



For Immediate Release
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Liberal MPs call on Harper government to defend women's rights in Afghanistan

OTTAWA – Recent attacks on Afghan women's rights activists, including the assassination of provincial councillor Sitara Achakzai, underscore the need for the Harper government to take a more active role in ensuring the basic human rights of Afghan women are respected, the Liberal Women's Caucus said today.

"We are shocked and saddened by these attacks and the silencing of Sitara Achakzai's voice," said Chair Maria Minna. "As one of the top contributors to the Afghan NATO mission and as a country with a proud legacy of leadership on human rights issues, Canada must take concrete steps to prevent the erosion of human rights in Afghanistan."

Liberal Status of Women Critic Anita Neville said Canadians expect the Harper government to do more than simply voice concern on this issue. "The Harper government was asleep at the switch, allowing the legislation infringing on women's rights – even legalizing marital rape – to pass through the Afghan parliament, without comment, not even noticing until it was too late."

Besides the stoning of female protestors and the brutal drive-by shooting of Ms. Achakzai, there have been other shootings and assassination attempts of high-profile women, in addition to the horrible acid attacks against school girls last fall.

The Liberal MPs called for the Harper government to support the efforts of our troops by demonstrating a stronger commitment to the women of Afghanistan through better human rights monitoring, use of diplomatic channels, and civil-society building.

"The long-term success of our military efforts depends upon the willingness of the Harper government to participate in civil society-building efforts that promote education and economic opportunity for women," added Ms. Minna. "We need the world to come together on this, yet Canada is missing in action when we should be leading the way as we have in the past."

The Liberal Women's Caucus is a network of women parliamentarians from across Canada committed to acting on gender-related issues in Canada and internationally to protect the rights of all citizens.

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