rohde, *Education Offers Women in Northern Afghanistan a Ray of Hope*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 3, 2001, at B6 ("Here at least they can ride in the backs of trucks if a man deigns to let them. They can shop in the market, although they are allowed to speak to male shopkeepers only if it is absolutely necessary. And they can go to school, even if the list of professions they can choose from is small—teacher, for instance, or midwife.")

74. Drew Brown & Sudarsan Raghavan, *Afghan Unity Faces Old Obstacles*, PIONEER PRESS, Jan. 21, 2002, available at <http://www.prod.twincities.com/mld/pioneerpress/news/nation/2505476.htm>.

Bonn chose a different leader, Abdul Sattar Sirat, to head the interim government, but pressure from American and United Nations officials resulted in the naming of Mr. Karzai and others to ministerial positions.⁷⁵ Unfortunately for Afghan women, Mr. Karzai is implicated on both sides of Afghanistan's modern fundamentalist camps. He supported the Taliban and served as deputy foreign minister in the first brutal Mujahadeen government.⁷⁶

As President Bush addressed the nation, he also claimed that "[t]oday women are free, and are part of Afghanistan's new government."⁷⁷ It is true that a handful of women were recently appointed to serious governmental positions, particularly to those that concern women's rights. However, Medea Benjamin of the human rights organization Global Exchange, after visiting with women's groups in Afghanistan, said:

While it is a positive development that several women were asked to participate in the Bonn talks on the transition government, the women were selected by the male delegates in a completely undemocratic fashion. We met many women who felt that several of the women delegates were selected primarily due to family connections. Women's groups that have been on the forefront of defending women's rights under the reign of the Taliban were not invited.⁷⁸

Such groups include the women of RAWA who have had over two decades of experience in community building, educating, healing, and organizing. There are experienced, able women who could have been selected to help run the country.⁷⁹ While an invitation was extended to one

75. Norimitsu Onishi, *G.I.'s Had Crucial Role in Battle for Kandahar*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 15, 2001, at A1 ("Members of a group representing the former king, Mohammed Zahir Shah, voted overwhelmingly to choose Abdul Sattar Sirat as head of the new government. . . . Mr. Karzai who has close ties to the king, received no votes."). See also, David Rohde, *When the Combat Ends, Another Struggle Looms*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 16, 2001, at B3 ("A Western diplomat confirmed this week that delegates in Bonn chose a different leader, Abdul Sattar Sirat to head the interim government. Pressure from American and United Nations officials resulted in the naming of Mr. Karzai and the selection of ministerial positions.").

76. *Hamid Karzai No Stranger to Leadership*, CNN online, Dec. 20 2001, at <http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/12/21/ret.karzai.profile/> ("But he grew weary of the fierce infighting between rival Afghan factions and initially supported the Taliban, who tried to name him as their ambassador to the United Nations."); Interview by Tricia Fitzgerald with Professor Amin Saikal, Australian National University (May 12, 2001), available at http://abc.net.au/ra/asiapac/features/AsiaPacFeatures_433262.htm ("Hamid Karzai who's also been a distinguished Afghan Mujahadeen during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and then subsequently he served as the deputy foreign minister under the first Mujahadeen government. . . .").

77. President George W. Bush, *supra* note 3.

78. MEDEA BENJAMIN, RECONSTRUCTING AFGHANISTAN: STATEMENT BY GLOBAL EXCHANGE WOMEN'S DELEGATION TO THE REGION (2001), available at <http://www.commondreams.org/views01/1206-07.htm>.

79. Janelle Brown, *Any Day Now: Afghan Women Hope to Use The Momentum of International Recognition To Secure Civil Rights and a Role in Government*, SALON.COM, Dec. 3, 2001, ("The Afghan women who emerge as politicians will not be unprepared to serve. Despite the fact that women largely were effaced from society by the Taliban, they have a history of political and professional involvement prior to that time."), at http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/2001/12/03/afghan_women/print.html.

RAWA member to attend talks as part of the former king's delegation, pressure from the fundamentalists at the table, and from members of the king's delegation itself, barred her from registering as a representative of RAWA.⁸⁰

How does the new government intend to address the needs of Afghan women? As part of a call by the United National Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to improve women's leadership in Afghanistan, one recommendation of high priority was that "an independent judiciary based on the rule of law must protect women's rights."⁸¹ Unfortunately for Afghan women, the interim government, like their Taliban predecessors, intends on running Afghanistan according to Islamic *Sharia* law.⁸² Afghan women are told to breathe easier though, as the version of *Sharia* law practiced will be milder. The interim government's Judge Ahamat Ullha Zarif revealed in an interview recently that *Sharia* law would be practiced as before, except that the new administration will use smaller stones to kill adulterers than the Taliban did, and bodies of publicly hanged people will be displayed for only fifteen minutes rather than the four days required by Taliban law.⁸³ In the context of such progress, one can only wonder how Afghan women will regain their rights.

As it did when arming the Taliban's fundamentalist predecessors, the U.S. continues to refuse responsibility for the fate of Afghans, and especially Afghan women, who are suffering under the dire consequences of the United States' "War on Terror." As bombs dropped on Afghanistan, one American government advisor, Richard Perle, said of foreign responsibility, "I don't think any outside power has a responsibility in Afghanistan. People have to take responsibility for their own destiny."⁸⁴ This remark was made as though the women and children of Afghanistan who were killed by U.S. bombs in their villages should have known better than to live there. Would we likewise have held those who were killed in the World Trade Center responsible for their fates?

As this Commentary goes to press, the picture for Afghan men, women, and children looks bleak, despite the rhetoric of liberation that has smothered mainstream American media. The responsibility lies

80. Stephanie Coop, Editorial, *Sowing the Seeds of Revolution*, THE JAPAN TIMES ONLINE, Dec. 18, 2001, (quoting a RAWA interview with THE JAPAN TIMES), available at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/geted.pl5?eo20011218a2.htm>.

81. Press Release, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UNIFEM calls for \$12 Million to Support Women's Leadership in Reconstruction in Afghanistan (Jan. 24, 2002), available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/480fa8736b88bbc3c12564f6004c8ad5/0818cb38f3a12af28256b4b00762397?OpenDocument>.

82. *Stone Me! The Law's Gone Soft*, SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, Dec. 29, 2001, available at <http://www.smh.com.au/news/0112/29/world/world8.html>.

83. *Id.*

84. Natasha Walter, *These Refugees Are Our Responsibility*, THE INDEP. (UK), Nov. 22, 2001, available at <http://www.commondreams.org/views01/1122-05.htm> ("If it were not for the missiles sent into Kandahar and Kunduz, the children wouldn't have had to take to the roads.").

heavily on Americans to pay close attention to the plight of Afghans, given the United States' dominant and destructive role in Afghanistan over the last two decades. We must, first and foremost, support those elements in Afghanistan that have a history of peace, not war.

RAWA AS A MODEL FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

*Foremost in the struggle [for women's rights] was the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) formed in 1977. RAWA organized women through successive regimes to resist their oppression, by non-violent methods. It organized underground schools and health facilities for girls and women, and support and succor for rape victims, even in the refugee camps in Peshawar and Quetta.*⁸⁵

*The key to the emancipation of Afghanistan from the fetters of fundamentalism lies in our united struggle. . . . As long as the curse of fundamentalism lies on the land, Afghanistan can never be free. Liberty, unity, national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Afghan homeland is only conceivable when the abomination of fundamentalism has been eradicated and the cessation of foreign interference becomes possible. . . .*⁸⁶

I began educating myself about the situation of Afghan women in Spring of 2000 after finding the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) on the Internet. Not only was I stunned by what I saw on www.rawa.org, but I was impressed greatly by the fact that a small group of revolutionary women on the other side of the world were using internet technology to educate the world about the suffering of Afghans, and of Afghan women in particular. I began discovering the disturbing complicity of the U.S. government in empowering misogynist fundamentalism in Afghanistan. The Afghan people were a broken people and, under Taliban rule, there seemed very little hope for them. I began communicating with RAWA in the summer of 2000, and met Steve Penners, RAWA's most dedicated U.S. supporter. Steve and I met with RAWA members visiting the U.S. for the first time, organized speaking tours for them, and pledged to help them reopen Malalai Hospital for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Although scores of highly educated and experienced medical staff were available, the resources were scarce.

85. Rasil Basu, *The Rape of Afghanistan*, Z MAG., Dec. 30, 2001, available at <http://www.zmag.org/basurape.htm>. Rasil Basu was the Senior Advisor to the Afghan government for Women's Development, United Nations Development Program from 1986-1988.

86. *Victory to the Anti-Fundamentalist Struggle of Afghan Women!: An International Women's Day Resolution*, Revolutionary Ass'n of the Women of Afghanistan [hereinafter RAWA] (on file with author), available at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/8emarch.htm> (Mar. 8, 1998).

Afghanistan, as RAWA declared, was a "challenge to the world's conscience."⁸⁷

Today, hope for the women of Afghanistan lies not in the token women who were chosen undemocratically to represent their fellow Afghan women in government, but rather in a grassroots women's movement which attempts to overcome societal prejudices on women's own terms. RAWA members are at the forefront of this movement. A year prior to the Soviet invasion, a visionary activist and feminist named Meena founded RAWA.⁸⁸ Since RAWA's inception, RAWA members have struggled for women's rights and human rights through education and public dissent.⁸⁹ Its members strongly denounced the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and have been openly critical of all fundamentalist warlords including the Taliban and their opposition, the Northern Alliance.⁹⁰ In RAWA's own words, the organizational goals and objectives are:

To struggle against . . . fundamentalists and their foreign masters. To establish freedom, democracy, peace and women's rights in Afghanistan. To establish an elected secularist government based on democratic values. To unite all freedom-loving and democratic force[s] and to struggle against all those who collaborate with the fundamentalists. To struggle against those traitors who want to disintegrate Afghanistan by causing tribal and religious wars. To launch educational, health care and income generation projects in and outside the country. To support the freedom-loving movements all over the world.⁹¹

RAWA's work in the field is devoted to these goals. The members comprise the oldest independent political women's organization in Afghanistan that agitates actively against anti-woman fundamentalism. As part of their work, the women of RAWA document closely human rights violations and publish them in their print magazine, *Payam-e-Zaan*,⁹² and on their website. RAWA's secret videos of a woman being executed by the Taliban were a shocking confirmation of the Taliban's policies.⁹³ Additionally, RAWA members interview hundreds of refugees and record their stories and eye-witness reports. This rare archive of evidence may be an important tool for the future prosecution of war criminals in Afghanistan.

87. *Caption: Reports from Afghanistan*, RAWA, at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/reports3.html> (last visited Mar. 16, 2002).

88. *About RAWA*, RAWA, at <http://rawa.false.net/rawa.html> (last visited Mar. 17, 2002).

89. RAWA, *Burst Bubble*, *supra* note 29.

90. *See Brown*, *supra* note 79.

91. *Our Goals and Objectives*, RAWA, at <http://www.rawa.fancymarketing.net/goals.htm> (last visited Mar. 17, 2002).

92. "Payam-e-Zaan" means "Women's Message" in Farsi and Dari.

93. *BEHIND THE VEIL* (Saira Shah, BBC documentary, broadcast June 27, 2001).

RAWA members also organize yearly demonstrations in which thousands of women march in the streets of Pakistan wielding anti-fundamentalist signs and banners.⁹⁴ The photos of RAWA's marches run counter to our image of mute and powerless Afghan women, hidden under a *burqa* and unable to fight back. RAWA members supplement their political agitation with periodic public statements on issues affecting Afghan human rights.⁹⁵ They also actively lobby international bodies such as the United Nations on behalf of Afghan women. One RAWA member, Tahmeena Faryal, told me: "RAWA has been calling for years for UN intervention [peacekeeping forces] in Afghanistan, in order to disarm the armed groups in Afghanistan as well as to sanction, militarily, the countries that supply arms and financial support to the Taliban and the Northern Alliance."⁹⁶

RAWA's members now warn consistently of the crimes committed by those who comprise the Northern Alliance, assailing their "freedom fighting" image in the U.S. media. The women of RAWA declared:

Though the [Northern Alliance] has learned how to pose sometimes before the West as 'democratic' and even a supporter of women's rights, in fact they have not at all changed, as a leopard cannot change its spots. . . . We would like to emphatically ask the UN to send its effective peace-keeping force into the country before the NA can repeat the unforgettable crimes they committed in the said years.⁹⁷

Unfortunately, RAWA's words have been completely ignored by the United Nations.

Consistent with their goals of freedom and peace, the members of RAWA are also active in humanitarian work. It is RAWA's belief that there can be no democracy without an educated and healthy population. After the assassination of their leader Meena, RAWA moved their operations to Pakistan⁹⁸ where a majority of the approximately 2.6 million Afghan refugees reside.⁹⁹ RAWA's work in the refugee camps of Pakistan forms the basis of members' vision for Afghan. Scores of *watan*¹⁰⁰ schools for young boys and girls provide much-needed education. Mobile

94. *RAWA Stages Protest Rally on International Human Rights Day*, RAWA, at <http://rawa.false.net/dec10-01.htm> (last visited Mar. 17, 2002).

95. *Recent Reports from Fundamentalism-Blighted Afghanistan*, RAWA, at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/recent2.htm> (last visited Mar. 17, 2002).

96. Kolhatkar, *supra* note 57, at 36.

97. *Statement: The People of Afghanistan Do Not Accept Domination of the Northern Alliance!*, RAWA, at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/na-appeal.htm> (Nov. 13, 2001).

98. Julia Scheeres, *Risking All to Expose the Taliban*, WIRE MAGAZINE, Aug. 10, 2001, available at <http://www.wired.com/news/print/0,1294,45974,00.html>.

99. Pam O'Toole, *Afghan Refugees' Unending Plight*, BBC NEWS, Jan. 11, 2001, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_1112000/1112821.stm.

100. "Watan" means "homeland" in many languages, including Urdu, Farsi and Arabic.

health clinics, and more recently, Malalai Hospital, administered and run by RAWA, provide a small but stable source of health care to Afghan women and children refugees.¹⁰¹

RAWA's unique ability to make the most of what little they have is astonishing. With no government funds, thus relying almost entirely on the generosity of individuals, RAWA's health and educational facilities are sparse but functional. Classrooms consist of four mud walls and a tarpaulin drawn over four poles to provide shelter. A small black board and poster of Meena on the wall adds finishing touches. Into this squeeze thirty or so boys or girls with one teacher who expounds on history, geography, and the benefits of secular democracy.

RAWA has also provided a haven for many women. Filmmaker Meena Nanji visited RAWA's refugee camps in Pakistan in 2000 and witnessed the positive difference they were making to the lives of women. One refugee named Mariam said: "RAWA helped me and brought me here. I didn't know what I was living for. Taliban controlled our village, each second passed on me just like a whole day. If RAWA didn't help me I might have killed myself because I was fed up of [sic] this life."¹⁰²

At a typical RAWA committee meeting, Nanji witnessed RAWA's attempts at helping two women, one who had tried to commit suicide, and another who was forced into marriage with a much older man. RAWA members discussed ways in which they could help these women through mediation and advice. And then, one member declared,

Our struggle is not for individuals or to rescue just one person . . . and think that we have done our job but we should try to help the whole society, to find the root of these suicides and find out why this is going on [when] people . . . want to [bid] farewell [to] this world.¹⁰³

RAWA's work within Afghanistan is comprehensive and uncompromising even when the challenges and risks are greatest. While most Afghan women languished inside their homes during the Taliban reign, a few were able to avail themselves of RAWA's clandestine schools inside Afghanistan. Said Zoya, a member of RAWA, during the Taliban rule, "We encourage people to learn to read and write. But our teachers have to give secret lessons in people's homes. We'll have a copy of the Koran on the table, and if the Taliban arrive we immediately hide the textbooks. That way, we can say we're studying the Koran."¹⁰⁴

101. Anne-Marie O'Connor, *Afghan Activist Speaks Out on Plight of Women; Human Rights*, L.A. TIMES, Nov. 12, 2001, at B3, available at <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-111201rawa.story>.

102. Video footage of refugee camps in Pakistan (Meena Nanji, 2000) (transcript on file with author, used with special permission).

103. *Id.*

104. *A Day in the Life of Zoya*, SUNDAY TIMES (UK), Aug. 5, 2001, (quoting an interview with Zoya, a 23-year-old RAWA activist), available at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/stimes2.htm>.

RAWA members routinely distribute emergency relief supplies to newly arrived refugees in the desolate camps along the Pakistan border with Afghanistan. RAWA is one of the only organizations to insist upon personally distributing all emergency aid to refugees rather than relying on Pakistani camp officials who routinely pilfer goods. In return, Pakistani camp officials have refused to provide security for RAWA members when they deliver emergency aid.¹⁰⁵ During last year's bitter winter, RAWA's blanket distribution in Jalozei camp was mobbed by thousands of desperately cold refugees.¹⁰⁶ As a solution, RAWA members visited families before distributing the blankets, identified the most needy people, mostly women and children, and gave them coupons with which to redeem life-saving blankets the next day at a designated time and place. RAWA members also distribute wheat flour, cooking oil, and learning materials, such as pencils and notebooks, among newly-arrived refugees.¹⁰⁷

These humanitarian efforts are carried out at extreme personal risk. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, most projects administered by RAWA are entirely underground operations. Some members move from one home to another every few months to maintain their secrecy while others permanently live amongst the refugees they help.

At the heart of RAWA's analysis is the reasoning that fundamentalism itself, as a concept and an institution, is the root of the problems in Afghanistan. RAWA's tenets of non-violence, freedom of religion, secularism, and full equality for women have always been rightfully perceived as a threat to fundamentalist Islamic warlords.¹⁰⁸ In 1987, the founder and leader of RAWA, Meena, was found brutally murdered by a Mujahadeen warrior in collaboration with the Soviet KGB.¹⁰⁹ Meena, a woman who struggled to end women's oppression on women's own terms, was perceived as a threat by both the fundamentalists and the occupying force that was ostensibly there to further women's rights.

105. Private communication with RAWA (Dec. 2000). I was able to confirm this information when I saw video footage of a blanket distribution at Jalozei camp. The video showed the RAWA distribution center being mobbed by refugees.

106. *Id.*

107. *Id.*

108. A December 10, 2000 rally on International Human Rights Day in Islamabad, Pakistan, organized by RAWA, was attacked by supporters of the Taliban and Islamic militants in Kashmir. An array of reports from Pakistani newspapers can be found at <http://rawasongs.fancymarketing.net/28against.htm>. RAWA's April 28, 1998 rally in Peshawar, Pakistan was also attacked. Behroz Khan, *Police Restrain Taliban Attacking RAWA Procession*, THE NEWS, Apr. 29, 1998, available at <http://www.rawa.org/28press1.htm>. Most recently, on December 10, 2001, RAWA's demonstration against the interim government was thwarted when bus loads of RAWA members and other Afghan women were prevented from reaching the demonstration destination. Mustafa Ali, *RAWA Cavalcade Stopped at Attock*, THE NEWS INT'L, Dec. 11, 2001, available at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/dec10-01p.htm>.

109. AMNESTY INT'L, WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN: A HUMAN RIGHTS CATASTROPHE (1995), available at <http://www.amnesty.se/women/23ea.htm> [hereinafter AI, WOMEN]; April Thompson, *The Real Freedom Fighters*, 36 WOMEN'S INT'L NET MAG. (Oct. 2000), at <http://www.geocities.com/Wellesley/3340/win-rawa.htm> (last visited Mar. 16, 2002).

Today, RAWA's work continues to be seen as a threatening force to those who want to maintain their domination over Afghanistan.¹¹⁰ The former Taliban and Northern Alliance have branded RAWA members as communists, infidels, and prostitutes for their views and work. Women working to abolish fundamentalism have been beaten, raped, tortured, had their homes ransacked, and seen their husbands and children killed in front of them. Yet RAWA's independence and decades of dedicated work on behalf of Afghan women have been recognized the world over. They have won numerous awards,¹¹¹ had their crucial work covered widely by the international media, and gained the respect and admiration of thousands of individuals.

It is easy to see why the women of RAWA provide hope for the people of Afghanistan. A year and a half after my involvement with RAWA, Malalai Hospital is now open and running through RAWA's vision and dedication.¹¹² RAWA's fierce independence and successful attempts at self-sufficiency are an inspiring example of the paths women can take to empower themselves even under the most oppressive of regimes. What sets RAWA apart from other organizations is that they are one of the only Afghan groups that I have come across to link the political and the humanitarian. The Afghan women of RAWA do not need to be "liberated," they simply need our moral and financial support to realize their vision. In RAWA's words and actions lie the hope for positive change in Afghanistan. Reporter Isabel Hilton described a refugee camp in Pakistan where RAWA is active, as "a peaceful rural village" with "hopes of education for girls, of democracy and peace, [and] faded memories of a time in Afghanistan when teachers taught in schools and doctors attended to their patients. . . ."¹¹³

To this day RAWA is the oldest political women's organization in Afghanistan to link fundamentalism and women's oppression, and has consistently called for a secular democratic government. RAWA's work and message of peace and democracy must be an integral part of any discussion concerning Afghanistan. It is a travesty that powerful countries like the United States and international bodies such as the United Nations

110. AI, WOMEN, *supra* note 109.

111. RAWA Gets HR Prize, NETWORK NEWS INT'L, Apr. 16, 2000, available at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/prize-pr.htm> (Human Rights Prize from the French National Assembly); *Glamour Award Includes Afghan Revolutionary*, JEFFERSON CITY NEWS TRIB., Oct. 31, 2001, (Glamour Magazine's "Women of the Year" Award), available at http://www.newstribune.com/stories/103101/ent_1031010912.asp; *Sixth Asian Human Rights Award*, JAPAN TIMES, Dec. 18, 2001, available at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/geted.p15?eo20011218a2.htm>; Press Release, ZDF, Afghan Women Awarded 'Mona-Lisa' Award, Nov. 24, 2000, (Mona-Lisa award, a "Woman of the Year" award given by ZDF, a major German television station), available at <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/monalisa.htm>.

112. *Malalai Hospital is Now Open!*, Afghan Women's Mission, at <http://www.afghanwomensmission.org/programs/health/> (last visited Mar. 18, 2002).

113. Isabel Hilton, *The Pashtun Code*, NEW YORKER, Dec. 3, 2001, available at http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?011203fa_FACT1.

only support those who fight with violent means for power over the country. These very groups are brought to the peace table while non violent pro-democracy groups such as RAWA are ignored. Today the U.S. government has installed the very men who were responsible for destroying Afghanistan and killing Afghans before the Taliban took over. Promoting RAWA and ithe ideals of RAWA—not continuing the armanent of known terrorists—must be the focus of any agenda to help bring peace to Afghanistan.