

Protecting women's rights

October 2012

'I do not want to lose what we have achieved so far, and I do not want to go back to my previous life. A peace process should not come at any cost.'

'I worry other countries may compromise to achieve a very superficial peace; they may make a mistake and ignore Afghan women and all Afghan citizens.'

Afghan MP Shinkai Kharokail voices the concerns of many throughout **Afghanistan** that **women's rights** are being overlooked by the international community as it plans its withdrawal. They fear that the fragile progress towards greater equality could be reversed.

Video: empowering Afghan women

Protecting women's rights in Afghanistan



'In 10 years we have achieved a lot, especially after five years of **Taliban**, when women were absolutely excluded from social, economic and political life.

'Now women are everywhere, women are part of the decision-making process, part of development in this country,' says Shinkai.

'We believe that this country will not be built without women's contribution or active role.' Shinkai Kharohail

Afghan Women's Education Centre

Shinkai is the founder-director of **Christian Aid** partner the **Afghan Women's Education Centre**, AWEC, and a renowned women's rights activist who has successfully lobbied for laws to protect women, including banning child marriage.

Through the work of AWEC and other **human rights partners**, Christian Aid has helped ensure successes in reforming Afghan law. For example, we were able to change four articles of a law for the Shia minority that effectively legalised marital rape and child marriage.

This kind of **advocacy** provides a framework for protection of rights, and is critically important.

'Moral crimes'

AWEC also work with women in jail in Afghanistan, many of whom have been imprisoned for 'moral crimes' such as running away from home or pre-marital sex. They help them defend their cases – such as Bibigul, featured in the video above, whose death sentence was commuted to 18 years.

Since the film was made, AWEC have had Bibigul's sentence further reduced to eight and then seven years. There is hope of a further reduction.

Work still to be done

Under the **Taliban**, human rights groups were not even allowed to exist. In the past 10 years groups such as AWEC have been able to establish a strong network to protect women's rights and provide **education** to the poorest.

Shinkai concludes: 'We believe that this country will not be built without women's contribution or active role. There have been many achievements – we must maintain these, and not lose them. It is vital to have more long-term commitment to this country and not turn your back.'

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