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The overall human rights picture in 2015 remained poor. The insurgency continues to be the biggest threat to the human rights of all people in Afghanistan. A notable example was the 15-day occupation of Kunduz by Taliban forces in October. A [report from the Office of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights](#) presented findings of arbitrary killings, abductions, and violence, including threats and widespread criminality, and the use of child fighters. The ongoing insurgency affected access to education, health, and freedom of movement. Taliban and Daesh affiliates actively targeted media outlets, schools, and polio vaccine workers. Daesh affiliates were reportedly responsible for sectarian attacks, including the beheading of seven Hazara in Zabul in November. The [UN reported](#) on allegations of extra-judicial killings by the Afghan national and local police in a number of provinces, including Kandahar, Farah, and Herat. The report also noted a 14% reduction in the use of torture and ill-treatment.

Against the background of insurgency and instability, the Afghan government made significant human rights commitments. On 5 September, through the [Self Reliance for Mutual Accountability Framework \(SMAF\)](#), the Afghan government committed to improve women's access to justice; to increase their participation in government; and to prepare and implement laws on anti-harassment and the elimination of violence. On 30 June, Afghanistan launched the [National Action Plan \(NAP\) for Women, Peace and Security](#). The government also worked to improve the number of women in government by appointing four female cabinet ministers, the first female Supreme Court Judge, and female Provincial Governors in Daikundi and Ghor provinces.

Documented cases of violence against women have risen, with 5,132 cases reported to the [Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission \(AIHRC\)](#) including 241 murders. Strongly-held conservative values contributed to slow progress, as illustrated by the tragic murder of Farkhunda Malikzada, who was beaten to death by a mob in Kabul on 19 March following false accusations that she burnt a copy of the Qur'an. Four death sentences were handed down for those involved, which were later reduced to prison sentences ranging from 10-20 years.

In December, the UK, together with the UN Population Fund and the Ministry of Public Health, launched support for response services for women survivors of violence. This complements existing Afghan programmes on

women's economic empowerment, education, security, and political participation. Following recommendations by the Special Electoral Reform Commission in December, we will continue to press for electoral reform to enable postponed parliamentary elections to take place.

In 2016, we will encourage the Afghan government to deliver commitments made in the NAP and SMAF, including a new priority programme for women's economic empowerment. We will continue to take action to support the EU+ strategy for human rights defenders (HRDs) to ensure that HRDs' rights are protected by state and non-state actors. We will also provide financial support to the work of the AIHRC. The Brussels Conference in October will allow the Afghan government to set out progress made in delivering its reform plans, and for the international community to set out the future size and scope of its support.

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