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> Any Deals With Insurgents Should Guarantee Women's Rights

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> (Kabul, July 13, 2010) – Ongoing Taliban attacks on women

> in Afghanistan show why women's rights should be a

> priority in any political agreement with insurgent forces,

> Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. The

> Afghan government and its international supporters have

> ignored the need to protect women in programs to

> reintegrate insurgent fighters and have not guaranteed

> that women's rights will be included in potential talks

> with the Taliban, Human Rights Watch said.

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> The 65-page report, "The 'Ten-Dollar Talib' and Women's

> Rights: Afghan Women and the Risks of Reintegration and

> Reconciliation," addresses the potential challenges to

> women's rights posed by future government agreements with

> insurgent forces. The report describes how in areas under

> Taliban control, women are often subjected to threats,

> intimidation and violence, girls' education is targeted,

> and women political leaders and activists are attacked and

> killed with impunity.

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> "Afghan women shouldn't have to give up their rights so

> the government can cut a deal with the Taliban," said Tom

> Malinowski, Washington director at Human Rights Watch. "It

> would be a tragic betrayal to snatch away the progress

> made by and for women and girls over the past nine years."

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> In areas they control or influence, the Taliban have

> threatened and attacked women in public life and ordinary

> women who work outside their homes. A common form of

> threat is the "night letter," a note often left at a house

> or school.

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> A female government employee quit her job after receiving

> this letter in February 2010: "We Taliban warn you to stop

> working for the government otherwise we will take your

> life away. We will kill you in such a harsh way that no  
> woman has so far been killed in that manner. This will be  
> a good lesson for those women like you who are working."  
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> Hossai, a 22-year-old working for an American development  
> company, received similar threats by phone but continued  
> to work. In April, unidentified gunmen shot her dead as  
> she left her office. Soon after, another woman received a  
> night letter telling her that she would be next: "In the  
> same way that yesterday we have killed Hossai, whose name  
> was on our list, your name and other women's names are  
> also on our list."  
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> Taliban and other insurgents regularly target girls'  
> education, including threatening and attacking female  
> teachers and students. In February, a girls' school in a  
> northern province received the following night letter:  
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> "You were already informed by us to close the school and  
> not mislead the pure and innocent girls under this  
> non-Muslim government; however you did not pay attention....  
> This is the last warning to close the school immediately...  
> If you remain in the province, remember that you and your  
> family will be eliminated."  
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> There is little sign so far that the government of  
> President Hamid Karzai is adequately addressing concerns  
> about these attacks in its programs to reintegrate  
> insurgents or in proposals to shift from fighting the  
> Taliban to reconciling with senior Taliban leaders, Human  
> Rights Watch said.  
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> The Afghan government has offered only weak assurances for  
> women that it intends to safeguard the freedoms they have  
> regained since the fall of the Taliban government in 2001.  
> In recent years, Karzai has sold women short when it was  
> politically expedient. In March 2009, for example, he  
> signed the discriminatory Shia Personal Status Law (which  
> denies Shia women the rights to child custody and freedom  
> of movement, among other rights), and in 2008 he pardoned

- > two convicted gang rapists for political reasons.
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- > Some international advocates of reintegration are
- > recasting the insurgency as primarily non-ideological,
- > highlighting "ten-dollar Talibs," who fight only for
- > money. United States and NATO forces and several major
- > donors are strongly backing reintegration programs, which
- > they will largely finance. Their support for
- > reconciliation with the Taliban is more limited.
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- > Despite promises from Afghanistan's international
- > supporters to promote women's rights, Human Rights Watch
- > remains concerned that they, too, may sacrifice women's
- > rights as part of an exit strategy from Afghanistan. For
- > instance, although the Afghan government has said that
- > insurgents who reintegrate or reconcile with the
- > government will have to agree to the Afghan constitution,
- > which upholds equal rights for women, there is no vetting
- > or mechanism to ensure compliance.
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- > Human Rights Watch interviews suggest that there is
- > division among Afghan and international actors about
- > whether it will be possible to offer explicit safeguards
- > for women's rights to education, work, and political
- > engagement.
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- > "Donor governments rightfully stress Afghan leadership of
- > these processes," Malinowski said. "But that doesn't mean
- > they have to bankroll Afghan deals that will endanger
- > women."
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- > The Afghan government has sought to co-opt opposition
- > factions by offering them impunity for war crimes and
- > other serious violations of international law. But justice
- > and accountability for serious crimes should be at the
- > core of any reconciliation process with the Taliban and
- > other insurgents, Human Rights Watch said. That requires
- > bringing current government officials to justice for
- > serious crimes, as well as stronger vetting of candidates
- > for elected office and political appointments.

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> The report outlines conditions that should be included in  
> any reintegration and negotiation or reconciliation  
> process to ensure women's rights. The rights of women to  
> work, obtain an education, and engage in political life  
> should be explicitly safeguarded, Human Rights Watch said.  
> Individuals with a history of serious abuses against women  
> and girls should be excluded from power. And women leaders  
> need to be fully involved in the decision-making processes  
> for both reintegration and reconciliation, since they are  
> themselves the best guarantors of their rights.

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> "Afghan women are paying a heavy price in this conflict,  
> and no one wants peace more than they do," Malinowski  
> said. "But their rights don't have to be traded away in  
> hasty deals. There can be peace with justice."

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