

THE Nation.

Bearing Witness: The Afghan Tragedy

by **MALALAI JOYA**

October 7, 2008

***Editor's Note** October 7 marks the second anniversary of the murder of **Anna Politkovskaya**, the crusading Russian journalist and outspoken government critic who exposed the brutal treatment of civilians in Chechnya by Russian forces and Moscow-supported Chechen officials. Two years on, Russia shows no political will to bring her killers to justice. To honor Politkovskaya and other women like her in the world, the human rights organization **Reach All Women in War** (RAW in WAR), presented the second annual Anna Politkovskaya Award to Afghan politician and social activist **Malalai Joya** in London Monday. An elected member of the Afghan Parliament and outspoken critic of warlords and war criminals in the government, Joya was suspended from office on grounds that she had "insulted" fellow representatives in a television interview. She delivered these remarks at the London ceremony.*

My own life and hardships speak for themselves about the obstacles Afghan women face today. I've been threatened with death; I've survived a number of assassination attempts; and every effort is made by the fundamentalists to silence me. But I am happy to enjoy support of the peace-loving people of the world. I am especially grateful to **Reach All Women in War** (RAW in WAR) for considering me for the Anna Politkovskaya Award of 2008.

I am deeply honored to receive this award, which links me to the memory of an extraordinary woman who sacrificed her life for telling the truth and fighting for justice. Her perseverance, bravery and dedication to justice inspire me. By receiving this award, I once again vow not to stop for a moment from telling the truth in the face of death threats and intimidation.

Exactly seven years ago, the United States and its allies attacked Afghanistan in the name of liberating Afghanistan and its women. Weeks after the overthrow of the Taliban regime, Laura Bush stated proudly, "Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women."

But only few days ago, a top European diplomat Francesc Vendrell warned that Afghanistan is in the worst shape since 2001. In an interview with BBC he said, "In 2002, we were being welcomed almost as liberators by the Afghans. Now we are being seen as a necessary evil."

Seven years after the US invasion of Afghanistan, our devastated country is still chained to the fundamentalist warlords and the Taliban; the country is like an unconscious body breathing its last.

The US government and its allies exploited the plight of Afghan women to legitimate its so-called "war on terror" and attack on Afghanistan. The medieval and brutal regime of the Taliban was toppled, but instead of relying on Afghan people, the United States and its allies pushed us from the frying pan to the fire and brought the infamous criminals of the "Northern Alliance" into power--sworn enemies of democracy and human rights, who are as dark-minded, evil, anti-women and cruel as the Taliban.

Only few months ago, US National Intelligence Director Michael McConnell told the Senate Armed Services Committee that 70 percent of Afghanistan is lawless. The Afghan government has control of only 30 percent of the country, and where the Taliban and local warlords hold power, there is no rule of law.

Our nation is still living under the shadow of war, crimes and brutalities of the fundamentalists, and women are the primary and silent sacrifice of this situation. Justice doesn't exist in Afghanistan. Every sector of life in Afghanistan today is a tragedy, from women's rights to security, law and order and domination of a drug mafia.

Women suffer especially. The rates of self-immolation and suicide due to domestic violence and poverty, of forced marriages and violence against women are higher than ever. In the first six months of 2008, forty-seven cases of self-immolation among women were reported in a single hospital in the western city of Herat. Reports come every day of gang rapes of young girls, especially in the northern portion of Afghanistan, where pro-US warlords have full power and a free hand. But the rapists are not prosecuted. Last month President Hamid Karzai ordered the release of two men who were sentenced to eighteen years in prison for raping and killing a girl.

The propaganda to the world about liberating Afghanistan and women and fighting against terrorists are lies. I believe that no nation can donate liberation to another nation. Democracy, human rights and women's rights are not things someone gives to us. We must achieve these values ourselves.

It is a heart-wrenching fact that Afghanistan has received \$15 billion in aid, but up to 70 percent of my people live on less than \$2 a day. Corruption and poverty have made life a torture for millions. Afghanistan is deeply suffering from a health scourge caused mainly by lack of facilities. The death rate of mothers during childbirth is incredibly high--similar to rates of other dangerous diseases like tuberculosis.

Afghanistan dominates the drug market, with the highest production of opium in the world--93 percent--and ranks last in terms of human development. Over the past seven years, the Taliban and other terrorist groups have become ever more powerful; today even Kabul is besieged by the Taliban and people are deeply afraid of their return to rule.

US and NATO forces kill more Afghan civilians than enemies of Afghan people. Thousands of innocent Afghan women and children have been killed in the US/NATO operations. On July 6, 2008, US troops bombed a wedding party in Nengarhar province and killed forty-seven civilians--including the bride. In the similar tragic incident, twenty-seven civilians perished in a US-led NATO attack in a remote village of Nouristan. In an air raid on Azizabad village in Heart province over ninety civilians were killed, sixty of them children, according to the United Nations.

My suffering people have been well and truly betrayed over the past seven years by the US and allies. They were invaded and bombed in the name of democracy, human rights and women's rights, but the most infamous enemies of these values were supported and installed into the power. They relied on the Northern Alliance bands who have a history full of bloodshed, treason and crimes against our people.

The only sector in which Afghanistan has progressed is in drug cultivation and trafficking. "The four largest players in the heroin business are all senior members of the Afghan government," the *Daily Mail* reported July 21, 2007. That is why today drug-mafia holds the real power; the insurgency and warlords all have hand in this dirty business.

Afghan people today believe that the United States is willing to put us in danger as long as its own regional and economic interests are met. Because years of conflict in Afghanistan have raised political consciousness, people here hold the United States responsible for pushing Afghanistan to its current tragedies.

About Malalai Joya

An advocate for womens rights--particularly rape victims--and elected member of the Afghan Parliament from Farah province, Malalai Joya is an outspoken critic of warlords and war criminals in her country's government. She was suspended from Parliament in 2007 on grounds that she had insulted other lawmakers. [more...](#)

Copyright © 2008 The Nation