

How did the socio-economic position of the Afghan women evolve throughout the past ten years and how have the recent initiatives of both the EU and UN contributed to the current position of these women?



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Executive Summary

After 2001, nine years after the fall of the Taliban, women's socio-economic position in Afghanistan has hardly improved. To this day, women are subjected to many cruelties such as torture and rape. After the Taliban had been defeated in 2001, the total amount of development assistance by the international community to Afghanistan has increased rapidly. Millions and millions of foreign aid money has been pumped into the country in order to improve and rebuild Afghanistan and to strive for a more coherent democracy. An Afghanistan, where women will be able to obtain fair chances, to participate within their own society, the ability to hold a governmental function, to attend school and the right to proper health care.

UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) and Human Rights Watch point out the "severe problem" of rape in Afghanistan. "Women and girls are at risk of being raped in their house in their village," said UNAMA, and that happens' in all parts of the country, among all social groups. Victims are at risk of being prosecuted for 'adultery'. More than 50% of these women are in prison because of this.

Both organizations attribute the decline in women's rights largely to two causes: the return of the Taliban (and thereby increased violence), and indifference with the authorities. Because the government in Kabul is weak, according to HRW, they rely more on "fundamentalist and conservative factions" that are not interested in women's rights.

In order to ameliorate the socio-economic position of Afghan women, many international donors are committed to improve this country's situation through their bilateral agreement and development aid. Two key donors are the European Union and the United Nations. Some of them even have established their offices in Afghanistan for over more than 20 years ago. Most of the donor countries and institutions have initiated special programmes to promote a gender balanced society and improve women's situation. Some of them succeeded, some of them failed.

However, the number of women active in State Service, according to the HRW report, declined from 31 per cent in 2006 to 21 percent in 2009. Most of them work at lower positions in departments such as Education, Health and Women. The number of women ministers has dropped from three to one, only the Ministry of Women Affairs is still run by a woman.

According to a report published by UNAMA in 2009, public life is increasingly unsafe for women. Because of the frequently threats and attacks women are more likely to stay at home.

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List of Abbreviations

AAP	Annual Action Plan
ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
CEED	Community Empowerment & Economic Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EU EOM	European Union Election Observation Mission
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IEC	Independent Election Commission
MOWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
MS	Member States
NAPWA	National Action Plan for the Women in Afghanistan
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NIP	National Indicative Program
NRVA	National Risk & Vulnerability Assessment
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PDPA	People Democratic Party of Afghanistan
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNSCR	United Nation Security Council Resolution
WFP	World Food Program

Introduction

Introduction of the topic

The life of women in Afghanistan has traditionally not been easy. The power of male family members is, to such an extent, that large that they barely have the opportunity to make decisions themselves. During the years when King Amanullah (1919-1929) was in power, women's lives had changed positively (WfWI, 2009, p.12). However, with the advent of the Taliban, their position changed radically.

Women in Afghanistan have hardly any rights, are generally not allowed to go to school and may only leave their homes unless fully covered (i.e. wearing the burqa). This is generally the way the Afghan women are being portrayed by the media. However, to which extent is it a nucleus of truth? It is a fact that women's rights in Afghanistan are being violated. Moreover, these women are subjected to many cruelties such as rape, assault and battery. These women have been the subject of discussion for many years now. Their socio-economic position has been and is much debated.

After the fall of the Taliban, everyone thought that women's position in Afghanistan would soon be improved; however, nothing is farther from the truth. Today women are still oppressed and suffer much opposition. Even in contemporary society it is still impossible for these women to hold a good position within the Afghan society or even for young girls to attend school.

Nevertheless, in these past few years the international community has lobbied and advocated as well as initiated many new projects and activities. Both the European Union and the United Nations clearly show their involvement in Afghanistan and the Afghan people. Many efforts have been made by the international community attempting to improve the current socio-economic position of Afghan women. Although many hurdles remain, Afghan women remain hopeful for a prosperous future.

Aim and Research question

The purpose of my dissertation is to give an insight into the development of the socio-economic position of Afghan women, examining the history of Afghan women till their position in contemporary society. Furthermore, an in-depth study will be executed regarding the involvement of both the European Union and United Nations at the same time; recent projects initiated by these two major donors will be further explored.

This brings me to my research question : *How did the socio-economic position of the Afghan women evolve throughout the years and how have the recent initiatives of both the EU and UN helped contributing to the current position of the these women?*

In chapter one, an analysis will be given of the women's history in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the key events will be discussed that were relevant to Afghan women. In doing so, the situation will be able to understood better.

In chapter two, the current status of Afghan women will attend to the matter. A closer look will be taken at two key events that recently had taken place. Furthermore, the socio-economic conditions of the women will be examined thoroughly.

In chapter three, the initiatives from both, the European Union and its institutions as well as the United Nations and its various bodies will be up for discussion and analyzed. This will ensure that a clear list of actions and measures can be found in this chapter.

In chapter four, recommendations will be offered that will help to improve the current socio-economic position of Afghan women. These recommendations urge the government of Afghanistan and the international community to take actions in order to improve women's status.

Finally, a conclusion will be given to summarize this final paper. And attempt will be made to answer the research question.

Research methods

For this dissertation, the main methodology has been desk research, using both primary and secondary sources. Both sources will ensure that all the different point of views will be addressed. In recent period, a vast amount of new documents have appeared on the Internet. Therefore, the importance of filtering all the information is of an essence. The variety of reports, news articles, press releases and other documentation will allow me to give a clear overview of the socio-economic position of Afghan women. Most of the desk research will focus on a variety of recent books, reports and press releases. Some of the reports that were quite helpful derive from the World Bank, European Commission and the Human Rights Watch. Furthermore, other relevant articles and press releases will be consulted and in case of relevancy this paper will be provided with quotations.

Chapter 1 History of women in Afghanistan

Introduction

If we look at the history of Afghanistan it shows that it is one of the few countries in the world where important people such as kings and politicians were formed and ‘destroyed’ when it came to women’s issues in Afghanistan. Furthermore, it would be unrealistic to link the status of the women in Afghanistan only to the Taliban, because if we observe the history of this country you will soon come to realize that, even before the Taliban arose, the subjugation of women already occurred (Ahmed-Gosh, 2003, p.1). Set forth below an analysis will be given of the women’s situation in Afghanistan throughout history.

Before the early state formation will be discussed I would like to explain to which extent tribal powers have an influence within the country and in particular for these women. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country and known for its variety of ethnic, religious, and tribal groups wherein none of these groups form a majority of the population. However, the *Pashtun* can be seen as the largest tribal group within Afghanistan followed by *Shia Muslim Hazara*. According to Dr. Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, for women in rural Afghanistan, control over the lives of all the tribes and gender roles are determined by patriarchal kinship arrangements. These kinship relationships are derived from the Quran and tribal traditions where men exercise unmitigated power over women (Ahmed-Gosh, 2003).

This chapter aims to describe and analyze some important events that occurred in the history of Afghanistan pertaining to Afghan women.

§ 1.1 Early state formation

During the 19th century the country was mostly dominated by a *Pashtun*- monarchy and consequently dependant on both the military and political support of the *Pashtun* tribes. The support was mainly through mutual agreements, “ensuring tribal cooperation in return for patronage from the centre” (WfWI, 2009, p.12). Nevertheless the state was able to temper these tribes which resulted in the fragmentation of certain territories. “The transition from a fragmented, patrimonial state to a unitary, bureaucratic nation-state began in 1880 under Abdur Rahman, the *Iron Amir*” (WfWI, 2009, p. 12). He was the one who created the Supreme Council, this is the highest judicial body in Afghanistan, but also the cabinet and a parliament, this is called in Afghanistan a *Loya Jirga*. Furthermore, some other reforms implemented by Abdur Rahman had a positive consequence on the women. Some examples of these reforms are amongst others: a civil code, the introduction of a clergy (appointed by the state) resulting in a more diminished

independence of the so-called *mullahs* which are religious officials. In the time span of 1919-1929, King Amanullah had tried several times to implement various reforms to modernize the country, such as promoting parity between men and women and making education obligatory for all Afghan women. Consequently, resistance from the tribes took place as a counter-plea of the *mullahs* who were against the 'new' socio-economic position of the women within the society. This ended up causing the fall of the King in 1929.

“For the next three decades, many of the reforms begun by Amanullah were abandoned, and the Musahiban regime achieved a workable compromise ‘between the competing interest groups of the state, traditional power groups, and an elite of bureaucrats and educated middle class’ (WfWI, 2009, p.12).

§ 1.2 Daoud's Republic and Soviet Invasion

In 1953, Mohammed Daoud became Prime Minister and at that time there was a huge demand for reforms. A significant difference was that, unlike Amanullah, Daoud did not alienate the religious powers. “Unlike Amanullah, Daoud did not immediately alienate the religious establishment” (WfWI, 2009, p.13). Due to the fact that he had focussed more on projects and infrastructure within the country he was able to succeed with his modernization plans, with the help of the US and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, due to his approach, Daoud was able to appropriate the rights of women to a more modern stage. He was also able to make a significant change in the roles of the *mullahs* in relation to women. After this, he entered a period where he started making the same mistakes Amanullah made. He tried to push through his changes without making sure all parties would agree with these decisions. Consequently, “he failed to codify his programme in a way acceptable to the predominantly traditional and Islamic society. To vindicate his claims of modernisation he extended social rights to women and granted them equal rights in the constitution. But by undermining all the representative institutions and denying political freedoms to the bulk of Afghan citizens, Daoud isolated his already fragile government” (WfWI, 2009, p.13).

“On April 27, 1978, in the so-called Saur (April) Revolution, the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) overthrew Daoud and began to implement a communist regime” (WfWI, 2009, p.14). Due to the dependence of the Soviet Union on Afghanistan, some Afghan people started a *jihad* (holy war). The Soviets played well into this situation, when they invaded Afghanistan on Christmas Day in 1979. However, their attempt to predominate the Afghan people had failed. Despite the large number of soldiers who were deployed by the Soviet they did not succeed to overpower Afghanistan. In 1981, when the Soviet Union decided to withdraw itself from Afghanistan, the chaos within Afghanistan came to the

foreground. As a consequence, all reforms were immediately put on hold for the simple reason that the country was in war with itself.

1.3 The Mujahedeen

The Mujahedeen in Afghanistan arose from their dissatisfaction of the Soviet invasion in their own country. “Afghan Mujahedeen groups were the main political and military forces whose struggle resulted in the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Since these groups themselves were the result of the mass mobilization in the country they also have ideological and organizational status” (Nojumi, 2002, p. 83).

If we look at the history of Afghanistan as a whole we can say without any doubt that ‘the Mujahedeen period’ was the most brutal one:

“The degree of arbitrary and opportunistic violence that followed Soviet withdrawal exacerbated the destitution already felt by most Afghans. Refugees fleeing the countryside gathered in cities where they became increasingly dependent on an impoverished state. The destruction of subsistence agriculture and the monopolization of trade routes by militias further contributed to urbanization and the food deficit. The tremendous need for income increased smuggling and opium production and the growth of the opium “industry” spawned schemes of credit and finance” (Women for Women International, 2009, p. 14).

Especially women related issues started to aggravate simply because of the newly created environment these women were forced to live under. This climate of war made it possible for the Afghan men to use these women under any situation imaginable such as forced marriages, slavery and physical abuse. Even though, the Western world did not pay attention when all of this had taken place it did raise attention at the national level. The general humiliation of the Afghan people presided by the Mujahedeen led to the fact that a new movement, with the norms and values for Islam, began to take shape in the Southern part of Afghanistan. “The *Taliban (students)* movement was not a spontaneous combustion of public outrage, but a deliberately mobilised, ideologically coherent force” (WfWI, 2009, p. 14).

§ 1.4 The rise of Taliban

Looking back at the history of Afghanistan it is striking how many students from Islamic schools seem to have responded in times of national conflict by means of assembling. During the Soviet invasion many Afghan people flee the country and went to Pakistan. In 1994, when a group of students were chased away from their country, they decided to gather at the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan in order to form a military group. However, unlike what is often referred to as the Taliban, a radical group who know no boundaries, these students consider themselves to act in the respect for the Islamic values. In time of total chaos and destruction, the Taliban were able to bring salvation in order to restore peace, safety and security and to exile the drugs etc. “The objective of the Taliban was to establish a moral order such as it imagined existed before the modernising reforms of the 1950s” (WfWI, 2009, p.14).

On account of both the support and financial aid of the Pakistani community the Taliban was able to penetrate its way in the country. Four years later, the Taliban became so big and strong that at that time their only opponent was the Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance was a military force in Afghanistan led by Ahmad Shah Massoud, who fought until the very end against the Taliban (BBC News, 2001). It ensured that the safety level began to increase and that disagreements between the tribes began to decrease. When it came to issues of which the Taliban did not attach any importance to, it was soon clear that it was completely neglected by them for both issues related to culture and infrastructure. They even went a step further, when they decided to forbid all movies and TV shows but at the same time intensify other media such as radio and newspapers. Adjacent to it, music became prohibited except for religious music and ultimately, they banned also the Internet and photos (WfWI, 2009, p.14).

Regarding the women of Afghanistan and their position during the Taliban, their ‘role’ soon began to fall back into a traditional role. Namely that the women are supposed to stay at home and take care of the household and children and that therefore, education for women is unnecessary (WfWI, 2009, p. 15).

§ 1.5 “Post-Conflict” Afghanistan: Reconstruction and Rebellion

“Following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the US by al-Qaeda, a transnational terrorist organization harbored by the Afghan government, the US and its allies overthrew the Taliban in less than three months” (WfWI, 2009, p. 15). Signing in 2001 the *Bonn Agreement (which was signed by representatives of several different anti-Taliban factions and political groups)* it was made possible for Karzai, who led the Afghan Transitional Administration, to receive foreign aid in order to restore the country in post Taliban era. “The 2001 Bonn Agreement pledged to address the structural

impediments to women's rights in Afghanistan and to include women in political life. Quotas were set to ensure places for women in the *Loya Jirga* and the interim administration, and a Ministry of Women's Affairs was established" (WfWI, 2009, p. 16).

Neither being a Pashtun without any ties to the Mujahedeen nor related to any radical political party, Karzai had succeeded to portray himself as a neutral person, who was going to be the head of state which the country needed at that time. This Bonn Agreement made it also possible to declare a new constitution. This was eventually ratified in 2004, making it possible before the end of the year for both men and women to vote for their new president: Karzai.

Defeating the Taliban and the creation of the Bonn Agreement had made it possible to, amongst others, call attention to the women's issues in Afghanistan. However, even Karzai was not able to exercise national political control because "many areas remain strongholds of warlords" but also due to the ongoing political, economical and social crisis within the country (WfWI, 2009, p. 15).

Chapter 2 Current Situation

Introduction

The lives of women in Afghanistan have traditionally not been easy. The power of male family members is, in such a way, tremendous that they barely have the opportunity to make decisions themselves. Since the past few years, concern of these women in Afghanistan rose.

In a 2009 published report by the Human Rights Watch (HRW), which is an international NGO that focuses on human rights around the world including Afghanistan, it stated that women in Afghanistan are among the group of women who stand the most wretched in the world. Violence against these women is “endemic” and the Afghan government fails to protect women from crimes such as rape, assault, battery and murder (HRW, 2009, p.10).

In 2001, the United States and their allies referred to the harrowing position of the Afghan women as their main reason for their invasion. However, nine years later since the Taliban had been defeated and a new government with Karzai as the current President of the country, Afghan women still find themselves in appalling conditions. Their current situation is abdominal in every way, whether looking at the education of these women or political participation, healthcare, employment etc. (HRW, 2009, p. 2-3).

Therefore, in this chapter, the abovementioned issue will be further explored and a closer look will be taken at two key events which contributed to an improvement of women’s position in Afghanistan. The Afghan Presidential Election of 2009 and the London Conference were two very import events improving the current situation of the women in Afghanistan. The 2009 elections were a first large scale opportunity for Afghan society to start working on improving the deteriorated position of women.

2.1. Socio-economic conditions of Women in Afghanistan

§ 2.1. Education

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2002, a significant change has occurred regarding the number of girls going to primary schools. Unfortunately, on the other side, a large number of girls are not able to continue their studies in secondary schools. According to Human Rights Watch, in 2002 less than one million children went to primary school and six years later an enormous growth has occurred. Last school year, over more than six million children went to primary school (HRW, 2009, p. 76).

Despite this major improvement, it still remains a fact that the Afghan government is not pro-active in order to tackle this problematical case. Therefore, it is clearly that, until the Afghan government decides to change the current status, these young girls will remain unable to go to

school. This also raises the question: why are these girls unable to attend school? This has to do with several factors one of which plays a significant part in it, namely: the inability to ensure the safety of these Afghan girls (HRW, 2009, p. 77). Moreover, it is often said that the key to success is education. And therefore, in order to succeed in society everyone should have equal opportunity to go to school. Also, expansive research have shown that education for these Afghan girls and in particular secondary education will positively affect these girls because that will mean that these Afghan girls/women will not be 'forced' to marry at such a young age nor will they become pregnant at a early age, according to the Human Rights Watch. This is an international non-governmental organization that focuses on addressing human rights violations.

As I had mentioned earlier, there are several factors for the low amount of school going girls. One of these factors, as said before, has to do with security treats. Afghan women often are afraid to let their daughters go to school due to the fact that if often has occurred that these young and innocent girls were raped or even abused on their way to school. Therefore, the parents decide to let this girls stay at home. But also, there simply not enough girls school, because in Afghanistan girls and boys go to separate schools. Some other factors may include lack of female school teachers, economic circumstances whereby girls are forced to work (HRW, 2009, p. 78).

§ 2.2 Employment

In general, the employment of women in Afghanistan can be divided into two main sections: a) agriculture and b) urban employment. The economy of Afghanistan is known for its agriculture and around 80% of the population lives in these rural areas according to the World Bank. For many Afghan women, agriculture and related activities are the main focus for women's employment and contribution to their country's economy. Also, which naturally makes sense, poor families need more help from their wives and children for paid labour than families with an income above average (World Bank, 2005, p. 53). According to the report of the World Bank, "Women's labour force participation rates in Afghanistan are comparable to the rest of the region at 35.8 % - lower than in Bangladesh (42.5%), Nepal (40.5%) and Sri Lanka (36.9%), but higher than in India (32.5%) and Pakistan (29.5%)" (World Bank, 2005, p. 54).

Moving on to the urban employment of women in Afghanistan, unlike the agriculture employment, when it comes to jobs in the city women are faced with limitations and restrictions. Taking a quick look at the history and the women's labour participation it can be concluded that "during (PDPA) government from 1965, the female labour force in the cities increased and women were employed in all major government departments, in addition to the police force, the

army, business and industry. Women taught, studied and acted as judges in the Family Court, dealing with issues relating to divorce, custody of children and other family matters” (World Bank, 2005, p. 67) .

When the Taliban came to power, it suddenly decided to dismiss the Afghan women in large number due to the fact that the Taliban is against women working out-of-doors. We must not forget that traditionally the Afghan women always remain the most important figure in their own household. This can be contemplated both negatively and positively. In a country such as Afghanistan, where traditionally the women is seen as the caretaker of the family, it is less likely for the women to hold a public function. Even today, this is still seen the same and women remain to struggle in order to obtain equal chances in getting a proper job.

§ 2.3 Health care

According to the World Bank, “women in Afghanistan have an extraordinarily high risk of dying during pregnancy and childbirth and the highest maternal mortality rate in the world” (World Bank, 2005, p.13). Compared to the West, the health care system in Afghanistan for women before, during or after their pregnancy is almost nonexistent. But also the lack of competent physicians contributes to the lack of proper health care for Afghan women.

At the same time, other important factors relate to the poor health care system for the women. Some of them include lack of healthy and proper food, housing and, also very important, clean water (World Bank, 2005, p.13). This ensures that, predominantly, these women live in appalling conditions which immediately affects their health care. This is the result of years of wars, poverty and inequality between Afghan citizens. Even though this situation as a whole affects the women and children the most, however there is no evidence that it is a deliberate discrimination, leaving aside the Taliban, says the World Bank.

2.4. Recent events relevant to the improvement of socio-economic conditions

§ 2.4.1 Afghan Presidential and Provincial Council Elections 2009

Last year, two different elections took place in Afghanistan both the presidential and provincial council elections. During both of these elections, Afghanistan and the Independent Election Commission had invited the European Union to observe the elections. “According to Article 156 of the constitution of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) has the authority and responsibility to administrate and supervise all kind of elections; as well as refer to general public opinion of the people, in accordance the provision of the law” (IEC, 2009, p.1). This resulted in the formation of the *European Union Election Observation Mission*

(EU EOM) in July 2009. The mission was led by General Phillipe Morillon. The EUEOM was in charge of observing the pre-elections activities and the voting operations in 28 provinces (EU EOM, 2009, p.1).

For the first time in many years, on the 20th of August 2009, the elections were being led by the Afghan people themselves. In the past few years, international community had learned that elections in Afghanistan did not usually go as planned, due to the lack of security and the falsification of votes. On top of all of that, the Taliban interfered unsolicited with their call for boycotting the elections but also causing several attacks which resulted in injured people or even causing death of many civilians. Therefore, the fact that the elections still had taken place can be seen as quite an achievement for the country (EUEOM, 2009, p.1).

The civil and political rights of Afghan women can be retrieved in the Constitution, however, in reality; all of their fundamental rights are being neglected. Therefore, according to the EU EOM, during the elections the women were excluded as candidates and for the women it was almost impossible to vote due to the fact that these women were only allowed to cast their vote at polling stations where women were present as supervisors. Obviously, women were unrepresented at the polling stations resulting in a disappointing turn-out of female voters. However, these were only one of many obstacles that had been thrown at the feet of these women. If we analyse the coverage during the campaigns on the internet, in newspapers and on television, it can be concluded that women did not receive almost any coverage, if not, none at all (EUEOM, 2009, p.3).

Something that is absolutely noteworthy is the two female candidates during the presidential elections. Even though everyone probably knew beforehand that these two Afghan women, Frozan Fana and Shahla Atta, did not stand a chance against male leaders such as Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah but still went through with it (BBC News, 2009, para 2). Sometimes, even at risk of their own lives during campaigns. Nevertheless, the fact that two women participated in the presidential elections is a major development for a male-dominated country like Afghanistan.

§ 2.4.2 The London Conference

On 28 January 2010 the conference on Afghanistan in London, hosted by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, took place. Dignitaries from more than over 70 countries attended the conference. However, out of all these important people who attend the conference, only one woman was invited namely, Wazma Frog a human rights campaigner from Afghanistan.

Furthermore, looking at the content of the conference the main issues that were brought to attention were: security, governance and development and Regional Framework/International

Architecture (conference program, 2010, p.1). Before the conference event even had taken place it had been criticised for their non-involvement of Afghan women and more importantly for not highlighting the women's issues in Afghanistan during the conference. As a consequence, Afghan women felt excluded.

As a response, the Afghan Women's Network (AWN which is a umbrella organization that represents all the women's organizations in Afghanistan) had issued a statement supported by UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women). In this statement AWN expresses their concern for not involving the women in these negotiating processes. Also, the decisions made during the conference are not in the interests of women in Afghanistan. On the contrary, Afghan women "will not be silent nor made to be invisible" stated AWN (AWN, 2010, para 1).

Even though the *Final Outcome Communiqué of the London Conference* had much content due to a total of 34 points described in the communiqué, only 3 points related to the Afghan women. And even those three points, only one was addressed directly to the women.

13. " In the context of a comprehensive, Afghan-led approach, Conference Participants reinforced the need for an effective and enduring framework to create and consolidate a stable and secure environment in which Afghan men and **women** of all backgrounds and perspectives can contribute to the reconstruction of their country" (Communiqué, 2010).

22. "The Government of Afghanistan reiterated its commitment to protect and promote the human rights of all Afghan citizens and to make Afghanistan a place where men and **women** enjoy security, equal rights, and equal opportunities in all spheres of life" (Communiqué, 2010).

26. "The international community welcomed the Government of Afghanistan's commitment to implement the National Action Plan for **Women** of Afghanistan and to implement the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law. Conference Participants welcomed the Government of Afghanistan's commitment to strengthen the participation of **women** in all Afghan governance institutions including elected and appointed bodies and the civil service" (Communiqué, 2010).

Even though these three points have been issued in the final communiqué, Afghan women remain reticent. According to AWN, the process of reconciliation and reintegration should not take place at the expense of (women's) human rights. Furthermore, women should be equally involved in the peace and stability process in Afghanistan. Lastly, unlike this London conference,

Afghan women should be included rather than excluded in every major event. Consequently, these women would henceforth be a part of the decision making in their country, says AWN (AWN, 2010, para 3).

The reason why the Afghan Presidential and Provincial Council Elections of 2009 and the London Conference of 2010 are important for the improvement of socio-economic conditions of Afghan women have to do with the fact that these key events have a huge impact on women's position in general. The Presidential elections for instance, the person who will be at the head of the country, will be an important actor for Afghan population, but more specifically for the women.

It is important to understand that in a country like Afghanistan, people or a group that have the most power, can decide, in a way, the future of these women. It depends whether the outcomes of the elections and London conference will guarantee modern reforms that will be beneficial for Afghan women. In this case, it can be said that both the outcomes of the elections and the London conference have not improved their situation. In the contrary, women were excluded from the conference and subjected to various threats during the elections.

Without the involvement and participation of women during these fundamental events that have a great impact on their country's future their situation will likely profoundly change.

Chapter 3 International Aid for Afghanistan: recent initiatives of the United Nations and the European Union

Introduction

According to the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), which is an “Afghani umbrella organization representing over 80 NGO members from the national and international humanitarian community in Afghanistan” (Partner profile, 2010, p.1), since 2001 the amount of money provided by the international donors for Afghanistan is about \$7 million a day (ACBAR, 2008, p.4). Furthermore, nearly all public expenditure of the Afghan government derives from revenue coming from those international donors.

In 2004, at a Berlin conference, the Afghan government had presented to all of the donors a policy document titled: *Securing Afghanistan's Future: Accomplishments and the Strategic Path Forward*. In this document the Afghan government had stated that Afghanistan would require an estimated amount of \$27.5 billion for a period of seven years in order to rebuild the country. Moreover, the government stressed the importance of the donor's financial contribution, due to the fact that without their financial aid the country would not be able to reform (WfWI, 2009, p.19).

Some of the major donors include the European Commission, US, Japan, UK, World Bank, Germany and Canada. Even though many countries's give financial support to Afghanistan they have to face many obstacles. Some of these obstacles may include:

- “Challenging operating conditions;
- high-level of corruption;
- weak absorption capacities;
- lack of systematic data gathering by government” (WfWI, 2009, p.19).

To give a clear example, since 2002, from the total amount of \$25 billion that was given to Afghanistan by the international community only 15 million has been spent so far, according to the Guardian newspaper.

Furthermore, it can be rather difficult to set priorities when it comes to financial aid in Afghanistan. An estimate of every three out of four Afghani earns their livings in agriculture on top of that around 2.5 million of them may suffer from famine due to uncertainties in the agricultural sector. And only a small amount of the financial aid contributed by the international donors goes to agriculture, around \$400- \$500 million since 2001 (WfWI, 2009, p.19).

Although progress has been made, it still remains a fact that much work still needs to be done. Many Afghan women are of opinion that the contribution of the international community, through means of financial aid, often reaches primarily men only, rather than the Afghan community as a whole. In addition to that, during the London Conference on Afghanistan, president Karzai mentioned in his speech that in order to rebuild and secure the country it will need at least then till fifteen years of foreign aid. However, during his speech he did not referred to the equal treatment of women, as an essential part, in order to make the reconstruction of Afghanistan a success. Especially in a country like Afghanistan, where women and children form a large majority of the population.

Therefore, in this chapter the emphasis will be on the two important donors, who have set up in the recent years initiatives for Afghan women. As mentioned before, the European Commission is one of the major donors and even though it funds the country as a whole at the same time it initiates also specific women's projects. Also, the United Nations plays a significant role in the role of invigorating the current position of the women in Afghanistan.

§ 3.1 United Nations initiatives

The United Nations and its various organs have a very long and intense history of support and cooperation with Afghanistan. During these past few years, when several conflicts occurred within the country it was both the secretary- general and Security Council of the UN who addressed these problems (Mehta, 2002, p.146). “The General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on the Status of Women and Human Rights as well as the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the special rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, have also paid special attention to the situation of women in Afghanistan” (Mehta, 2002, p.146).

As mentioned earlier, the UN has several organs that work on women's rights and women's participation in Afghanistan; however, in this final paper I made a selection of key organs that have participated, to ameliorate the situation of Afghan women in conflict. In addition, two key instruments will be discussed, which have helped to improve the current position of women in Afghanistan.

§ 3.1.2 United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

“United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies that promote women's human rights, political participation and economic security” (UNIFEM,

2008, para1). This institution of the UN has been established in the beginning of 2002 in Afghanistan, after the fall of the Taliban. Since then, it has been working closely with the Afghan women and the government in order to ensure that these women get a fair chance to participate in their society. UNIFEM provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programs and strategies for women empowerment and gender equality.

“The main goal of UNIFEM is to increase opportunities for women in Afghanistan by transforming the overall development of Afghanistan into a more equitable and sustainable process. Therefore, it supports the long term goal of Afghan women to fully realize their human rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)” (UNIFEM, 2008, para3). We will elaborate on this convention later on.

When UNIFEM selects projects in Afghanistan it focuses on four main strategic areas:

1. *Reducing poverty among women*
2. *Stopping violence against women*
3. *Inhibiting the spread of HIV / AIDS among women and girls*
4. *Achieving gender equality in democratic governance*

(UNIFEM, 2008).

Adjacent to it, UNIFEM currently is working on four main programs to tackle the subject of these women in Afghanistan. Firstly, the *Gender and Justice* programme ensures that all legal and judicial reforms include various aspects of gender equality. Consequently, UNIFEM helps the various governmental institutions to meet their international responsibility regarding human rights protection of both men and women. This programme consists out of four different components: *The Elimination of Violence against Women, Gender Mainstreaming within Legal and Judicial Processes, Increasing Women's Access to Justice and Women's Leadership in Politics*. This programme shows that it strives for enhancing women's political participation and representation in Afghanistan (Gender & Justice, 2008, para1).

Secondly, the *Women, Peace & Governance* programme. “This was created by UNIFEM Afghanistan to solidify gains made by Afghan women in claiming a space as decision-makers and political actors of change. This change is essential for sustainable democratization, founded on human rights and gender equality” (Women, Peace and Governance, 2008, para1). To put it simply, this programme helps to create various opportunities for women to participate within the political arena of Afghanistan.

Thirdly, the *Institutional Capacity Building* programme, this has been created by UNIFEM to help the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) to act as the leading ministry for gender equality within the Afghan government. MOWA is the leading institution enhancing women's

participation and empowerment in Afghanistan (Institutional Capacity Building of The Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2008, para1).

Lastly, *Community Empowerment & Economic Development (CEED)* programme. This final programme attempts to enhance the socio-economic development of Afghan women. UNIFEM has been able to provide for six different provinces in Afghanistan small grants to various national NGO's that are engaged on women's project that focuses on their socio-economic position. Since 2003, this programme has been able to help more than 12.000 women and girls so far (Community Empowerment & Economic Development, 2008, para1).

All of these clear examples show that UNIFEM works effectively in reclaiming the freedom, equity and their (political) participation of the women in Afghanistan.

§ 3.1.3 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been adopted by the UN General Assembly, in 1979. Since then more than 180 countries have ratified the convention. Afghanistan had signed this convention on 14th August 1980. "By signing this convention Afghanistan made a preliminary and general endorsement of the convention and agreed to undertake a careful examination of the treaty to determine her position towards this convention. But unfortunately due three decades of conflict in the country, Afghanistan was not able to ratify and implement it. Afghanistan acceded to the convention on 5th March 2003 without any reservation" (HAWCA, 2010).

This legal binding document is often described as the international treaty for women, therefore it is often called: *Treaty for the Rights of Women*. Furthermore, it is based on *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The convention consists of a preamble and 30 articles in total. "It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination" (Overview of the Convention, 2009, para1).

This committee consists of a total of 23 experts globally on women's rights. These independent experts have the responsibility to ensure and monitor that the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* is being implemented correctly, thus also in Afghanistan (CEDAW, 2010, p.1).

In the beginning of this year, during the 45th session of the CEDAW Committee in Geneva they had issued a statement wherein they expressed their dissatisfaction "on the inclusion of the Afghan Women in the process of Peace building, Security and Reconstruction in Afghanistan" (CEDAW Committee, 2010, p.1). In this statement, the Committee expressed its deeply regret and sincere concern for the exclusion of Afghan women during the London

Conference and the lack of tangible strategies in order to protect women's rights while being in the midst of discussions that could lead to possible negotiations with the Taliban. Furthermore, the Committee argued that in case the Afghan government may reach agreements with the Taliban it should include clear commitment that expresses respect and protection for the human rights of the Afghan women, as can be retrieved in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other international human rights treaties to which Afghanistan is party (CEDAW, 2010, p.2). Two other very important remarks made by the Committee are:

“The Committee emphasizes that Afghan women, who constitute the majority of the Afghan population, must be full and equal participants in decision making, at all levels, in the process of peace building, reconciliation, reconstruction, rebuilding and development of their country. (...) In that regard, the Committee urges the Afghan government and its international allies to ensure that women representatives are included in the upcoming peace and development dialogues and negotiations with the Taliban” (CEDAW, 2010, p.2).

“The Committee further urges the State Party to give special attention to a critical review of all discriminatory laws and provisions, based on the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against the Women. In particular, the Committee is concerned about the new personal status law of the Shiite minorities and the discriminatory nature of that law against women. The Committee reminds the government of Afghanistan of its obligations under the Convention, particularly articles 2, 9 and 16 of the Convention, and urges the government to repeal and modify the discriminatory provisions in the personal status and other laws” (CEDAW, 2010, p.3).

§ 3.2. United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325

As mentioned before, the CEDAW is a legal binding document, however there is also another tool that advocates on women's right in the women, peace and security process namely United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

This particular resolution that focuses on women, peace and security that was adopted unanimously in October 2000 is seen as a milestone in the history of women's rights. “It is the first formal and legal document from the Security Council that requires parties in a conflict to

respect women's rights and to support their participation in peace negotiations and in post conflict reconstruction" (Anderlini & El-Bushra, 2004, p.1).

This key document is of great value for the women in Afghanistan. More importantly, UN Resolution 1325 can be seen as an action document. "It is a framework for bringing change to the lives of women and girls affected by war. The resolution puts women at the centre, articulating the unique ways in which war affects women and the measures needed to channel women's voices into peace processes and reconstruction" (Oates, 2007, p. 6).

For the women in Afghanistan, 1325 is a very practical tool that they can refer to whenever a situation occurs where their rights are being violated or neglected and how it can be solved. More importantly, this resolution compels the Afghan government, UN agencies and the international community to step in whenever it occurs that protection of Afghan women and girls has failed (Oates, 2007, p. 6).

The provision of Resolution 1325 can be categorized under the familiar 3 P's:

- *Participation*: this means that Afghan women need to be involved more during peace processes. Also, these women should be able to hold a function in the various governmental institutions.
- *Promotion*: women's human rights should be promoted more; therefore, a closer look should be taken at the many important international key documents. Whereupon, this should be reflected in Afghan national laws.
- *Protection*: during war and peace these women should be protected. This resolution in particular emphasizes the importance protecting women and girls from violence, rape and other forms of sexual violence (Oates, 2007, p. 6).

Nowadays, more and more women's organizations and movements in Afghanistan are familiar with 1325 and are working intensively towards reaching the objectives of this resolution. A good example is the *Afghan Women's Network* and all of these movements/organizations are working closely with the Afghan people to get them familiar with this particular resolution.

"However, for the Resolution to take effect, a concerted effort necessitating immediate actions for its implementation is required by the key stakeholders in Afghanistan's peace building process. In order to ensure women's peace and security in Afghanistan, this effort needs to be supported by a long term vision, and strong political will led from the top" (Oates, 2007, p. 34).

§ 3.3 The National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA)

“The National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) is the main resource for gender mainstreaming in Afghanistan's government institutions” (UNIFEM, 2008, p.1). It was introduced during 2005-2006 after which it was approved by the cabinet in May 2008 (HRW, 2009, p. 85). This NAPWA is a plan of action by the Afghan government for the duration of ten years to implement its commitments towards women. All of these commitments can be retrieved in both the constitution of Afghanistan and the international treaties for instance the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (UNIFEM, 2008, p.1).

This National Action Plan ensures that women are equally incorporated in the governmental institution of Afghanistan. Additionally, the reason for the creation of NAPWA is to guarantee stability and uniformity concerning the efforts made by the Afghan government to safeguard women's rights in their society by means of equality and empowerment. Therefore, the ultimate goal of this NAP is to achieve a modern society in which both men and women are equivalent to each other, to have equal opportunities and to be successful in every way possible.

In order to achieve this ultimate goal NAPWA focuses on six different divisions:

- Security
- Legal Protection and Human Rights
- Leadership and Political Participation
- Economy, Work and Poverty
- Health
- Education

(HRW, 2009).

Furthermore, to ensure that the implementation of NAPWA is going correctly a growth in “gender units,” “gender focal points,” “gender working groups” and “gender consultants has occurred within the Afghan ministries (HRW, 2009, p. 85). This designates that the government is pursuing a gender-balanced society although sometimes there is ambiguity about their roles.

§ 3.4 European Union initiatives

The participation of the EU in Afghanistan can be traced back to beginning of 2001, when the fall of the Taliban took place. It was then, when the European Union decided to set up an *EU Special Representative (EUSR)* and to create a *Delegation of the European Commission in Afghanistan*. Furthermore, it has devoted itself to one of the largest development programmes after 2001; it has granted an amount of more than €4.371 billion EU assistance to Afghanistan. This corresponds with one fifth of the official development assistance (ODA) received by Afghanistan between 2002 and 2008 (EU Blue Book, 2009 p. 7-8).

The EU also promotes democracy and human rights in Afghanistan, in the Blue Book (this report contains a detailed description of the EC and EU Member States (MS) foreign aid contributions to Afghanistan) published by the EU states the following:

“Cultural, religious and political factors continue to severely limit the lives and potential of Afghan women and the number of reported rape cases of women and children have increased significantly in recent years. This situation is compounded by a lack of a functioning formal justice system in large parts of the country and especially outside the main urban areas” (EU Blue Book, 2009 p. 10).

Each EU Member State individually works closely on human rights related issues in Kabul; they do not simply monitor but if necessary take actions were human rights are being violated. “Such actions are coordinated through the offices of the EUSR and the EU Presidency in Kabul, with the Commission, ensuring a coherent and unified European voice on human rights issues in Afghanistan” (EU Blue Book, 2009 p. 10). The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which is a financial instrument of the EU, helps to promote human rights in Afghanistan. This will be discussed later on.

In the upcoming paragraphs a closer look will be taken at the involvement of the European Commission in Afghanistan and to the Member States contribution. They both play a significant role in the development aid to Afghanistan and in particular to the status of Afghan women. And lastly, two different EU instruments will be discussed.

§ 3.5 European Commission's involvement

The presence of the Commission in Afghanistan goes a long way back, namely since 1980. As mentioned earlier, the European Commission (EC) is one of the core donors providing official development assistance (ODA) and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. Since 2002, the EC has set up a Delegation in Kabul. From 2002 until the end of 2009 the EC had supported

Afghanistan with a total amount of €1.8 billion of which €282 million went to humanitarian assistance. The European Commission has paid out €1.55 billion so far by the end of 2009, which represents an expenditure of 85% (EC, 2010, p. 1). Here below, you can see some statistics that show how much the financial aid, provided by the European Commission, was per year to Afghanistan.

EC aid to Afghanistan 2002 – 2009 in € million

Year	Total Commitments	Disbursed
2002	247.59	151.04
2003	285.55	213.90
2004	247.55	171.19
2005	224.48	206.11
2006	200.53	175.98
2007	195.90	224.59
2008	214.49	213.27
2009*	219	198.82
Total	1835.09	1555

* Provisional figures

(EC, 2010, p. 1).

“The EC's legal and strategy framework for bilateral cooperation includes multiannual programming documents and annual action programmes” (EC, 2010, p. 1). Some good examples are the Country Strategy Paper of the European Commission, the first paper was from 2003-2006 and the National Indicative Programme (NIP). These two documents supported stability and diminution of poverty through supporting rural development and food security, good governance, infrastructure and health and also other areas. Each year, the Commission implements an Annual Action Programme (AAP) for Afghanistan among which various projects are being established (EC, 2010, p. 1).

The European Commission provides also (financial) aid for gender related issues in Afghanistan. For instance, the rural development programmes or health programmes attempt to develop for these women the accessibility to these services and to give women better opportunities. These women are being supported by means of providing them ‘social protection with legal aid and mediation for women in conflict with traditions, or promoting freedom of expression for women’ (EC, 2010, p. 3).

The EC is also the leading agency, with a total amount of €3.5 million, assisting the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and the Ministry of Economy. They

conduct a survey on a national scale in Afghanistan, the so-called *National Risk & Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA)*. This assessment takes twice a year place and the NRVA helps to stay informed on the progress that is being made in numerous fields such as poverty, labour and more importantly the situation of women. Even though the data shows good progress, however, many problems remain unchanged such as the fact that nine million Afghans are not capable to meet their basic needs and women still remain to be not treated equally and therefore strongly disadvantaged (EC, 2010, p. 4).

“EC aid systematically takes into consideration gender issues – which are of particular sensitivity and difficulty in the Afghan context. For example, programmes in health or rural development strive to give women greater opportunities. Specific actions are also undertaken in support of women, e.g. providing social protection with legal aid and mediation for women in conflict with traditions, or promoting freedom of expression for women” (Delegation of the European Union, 2010). Nevertheless, although many hurdles remain, regarding women’s rights and participation in Afghanistan, due to the results of the EU’s intervention and its humanitarian aid some achievements have been accomplished concerning gender issues. Such as the fact that, during March 2008- March 2009, a total of 144 policewomen have been recruited (EC, 2010, p. 7).

§ 3.6 Contributions of EU Member States

Having already discussed both EU’s and EC’s involvement towards development aid in Afghanistan, some of the Member States will now be examined. First of all, it is important to understand that, as said before, not only do the EU and Commission contribute to development assistance but also the Member States individually. In the EU Blue Book a description of every individual MS has been elaborated. Some of these countries have contributed to initiatives aimed at women in particular some of them have not. Therefore, an attempt will be made to highlight one of the major contributors within the EU Member States that have helped to improve the socio-economic position of women in Afghanistan, which is the Netherlands.

§ 3.6.1 Netherlands

The situation of women in Afghanistan remains precarious, that is the main reason why the Netherlands has intensified its efforts regarding this issue. The Dutch initiatives focus inter alia, the implementation of Resolution 1325 in Afghanistan by the UN Security Council. Afghanistan has no specific national action plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325. The Afghan government did adopt the NAPWA in 2008. However, an effective implementation to date has however stayed off. Furthermore, in order to cultivate the implementation of NAPWA, the

Netherlands has been focusing mainly on the capacity building of women's organizations in Afghanistan. The ultimate goal is to create better opportunities for these women (Minbuza, 2009).

The bilateral development aid between The Netherlands and Afghanistan started 20 years ago. “After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the Netherlands placed Afghanistan on its list of partner countries, thus guaranteeing a long-term development partnership” (EU Blue Book, 2009 p. 33). Since the past three years the program has been increasing rapidly, as a consequence, The Netherlands had donated almost €88 million to Afghanistan in 2008. Due to this, Afghanistan has become one of the countries that receives most of the financial aid provided by the Netherlands. However, this country also initiates projects on women’s position and in particular the access of women to justice (EU Blue Book, 2009 p. 29).

In accordance with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), the Netherlands is paying much attention to all the different sectors regarding the women’s socio-economic position. Some good examples are: girls’ education, training of female teachers, the reservations of seats for women in the scholarship programs, training of district maternity nurses and horticultural business / economic activities addressed towards women (Minbuza, 2009). All of these initiatives will contribute to an improvement of the socio-economic position of Afghan women. By means of educating and informing them, this will ultimately ensure that these women will turn out to be well-educated en well-informed. Consequently their opportunities for a fair share in their own society will increase only more, due to this.

Using some facts and statistics, I will now clearly show how the contribution of the Netherlands has positively affected the position of Afghan women in Uruzgan and in other parts of Afghanistan.

- The number of births in hospitals in Afghanistan since 2001 rose from 2.5% to 12%. The number of pregnant women, that visit the doctor at least once before birth, has increased from 45% (2006) to 71% (early 2009). The number of pregnant women that receive at least two tetanus vaccinations in the same period doubled from 29% to 62% (Minbuza, 2009).
- Since 15 new schools have opened in Uruzgan and another 24 schools are still under construction an estimated 4500 girls are able to go to school throughout the province. And more than 950 girls are educated at home through the accelerated learning classes (Minbuza, 2009).
- Thanks to Dutch efforts the ‘District Centre’ is now also available for Afghan women

- In Tarin Kowt, the Netherlands has successfully participated in the construction of a female park protected by walls and security. This has turned into a place where women can talk, walk or sell stuff. This project was designed in collaboration with local women
- The Dutch government also supports the political and public dialogue to improve the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. This is being executed through financial contributions to meetings or other activities organized by Afghan women's organizations. Also, every year around International Women's Day with the help of Dutch funding, radio programs and interviews are being broadcasted on successful women and the role of women in their community (Minbuza, 2009).
- The Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence take into account the position of women during all operations and mission. Due to the fact that direct contact with women often can be seen as the starting point, nowadays, more women are being included in these mission teams (Minbuza, 2009).
- In the field of healthcare, the number of female health workers in Afghanistan has increased significantly. Moreover, in the hospital of Tarin Kowt a women's wing has been set up, this has made medical care much more accessible for women (Rijksoverheid, 2010).

It can be concluded that the Netherlands is actively working towards the improvement of the socio-economic position of women in Afghanistan. Their various initiatives have contributed to improve the position of Afghan women. And it remains to advocate, lobby and initiate on this field, now and in the future.

§ 3.7 European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)

In this chapter it has been mentioned earlier that the EIDHR is a financial instrument that helps to promote democracy and human rights. This instrument, which came in to force in 2007, has been set out by the European Union to support the activities of civil society in third world countries, among which Afghanistan is included. "The EIDHR has an average annual global budget of EUR 120 million, funding projects related to the improvement of human rights and democracy. For Afghanistan, the pipeline for EIDHR related projects (2009-2010) comprises an annual budget of €1.2 million" (EU Blue Book, 2009 p. 5). Since five years, both national and international NGO's and several partners have created various activities supported by the EIDHR "such as promoting the government's transparency and accountability; raising awareness

on human rights through local radio broadcasting introduction of human rights training in the teachers' training colleges; media rights monitoring and transitional justice and reconciliation in Afghanistan” (EU Blue Book, 2009 p. 5). The many initiatives of the EU Member States, as examined earlier in this final paper, in Afghanistan reinforced and complimented the approach regarding the improvement in human rights due to the EIDHR. “These activities have included legal and psycho-social aid to women, support in human rights training of police and support to refugees and the disabled” (EU Blue Book, 2009 p. 5).

§ 3.8 European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL)

“Afghanistan needs a strong police force to contribute to peace, security and safety to the Afghan people in a society based on the rule of law”, stated the EU (EUPOL, 2010). Therefore, the EU launched the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan in June 2007. The international staff, consists of qualified police officers from the MS and Canada, Croatia, New Zealand and Norway, is educating the Afghan National Police. The ultimate goal is to ensure that Afghanistan will obtain proper and qualified Afghan police officers at their disposal nationwide.

In a recent press release issued by EUPOL on the 7th March of this year it stated that EUPOL actively supports women’s position in Afghan police (press release EUPOL, 2010). A day before the International Women’s Day they launched a new project tackling the highly sensitive subject due to the fact that female police officers have been getting threats. This new project introduces a special telephone helpline accessible for these female officers that are being harassed. While the Ministry of Interior Affairs in Afghanistan endeavors to increase the number of female police officers, which is rather low now, to 5000 in 2014 severe cultural and security obstructions retain women to operate within this service. These women have been threatened and also received many death threats. In Afghanistan the number of police officers is 93,000 of which 700 of them represent the female officers. This is obviously a minuscule representation of Afghan female officers and the constant threats and harassments do not make it any easier for them. However, EUPOL is working actively to help these violated women to press charges and it is also working more on domestic and sexual violence against women.

“Creating a culture of respect for gender equality and other basic human rights standards is vital to success of the Mission”, says Nigel Thomas, Deputy Head of the EUPOL Mission to Afghanistan, “for this reason the Mission has placed such standards at the core of its training and mentoring activities supporting the establishment of a sustainable and effective policing arrangements in Afghanistan – one where in women can increasingly play a more prominent role” (press release EUPOL, 2010).

We can conclude now that both the United Nations and the European Union and its various institutions, some of them even established in Afghanistan, have contributed to the current socio-economic position of Afghan women. They proactively advocate and lobby to ensure that women are treated equally and not being excluded. And if necessary, actions will be taken by them. As mentioned before, although many hurdles remain, a change has occurred to which extent the international community supervises even more the actions of the Afghan government. If needed, measures will be taken by the international community in order to step up against the violations against Afghan women. After all, this country depends for a great deal on the contributions made by the international donors. Furthermore, Afghanistan is closely being monitored by both the international community and the media. All of these tools and instruments that have emerged from the UN have helped to positively influence Afghan women of which they can appeal to. Therefore the EU and UN have and remain to be of great value for these women due to their initiatives and involvement in Afghan society. However, it remains to be an intensive process due to the fact that a strong shift in traditional cultural and religious beliefs is required. Nevertheless, this should come from the Afghan society, with support and assistance where possible by the international community

Chapter 4 Recommendations for the future

These recommendations will help to provide an overview of necessary actions that must be taken to improve the socio-economic position of the Afghan women in the future. In order to give a clear overview of the required measures, the recommendations will be subdivided.

§4.1 Afghan government

The most important actions that need to be taken, relate to the government of Afghanistan. They play a significant role in the amelioration of the socio-economic position of the women. The government has been often criticized for excluding Afghan women in the process of rebuilding the country. However, women are indispensable for the reconstruction of the country. Especially, in a country like this, where women and children, form a majority of the population.

Furthermore, the government should take strong actions to the violations of women. They are often subjected to molestation, assault and battery, rape and even in the worst case murdered. But most of the time these women are left to their fate. Therefore, the Human Rights Watch urges the government to “ensure that all cases of harassment, threats, and intimidation of women in public life are recorded, monitored, investigated, and prosecuted by officials from the Ministry of Interior or Office of the Attorney General” (HRW, 2009, p.89).

Moreover, in order to ensure that the development aid provided by the international community will succeed, the government should “adhere to international commitments, including its signing of the UN’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (WfWI, 2009, p.39).

It should also improve the accessibility for women to public health and education. It often occurs that women and girls subjected to violence are unable to go to the hospital due to the lack of qualified female doctors and nurses for instance. Therefore, the government, ought to make more efforts to facilitate these services. And as mentioned earlier, young girls cannot often attend school. This inability has several causes such as:

- there are simply not enough girls schools;
- the inability to ensure the safety;
- shortage of qualified female school teachers;
- poor school infrastructure

(WfWI, 2009, p.78).

The government can respond to this through the construction of new girl’s schools but also providing funds for girl’s transportation from their homes to school and vice-versa.

Besides, the government should endorse measures so that the media will have more respect towards Afghan women. In the past, when the media would cover a story about the vulnerable position of women, they would use and misuse these women for their own benefit. However, the government should seek the contrary; it should promote media coverage that condemns gender violence, “in order to increase public understanding of women’s rights and the legal sanctions against crimes of violence against women” (HRW, 2009, p.90-91).

§4.2 International community

The international donors can also contribute to the future of these women. Besides their contribution of development aid to the country, still some recommendations can be made.

The donors should ensure that the development aid actually reaches the women. Furthermore, it should guarantee that women from every region receive the same amount of aid as any other region. Thus, that the aid provided by international donors is well distributed.

Also, it is often said by female Afghan leaders that, in the end, the money often goes to the men instead of the women. Therefore, the donors should make more effort in monitoring the distribution of their funding to Afghanistan (WfWI, 2009, p.39).

Regarding UNSCR 1325, the international community should implement this resolution. Doing so, they can guarantee “the protection and recognition of women in conflict zones – funding national institutions aimed at supporting women and their rights, especially at the local level” (WfWI, 2009, p.39). Thus, that would be beneficial for the Afghan women.

Furthermore, according the Afghan’s Women Network, “the international donors should make aid contingent on accelerated implementation of existing policies for the advancement of women in Afghanistan, especially the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, and the cross-cutting gender component of the Afghan National Development Strategy” (Afghan Women’s Leaders’ Priorities for Stabilization, 2010).

Also, both the Afghan government and international community should supervise possible rapprochements and to ensure that women's rights are not ignored during these conciliations (Afghan Women’s Leaders’ Priorities for Stabilization, 2010).

Thus, these recommendations directed towards the international community mainly include monitoring more precise whether the funds made available to Afghanistan are properly used and to ensure that women are not being excluded.

§4.3 Women's political participation

Having discussed both the recent elections in Afghanistan and the London conference, in this final paper, it has shown that women have been consistently excluded. “According to the constitution of Afghanistan and national and international treaties, one of the important social rights of human beings is to determine their political future (the right to elect and to be elected), but unfortunately in Afghan society the women are facing many problems in order to use their rights” (WLUML, 2009). Therefore, the government is being urged to push through reforms that will allow Afghan women to participate more in the political process of their own country. Thus, this would mean that in the future women will be part of the peace building and reconciliation processes.

Furthermore, the government should be able to guaranty the safety of the women. In addition, the Human Rights Watch urges the government to “ensure that the security of women candidates and voters is addressed from the very start of preparations for the 2010 parliamentary elections” (HRW, 2009, p.98).

Another point that should be highlighted is the lack of female politicians such as ministers and deputy ministers. Even though, some women are represented in the government, often this is nothing more than a symbolic gesture, rather than that these women can actually hold a function within the government. Therefore, it is highly recommended to implement a quota system that will ensure the participation of women in the ministries (HRW, 2009, p.98). Consequently, this should be monitored as well in order to ensure that their positions are not being misused.

Concluding, all of these recommendations aim to improve the current socio-economic position of the women in Afghanistan. Some of these recommendations are directed towards the Afghan government and other to the international community. However, the fundamental point of view remains the same. Unless the deteriorated situation of women will be improved, the future of Afghanistan will exactly remain to be the same as the contemporary situation.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

The purpose of my dissertation was to provide an answer to the question: *How did the socio-economic position of the Afghan women evolve throughout the years and how have the recent initiatives of both the EU and UN helped contributing to the current position of these women?* Firstly, a comprehensive overview of the history of Afghanistan was conducted. Secondly, an analysis about the current position was given. Afterwards, both EU and UN initiatives were studied in-depth. Concluding with some key recommendations that could help improve the current women's status in Afghanistan.

After having examined in the first part the history of women in Afghanistan it became clear that they have been subjected to various atrocities, for many years now. And still remain to be subjected to sexual assault and/or violence. However, it used to be different in the past. We must not forget that in a country like Afghanistan, where tribal powers have an enormous influence on Afghan women. Men would exercise unmitigated power over women (Ahmed-Gosh, 2003). When Abur Rahman ruled over the country during the 1880's, it had implemented various reforms benefitting women. And king Amanullah took it a step further, he attempted even to modernize the country. He even promoted gender equity and under his authority women had to attend school. These progressive reforms caused the fall of his kingship. In the subsequent years, it went from worse to bad, culminating in the rise of the Taliban.

In the second chapter, the current socio-economic position of Afghan women was analyzed. Women have a hard time whether it is related to education, employment or health. They all encounter difficulties to each and every one of these mentioned sectors. Looking at the education for women and girls in Afghanistan, one can conclude that many times it is hardly made impossible for these young girls to attend school. According to the World Bank, women in Afghanistan have an extremely high risk of passing away during their pregnancy or even during birth (World Bank, 2005, p.13). Compared to the Western countries, the healthcare system in Afghanistan for women leaves much to be desired. Furthermore, the exclusion of women during the 2009 elections and London conference illustrate that women in Afghanistan are being treated disproportionately. However, the government should come to terms that eventually women will be part of governing the country. This is without any doubt, easier said than done.

Regarding the recent initiatives of both the European Union and United Nations it can be concluded that both institutions are making quite some effort to help develop the country as a whole but more importantly, to improve the socio-economic position of Afghan women. Both

EU and UN have several (financial) instruments which aim to improve women's lives in Afghanistan. Thanks to initiatives such as UNIFEM, UNSCR 1325, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, National Action Plan, EC's commitment, Contribution of Member States and much more, things have changed for the better. Although sometimes it may seem that no progress has occurred that is not always true. In a country like Afghanistan where problems most of the time seem to escalate, initiatives have actually helped to benefit women. Although this may seem to be just a drop in the ocean. As long as women's voices remain to be heard by the international community and they remain to proactively lobby and advocate for the improvement of women's socio-economic position we must remain hopeful. And believe that things might change for the better in the future.

Furthermore, some recommendations were made towards the future of these women. Although many years of development aid, lobby and advocacy have taken place, women's rights still remain to be violated. Therefore, recommendations were put together in an effort to address both the Afghan government and the international community the ongoing violation of women and the continuance of excluding women from political processes.

Coming back to my central question: **How did the socio-economic position of the Afghan women evolve throughout the years and how have the recent initiatives of both the EU and UN helped contributing to the current position of these women?**

The socio-economic position of the women in Afghanistan has had its heights and lows. Since Abdur Rahman and King Amanullah ruled the country, women's rights have never been the same again. Even though progress has been made in the last decade, many issues remain unsolved. Which could raise another question, namely: how long will it take before Afghan women will be treated as equals? Such a simple question but at the same time a very difficult one. Personally, I believe that as long as Afghanistan makes effort to improve the situation and it remains to be monitored by the international community we must keep hope alive. Regarding the recent initiatives of both the EU and UN, I sincerely believe that without their development aid, and of others, the country would be much worse off. Every project, every activity initiated by the European Union or the United Nations, for instance, is one step closer to a more democratic country and an enlargement of freedom for Afghan women. We must never forget that.

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