

AFGHANISTAN AND THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Introduction

Focus

In this *News in Review* story we'll look at the situation of women living in Afghanistan. This issue was thrust into the limelight when news leaked out that Afghan President Hamid Karzai had signed the Shiite Personal Status Law in February 2009. The legislation would make many Afghan women financially and sexually subservient to their husbands. Canada and the international community reacted strongly against the legislation. In this *News in Review* story, we will examine the legislation and the response to it and explore the reality of life for Afghan women.

Note

This story is very controversial, and some elements may be disturbing to students, particularly younger girls. Teachers should use discretion in presenting this important but challenging story.

The news broke in March 2009. A law had been passed in Afghanistan that limited the human rights of the country's Shiite women. The legislation—named the Shiite Personal Status Law—made it illegal for women to leave the house or work without the permission of a male family member. It also took away women's custody and inheritance rights and stipulated that it was a woman's duty to have sex with her husband at least every four days. If she refused, her husband could refuse to feed her.

Canada and much of the international community responded with outrage. Canadians asked themselves: How could a country so blatantly disregard the rights of women? And why were we putting Canadian Forces personnel in harm's way in Afghanistan when the country clearly did not support human rights? Many Canadians called for the withdrawal of troops and demanded that aid money to the country be frozen.

Members of the government contacted the Afghanistan President, Hamid Karzai, to share their displeasure. Karzai admitted that he had signed the law, but said he did so without reading it. He said that he relies on his aides to review most documents that he signs. This law simply got by him unnoticed. On April 25, 2009, after continued international pressure, Karzai made assurances that he would review the legislation and amend the offending sections to bring it into line with international human rights standards.

But not everyone is convinced. "This is a good step," said Sabrina Saqib, an Afghan activist and member of Afghan's National Assembly. "We're

not really sure if he'll keep the promise and bring the amendments, but at least he says he will. We're hopeful" (*The Globe and Mail*, April 26, 2009). Politicians outside Afghanistan are wary, too. Prime Minister Stephen Harper and other Canadian members of Parliament have stated that they will continue to put pressure on Karzai until the law is amended.

There is a good chance that the law may not be reviewed until after the next Afghan election, scheduled for August 2009. Karzai has become unpopular within Afghanistan because he is seen by many as being a puppet of the West. Some observers believe that Karzai signed the law because he wanted to appeal to the hardline conservative elements of the country. The law was drafted as a way to win the support of the powerful Shia minority in the country.

Any hope that Karzai might have had that the furor would subside after he gave his reassurances that the law would be reviewed were dashed when a group of Afghan women took to the streets to protest the law. About 300 mostly young Shia women protested in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. But the protest drew a swarm of about 1 000 angry Afghan men who pelted the women with stones and cursed them. Jeremy Starkey, a reporter for *The Independent*, heard one man yell: "You are a dog. You are not a Shia woman" (CBC News, April 15, 2009).

Women's rights activists were quick to point out that the proposed law is just the tip of the iceberg. The law simply reflects the day-to-day reality of all Afghan women. The Sunni majority, for example, already deny Afghan

Definition

Shia and *Sunni* are different sects within Islam. It should be noted that not all Sunni or Shia Muslims share the views of fellow Muslims in Afghanistan. Even within Afghanistan, there is a range of views on many important issues, including the role of women.

Quote

"Afghanistan will not fast-forward from the 12th century to the 21st century in the blink of an eye and certainly not according to the agenda of Canadian sensibilities." — Rosie DiManno, columnist (*Toronto Star*, February 4, 2008)

women inheritance rights. And it has long been the case, in this country ruled by old traditions and customs, that women have no recourse against domestic violence, guarantees to a fair trial, or control over who and when they marry.

Nelofer Pazira, an Afghan Canadian journalist and filmmaker, had this to say about the reforms needed in Afghanistan: "This week, more than 100 Afghan women from 34 provinces met in Kabul to discuss the situation of women in the country; they highlighted insecurity as the biggest impediment to their freedom and equality. Most women fear leaving their homes to attend school or go to work—not because of their husbands, but because they don't feel safe. Their rights to education, freedom of movement and

action are guaranteed in the Afghan constitution, but the gap between words and reality is too huge to be bridged simply by revising a few clauses in a legal document" (*Toronto Star*, April 8, 2009).

So the issues are complex and not easily solved. The introduction of the Shiite Personal Status Law has focused attention on the plight of Afghan women, at least for now. And Canadians are left to struggle with some tough questions. Are we willing to lose more Canadian Forces personnel than the 118 who have already given up their lives in this country? Can we guarantee that aid money gets to the people who really need it within Afghanistan? And if we leave, are we condemning Afghan women to a life without basic human rights?

To Consider

In May 2007, Prime Minister Stephen Harper visited Canadian Forces troops in Kandahar. During his visit, he said the following: "Because of you the people of Afghanistan have seen . . . democratic elections, the stirring of human rights and freedoms for women, the construction of schools, health-care facilities, and the basic infrastructure of a functional economy. Friends, you are helping the Afghan people make a better life for themselves and their children" (*Toronto Star*, April 2, 2009).

1. If he visited the troops again today, would his words still apply? Explain.
2. Is it possible to help the women of Afghanistan if many Afghan men are strongly opposed to the extension of basic human rights to those women?
3. How much power does a government actually have to change traditional values and customs in a society?
4. Does Canada have the right to demand that Afghans change the attitudes that they have developed over thousands of years?

AFGHANISTAN AND THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Video Review

Did you know . . .

Afghanistan has a minister of women's affairs in the government—and the minister is a woman.

Quote

"These are the very kinds of laws that the Taliban brought to Afghanistan, the very kinds of laws that our government has said we are sending troops to Afghanistan to ensure that this kind of thing doesn't happen." — Dawn Black, British Columbia MP, New Democratic Party

Pre-Viewing Activity

In a small group, discuss the following questions:

1. Should men and women in all parts of the world be guaranteed the same human rights? *Why/Why not?*
2. Rank the following human rights in order of importance and be prepared to explain your choices.
 - (a) The right to an education
 - (b) The right to marry when one chooses, and whom one chooses
 - (c) The right to vote
 - (d) The right to dress as one chooses
 - (e) The right to personal safety — free from domestic or public violence
 - (f) The right to free speech
 - (g) The right to full employment
3. If basic human rights are being denied to men or women in a particular region or country in the world, does the international community have an obligation to take diplomatic or military action against that country? Explain.
4. Do you support Canada's military action in Afghanistan—a country where religious fundamentalists deny women basic human rights? Explain.

Video Questions

1. What sort of restrictions were placed on women when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan?

2. Why did Canada and other countries become outraged when Afghanistan passed a law that stripped certain Afghan women of their rights?

3. What are some of the specific provisions of the proposed law?

Quote

"It could be a turning point, but we equally know that there is a huge backlash at the moment against women's rights in Afghanistan. So the climate is getting worse, if anything, for these women to oppose such laws."
— Ceri Hayes, human rights advocate

Quote

"This is Islamic country. This is Afghanistan. We want Islamic rule."— Unidentified Afghan man

4. How did Omar Samad, the Afghan Ambassador to Canada, explain the controversial law?

5. How did the Afghan government respond to the international criticism shortly after the controversy erupted?

6. What evidence exists that the Taliban continue to target women in Afghanistan?

7. What happened to Sitara Achakzai?

8. What happened when Afghan women publicly demonstrated against the law?

Post-Viewing Activities

1. With your group, review your answers to the pre-viewing questions. Are there any answers that you would like to revise based on the information you learned in the *News in Review* video? If so, make those changes.

2. You learned that violence and the threat of violence make it very difficult for Afghan women to fight against injustice within the country.

(a) Does this mean it is more important for the international community to take action in this matter? Explain.

(b) Might pressure from the international community have any unintended negative consequences for Afghan women? Explain.

3. At the time this video was produced, the Afghan government had not formally withdrawn the controversial law. Instead, revisions to the law were "under consideration." If the law is not amended, should Canada withdraw its armed forces from Afghanistan? Explain your answer.

AFGHANISTAN AND THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Document Study: The Controversial Law

Quote

"Afghanistan is still one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman. It is a place where women set themselves on fire to escape brutality and where girls as young as eight are married to elderly men and where 60 per cent of marriages are forced."
— from London-based charity Womankind Worldwide (*Toronto Star*, April 14, 2009)

Shiite Personal Status Law

This law was approved in February 2009 with the signature of Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The information that follows outlines the provisions of the law that have garnered the greatest criticism within the international community and from Afghan women themselves.

The Provisions

Article 27: This provision legalizes child marriage. The law states that it is legal to marry girls once their menstruation cycle has started.

Article 47: This provision denies women custody of their children. The law grants guardianship of children to fathers and grandfathers.

Article 133: This provision states that a woman can only work, get an education, or access health care if her husband grants permission for her to do so.

Article 161: This provision legalizes divorce proceedings with the simple requirement that two male witnesses be present.

Article 177: This provision denies a woman the right to leave her home without a male relative's permission, except in the case of an emergency.

Article 226: This provision regulates inheritance rights between couples. Men inherit both movable and immovable property from a deceased spouse, while women inherit only movable property (no houses or land) from a deceased spouse. (This is also the case for Sunni Muslim women under Afghan law.)



Since 2002, 118 Canadian soldiers have been killed serving in the Afghanistan mission. One diplomat and two aid workers have also been killed. The concern over the right of Afghan women has caused many Canadians to rethink the value of this mission.

The Marital Rape Provision

The provision that has generated the greatest outrage is Article 132. Critics claim that the article condones marital rape. The text of the article is described below and then explained by Mohammed Asif Mohseni, a leading Shiite cleric who was involved in the drafting of the law.

Article 132: This article obligates wives to submit to their husband's sexual desires. Specifically, the wife will provide sex a minimum of once every four nights unless she is sick or can offer up a logical or lawful reason to abstain. In contrast, the law stipulates the husband has an obligation to have sexual relations with his wife once every four months.

Quote

"The onus is upon the government of Afghanistan to live up to its human-rights responsibilities, absolutely including the rights of women. If there is any wavering on this point . . . this will create serious difficulties, serious problems for the government of Canada."— Stockwell Day, Federal Trade Minister (*The Globe and Mail*, April 1, 2009)

Did you know . . .

Spousal sexual assault became a crime in Canada in 1983. It is an offence in most parts of the Western world and, in 1993, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights established marital rape as a human-rights violation.

In an article in the *Toronto Star*, (April 12, 2009) Mohseni is quoted as saying that men and women enter into a business arrangement when they marry. Because men are the primary breadwinners in Afghanistan, they are expected to provide for the women and children. In return, women have an obligation to have sexual relations with their husbands. "It is not possible for all women to pay the same amount of money as men . . . For all these expenses, can't we at least give the right to a husband to demand sex from his wife after four nights?"

Mohseni also states that husbands should never force themselves on their wives, and the law does not sanction that. However, women do have a duty to

meet their husband's needs. "If a woman says no, the man has the right not to feed her" (Reuters, April 16, 2009).

Under this provision, the husband can also demand that his wife wear cosmetics and dress up for him. Critics argue that this reinforces the second-class status of women and the fact that they exist to serve their husbands' needs. But Mohseni argues that this provision is actually intended to improve the relationship between husbands and wives. "When men venture outside, they see lots of other women with make-up, but he comes home and finds his own wife with a dirty face. This is mentioned to encourage men to have more interest in a social and personal life with his wife" (*The Telegraph*, April 16, 2009).

Analysis

1. Do the words of Mohammad Asif Mohseni make it easier to understand the legislation? Why/Why not?
2. Do you feel that the media have exaggerated the punitive nature of this legislation? Explain.
3. What might an Afghan woman, if she were free to speak openly, say in response to the words of Mohseni?

AFGHANISTAN AND THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Women In Afghanistan: An Overview

Quote

“How has the war helped women in Afghanistan? It hasn’t. Never have women achieved equality by somebody coming in and giving it to them.”
— Judy Rebick, former head of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (*The Globe and Mail*, April 18, 2009)

Women in Afghanistan have not experienced equal rights, as we know them in the West, for a very long time, if ever. Although women’s groups and human rights activists have worked hard to improve the lives of Afghan women, to a large extent the international community has paid little attention to the problem.

Part of the reason for this is that Westerners do not want to appear to be culturally insensitive. Westerners are aware that they have a fleeting knowledge, at best, of Afghanistan’s history, and of the social customs and norms of Afghan society. Many social sciences like anthropology and sociology have been critical of the ethnocentric nature of Western nations. A person is being ethnocentric when they judge other cultures as “less sophisticated” or “inferior” to their own.

Another reason that little action has been taken on behalf of Afghan women is that women’s equality rights have historically not been given high priority. Even in Western nations, it was only in the last few decades that women have been able to secure decent maternity leave, strong property rights, and protection from domestic violence. And even these rights have not been achieved universally. For example, in the United States today, women are guaranteed only six weeks of maternity leave.

As well, it is difficult to bring about change in any society by imposing it from the outside. Change is most effective, and more permanent, when it comes from the people living within the society.

The Problems

Although life for women improved after the fall of the ultra-conservative Taliban in 2001, any gains they made appear to

be slipping. For example:

- Women in Afghanistan are basically the property of their husbands.
- Anyone who provides protection or shelter to a married woman who has fled her household is considered to be a kidnapper.
- Women convicted of adultery—sometimes just for being seen in public with men who are not their husbands—can be stoned to death.
- In Kandahar province, it is almost impossible for women to walk in public without a head-to-toe burqa.
- Educators of women are harassed, threatened with violence, and sometimes executed.
- Girls comprise only 17 per cent of the students in classrooms.
- Only five per cent of women can read.
- Domestic violence is not uncommon, but women are ostracized by their families and by society if they leave an abusive spouse.
- It is common for young girls to be married off for cash dowries.

The Dangers Facing Educators

Male and female teachers are common targets of violence, because the conservative elements of the country realize it is easier to withhold basic human rights from people if they are uneducated. In December 2005, gunmen pulled a teacher from Helmand province from his classroom and killed him in the street. His crime was teaching boys and girls in a mixed class and ignoring warnings to stop. In the same month in Zabul province, a teacher was dragged from his home and beheaded. And in early 2006, seven schools in Kandahar province were burned to the ground.

Quote

"I'll continue my schooling even if they try to kill me. I won't stop going to school. — Shamsia, 17-year-old victim of an acid attack (*Toronto Star*, November 16, 2008)

Quote

"The women's wing at Sarpoza was indeed like a page torn from a Grimm's fairy tale. Filthy, pre-teen girls, their hair matted with dirt, balanced babies and toddlers on their hips. No one wore shoes. The cells had no toilets or running water . . . Most of the female prisoners were very young women, barely out of their teens. They were in jails for so-called crimes that didn't exist in the criminal codes of any Western nations. — Jane Armstrong, reporter (*The Globe and Mail*, April 18, 2009)

Those who teach girls are particular targets. In 2006, Ahmed Nabi, the principal of Zarona Girls' High School—just outside Kandahar—reported that one of his teachers had found a homemade bomb next to his house. The director of Mirwais Minna Girls' School in Kandahar found a hand grenade dangling from the doorknob of the school. More commonly, messages like the following are placed in public areas: "This is a warning to all dishonourable people, including *ulemas* (legal scholars) and teachers, not to teach girls. Based on information given to us, we strongly ask those people whose names have been particularly reported to us not to commit this act of evil. Otherwise it is they who will bear all the responsibilities. They have no right to claim they have not been informed" (*The Globe and Mail*, November 3, 2006).

As if that wasn't enough, the world was shocked on November 12, 2008, when two men on a motorcycle threw acid in the face of eight girls who were on their way to Mirwais Minna School in Kandahar. Ten men were arrested for playing a role in the acid attacks.

They reported that Taliban organizers offered them \$1 500 for every woman or girl sprayed with acid. Attendance at the school dropped off sharply after the attacks but quickly rebounded as girls resumed their education.

Arranged Marriages

Jane Armstrong, a reporter with *The Globe and Mail*, has visited and studied Afghan culture and the daily life of Afghan women for years. Her columns in the newspaper explain that Afghanistan is still largely ruled by ancient customs that govern the conduct and expectations of women and girls. The practice of trading young girls for marriage is widespread among poor families, where girls are used as a form of currency.

In 2006, Armstrong visited Sarpoza, a Kandahar jail, to interview female inmates. There she met Shabano, a 13-year-old girl who had been jailed for running away from an arranged marriage with a 50-year-old man. Shabano explained that when her father promised her in marriage to the 50-year-old man, the 50-year-old offered his own teenaged daughter to Shabano's father in return.

Analysis

- 1. What have you learned about daily life for Afghanistan women?

- 2. If you had the power to change one aspect of the lives of these women, what would you choose? Why?

AFGHANISTAN AND THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Afghanistan's Brave Women

Did you know . . .
One of the candidates for the position of president of Afghanistan in the upcoming summer elections in Afghanistan is a female MP, Shahla Atta.

You have learned in this *News in Review* story that it is often very difficult for Afghan women to participate in public life. Women who choose to work risk both violence and intimidation. And those who choose to work in education or politics, or who challenge traditional ideas about appropriate roles for women, face death threats or worse. Many women in Afghanistan face their fears and choose to work. Through their actions they try to make Afghan society better for the poor and vulnerable. Better for the children. In this section you will learn about some of these brave women and the price they have paid for their bravery.

Sabrina Saqib

Sabrina Saqib is a politician in Afghanistan's lower house of government. She was elected in 2005, when she was only 24-years-old. Remarkably, she ran on a platform of liberal reform and gender equality. During her campaign she told people that she hoped to make the wearing of the burqa a matter of choice for all women and advocated an end to forced marriages.

Her family supported her campaign, printing and distributing posters and pamphlets of Saqib wearing only a headscarf, her face unveiled. Many people spoke out against her behaviour. And men, who are not used to being around women in public, found her presence quite astonishing.

The Taliban had vowed to kill any women who participated in the election. Not surprisingly, she received numerous death threats throughout the campaign, and her office had to be protected by the military police. But she succeeded and

was elected in September 2005. She is still a member of the government and she still receives death threats.

Zakia Zaki

Zakia Zaki was a talented woman. She was a respected journalist and human rights activist, the principal of a local school, and she ran for parliament in 2005. She had a local radio show and was often trying to raise money for textbooks for local school children. She was very active in her community, despite the fact that she was also a mother of six.

Female journalists are often threatened by the Taliban or other conservatives, or by their own families.

In June 2006, Zaki was shot seven times while she slept in bed with her youngest son. She was 35.

Masoda Younasy

Masoda Younasy is only 23 but has already had an extraordinary life. At 22, she was running her own construction business. She had already been a justice assistant to the Afghan human-rights commission and a field officer for the electoral-management body. But then she landed a job as a project manager with a group of construction companies.

She was drawn to the job, she said, because it was unconventional work for a woman. "I said, 'Oh, this is my wish—to do something in Afghanistan that a lady cannot do because of our culture. They are not doing these things because they are scared of family, culture, the Taliban. So I said, 'Why don't I do this?'" (*The Globe and Mail*, September 1, 2008).

When she was 21 she found out that a price had been put on her head. She even met the man who had been hired

to kill her. However, because he knew her family, he decided not to kill her but chose to warn her that she had been targeted for death. She has also been threatened by her own extended family. On one occasion, two uncles and three cousins beat her and locked her in a room, saying they would kill her, her sister, and her mother.

In January 2009, Younasy was granted a three-year permit to live and work in Canada after it became apparent that her life was in grave danger. Federal Immigration Minister Jason Kenney signed the papers after learning that Younasy's life had been threatened. Younasy hopes to return to Afghanistan some day to become a member of government.

Malalai Kakar

On September 28, 2008, one of the bravest women in Afghanistan was gunned down shortly after she had fed her six children and sent them to school. Lieutenant-Colonel Malalai Kakar was in charge of the female investigators who pursue crimes committed by and against women in Kandahar. The women's police program in Afghanistan is very important because the strict interpretation of Islamic law followed in the country prohibits policemen from interacting with women to whom they are neither married nor related. Female

police officers must deal with female offenders and victims.

Lieutenant-Colonel Kakar had a reputation for being fearless. She reportedly once beat up an abusive husband in order to rescue the wife and child he had kept chained in a cage. Her execution by the Taliban has made the rest of the female police officers very reluctant to continue their work.

Sitara Achakzai

Sitara Achakzai was a member of Kandahar's provincial council and was known for fighting for women's rights. Achakzai lived in Germany during the years of Taliban rule but returned to her native Afghanistan in 2004 to help rebuild the country. She encouraged women to take jobs and to fight for equal rights. Achakzai had been receiving death threats from the Taliban and, according to friends, was very aware she was likely going to die a violent death.

She was gunned down close to her home while sitting in a rickshaw. Her husband, a professor at Kandahar University, confirmed that the Taliban had claimed responsibility for the attack. He also confirmed that the couple had planned a long trip to Toronto on May 1, where they have family, because of the increase in violence they had witnessed in the city.

Response

1. What qualities must Afghan women display in order to take leadership positions in their country?
2. What lessons can be learned from the lives and careers of the women described above?
3. Which of the above women most impresses you? Why?

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Activity: Should Canada Continue its Mission?

Further Research

- United Nations Development Fund for Women: www.unifem.org
- Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan: www.rawa.org/women.php
- Canadian Women For Women in Afghanistan: www.w4wafghan.ca
- Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/news-nouvelles/2009/2009_03_27.aspx?lang=eng

Quotes

"We are caught in the Catch-22 that the Afghans obviously have the right to write their own laws. But there is dismay. The rights of women was one of the reasons the UK and many in the West threw ourselves into the struggle in Afghanistan. It matters greatly to us and our public opinion." — Lord Malloch Brown, British Cabinet Minister (*The Globe and Mail*, April 1, 2009)

This *News in Review* story has explored a controversial new law in Afghanistan that would—when it comes into effect—legislate human rights violations against Shiite Muslim women in the country. Observers note, however, that the law is just the tip of the iceberg, since women throughout the country suffer violence, discrimination, and an almost complete lack of power.

When the Canadian government learned about the Shiite Personal Status Law, it was outraged at certain provisions of the legislation. Canadians across the country began to ask why the government was sacrificing the lives of Canadian Forces personnel and spending millions of dollars in foreign aid on a country that clearly does not support basic human rights for women.

Your Task

Write a persuasive speech either in support of, or against, Canada's continued participation in the military mission in Afghanistan. Use a number of specific reasons and examples to support your position.

To prepare your speech, you may choose to:

- watch the *News in Review* video again
- review the quotes on this and the next page
- visit one of the Web sites listed in the margin
- read other sections of this guide

Student Opinion

Before the speeches are read in class, your teacher may choose to ask for a show of hands to determine how many students are in favour of the military mission continuing and how many oppose it. After all the speeches have been read, your teacher may again ask for a show of hands to see if any students changed their minds as a result of this activity.

Reading Your Speech

Practise reading your speech a couple of times so that you are very familiar with your main arguments. Try to not speak too quickly while you are reading.

Quotes

"While the emancipation of women in Afghanistan was one happy byproduct of the war, it was not the reason for it. The Taliban's murderous, fundamentalist regime played host to Al Qaeda, which used Afghanistan as a safe haven to plot terrorist attacks against Western countries. It was not for the advancement of Afghan women that the war was launched. The effort to rid the world of the Taliban was a matter of self-interest." — Editorial, *The Globe and Mail*, April 2, 2009

"I want little girls to go to school as much as anyone else. But the Afghan mission has morphed far beyond its original intent. Now, it's nation building. To secure the terrain until the Afghans are able to help themselves will require more boots on the ground, more training of police, more civilian aid, more democracy promotion, and a whole bunch more money. No one has yet been

able to explain how we will prevent the next few billion dollars worth of aid from disappearing into the pockets of corrupt government officials and useless projects, the way the last few billion dollars did." — Margaret Wentz, columnist (*The Globe and Mail*, April 2, 2009)

"Now is not the time for Canadians to lose our heads over Afghanistan. Mindless panic on the one hand, and bubbling righteous indignation on the other, are bad guides to foreign policy. Yes, the strategic situation has deteriorated, and yes, the proposed Afghan marriage law is regressive. Neither justifies cutting and running. We have a way to go to win this conflict, but we haven't yet lost it . . . We are not, and never have been, in Afghanistan to establish a full-fledged democracy there . . ." — Clifford Orwin, professor of political science (*The Globe and Mail*, April 4, 2009)

"Canadians protesting *sharia* law claim that we are in Afghanistan to protect women's freedom. But we are forgetting we are there to provide security so that both women and men can live in peace. Our soldiers are not dying to change tribal codes of behaviour or the culture of that country. It is up to the people of Afghanistan to reject laws and practices that are against human rights. Creating conditions that allow women an education is far more important." — Nelofer Pazira, Canadian journalist and filmmaker (*Toronto Star*, April 8, 2009)

"The Canadian troops are dying the same way my sister sacrificed herself. They should come out of Afghanistan because all the good people who are trying to do something there are dying away." — Mawena Maiwand, sister of slain Afghan activist Sitara Achakzai (*Toronto Star*, April 14, 2009)