

**Federica Mogherini**

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
Vice President of the European Commission (HRVP)  
European Commission  
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**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS OFFICE**

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Dear High Representative Mogherini,

### **EU MUST ACT FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS UNDER ATTACK IN AFGHANISTAN**

Today, Afghanistan stands at a critical juncture. With the departure of international military forces in late 2014 and the culmination of reduced economic and political support from the international community, there is concern that the Afghan government will de-prioritise human rights amid growing economic problems and increasing instability, and that human rights, especially those of women and girls, will be traded off in the interests of security. Amnesty International calls on you to act to ensure that the European Union (EU), its member states, and the wider international community remain committed to protecting and supporting the crucial work of human rights defenders (HRDs), and particularly of women human rights defenders (WHRDs), in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>

In a recently issued report, [Their Lives on the Line: Women Human Rights Defenders under Attack in Afghanistan](#), Amnesty International documents the systemic failure of Afghan security and law enforcement agencies to investigate threats and attacks against WHRDs – human rights violations rooted in patriarchal traditions that normalise gender-based violence and render it acceptable. The Afghan government must demonstrate the political will to implement fully its human rights obligations. Alongside this, financial commitments from donors and the Afghan government are necessary to ensure that protection mechanisms are adequately resourced in order to function fully and effectively.

In December 2014, the EU, its member states, and other diplomatic missions (Canada, Norway and Switzerland) worked with Afghan HRDs to develop the EU+ Local Strategy on HRDs<sup>2</sup> that will, once operational, offer a protection mechanism for Afghan human rights defenders, including both emergency protection and ongoing monitoring. However, the strategy has yet to be tested in terms of concrete outcomes, including the mainstreaming of the particular needs of WHRDs, and especially those in rural areas of the country. In March 2015, the EU announced new initiatives to support Afghan women,<sup>3</sup> and it will be essential to connect this gender equality initiative to ongoing commitments to protect and support WHRDs.

Full political and financial support for the EU+ Local Strategy on HRDs will make a significant, sustainable contribution to protecting HRDs, including women human rights defenders, and enable them to continue – in safety and with dignity – their essential work for the fulfilment of women's rights in Afghanistan.

To this end, the EU, its member states, Canada, Norway, and Switzerland should:

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<sup>1</sup> Women human rights defenders are women and men who are peaceably engaged in activities to promote and protect nationally and internationally recognised rights of women and girls. However, female WHRDs are not only targeted because of their words or actions in promoting and protecting women's rights, but also because of who they are – women in public life.

<sup>2</sup>[http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/afghanistan/documents/eu\\_afghanistan/eu-local-strategy-for-human-right-defenders-in-afghanistan-2014.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/afghanistan/documents/eu_afghanistan/eu-local-strategy-for-human-right-defenders-in-afghanistan-2014.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://eeas.europa.eu/factsheets/docs/150308\\_01\\_factsheet\\_promoting\\_women\\_leaders\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/factsheets/docs/150308_01_factsheet_promoting_women_leaders_en.pdf)

- Fully use all appropriate diplomatic opportunities to advocate for improved security, protection and support to human rights defenders, addressing the particular needs of women human rights defenders and engaging with the Afghan government through all channels, including high level meetings. Public statements should be issued where appropriate at local, national, and EU levels on the situation of individual HRDs and of HRDs in Afghanistan in general.
- Ensure comprehensive funding and resources are available to implement fully the EU+ Local Strategy for Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan, including through:
  - Ensuring that diplomatic staff are fully trained on EU, EU+, and international commitments towards HRDs
  - Monitoring progress and evaluating actions according to benchmarks for the implementation of the strategy
- Ensure that the EU+ Local Strategy addresses the specific situation and needs of human rights defenders in rural and volatile areas as well as urban areas across the country
- Develop the strategy to include psycho-social and health components as well as support for the families of the human rights defenders
- Support the development, co-ordination, and implementation – with and across other international actors – of human rights defender strategies that take into account the particular needs of women human rights defenders
- Prioritise financial and technical assistance to law enforcement and judicial systems, with benchmarks linked to improved access to justice for women human rights defenders
- Fund public awareness campaigns, including media initiatives that highlight the importance of the work of women human rights defenders, and recognise their contributions to Afghan society

We thank you for your engagement to protect and support the vital work of HRDs in Afghanistan and stand ready to provide any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely,



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