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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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Dr. Ruth to Kanter

Where are the women in the Afghanistan in The Hague?

Is Hillary Clinton the only woman participating the international Afghanistan conference Tuesday March 31 in The Hague? Who represents the thousands of Afghan women in the diaspora and who represents half the Afghan population?

Especially the Afghan women and girls are still severely affected by 30 years of war and its aftermath: poverty, the lack of security and legal certainty in public life, the lack of good education and paid work and the perspectives of an economic existence and forced marriages of young girls and women due to poverty, domestic violence and sexual abuse due to the narcotics trade, poverty and patriarchal traditions.

What measures and policies which will strengthen their position in the next five years to change?

The attitudes of men in the top of the Afghan government, in all the middle layers of the police, judiciary and government officials, in the daily life of the home will not change by itself without substantial changes in policy. This means that Afghan women did not have had insufficient influence in rebuilding their country until now. Will this change after March 31st when political, military, economic and humanitarian decisions on the future of Afghanistan will be made?

Have Afghan women been involved in preparing this conference? What can Afghan women who have fled to the West expect? What can women in Afghanistan expect when they are excluded from this important international conference?

Many qualified women fled their country for Mujahedeen and the Taliban since the nineties of the last century. There has been a brain drain of professional women since the early nineties. For example the women of the board of the Ariana Foundation studyfund for Afghan women in Maastricht, The Netherlands, studied at universities in the Soviet Union in the eighties of the last century. The gender perspective of the Democratic government gave to intelligent young girls in the eighties the opportunity to study in Russia. There has been a time in Kabul of a relative equality between the sexes and girls were encouraged to study even when their mother was illiterate and were some male relatives or Imans opposed to the fact that girls went to universities in Russia. These women studied literature, law, chemical engineering, medicine and became teacher, journalist or medical doctor. They have had many years of professional work in Afghanistan. These good educated women in Afghanistan did not have any perspective in

the nineties and had no flee their country because they were threatened to death. They will not return to their country of origin because they now are rooted in the West where their children study and are totally integrated in their new country. These intellectual woman are of a great loss for their country of origin and it is a pity that their professional knowledge is not valued in the West.

A newly trained female middleclass must be educated in Afghanistan so that women as a doctor, teacher, judge, economist, politician or lawyer may participate in the reconstruction of the country. What opportunities do have high school girls and girlstudents who want to go to the university or enter vocational education but do not have these possibilities because of poverty, because their father has been killed in the war?

Major investments in secondary and higher education for girls, training of women teachers and health care will contribute probably more to stability, peace and justice than an increased military involvement by the international community and training of police and justice. Without the participation of a well-trained female middle the reconstruction of Afghanistan is not possible. Stability, peace and justice could however been achievable purposes when women as equal citizens can participate in the economic, political and legal reconstruction and when women's rights in the Constitution of 2004 are implemented and monitored in practice.

In the Hague, the city seen as the seat of International Peace and Justice, The Dutch miniter of foreign Affairs mr Maxime Verhagen is host of the conference. As such he could refer to the gender perspective in order to stimulate the analysis in the top of the international community. The perspective of women must be included in the policy of law and justice, peace and freedom, security, continued stability, poverty-, corruption- and narcotics control.

Are Afghan women represented by the 72 invited countries and the 16 participating organizations such as NATO, EU, UN, Ban ki-moon and Kai Eide, the UN Special Representative for Afghanistan, OECD, OSCE, the great financial? Le donors such as IMF, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, The Islamitic Development Bank, Aga Khan Foundation or Dadfar Rangin Spanta, the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs and President Karzai? Peace talks with the Taliban could only be fruitful if the rights and the freedom of women and girls will be fully respected and controlled.

It seems that thinking and making decisions about Afghanistan is still the domain of men. When will it change?

dr. Ruth to Kanter

(President of the Ariana Foundation studyfund for Ariana Afghan women
The foundation gives to 50 girl students age 15-25 in Kabul a studygrant.
bancaccount 8245118 Tegelen. IBAN: NL70INGB0008245118 www.stichtingariana.nl)
r.dekanter@cgd.unimaas.nl