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Women

# **Interview: Afghan Women's Struggles against Patriarchy, Imperialism and Capitalism**

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**The following is an interview conducted by activists of the Kurdish Women's Movement with Samia Walid, activist of RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan). It was first published in German in Kurdistan Report in September 2019.**

**Can you please tell us about the history and mission of RAWA? What were Afghan women's conditions when your organization was first formed? What is your role in society? How do you organize?**

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), is the oldest women's organization in Afghanistan that fights for freedom, democracy, social justice, and secularism. RAWA's founder was Meena who formed this group at a young age in 1977, with the help of some other female university students in Kabul. Meena was assassinated in Quetta, Pakistan in 1987 by agents of KHAD (Afghanistan branch of KGB) with the help of the bloodthirsty fundamentalist gang of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. She was only 30-years-old. What distinguishes RAWA from other associations is the fact that we are a political organization. When RAWA was found, Afghanistan was under the oppression of the USSR puppet government and later Russian invasion, and Meena felt that the struggle for independence, freedom, and justice was inseparable from the struggle for women's rights. After Meena's martyrdom, RAWA continued fighting against the Afghan Islamic fundamentalists and their international backers till today.

RAWA still works underground in most parts of Afghanistan but faces enormous difficulties. The Jihadi leaders, warlords with bloody pasts of horrific crimes, are in control of the current government and parliament, and have their separate kingdoms in different parts of Afghanistan. Abdullah Abdullah, the CEO of Afghanistan, is one of these Jihadi leaders who belongs to the criminal gang of Shorae Nizar. This creates a dangerous situation for us as these thugs our biggest enemies who do not hesitate in hindering our work and harming us. In other parts of Afghanistan where the Taliban fundamentalists are in control, RAWA faces the same oppression. All our members use pseudonyms for protection and we can never go public with our work. Despite these obstacles, it is still possible for us to continue our political activities in most parts of the country due to our contact with locals and the fact that their hatred for these criminals translates into support for us.

Our political activities include publishing our magazines and articles, and mobilizing women to get this consciousness and join our struggle. We collect and document the killings, raping, pillage, extortion, and other crimes of these warlords in remote parts of Afghanistan. Our social activities are providing education to women (not just literacy classes but social and political awareness as to their rights and how to achieve them), emergency aid, making orphanages, and health-related activities.

**What is your analysis of patriarchy? In what ways is it linked to the state, imperialism and capitalism?**

Patriarchy is constantly supported and nurtured by reactionary feudal, capitalist and imperialist governments all over the world mainly to erase the role of women in the society, especially in politics. Governments of all kinds, especially feudal governments tied to imperialist colonizers like Afghanistan's, see the strength and consciousness of women as a serious threat to their domination and have used different means to stop their growth and consciousness. Considering such governments are anti-people by nature and can only last by oppressing the masses and their struggle, the suppression of women is their prime target. By strengthening feudal misogyny and culture, they deprive women of all their rights and thus cripple half the society and can be assured of no struggle and resistance from it. These governments never take any steps for the emancipation of women, rather they tighten the chain around women. Today Afghan women's situation is more disastrous than ever. The US invaded Afghanistan under the

pretext of 'women rights' but the only thing it brought on our women in the past eighteen years is violence, murder, sexual violence, suicide and self-immolation, and other misfortunes. The US brought to power the most vicious enemies of Afghan women, the Islamic fundamentalists, and committed an unforgivable treachery against our suffering women. This has been its tactic for the past four decades. By nurturing Jihadi, Taliban and ISIS which are all Islamic fundamentalist elements and not just murderous criminals, but misogynists as well, the US has practically oppressed our women.

### **In what ways do you link women's liberation to the resistance against occupation?**

We see the liberation of Afghan women in their liberation from imperialist colonizer, Islamic fundamentalists and the puppet government. The freedom of women is directly tied to the resistance and revolutionary struggle of women against the main cause of their suffering and misfortune, meaning occupiers and their internal lackeys. We believe that fundamentalists and murderous and corrupt groups involved in killing, looting and other crimes and treacheries have no source of support except for foreign powers, without which they would not survive a day. By raising the political consciousness of women and by exposing these people as the root cause of their misfortunes, we want to organize women in a resilient struggle against them who will be as readily annihilated as they were created by their foreign masters.

### **Afghan women's rights have been instrumentalized especially by US imperialism to justify and legitimize the invasion of Afghanistan. In what ways did this narrative undermine your women's activism on the ground?**

The US is a master at diverting revolutionary and political struggle of people, especially women. In the past eighteen years, in addition to supporting the most anti-women elements all over Afghanistan and ensuring that these elements remain untouchable, the US has introduced a stream of educated women into the government and other institutions, NGOs, civil society, and women's networks. This has a dual purpose. First, it uses these women to deceive the world about the real situation of Afghan women and presents them as its achievement in its tiring war. Second, by taking such educated women under its wing, it makes sure that they don't join the revolutionary struggle, thus depriving the women's movement of valuable people. Recently, a group of sell-out, power hungry women from 'Women's Network' met with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as 'representatives' of Afghan women. Gulbuddin is one of the most bloodthirsty misogynist criminals who is well-known for throwing acid on the faces of women in his younger days and these women went to meet him to whitewash his misogynist Islamist party, all for fame, power and money. Women like Fawzia Koofi, Habiba Sarabi, Sima Samar, and others sit with Jihadi and Taliban criminals every other in exchange for money and power, and treacherously introduce themselves as representatives of the oppressed women of Afghanistan. These women ignore the flogging and stoning of women by the Taliban and point to their 'good' programs for women if they join the government! These women stand next to the ruling powers as traitors to our suffering women and have no ties or sympathies to the Afghanistan women.

### **Why did RAWA decide to stay in Afghanistan or in the region, instead of moving its activities to Europe/Western countries? What do you think about the increasing NGO-ization in Afghanistan and other countries in the Global South, sponsored by western institutions?**

RAWA believes that it can only turn into a powerful movement with the backing of the masses, and this backing comes by staying and working in Afghanistan, even if the situation is hell-like. People only trust revolutionary organizations that stand by them in practice and are active inside the country. Our experience has shown that organizations that have clipped their roots from Afghanistan and moved to Europe and other countries have been dissolved shamefully. One of the reasons RAWA has lived for this long and continues its struggle is because we chose to stay in Afghanistan despite the bloody situation.

NGOs are a major part of the backbone of imperialism in our country. NGO-ization, we believe, is almost as

dangerous as the formation of the puppet government of Afghanistan. The NGOs formed in Afghanistan are almost all through the funding of the US and other Western powers. They are a hotbed for recruiting youth to form the future puppet governments of Afghanistan which will have the appearance of a modern, democratic government, but whose heads will be brainwashed to serve as much more loyal lackeys of these powers. NGOs are also used to suck out nationalism and revolutionary struggle out of the heads of our youth by giving them huge salaries and lives abroad. It is well-established that none of these NGOs serve the people and women and are simply giving out slogans of 'reconstruction' and 'aid for people' to hide their true purposes.

**Afghanistan has been invaded, exploited, attacked and severely damaged by imperialist forces over the past decades. This has affected women in particular. Although RAWA has led campaigns to put the Taliban's systematic sexual violence before justice, we have seen misogynist corrupt people rise to high political positions with the support of the US. How do you analyze sexual violence in war? In what ways and with whose support has sexual violence been used as a tool of war in Afghanistan? And what does justice for Afghan women look like in your perspective?**

Like in every conflict in most of history, women and children have been the prime targets in the war and conflict of Afghanistan. They have been the most vulnerable targets of fundamentalist groups that have ravaged our nation for almost three decades now. Rape and other forms of sexual violence became common after the Jihadis, created, nurtured and backed by the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, came to power in 1992 after the defeat of the Soviets. The different factions of Jihadi warlords divided on the lines of ethnicity led by Gulbuddin Hekmatary, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Abdul Rab Rasool Sayyaf, Karim Khalili, Ahmad Shah Masood and Abdul Rashid Dostum, looted and raped the people of Kabul, door by door. Women were abducted and kept in basements and empty buildings and repeatedly raped and tortured. Most were eventually killed with their mutilated bodies found after the faction members left a particular area. The accounts of such women are stories of horror and nightmares.

Justice for women can only be achieved by the complete annihilation of the present government composed of Islamic fundamentalist elements and other US sell-out. Leaders of Islamic fundamentalist parties involved in war crimes particularly against women need to be prosecuted and punished. Once our women accomplish this task, we can say that justice has been served.

**In war-torn countries, women are often victimized and silenced during war and peace alike. It seems as though their agency, will power and political demands are sidelined at all stages of conflict, even in peace-making efforts. In rare instances, women are essentialized in a tokenistic manner as crying, helpless victims, incapable of speaking for themselves. What is Afghan women's role for peace and justice?**

For Afghan women peace can only be achieved by justice and justice can only be attained by freeing Afghanistan of foreign occupation and Islamic fundamentalism. The removal of these traitors and murderers from power, and their persecution and punishment is the justice women are seeking for peace, prosperity and real democracy. And this is on attainable by an organized struggle of conscious women.

The peace talks that are ongoing between the US, Taliban and several prominent Afghan figures, including women, is salt on the wounds of our women. The phony women claiming to represent women are their worst enemies and they are negotiating with the most dangerous enemies of women to give them more power and money than they already have.

**What is the kind of society that you are struggling for? What efforts do you make to realize your utopias in the here and now?**

We are struggling for an independent, free and democratic society run on the pillars of social justice, and where women and men are equal in every aspect. The path to this is a long and hard one and it is a huge task to mobilize and organize women into a large movement, but we believe there is no other option for attaining these values.

### **What does women's freedom mean to you and your movement?**

Women's freedom for us is our participation in every sphere of the society built on independence, democracy, secularism and social justice. It is our complete equality with men in every aspect. This freedom and equality is tied directly to politics and society. Only a society free from occupation and the fundamentalist misogynist virus, where democracy and social justice are implemented can break the chains of violence against women and accommodate the complete freedom and rights of women.

### **As the Kurdish Women's Movement, we know that RAWA values internationalism as an important aspect of resistance and liberation. Women in Afghanistan have taken to the streets in support of the women's revolution in Rojava. What are your thoughts on the women's struggle in Rojava or in Kurdistan more generally? What can we learn from each other?**

The struggle and sacrifices of the lionesses of Kurdistan have been an inspiration and source of strength for us. Their struggle against ISIS and other medieval-aged criminals have given us huge lessons. We know that no force on earth, not ISIS and its superpower backer and other countries in the region, can stand in the face of true resistance from the masses. We know, for the millionth time, that no struggle can succeed without the participation of women. We understand the sacrifices we have to make in order to attain our dream society. When we hear the name of ISIS in Afghanistan we associate it with the resolute and brave women of Kurdistan, not with the terror it is waging in our country. We believe they are defeatable and don't stand a chance in the face of a genuine women's movement. While we obviously believe these things as we have set foot on this path, this struggle is a luminous proof of our beliefs.

### **In terms of women's global struggle for freedom, what do you think is the way forward for us to be working together in common fights against patriarchy and other systems of violence and oppression?**

RAWA believes international solidarity with independence-seeking, freedom-fighting, democratic and progressive organizations and parties as a vital part of our internal struggle. Our struggle converges with the Kurdish people's struggle as most of our enemies are similar in nature. We are fighting imperialism and their fundamentalist mercenaries. On this point, we have to share our experiences and lessons so we can better go through this arduous struggle.

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