

Women, Peace and Security ,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

First of all, I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to this important program , and it is indeed a pleasure for me to speak in this timely program.

Secondly, I would like to mention that I am not a lawyer, not even have academic background in any sector. I am simply a Medical doctor and have lived in a male dominated society , that is poverty driven and is in continued conflict situation. I have experienced discrimination based on my sex, ethnicity and the religion that my family practiced.

In order to survive such a situation , I chose and continued to fight for equality and human rights in Afghanistan. My talk today is based on my personal experience in a country where human rights abuse and violation is our daily scenario , some time is even unnoticed.

Afghanistan is a country who suffers from four decades of war; almost majority of the powerful countries in the world are somehow involved in the conflict. Different regimes came and gone , each one of them violated the human rights of the people, particularly the rights of women, children and other vulnerable groups including the rights of minorities.

The third point that I would like to mention here is that usually the human rights of minorities are violated ; although we women are the majority in this world, our rights are violated every day and every where---at different levels and according to the level of education and of socio- economic situation in our countries. The discrimination against women continues in national , regional and international levels most of the time with impunity.

The fourth point I would like to raise is the fact that in the past 70 years there are undeniable improvements on human rights; and gender equality has been achieved. However, we are still very far from equal rights and equal opportunity for every one and between men and women.

Actually, the truth is that most of the international laws are drafted and finalised by men. Women were not involved or even if they were involved they were in the minorities. It is quite natural that men do not understand the needs and the pains that women feel. Men do not feel them- they might not ignore the women's needs and requirements intentionally, but because they do not simply understand them and it is quite natural.

Men do not feel the pains and wounds of discrimination that we feel as women. The simple example is that men do not understand the labour pain, even if they are very converted men , or our closest persons such as our husbands and our sons who are so close to our hearts. We also know that they love us and they are not able to live without us.

I believe that women's rights is a political issue and it is a question of power and control over half of the population. Because men are more powerful physically, they are the one who runs the show . Men are making the law , the culture and tradition, which is human made code of conduct. Usually women are pushed to respect them more than men in their respected societies.

If you look who the designers and owners are of the companies that produce different kinds of weapons and bombs to control people and gain more money, the absolute majority are men. Very few or no women own a company which produces guns. Guns are made for violence not for peace, not for the reduction of poverty.

On 30 October 2000 for first time in the UN history Security Council passed the resolution 1325, which is a recognition of the suffering and violation of human rights of women during conflicts and their role on the conflict prevention and conflict resolution, negotiation for peace process , and

their protection during armed conflicts. For many decades , women have been specifically targeted in the theatre of war, whether internal war or international war. Women's fundamental rights and dignity continue to be violated. The use of women's bodies become a weapon of war. It is part of systematic strategies of many warring parties during the history and continues even today .

I and the women in Afghanistan fully understand the pain of the violation of women's human rights during almost four decades of war in our country.

Sexual assaults, forced marriages, child marriages and systematic discrimination against women including restriction to their basic rights to education Freedoms of movement, access to health care, justice and job opportunities continued during this long period of war. The warring factions changed but the violation of human rights in particular women's rights continued with full impunity.

Violence against women during the war is not limited to Afghanistan or any particular country. Unfortunately it is a global problem, most of the time it continues without accountability and justice for the victims.

Few example:

In Rwanda in 1994, during the 100 days of Genocide 250, 000 to 500,000 women were raped ; 20,000 children were born as a result of that brutal human rights violation .

We saw the same in Bosnia Herzegovina where the rape camps were established in which women were tortured and violated as a tactic of war and ethnic cleansing .

In Sudan and Congo, thousands of women faced rape and sexual violence due to their ethnicity or if they were born in those regions.

Unfortunately we are still witness to the same trend of human rights violation of women's human rights by Boko Haram, Alshbab, ISIS or other forces.

The majority of the initiators of war are men , yet it is left to the men to mediate and end the conflict! The majority of those who keep peace are men, the majority who lead the recovery from war and deal with reconstruction are also men.

Dear Friends !

I am sorry that I have gone through some of the common issues that women face every day , but let me focus on Women, Peace and Security in Afghanistan .

I , as women on top of all kind of discrimination which was mentioned above, lived as an IDP and as a Refugee and have gone through extra suffering. Millions of women in my country live in much worse conditions then I did. I have not seen much of protection by the international laws .

The international law guarantees equal rights of every human being. These rights which are included in the UDHR should be respected every where and under every circumstances . No exceptions are acceptable even during conflicts and natural disasters, but the reality on the ground for women living in conflict zones are very sad .

I would like to mention one example on the provision of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan refugees. Women were not involved in the decision making , distribution or monitoring and evaluation at all ; even their needs were not part of the assistance materials. No special toilets for women in refugee camps , no sanitary items for them and no access to the reproductive rights and contraceptions at all, where there is critical need for contraception while they are in Humanitarian crises.

Women ended up with so many children that they were not able to feed. They were pushed to send them to the Madrases .

The people's access to education was denied and the only education facilities existed were the religious Madrases .we ended up with Taliban and millions of girls uneducated and vulnerable to violence, trafficking and prostitutions due to the economic hardship they faced. For me the frustration and the question was and still is that the International law exist, but it is not for us ?

Women were not involved in the war they were even ignored by the international community and the UN who were involved in Afghanistan's politics or the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Respect for religion and culture was used as an excuse not to talk with or about women and not to support women even with some humanitarian projects for their capacity building and empowerment. We all know the key to empowerment is access to education which was denied for women for so long.

Afghanistan is a small and poor country and in the 1960s and 1970s there were some progress on women's rights , but the Military Coup in 1978 and the military invasion by USSR in 1979 was the beginning of armed conflict and the proxy war in Afghanistan .

The USA, most of western countries, and Saudi Arabia chose and supported the most conservative groups of people to fight against communism . Both sides of the war, the puppet regime in Kabul and the Mujahideen , from 1978 to 1992 violated the people's rights and the IHL--- thousands of people disappeared or were killed arbitrarily , villages were bombed even the animals were killed , and water points were destroyed.

The regime used women's rights and advancement as an object, not really to empower them to stand on their own feet, and of course the Mujahdeen did the opposite .Women were killed because they were providing education or health service to other women, specially in refugee camps in Pakistan. As you all know that Afghanistan had the largest number of refugees after the Palestinians , we are still the second largest after Syria right now.

USSR had around 140 000 solders in Afghanistan and they could not control the Afghan people . After 14 years of brutal war, In 1989 after an accord in Geneva, and without the participation of women at all, USSR solders left Afghanistan. However, the regime enjoyed the continued support from USSR and survived until 1992.

After the collapse of puppet regime in Kabul, the mujahideen formed an Interim government in Pakistan, no women and no minority ethnic groups were included; they moved to Kabul and began to fight for power among themselves; and once again women were used as weapons of war, naturally they were confined to their houses and wore their Hejabs.

And 1994 Taliban was used against the Mujahideen groups, and they were extreme on their treatment of women as you all know. I do not want to take you to the issues you already heard of.

After the collapse of Communism the international community who were supportive of Mujahideen left Afghanistan and ignored the people's suffering in Afghanistan because they achieved their goal which was the collapse of USSR.

Afghanistan turned to become a safe heaven for terrorists from all over the Islamic countries-- the biggest producers of Opium and the largest jail for women. The violation of human rights of every one continued without any criticism by the international community .

After the attack on US embassies in Africa in 1998 , US attacked Afghanistan and Sudan by Rockets. And very small number of people were killed in that attacks, and some of their rockets were not exploded which was sold to China by the Taliban.

After 9/11, Afghanistan became again an important country and for the first time we had almost all countries in one side to fight against Alqaida and terrorists. Women's Rights was used as one of the reason to military intervention by US and NATO alliance.

The UN initiated peace talks in Bonn, Germany. Only a small number of women were part of the actual political negotiations. For the first time, the international community and UN organized parallel meetings of civil society, women's human rights defenders and some women from NGOs who were there of course for advocacy and lobbying.

Two women were appointed in the Interim Cabinet including myself as Minister of Women's Affairs and one of the five Vice-presidents. It was not easy to be in that position but we tried our best and had to fight for every single small issues of women.

With soldiers from 49 countries in Afghanistan, the war did not stop because there was no strategy to empower people. We highly appreciate the sacrifice of the soldiers in our country, but if there were unified strategies based on human rights, we would have achieved much more .

In 2007, the talk with Taliban and other armed opposition started and the government established a structure to strengthen the peace and solves the grievance of the people also to reintegrate the armed men into the society. This structure claimed that 10,000 people lay down their arms and joined in their societies , but the conflict was not reduced. The competition began to find Taliban and talk to them , with no women's involvement.

The situation of human rights and women's rights improved and there are numerous achievements including equal rights in the Afghanistan's 2004 constitution and for first time in our history domestic violence is criminalized in The country. We have 25 % women quota in the Parliament . Women's access to education, health care and freedom of movement is much much better. But all these achievements are visible in big cities not for every women in the countryside, and areas under control of Taliban.

After the 2009 election, the government held a loya jirga, the traditional gathering of the people , and this so called traditional loya jirga decided to establish a high peace council, with 69 member. With all the lobbying carried out by Afghan women and the international community, the president appointed only 9 women who are polite and well dressed as members, but honestly they were not involved or included in decision making for the main talk with Taliban. The High Peace Council had reintegration programs where people came and received some financial support. This High peace council also claimed that they disarmed another 10000 people , but the public do not know where their weapons are gone and most importantly why the violence was not reduced. The war continues with more negative impact on women. When young Afghan men are killed from both sides, it is their mothers and their wives who suffer more than any one in the families.

This current Government tried to be more women's rights friendly. Now we have a women who is one of the five deputy of the High Peace Council and another young woman as Advisor. We need to see their effectiveness in the High peace council.

I do believe that peace is not the absence of war , it is more then that . Security is not the absence of explosion of a bomb and killing , but is a human security --Security from fear and wants. Security is where people specially women and other vulnerable groups of people live with dignity .

Peace requires a strong political will and clear definition of enemy . But to build a peaceful society, it requires attitude, institutions , structures and people's support and inclusions .

When we want to build Sustainable peace then we need to have the followings !

1- Good governance: Well-functioning institutions to be able to provide the basic social services and responsive to the need of the people , including the provision of justice . Promoting good governance isolate the opposition armed groups and build confidence of the people in state institutions.

2- Acceptance of human rights of people, in particular, gender equality and equal rights of women: This should be part of every policy and development program. Avoid superiority of any ethnic group on the others. A safe and desirable country would be the one where women and minorities feel safe and live with dignity.

3- Equitable Distribution of Resources: Peaceful countries tend to ensure equity in access to resources, such as access to education, health care and all other basic needs. Every one should be able to exercise their basic human rights and live with dignity.

4- Free flow of information: the right to information and freedom of expression and media is a sign towards peaceful societies. The flow of information helps transparency and building trust between the people and state institutions.

5- Level of human resources: To build trust and peaceful society requires sufficient, honest human resources. Unfortunately, war in Afghanistan caused a lot of brain drain. We face shortage of human resources, even in the last fifteen years of involvement of international community, less attention is paid on the quality of education. The focus was on quantity, which in itself is not very useful for peace building in the country. We do have a large number of people with very low quality of education and capabilities.

This kind of approach causes more conflict, rather than solving the conflict.

6- Fighting against corruption: The people in Afghanistan suffer from high level of corruption, almost at every level. Corruption in a country fuels conflict, limits people's access to justice and basic social services and increases the poverty.

7- Good relations with neighbors: Unfortunately Afghanistan did suffer from bad relations with our neighboring countries, particularly with Pakistan and partially with Iran.

This problem causes a lot of terrorist activities in both countries and in our region. We need to acknowledge that the problem exists among us and try to solve it, without better relationship between us, peace building will not be possible. Both countries should get out of denial attitude and the denial of the problem will end up with more and more violence.

8- Safe business environment: The safety and security of the business should be guaranteed to create job opportunities and reduce poverty for the people and specially for women.

9- All these require strong political will and honest leadership: Unfortunately we do not see long term strategies by our international partners and Afghan Government to facilitate the peace building and peace process-- we are all trying to rush for a short term political gain.

10 - Peace Building is a long term multidimensional process; and this process cannot be successful unless the people support, especially women and victims of human rights violations inclusion and active participation. Peace building can not be done with strong respect for human rights, accountability and justice.

Afghanistan case and peace processes is very good example of peace without justice.

Ladies and Gentlemen !

Let me touch again upon the international law and UN resolutions. The UNSCR 1325 was passed on the year 2000, when Afghanistan was already under the control of Taliban.

In Afghanistan this resolution was known only by a few of us when we were lobbying for the implementation of the resolution. After a lot of advocacy in 2010 the Minister of Foreign Affairs signed an MoU with the Finnish Embassy to help Afghanistan work on the National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325. This is already after 10 years.

Finally after a lot of delays last year on 30 June 2015 our President launched the National Action Plan for 1325. In fact the NAP requires another Action Plan with more concrete actions, indicators and budget.

This June the authority began to discuss and prepare an action plan with budget, one of the problems for this delay is the lack of political will and lack of human resources.

By sharing the above information on the implementation of the UNSCR 1325, member countries demonstrate how the International law's implementation is slow and the impact will not be very

visible on the daily life of women in countries with conflict. The women rights situation in Afghanistan, Syria , Iraq and a lot of other countries show the uselessness of these resolutions.

As I already said that the international laws have a lot of advantage if they are implemented by the different stake holders. We need to work and establish a mechanism to promote accountability and justice for violation of International laws. These laws should be applied on rich and poor people and countries, not as a tool only against the poor countries or the people who are not liked by the powerful ones. The recent example of misuse is the report of Enquiry Commission on War in Yaman. The SG of the UN Bane ke Moon had to take his words back , because of the pressure applied by Saudi .

We also need to look at the IHL more critically because the existing IHL do not respond to the new waves of conflicts currently in our world . For example, the terrorist attacks, the weapons used in the war and the on going arbitrary detentions are not covered by IHL.

ICRC as almost the sole guardian of the IHL, in my view, is too limited to handle these crises and conflicts in the twenty first century .

It is the time that International laws and instruments come out of the drawers and be used to create space for women and help people's effective participation and effective contributions in peace , reconciliation and reintegration processes.

Right to peace and peace full environment is a basic human rights. Hope that we stand united to protect our own dignity and be able to change the international law to protect the whole humanity rather than the powerful countries financial interests.

We all need to end the culture of impunity , in particular on sexual and gender based violence in this planet, if our sisters suffer in Syria , Afghanistan , Congo, Sudan or Yaman , the pain will reach us and disturb our lives.

Any program, development policy, democratization , conflict prevention and peace building will not be completed without active participation of women . We need to continue our struggle to change the National , regional and international law , mechanism and procedures in favor of respect for human dignity .

Thank you .

Sent from my iPad