



## AFGHANISTAN



### **Women of Afghanistan Remain Defiant Despite Growing Security Risks and Mounting Challenges**

In early March 2012, the Gender Concerns International team concluded its mission to Afghanistan following intense consultations with various stakeholders.

Building on long-standing partnerships with local Afghan organizations, an impressive record of achievements in the region and supportive international lobby and advocacy from Europe, Gender Concerns International sought to solidify its local office in Kabul and make headway on the implementation of its' programs in Afghanistan, supported by the European Union.

#### **Supporting female leadership in Afghanistan**

Gender Concerns International's Afghanistan program takes an innovative multi-dimensional approach to strengthening and enhancing the effectiveness of female leadership in Afghanistan by supporting the capacity of local women led organizations, strengthening and enhancing the effectiveness of the female leadership cadre at the community and parliamentary level, and facilitating valuable modes of interaction between major stakeholders in women's affairs including individual female leaders and parliamentarians, civil society organizations, women-led organizations and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The ability for women to share experiences, skill-share and interact with one another in an open, cooperative and sustainable manner on gender issues has wide reaching implications for the potential for Afghan women leaders to continue to push the gender agenda and achieve genuine rule of law in Afghanistan.

#### **Meetings and Engagement**

The mission saw members of the Gender Concerns International team, including Director Sabra Bano and Afghanistan Coordinator Melanie Hyde, attending meetings with our local partner, the Afghan Women's Network, the largest network of women's organizations in Afghanistan. At the invitation of the Dutch Embassy in Kabul, Gender Concerns International also met with His Excellency Radinck van Vollenhoven to discuss female leadership and the role of women in the pursuit of rule of law in Afghanistan. The meeting was fruitful and stressed Gender Concerns International's commitment to its' program for women across Afghanistan. Important meetings were also held with Deputy Minister Palwasha Kakar, prominent female parliamentarian Ms Farkhunda Zahra Naderi and Professor Jawida Ahmadi to discuss the issues concerning women's full democratic participation in Afghanistan.





### **Gender Concerns International welcomes new members to local office**

Following Ms Bano's return to The Netherlands to attend the CSW conference in New York, Ms Hyde remained in Afghanistan, tasked with operationalising and coordinating the Gender Concerns International local office in Kabul. Gender Concerns International proudly supports its' Kabul office situated at Karta Parwan Square, Kabul and welcomes the addition of two new members of staff to our team: Shukria Hassani, Lobbyist & Liaison Officer and Lemar Meenanak, Communications Officer. Our newest team members will be on the ground in Afghanistan and will provide strategic local advice and assistance for Gender Concerns International's Afghanistan program.

### **Recommendations**

As the local team continues to engage with women's organizations and female leaders of Afghanistan with the support of The Hague, Gender Concerns International and other international organizations must support our local partners to ensure that the international community honours its' commitment to ensuring that women are not forgotten or their rights compromised in the pursuit of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Despite the fact that Afghan women have and continue to deal with insecurity, violence and trivialization of their roles on a daily basis, they remain strong, defiant and resolute in their battle to achieve equal opportunities and decision making power in their communities. There remain tremendous challenges to women's genuine inclusion in democratic governance in Afghanistan. These obstacles are both complex and multi-dimensional, relating to deeply entrenched ideas about the role of women—economically, socio-culturally, politically, environmentally, in religious discourse and institutionally. For women to challenge these ideas, it is first necessary for them to be in a position where they can not only voice their views and experience on equal footing with men, but also to share power equally with men in all aspects of society.

