

## The Status of Women in Afghanistan, October 2004

The Taliban fell in 2001, but today women and girls in Afghanistan still face daily oppression. Education remains restricted and 79 percent of Afghan women cannot read. Women's healthcare is poor and Afghanistan has the second-highest maternal mortality rate in the world. Many women and girls still fear attending school, working, traveling or appearing without a burqa. Forced marriage, rape and abduction remain common, and over the past year, girls' schools have been bombed and set on fire. Despite these conditions, women determinedly took part in Afghanistan's recent national elections, an indication of their continuing strength and courage in defining their own futures.

### Some recent statistics:

- **Maternal mortality:** Maternal mortality rates during the Taliban era were estimated at 1,900 deaths per 100,000 live births. The country still has the world's second highest maternal mortality rate, at 1,600 deaths per 100,000 live births. The eastern province of Badakshan has the highest recorded rate in history, at 6,500 deaths per 100,000 live births.
- **Women's reproductive health awareness:** 72 percent of married women under age 50 are unaware of any methods to delay pregnancy.
- **Girls' primary school enrollment rates:** Approximately 34 percent of 4 million Afghan children enrolled in school are girls. In 10 provinces, fewer than one out of every four girls aged 7 to 12 attends primary school. Only one out of every 100 girls aged 7-12 attends primary school in Zabul and Badghis provinces.
- **Girls attending secondary school:** Of girls attending primary school, only 9 percent continue to secondary school.
- **Attacks against schools:** UNICEF has confirmed 26 attacks against schools, mostly girls' schools.
- **Early marriage:** Approximately 57 percent of girls marry before the age of 16, according to a study by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Afghan women's NGOs.
- **Women's voter registration:** 41 percent of 10.5 million registered Afghan voters are women. These figures have been inflated by multiple registrations. Women's registration rates in southern provinces were significantly lower than the national average: Zabul (9 percent), Uruzgan (10 percent) Helmand (16 percent), and Kandahar (27 percent).

**SOURCES:** **On maternal mortality:** *Maternal Mortality in 2000: Estimates Developed by WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA*, (Geneva: WHO, 2003). UNICEF, CDC, and Afghan Ministry of Public Health, *Maternal Mortality in Afghanistan: Magnitude, Causes, Risk Factors and Preventability* (New York: UNICEF, 2002). **On reproductive health awareness:** TISA, UNICEF, *Afghanistan—Progress of Provinces: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003* (New York, UNICEF, 2004). **On primary school attendance:** Ibid. and TISA, ADB, UNAMA, UNDP, and the World Bank, *Securing Afghanistan's Future: Accomplishments and the Strategic Path Forward, 2004*. **On secondary school attendance:** The Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, *Report Card: Progress on Compulsory Education, Grades 1-9*. **On attacks against schools:** "Girls' Schools Become Targets," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, June 24, 2004. **On early marriage:** IRIN, "Afghanistan: Child marriage rate still high - minister. Human Rights Watch, "Killing You is a Very Easy Thing For Us: Human Rights Abuses in Southeast Afghanistan.

See also, Amnesty International, “No one listens to us and no one treats us as human beings:’ justice denied to women.” **On voter registration:** Joint Electoral Management Board, Daily Voter Registration Update, August 26, 2004.



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