

UN ‘Global Open Day’ emphasizes Afghan women’s role in fighting violent extremism

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Following a meeting with Afghan civil society representatives today in Kabul, senior UN officials stressed that securing women’s rights is essential to strategies that combat violent extremism and encouraged the Government to develop and implement human-rights based and gender sensitive policies to address its drivers.

The [meeting](#) was part of 2016’s ‘Global Open Day’ on women, peace and security during which women from Afghan civil society working in this field were joined by the UN Secretary-General’s Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, Pernille Kardel, and the Country Representative for the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ([UN Women](#)), Elzira Sagynbaeva.

The two UN officials called attention to the essential role that women play in securing a peaceful and tolerant society – including preventing family members or communities from turning to violent extremism.

“In Afghanistan, ideologies imposing discriminatory belief systems continue to deprive women and girls of basic human rights such as freedom of movement and access to education and health,” said Ms. Kardel in a press release.

Such discriminatory practices have led to executions of women and corporal punishments imposed by anti-Government elements, and messages of intolerance, whether of political, religious, or social nature, foster discrimination and are incompatible with the universal human rights standards that Afghanistan’s laws protect.

According to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)), the meeting follows in the tradition of other Open Days events, [launched in 2010](#) to generate dialogue between UN senior leadership and women’s organizations throughout the world. They are part of the implementation of UN Security Council [resolution 1325 \(2000\)](#) on ‘women, peace and security,’ and its subsequent seven UN resolutions.

In addition to the event held today, UNAMA will conduct similar consultations in provinces throughout the country.

In Afghanistan, women can be victims of violent extremism, but are also critical players in fighting it. Ms. Sagynbaeva recognized women’s resilience and efforts to strive for peace and equality in the country and emphasized the importance of supporting women’s leadership and creating opportunities for women to participate at every level of the decision making process.

“Women are the biggest untapped resource in the search for sustainable peace in Afghanistan,” she emphasized. “Women’s empowerment and gender equality are essential drivers of development and reconciliation and they stand as a bulwark against the radicalization of youth.”

Today's meeting in Kabul was an opportunity for civil society representatives to share local community initiatives that included women using their influence in communities, schools, workplaces and homes to challenge extreme ideologies that recruit and radicalize participants and incite them to violence. Some women had pressured male family members to stay away from such insurgencies, while others pointed to examples where women actually adhered to or encouraged radicalization – such examples were sometimes motivated by poverty or exclusion.

Security Council [resolution 2242](#), adopted last year, which aims to improve the implementation of the UN's women, peace and security agenda and the Secretary-General's new [Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism](#) are part of the Organization's commitment to support Afghan civil society and institutions that empower women in order to prevent and respond to violent extremism.

Ms. Kardel encouraged the Government to continue to develop and implement policies that prioritize human rights and gender-sensitive approaches in order to root out underlying drivers of violent extremism.

Stakeholders, urged Ms. Sagynbaeva, “need to recognize, build and expand on women's ongoing experiences in prevention and mitigation.” She added that policies must be supported through an equal representation of women throughout conflict prevention, which should include investments in such policies for women and girls as well as the creation of an environment that enables women to participate in both preventing and resolving conflict.