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Lessons in Terror Attacks on Education in Afghanistan

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Glossary

ANSO: Afghanistan Nongovernmental Organization Safety Office, which monitors security incidents that affect the operations of nongovernmental organizations.

Afghani: The currency of Afghanistan. The afghani traded at various levels in 2005-2006: one U.S. dollar bought between 45 and 50 afghanis.

burqa and chadori: Terms used interchangeably in many parts of Afghanistan to describe a head-to-toe garment worn by women that completely covers the body and face, allowing vision through a mesh screen.

Dari: The dialect of Persian spoken in Afghanistan, one of Afghanistan's main languages.

hijab: Generally, dress for women that conforms to Islamic standards, varying among countries and cultures; usually includes covering the hair and obscuring the shape of the body.

ISAF: International Security Assistance Force provided by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization under mandate of the United Nations.

mujahedin: "Those who engage in jihad." By common usage in Afghanistan, and as used in this report, the term refers to the forces that fought successive Soviet-backed governments from 1978 until 1992, although many former mujahedin parties continue to use it in reference to themselves.

night letters ("Shabnameh"): Letters left in homes or public places, such as roadsides and mosques, threatening individuals or communities for engaging in certain activities. Letters may be anonymous or signed, and may warn against activities such as working with the government or with foreigners, or sending children, often girls in particular, to school.

Pashto: The primary language spoken by many Pashtuns.

Pashtun: The largest ethnicity in Afghanistan and a plurality of the population (Pashtuns also reside in Pakistan).

PRTs: Provincial Reconstruction Teams, military units ranging in size from eighty to several hundred, with a small civilian development component. Each PRT is fielded by a donor

country as part of NATO or the U.S.-led Coalition forces. The make up and function of the PRTs differ based on the donor country, the mission of the PRT, and the location.

shura: “Council.” The shuras mentioned in this report include both governmental and nongovernmental bodies.

I. Summary

From fear of terrorism, from threats of the enemies of Afghanistan, today as we speak, some 100,000 Afghan children who went to school last year, and the year before last, do not go to school.

—President Karzai on International Women's Day,
March 8, 2006.

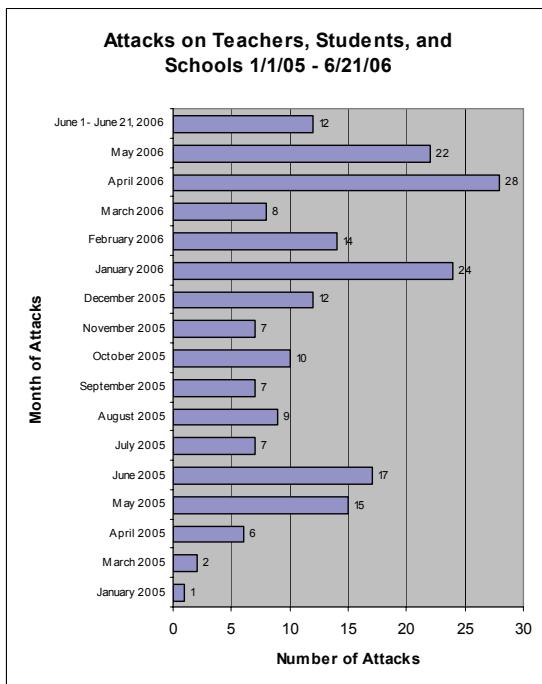
During Ramadan [late 2005], the girls were still going to school. There was a letter posted on the community's mosque saying that "men who are working with NGOs and girls going to school need to be careful about their safety. If we put acid on their faces or they are murdered, then the blame will be on the parents." . . . After that, we were scared and talked about it, but we decided to let them keep going anyway. But after Eid, a second letter was posted on the street near to there, and the community decided that it was not worth the risk [and stopped all girls over age ten from going to school]. . . . My daughters are afraid—they are telling us "we'll get killed and be lying on the streets and you won't even know."

—Mother of two girls withdrawn from fourth and fifth grades, Kandahar city, December 8, 2005.

Brutal attacks by armed opposition groups on Afghan teachers, students, and their schools have occurred throughout much of Afghanistan in recent months, particularly in the south. These attacks, and the inability of the government and its international backers to stop them, demonstrate the deteriorating security conditions under which many Afghans are now living. While ultimate responsibility lies with the perpetrators, much about the response of the international community and the Afghan government can and must be improved if Afghanistan is to move forward. The situation is not hopeless, yet.

This crisis of insecurity, now affecting millions of Afghans, was predictable and avoidable. The international community, led by the United States, has consistently failed to provide the economic, political, and military support necessary for securing the most basic rights of the Afghan people. As detailed below, groups opposed to the authority of the Afghan central government and its international supporters have increasingly filled this vacuum, using tactics such as suicide bombings and attacks on "soft targets" such as schools and teachers to instill terror in ordinary Afghans and thus turn them away from a central government that is unable to protect them. Such attacks are not just criminal offenses in violation of Afghan law; they are abuses that infringe upon the fundamental right to education. When committed as part of the ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan, these attacks are serious violations of international humanitarian law—they are war crimes.

Insecurity—including acts designed to instill terror in civilians, actual fighting between rival groups or armed opposition groups and international security forces, and rampant lawlessness—affects all aspects of Afghans' lives: their ability to work, to reach medical care, to go to the market, and to attend school. Afghan women and girls, who have always confronted formidable social and historical barriers to traveling freely or receiving an education, especially under the Taliban and their mujahedin predecessors, are particularly hard hit.

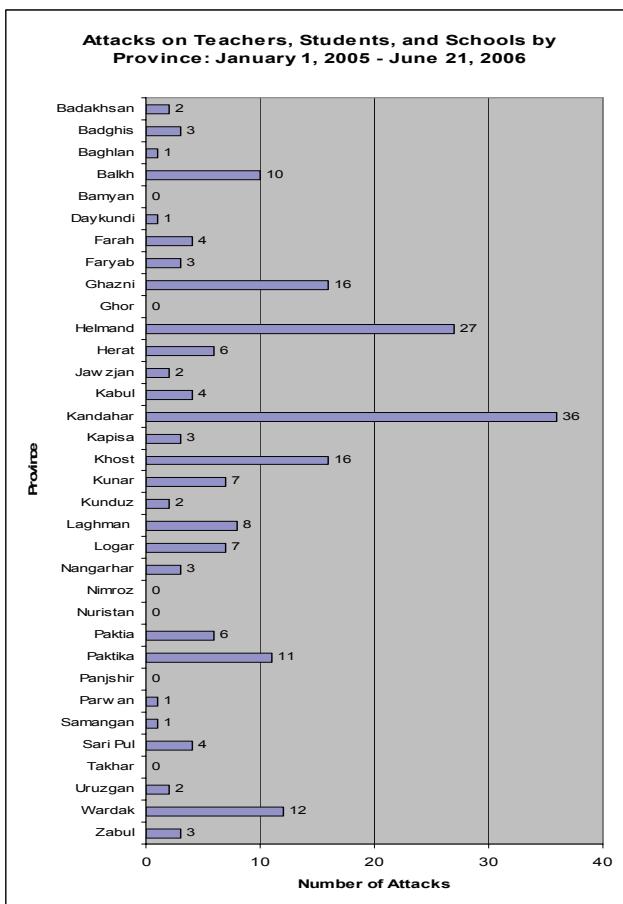


This report examines the impact of insecurity on education in Afghanistan, especially on girls' education. It concentrates on armed attacks on the education system in the south and southeast of the country, where resurgent opposition forces, local warlords, and increasingly powerful criminal groups have committed abuses aimed at terrorizing the civilian population and contesting the authority of the central government and its foreign supporters. This confrontation has stunted and, in some places, even stopped the development and reconstruction work so desperately desired and needed by local residents.

Attacks on all aspects of the education process sharply increased in late 2005 and the first half of 2006. As of this writing, more attacks have been reported in the first half of 2006 than in all of 2005. Previously secure schools, such as girls' schools in Kandahar city and in northern provinces such as Balkh, have come under attack. There have been reports of at least seventeen assassinations of teachers and education officials in 2005 and 2006; several are detailed below. This report also documents more than 204 attacks on teachers, students, and schools in the past eighteen months (January 2005 to June 21, 2006).

Even more common have been threatening "night letters," alone or preceding actual attacks, distributed in mosques, around schools, and on routes taken by students and teachers, warning them against attending school and making credible threats of violence.

Physical attacks or threats against schools and their staff hurt education directly and indirectly. Directly, an attack may force a school to close, either because the building is destroyed or because the teachers and students are too afraid to attend. Attacks and threats may also have an indirect ripple effect, causing schools in the surrounding area to shut down as well.



Where schools do not close altogether, each incident influences the risk assessment that parents and students undertake every day. Single episodes of violence, even in far away districts, accumulate to establish a pattern; in a country as traumatized by violence as Afghanistan, teachers, parents, and students are keenly attuned to fluctuations in this pattern and decide to continue—or stop—going to school based on how they view the general climate of insecurity. Parents often have a lower threshold for pulling their daughters out of school than boys, given greater social restrictions on girls' movements and legitimate concerns about sexual harassment and violence. As a result of the cumulative impact of attacks and closures over the past three years, schools, which were only recently opened or reopened, have once again been shut down in many districts in the south and southeast. In many districts in these areas, no schools operate at all.

General insecurity and violence targeted against education also exacerbate other barriers that keep children, particularly girls, from going to school. These include having to travel a long way to the nearest school or having no school available at all; poor school infrastructure; a shortage of qualified teachers, especially women teachers; the low quality of teaching; and poverty. All of these factors affect, and are affected by, Afghanistan's varied but conservative culture. Each has a greater impact on girls and women, in large part because there are far fewer girls' schools than boys' schools.

Measuring the deleterious impact of insecurity on education provides a strong diagnostic indicator of the costs of insecurity more generally. Basic education is important for children's intellectual and social development and provides them with critical skills for leading productive lives as citizens and workers. Education is central to the realization of other human rights, such as freedom of expression, association, and assembly; full participation in one's community; and freedom from discrimination, sexual exploitation, and the worst forms of child labor.

Education also facilitates many other socially important activities, such as improvements in the economy, development of the rule of law, and public health. Restrictions on girls' right to education especially hurt the country's development: for example, girls' and women's literacy is associated with lower infant and maternal mortality and, unsurprisingly, better education for future generations of children. Girls not educated today are the missing teachers, administrators, and policymakers of tomorrow. After the Taliban, Afghanistan cannot afford to lose another generation. Such a tragedy would compound the misfortune the already beleaguered nation has faced.

In focusing on the nexus between insecurity and access to education, we seek to establish new benchmarks for assessing the performance of Afghan and international security forces and measuring progress on the security front. The benchmarks most often used at present—numbers of Afghan troops trained and international troops deployed, or the number of armed opponents killed—are important, but they do not accurately assess the security situation. What is more important is how much these and related efforts improve the day-to-day security of the Afghan people. We urge that access to education be made one key benchmark.

We suggest this benchmark for three reasons:

- on a political level, because teachers and schools are typically the most basic level of government and the most common point of interaction (in many villages the only point of contact) between ordinary Afghans and their government;
- on a practical level, because this benchmark lends itself to diagnostic, nationally comparable data analysis (for instance, the number of operational schools, the number of students, the enrollment of girls) focused on outcomes instead of the number of troops or vague references to providing security; and,
- on a policy level, because providing education to a new generation of Afghans is essential to the country's long-term development.

Plight of the Education System

The Taliban's prohibition on educating girls and women was rightly viewed as one of their most egregious human rights violations, even for a government notorious for operating without respect for basic human rights and dignities. But even before the Taliban, the mujahedin factions that ripped the country apart between 1992 and 1996 often opposed modern education, in particular the education of girls.

Since the United States and its coalition partners ousted the Taliban from power in 2001, Afghans throughout the country have told Human Rights Watch that they want their children—including girls—to be educated. Afghans have asked their government and its

international supporters to help create the infrastructure and environment necessary for educating their children.

A great deal of progress has been made. When the Taliban were forced from power, many students returned to school. According to the World Bank, an estimated 774,000 children attended school in 2001.¹ By 2005, with girls' education no longer prohibited and with much international assistance, 5.2 million children were officially enrolled in grades one through twelve, according to the Ministry of Education.² (All statistics on education in Afghanistan should be understood as rough approximations at best.)

Despite these improvements, the situation is far from what it could or should have been, particularly for girls. The majority of primary-school-age girls remain out of school, and many children in rural areas have no access to schools at all. At the secondary level, the numbers are far worse: gross enrollment rates were only 5 percent for girls in 2004, compared with 20 percent for boys.³ Moreover, the gains of the past four-and-a-half years appear to have reached a plateau. The Ministry of Education told Human Rights Watch that it did not expect total school enrollments to increase in 2006; indeed, they expect new enrollments to decrease by 2008 as refugee returns level off.⁴ In areas where students do attend school, the quality of education is extremely low.

Two critical factors are, first, that attacks on teachers, students, and schools by armed groups have forced schools to close, and, second, that attacks against representatives of the Afghan government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), along with general lawlessness, has made it too dangerous for them to open new schools or continue to operate in certain areas. Where schools do remain open, parents are often afraid to send their children—in particular, girls—to school. The continuing denial of education to most Afghan children is a human rights crisis that should be of serious concern to those who strive to end Afghanistan's savage cycle of violence and war.

¹ World Bank, "GenderStats: Database of Gender Statistics," <http://devdata.worldbank.org/> (retrieved April 17, 2006).

² Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005. The now commonly cited figure of 6 million includes adults and children outside of formal schools: 55,500-57,000 people (of whom only around 4,000-5,000 are girls and women) enrolled in vocational, Islamic, and teacher education programs, and 1.24 million people enrolled in non-formal education. Human Rights Watch interview with Mahammeed Azim Karbalai, Director, Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, March 11, 2006.

³ World Bank, "GenderStats: Database of Gender Statistics." The gross school enrollment ratio is the number of children enrolled in a school level (primary or secondary), regardless of age, divided by the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the same level. By comparison, the net school enrollment ratio is the number of children enrolled in a school level who belong to the age group that officially corresponds to that level, divided by the total population of the same age group.

⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director, Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, March 11, 2006.

Sources and Impact of Insecurity

Insecurity in Afghanistan is most dire in the country's south and southeast, although it is by no means limited to those areas. The problem is particularly acute outside of larger urban areas and off major roads, where an estimated 70 percent of Afghans reside and where U.S. forces, the International Security Assistance Force led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and Afghanistan's small but growing security forces rarely reach.

Three different (and at times overlapping) groups are broadly responsible for causing insecurity in Afghanistan: (1) opposition armed forces, primarily the Taliban and forces allied with the Taliban movement or with veteran Pashtun warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, (2) regional warlords and militia commanders, ostensibly loyal to the central government, now entrenched as powerbrokers after the flawed parliamentary elections of October 2005, and (3) criminal groups, mostly involved in Afghanistan's booming narcotics trade—a trade which is believed to provide much of the financing for the warlords and opposition forces. Each of the above groups attempts to impose their rule on the local population, disrupt or subvert the activity of the central government, and either divert development aid into their own coffers or block development altogether.

In many cases that Human Rights Watch investigated, we were not able to determine with certainty either who was behind a particular attack or the cause. But it is clear that many attacks on teachers, students, and schools have been carried out by Taliban forces (now apparently a confederation of mostly Pashtun tribal militias and political groups) or groups allied with the Taliban, such as the forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami (previously bitter rivals of the Taliban). But the Taliban are clearly not the only perpetrators of such attacks, because in many areas local observers and Human Rights Watch's investigation indicated the involvement of militias of local warlords (for instance in Wardak province, where forces loyal to the warlord Abdul Rabb al Rasul Sayyaf hold sway) or criminal groups (such as those controlling smuggling routes in Kandahar and Helmand provinces).

The motives behind the attacks differ. In some instances, it appears that the attacks are motivated by ideological opposition to education generally or to girls' education specifically. In other instances schools and teachers may be attacked as symbols of the government (often the only government presence in an area) or, if run by international nongovernmental organizations, as the work of foreigners. In a few cases, the attacks seem to reflect local grievances and rivalries. Regardless of the motivation of the attackers, the result is the same: Afghanistan's educational system, one of the weakest in the world, is facing a serious and worsening threat.

Insecurity, and the attendant difficulty it causes for government agencies, foreign reconstruction groups, and aid organizations, has also distorted national-level reconstruction policies in

Afghanistan. Southern and southeastern Afghanistan, which have suffered most from insecurity, have witnessed a significant drop in reconstruction activity.

Many NGOs, which play a significant role in providing education and other development activities in Afghanistan, no longer feel it is safe to operate outside of urban areas and off major roads linking them. As of this writing—midway through 2006—already twenty-four aid workers have been killed in Afghanistan this year, a significant increase from the rates seen in previous years, when thirty-one aid workers were killed in 2005 and twenty-four in 2004. Several large international NGOs told Human Rights Watch in December 2005 that they had curtailed their activities in the south and southeast or aborted plans to operate there as a result of insecurity. Afghan NGOs also face significant constraints. Together, security, logistical, and infrastructural limitations are keeping organizations out of the areas where their assistance is most needed. A senior Western education expert working in Afghanistan expressed his apprehension about this phenomenon: “We are very concerned about disparities that we’re creating. We’re not covering the whole country. There are some places in the country that have never seen a U.N. operation.”⁵

The failure to provide adequate aid to southern and southeastern Afghanistan also has significant political impact because it has fostered resentment against the perceived failures and biases of the central Afghan government and its international supporters. Afghans in the largely Pashtun south and southeast complain when they see more development aid and projects go to non-Pashtun areas in other parts of the country. Lacking the ability to confront the security threats facing them, they feel that they are being doubly punished—by the Taliban and criminal groups who impinge on their security, and by international aid providers being driven away due to (justified) fear of the Taliban, other opposition elements, and criminal groups.

International and Afghan Response to Insecurity

The international community has shortchanged Afghanistan’s security and development since the fall of the Taliban both qualitatively and quantitatively. International military and economic aid to Afghanistan was, and remains, a fraction of that disbursed by the international community in other recent post-conflict situations. For the past four years, Afghanistan’s government and its international supporters, chiefly the United States, have understood security mostly as a matter of the relative dominance of various armed forces. Presented this way, addressing insecurity revolves around matters such as troop numbers, geographic coverage, and political allegiance. Development and reconstruction become viewed as part of a “hearts and minds” campaign necessary to placate a potentially hostile population—not as

⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with high-level U.N. staffer who requested anonymity because he did not want to publicize internal U.N. debates, Kabul, December 5, 2005.

preconditions for a healthy, peaceful, and stable society, and certainly not as steps toward the realization of the fundamental human rights of the Afghan people.

The international community's chief tool for providing security and local development in Afghanistan has been the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), military units ranging in size from eighty to three hundred military personnel combined with a small number (usually about 10 percent of the total) of civilians from a development background or the diplomatic corps. The PRT program, initially developed by the United States to compensate for the inadequate troop numbers committed to secure Afghanistan after the Taliban, eventually became the template for international security assistance. After three years, the PRT program has now expanded to most of Afghanistan's provinces; as of this writing there are twenty-three PRTs operating in Afghanistan (note, however, that the presence of small PRTs in a province does not necessarily mean there is geographic coverage of the province outside PRT headquarters). The United States still operates the most PRTs, all of them now in southern and southeastern Afghanistan, where military threats are more pronounced. Other countries, mostly under the umbrella of NATO, including the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, and Germany, as well as non-NATO U.S. allies such as New Zealand, also field PRTs. The U.K., Canada, and the Netherlands have begun moving PRTs into some provinces in southern Afghanistan since mid-2005. NATO is scheduled to take over security in southern Afghanistan by mid 2006.

The PRTs were conceived of as a blend of military frontier posts and humanitarian and development aid providers. This has proven to be an uneasy combination, from the military point of view as well as in terms of development. There is no coherent nationwide strategy for the PRTs, nor are there any clear benchmarks for their performance. Each PRT reports to its own national capital, and, despite some efforts at coordination, does not share information or lessons learned with other PRTs. The handful of public assessments of the PRTs' performance have generally agreed that thus far, the PRTs have succeeded in improving security and development only in fairly limited areas, primarily in northern and central Afghanistan. In this sense PRTs may be considered to have been successful within their limited areas of operation. But the PRTs have not provided an adequate response to the broader problem of insecurity in Afghanistan, as evidenced by the country's overall deteriorating security situation. Nor have they been particularly successful at providing development or humanitarian assistance.

Key Recommendations

The government of Afghanistan is ultimately responsible for the security of the Afghan people. The Afghan army and police forces operate with varying degrees of effectiveness. In practice, U.S.-led coalition forces and NATO provide much of the security structure throughout the country, and particularly in the south and other volatile areas. As the responsibility for providing security in southern Afghanistan shifts from the U.S.-led coalition to NATO forces,

Human Rights Watch believes that a key measure of their success or failure should be whether children are able to go to school. This will require a military and policing strategy that directly addresses how to provide the security necessary for the Afghan government and its international supporters to develop Afghanistan's most difficult and unserved areas.

The Afghan government and the international community have not developed adequate policy responses to the impact of increasing insecurity on development in general, and education in particular—a particularly sensitive topic because education is often touted as one of the major successes of the post-Taliban government in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, the international community and the Afghan government have failed to address this policy shortcoming in the “Afghanistan Compact,” the blueprint for Afghanistan’s reconstruction agreed upon after a major international conference in London in January 2006. While the compact lists security as one of the key components of Afghanistan’s reconstruction, security is discussed in terms of troop numbers, instead of whether the composition and mission of these forces is sufficient to improve security for the population at risk. The compact explicitly links itself with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, but development goals—more broadly speaking, the notion of human security—do not appear among the benchmarks used to measure security. In implementing the compact, the Afghan government and the international community should ensure that they refocus their security efforts on fostering a climate conducive to the necessary work of development and reconstruction.

Human Rights Watch urges the Afghan government, NATO, and U.S.-led coalition forces to implement a coherent, nationwide security policy firmly tethered to the development needs of the Afghan people. A critical benchmark of success in improving security should be whether Afghans can exercise their basic rights, starting with access to basic education. Such a benchmark should be explicitly incorporated into the Afghanistan Compact.

Human Rights Watch also urges NATO and the U.S.-led Coalition to improve coordination between their PRTs and the government; to improve communication with aid organizations, and, within six months, to assess whether they have committed resources (troops, materiel, and development assistance) sufficient to meet set goals.

Finally, given the emergence of schools as a frontline in Afghanistan’s internal military conflict, Human Rights Watch urges the government and its international supporters to immediately develop and implement a policy specifically designed to monitor, prevent, and respond to attacks on teachers, students, and educational facilities.

More detailed recommendations can be found at the end of this report.

* * *

This report is based on Human Rights Watch research in Afghanistan from May to July 2005, and from December 2005 to May 2006, as well as research by telephone and electronic mail from New York. In Afghanistan we visited the provinces of Balkh, Ghazni, Heart, Kabul, Kapisa, Laghman, Logar, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Paktia, Parwan, and Wardak. We also spoke in person and by telephone with people from other provinces, including Helmand and Zabul, which we were unable to visit due to security concerns. During the course of our investigations, we interviewed more than two hundred individuals, including teachers, principals, and other school officials; students; staff of Afghan and international NGOs; government officials responsible for education at the district, provincial, and national levels; staff of the Ministry of Women's Affairs; members of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission; police officials; staff of the European Union, World Bank, USAID and its contractors, and the United Nations, including the U.N. Assistance Mission to Afghanistan, the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); officials from NATO; and other experts on education or security in Afghanistan. Many Afghans asked that their names not be used, fearing retaliation for identifying opposition groups, including the Taliban and local strongmen, that they believe are responsible for the attacks on schools documented in this report. "I'm afraid of this attack, this terrorism," a man working in Logar told us. "Don't mention our names in this report. There is no security. We don't feel secure in border areas."⁶ Similarly, many NGO staff and others working in the field of education requested anonymity, reflecting both fear of these groups and pressure to maintain a positive picture of education in Afghanistan in the face of crisis.

All numbers in this report regarding education should be understood as rough estimates only—data are incomplete and those which are available are often unreliable and conflicting.⁷ Figures on school enrollment for 2005-2006 are those provided by the Ministry of Education to Human Rights Watch. The most comprehensive data on factors affecting participation in education available at the time of writing remains that of two nearly nationwide surveys conducted in 2003: the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA).⁸ The 2006 briefing paper of Afghan Research & Evaluation Unit (AREU) entitled "Looking Beyond the School Walls: Household Decision-Making and School Enrollment in Afghanistan" also provides valuable insights regarding several key areas of the country.

⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO education staff member working in Logar and Ghazni, December 20, 2005.

⁷ Almost everyone Human Rights Watch interviewed involved in education policy cautioned that education statistics in Afghanistan were unreliable. Although a national Education Management Information System (EMIS) was made available in 2006, problems with the data's collection have called into question their accuracy.

⁸ Even with these surveys, insecurity prevented surveyors from reaching some districts.

II. Background: Afghanistan Since the Fall of the Taliban

The Taliban's Ouster, the Bonn Process, and the Afghanistan Compact

It has been more than four years since the United States ousted the Taliban from Kabul in retaliation for their support for Osama bin Laden and the large-scale murder of civilians in the United States on September 11, 2001. Much has improved in the lives of Afghans in the past four years, the most significant improvement perhaps being the ability to hope for a better future for Afghanistan's next generation. But the hopes of many Afghans are today beset by a growing crisis of insecurity.

This crisis was predictable and largely avoidable. The failure of the international community, led by the United States, to provide adequate financial, political, and security assistance to Afghanistan despite numerous warnings, created a vacuum of power and authority after the fall of the Taliban. Where the United States and its allies failed to tread, abusive forces inimical to the well-being of the Afghan people have rushed in.

The United States and the international community too often favored political expediency over the more painstaking efforts necessary to create a sustainable system of rule of law and accountability and in Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement, which in November 2001 (before the Taliban had been ousted) established a framework for creating a government in Afghanistan after the Taliban, focused on political benchmarks such as the selection of a transitional government, the drafting of a constitution, and holding presidential and parliamentary elections; it did not include clear guidelines about how these institutions were to operate. The first clear signal that the international community, and in particular its de facto leader in Afghanistan, the United States, would tolerate and even support the return of the warlords came during the Emergency Loya Jirga ("grand council") convened in June 2002 to form Afghanistan's transitional government. Although many warlords had been kept out of the meeting under the selection provisions, a last minute intervention by Zalmay Khalilzad, then the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan (and currently the U.S. ambassador to Iraq), and Lakhdar Brahimi, the special representative of U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, gave access to all the major regional militia commanders. Their intimidating presence immediately distorted the proceedings and disappointed Afghans hoping for a new beginning.⁹ The authority and power of regional warlords and militia commanders grew with every step in the Bonn Process.¹⁰

⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Loya Jirga Off to Shaky Start," June 13, 2002; Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Guarantee Loya Jirga Delegates' Security," June 19, 2002; Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Analysis of New Cabinet: Warlords Emerge from Loya Jirga More Powerful than Ever," June 20, 2002.

¹⁰ Ahmad Rashid, "Afghanistan: On the Brink," *New York Review of Books*, June 22, 2006. The United States changed its policy of relying exclusively on warlords to provide regional security and assistance against the Taliban in the summer of 2004, when it became apparent that this strategy was undermining the authority of the central government and causing major resentment among ordinary Afghans. Pursuant to this shift, some of the warlords with the greatest

The Bonn Process officially ended with the parliamentary elections of September 2005. Election day itself was relatively peaceful, but it followed a campaign marked by intimidation (especially against women candidates and voters) and voter discontent, ultimately reflected in a turnout much lower than expected.¹¹

With the end of the Bonn Process, at the beginning of 2006 the international community established a new framework for its cooperation with the Afghan government for the next five years. This new framework—known as the Afghanistan Compact—was unveiled at an international conference in London in January 2006 with much fanfare and congratulatory rhetoric: The conference's official tagline was “Building on Success.” The reality was more sobering. As U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan was quick to point out in London, “Afghanistan today remains an insecure environment. Terrorism, extremist violence, the illicit narcotics industry and the corruption it nurtures, threaten not only continued State building, but also the fruits of the Bonn Process.”¹² Events have since borne out the accuracy of Annan’s cautionary statement.

Even though Afghanistan met the political markers established by the Bonn Process—drafting a constitution and electing the president and parliament—the situation in the country is far from healthy. The Taliban and other armed groups opposing the central government are resurgent. Parliament is dominated by many of the warlords, criminals, and discredited politicians responsible for much of Afghanistan’s woes since the Soviet invasion in 1979. Production and trade of narcotics provide more than half of Afghanistan’s total income and is a major source of violence, corruption and human rights abuse. Some of the same warlords in parliament or in key official positions in the government or security forces control the drug trade. Afghanistan remains one of the world’s least developed countries,¹³ and President Karzai’s government remains completely reliant on international financial, political, and military support.¹⁴

regional or ethnic appeal were effectively sidelined, at least temporarily (for instance, Ismail Khan, General Dostum, Marshall Fahim, and Gul Agha Shirzai). However, hundreds of lower level warlords continue to impose their will on the populace. Michael Bhatia, Kevin Lanigan, and Philip Wilkinson, *Minimal Investments, Minimal Results: The Failure of Security Policy in Afghanistan*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, June 2004.

¹¹ “Afghanistan on the Eve of Parliamentary and Provincial Elections,” *A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper*, September 15, 2005, <http://hrw.org/backgrounder/asia/afghanistan0905/>; and “Campaigning Against Fear: Women’s Participation in Afghanistan’s 2005 Elections,” *A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper*, August 17, 2005, <http://hrw.org/backgrounder/asia/afghanistan0905/>. For coverage of the election period and its aftermath, read Human Rights Watch’s Afghanistan Election Diary, available at <http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/afghanistan/blog.htm#blog18>.

¹² U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. The text of his remarks can be found at “In statement to London conference, Secretary-General says providing assistance to Afghanistan is in interest of ‘entire international community,’” <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sgsm10331.doc.htm>. (retrieved February 12, 2006).

¹³ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2005* (New York: UNDP, 2005), http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/HDR05_complete.pdf (retrieved April 4, 2006).

¹⁴ On President Karzai’s current political difficulties, see Kim Barker, “An Afghan Pressure Cooker,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 21, 2006. For general overviews of the situation in Afghanistan, see Barnett Rubin, *Afghanistan’s Uncertain*

Afghans look to President Hamid Karzai—and beyond him, to his international supporters—for realistic responses to the country’s problems. The Afghanistan Compact was the international community’s answer, at least for the next five years.

The Compact identifies three major areas of activity, or “pillars”: security, governance and human rights, and economic development. The Compact also emphasized cross-cutting efforts to fight Afghanistan’s burgeoning production and trafficking of heroin. The Compact established benchmarks for performance in each area, explicitly tied to Afghanistan’s National Development Strategy (ANDS).¹⁵ The Compact also established a Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) to ensure overall strategic coordination of the implementation of the Compact, with membership including senior Afghan government officials appointed by the president and representatives of the international community. The JCMB is co-chaired by a senior Afghan government official appointed by the president and by the special representative of the U.N. Secretary-General for Afghanistan.¹⁶

The Compact’s preamble identifies security as “a fundamental prerequisite for achieving stability and development in Afghanistan.”¹⁷ Furthermore, the preamble highlights the inextricable link between security and development and committed the international community to support efforts to improve security in order to allow essential development to take place: “Security cannot be provided by military means alone. It requires good governance, justice and the rule of law, reinforced by reconstruction and development. . . . The Afghan Government and the international community will create a secure environment by strengthening Afghan institutions to meet the security needs of the country in a fiscally sustainable manner.”¹⁸

Despite identifying the important relationship between security and development, the security benchmarks used in the Compact referred solely to military and policing, and focused on the

Transition from Turmoil to Normalcy, Council on Foreign Relations, March 2006; and Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service, updated May 4, 2006.

¹⁵ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghan National Development Strategy: An Interim Strategy for Security, Governance, Economic Growth & Poverty Reduction*, 1384 (2005-2006), <http://www.andis.gov.af/>. As Barnett Rubin has pointed out, the Compact established accountability for the Afghan government, but not for donors, instead referring vaguely to “the international community.” Rubin, “Afghanistan’s Uncertain Transition...,” p. 1.

¹⁶ For information about the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, see: www.andis.gov.af/ands/jcmb.

¹⁷ “The Afghanistan Compact,” The London Conference on Afghanistan, January 31-February 1, 2006, “Security,” p. 3.

¹⁸ Ibid. The reference to strengthening Afghan security institutions in a “fiscally responsible manner” is tacit recognition of the absolute failure of the plan to create a 70,000-strong Afghan army. This plan rejected advice from security and development experts who questioned why Afghanistan needed to focus on creating an army when most of its threats were internal and required better police work. Ultimately, reality scuttled the rhetoric: it proved impossible to train and retain so many troops so quickly, and the cost of maintaining such an army was prohibitive and unbearable by Afghanistan’s shattered economy. See Report of the Panel of United Nations Peace Operations, August 21, 2000 United Nations, *Report on the Panel of United Nations Peace Operations*, U.N. Doc. A/55/305.S/2000/809 (New York: United Nations Publications, 2000). For an argument in favor of the 70,000-strong Afghan army, see Vance Serchuk, “Don’t Undercut the Afghan Army,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2006.

size of the different forces, not on their actual capacity to provide security.¹⁹ The ability to carry out the development that is earlier recognized as a “fundamental prerequisite” to security do not appear among these benchmarks.

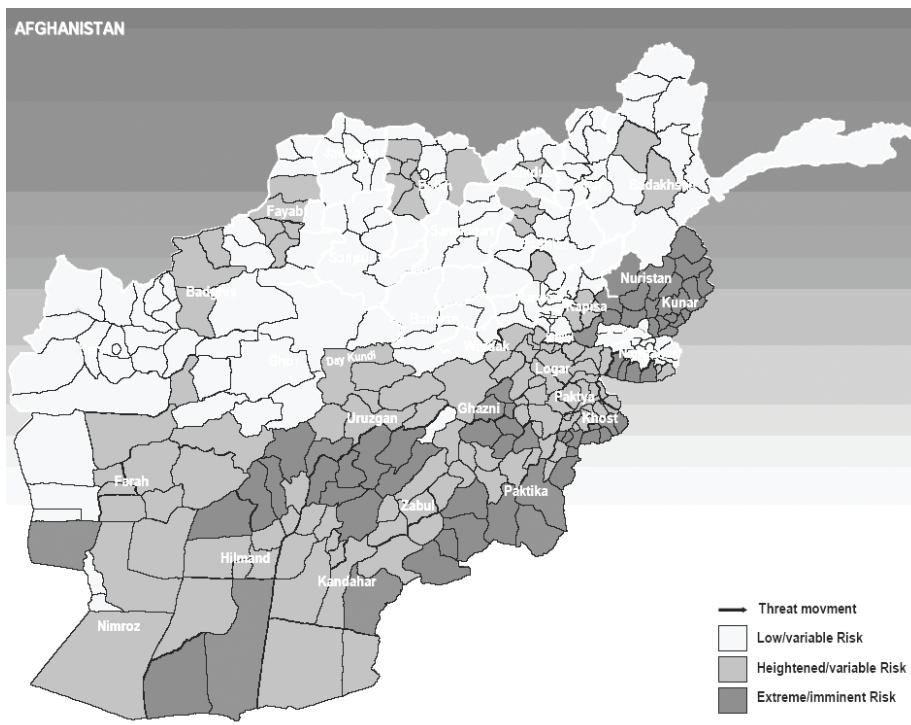
Similarly, the Compact’s benchmarks for development do not refer at all to the fact that, as was obvious while the Compact was being drafted in late 2005, security conditions precluded development and reconstruction in many areas of the country. For instance, the ambitious benchmarks for primary, secondary, and higher education, set out that by 2010:

Net enrolment in primary school for girls and boys will be at least 60% and 75% respectively; . . . female teachers will be increased by 50%; enrolment of students to universities will be 100,000 with at least 35% female students; and the curriculum in Afghanistan’s public universities will be revised to meet the development needs of the country and private sector growth.²⁰

There was no recognition that in many parts of Afghanistan, schools have become a frontline in the military conflict between the Afghan government and the armed opposition, as documented in this report. These attacks signal a major breakdown in security and in the ability of the central government and its international supporters to provide for the basic needs of the Afghan people and meet the goals established in the Afghanistan Compact.

¹⁹ “The Afghanistan Compact,” The London Conference on Afghanistan, annex 1, p. 10.

²⁰ Ibid.



Thursday, 22 June 2006



Afghanistan NGO Safety Office map of insecure areas, June 15, 2006. © 2006 ANSO

Insecurity in Afghanistan

At its simplest, insecurity in Afghanistan can be understood as violence and the threat of violence, which, depending on the locale, are often quite pervasive. Direct sources of insecurity—that is, the agents responsible for the violence—can be characterized in three overlapping categories:

- groups opposed to the central government, including the Taliban, groups linked to the Taliban, those allied with warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; and tribal or ethnic groups opposed to government presence at any given particular time;
- forces of regional military figures (warlords, but also some security officials, militia commanders, and even some governors with independent armed forces) who maintain their local authority while ostensibly operating under the umbrella of the central government in Kabul; and,
- criminal enterprises, particularly those involved in the production and trafficking of narcotics.

The source and type of insecurity varies across the country, and can be distinguished between the north and south and between urban and rural areas. Insecurity is also perceived differently by men and women and by the local population and foreign aid workers and contractors. Wherever it happens and whoever causes it, the impact of insecurity is largely the same: it keeps Afghans from enjoying their most basic rights as human beings, rights such as the right to life, the rights to freedom of association and assembly, the right to obtain health care, the right to work and to participate in public life, and the right to education.

As explained in Afghanistan's 2004 National Human Development Report, “[t]raditional security threats to the people of Afghanistan are both direct (violence, killings, etc.) and indirect. The latter emerge from a weakened state capacity and challenges to the legitimacy of institutions outside the capital, or from the withdrawal of international aid agencies from dangerous but needy zones.”²¹ In much of Afghanistan, the basic difficulties of living in a war-shattered, impoverished country gripped by draught and chronic food shortages aggravate the insecurity. As set out in more detail below, insecurity has limited the work of the government and of aid agencies in many areas of the south and southeast, exacerbating the insecurity Afghans in these areas experience.

Direct insecurity increased sharply in Afghanistan in 2005 and early 2006. The first half of 2006 (January to June) witnessed the greatest number of conflict-related deaths in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, with nearly 1,000 people, both civilians and combatants, killed in conflict-related incidents in the first six months of the year.²² This fatality rate is markedly higher than the previous rate of 1,600 people who died in conflict-related violence in 2005, according to the Afghan NGO Security Office (ANSO).²³ For the international community in Afghanistan, this has included attacks on both foreign militaries (NATO and U.S.-led coalition forces) and the humanitarian aid workers whose efforts are essential for maintaining and improving the lives of the Afghan people. For aid workers, 2006 has been a particularly bloody year, with 24 killed as of June 20, 2006.²⁴ This marks a serious escalation in the risk facing aid workers compared with the previous year, when thirty-one aid workers were killed—itself a significant increase compared to twenty-four aid workers killed in 2004 and twelve in 2003, according to ANSO.²⁵ A May 2005 report by CARE and ANSO had already concluded that “though comparative statistics are not readily available, the NGO fatality rate in Afghanistan is

²¹ UNDP, Afghanistan, National Human Development Report 2004, *Security with a Human Face: Challenges and Responsibilities*, 2004, sec. 3.2.

²² “Coalition: More than 45 Insurgents Killed in Afghanistan,” Associated Press, June 17, 2006.

²³ “Afghanistan: Year in Review 2005—Fragile progress, insecurity remains,” IRIN, January 11, 2006.

²⁴ E-mail from ANSO to Human Rights Watch, June 20, 2006.

²⁵ Ibid. 2005 casualty figures for aid workers were cited by Scott Baldauf, “Mounting concern over Afghanistan; Cartoon protests are part of an impatience with the problems of drugs, jobs, corruption,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 14, 2006 (citing ANSO).

believed to be higher than in almost any other conflict or post-conflict setting.”²⁶

Similarly, Afghan and international military forces have suffered some of their heaviest casualties in 2006. As of June 15, 2006, 300 U.S. troops had died in Afghanistan, as well as eighty-two from other countries²⁷; of this total, forty-seven U.S. troops died in 2006, along with seventeen from other countries.²⁸ This trend continues from 2005, when ninety-one U.S. troops died in combat and from accidents in 2005, more than double the total for the previous year.²⁹

Geographically, the sources of insecurity can be distinguished along a line dividing Afghanistan along a gentle gradient from the southwest to the northeast and passing directly through Kabul. North of this line, insecurity largely reflects the activity of narcotics networks and the growing authority and impunity of regional military commanders—warlords—who have returned and entrenched themselves by subverting the political process, most notably during parliamentary elections in September 2005.³⁰ Many regional commanders were able to use intimidation and fraud to place themselves or their proxies in the national parliament or the local shuras, or provincial councils, thus adding political legitimacy to their rule of the gun and the financial independence many of them enjoy due to the drug trade.³¹ Alarmingly, groups allied with the Taliban and with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar have also begun operating more openly in the north, even in areas quite close to Kabul.

For now, it is in the interest of regional power-holders in the north to minimize blatant use of force in confronting one another (or the central government). While this state of affairs has allowed the residents of northern and western Afghanistan some measure of respite, their sense of insecurity—their fear that any gains they make could be taken away arbitrarily—remains high.³² While factional fighting and overt violence has decreased in areas outside the south and southeast, insecurity remains high because of the near absolute impunity with which regional strongmen are able to act. The rule of law and the justice system remain very weak in Afghanistan, so it is not enough for incidents of actual violence to decrease for the sense of insecurity to lessen.³³ The problem of impunity must first be addressed.

²⁶ “NGO Insecurity in Afghanistan,” ANSO and CARE, May 2005, available at http://www.care.org/newsroom/specialreports/afghanistan/20050505_ansocare.pdf.

²⁷ “Enduring Freedom Casualties,” CNN.com, available at <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2004/oef.casualties/> (retrieved June 15, 2006).

²⁸ Annual breakdown of the number of casualties in Afghanistan are available at the website <http://www.icasualties.org/oef/>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ See “Campaigning Against Fear: Women’s Participation in Afghanistan’s 2005 Elections,” *A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper*.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Human Rights Watch interview with Christian Willach, operations coordinator, ANSO, Kabul, December 4, 2005.

³³ Human Rights Watch interview, Ahmad Nader Nadery, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, commissioner for rule of law and justice sector, Kabul, December 20, 2005.

South of the southwest-northeast line described above, all three sources of direct insecurity torment ordinary Afghans. Warlords in southern and southeastern Afghanistan have assumed many senior government and security posts. After the Taliban were overthrown, many warlords took on the mantle of government authority by rebranding themselves as security forces without changing how they operate.³⁴

Many observers, including the United Nations, the United States, and NATO, consider the narcotics trade as the gravest threat to the security of Afghanistan.³⁵ The illicit drug trade accounts for an estimated U.S.\$2.7 billion annually, surpassing the government's official budget, and equaling nearly 40 percent of the country's legal gross domestic product.³⁶ As Barnett Rubin has put it, "the livelihoods of the people of this impoverished, devastated country are more dependent on illegal narcotics than any other country in the world."³⁷ However, Rubin points out that according to U.N. estimates nearly 80 percent of this income goes not to farmers, but to traffickers and heroin processors.³⁸

Criminal gangs involved in the drug trade are a major source of violence and insecurity in Afghanistan, as their interests seem to transcend any particular ideology and focus on maintaining their ability to operate without any inhibitions or monitoring from the government or its international allies. Despite over U.S.\$500 million dollars dedicated to the counter-narcotics campaign by the United States and the United Kingdom, drug production raged out of control in 2005, and there are strong indications that it will reach record highs in 2006.³⁹ This vast criminal enterprise undermines the rule of law, challenges the authority of the central government, and provides easy and massive funding for military groups operating independently of the central government.⁴⁰

Both the insurgents and the regional warlords assuming government authority have benefited from Afghanistan's booming drug trade and the criminal networks it has spawned—raising fears that Afghanistan is turning into a narco-state.⁴¹ There is a very strong belief among Afghans and outside observers that senior government officials, including police chiefs, are

³⁴ Wahidullah Amani, "Growing Sense of Insecurity," Institute for War & Peace Reporting, December 23, 2005.

³⁵ See, for instance, Richard Holbrooke, "Afghanistan: The Long Road Ahead," *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2006. A clear indication of the alarms raised by Afghanistan's burgeoning drug production and trade is the prominence with which the topic is addressed in the Afghanistan Compact, where it is addressed as the only issue cutting across all other topics, such as security, rule of law, and economic development.

³⁶ U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005*, November 4, 2005.

³⁷ Rubin, *Afghanistan's Uncertain Transition* . . . , p.31.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005*. Although the area of land under poppy cultivation dropped by 20 percent in 2005, actual production dropped only four percent, indicating a bigger harvest due to more rain and better farming methods. Early indications are that poppy cultivation and drug production are already even higher in 2006.

⁴⁰ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance*, p.14.

⁴¹ "Afghanistan: Year in Review 2005—Fragile progress, insecurity remains," IRIN.

involved in the drug trade.⁴² Even the Taliban, who had effectively stamped out poppy cultivation during their reign, are now cooperating with criminal networks and apparently using it to finance their military and political activity.

Another factor complicating the security situation is interference by Afghanistan's neighbors. Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbors—Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan—each have significant ethnic and economic interests in Afghanistan, while Iran and Pakistan have historically maintained unofficial zones of influence across their respective borders. Afghans throughout the country, and particularly in the south and southeast, in interviews with Human Rights Watch in December 2005, were adamant in blaming Pakistan for directly controlling, or at least sheltering, the forces responsible for destabilizing southern and southeastern Afghanistan.⁴³

The proximity of Pakistan and its tribal areas (typically described as ungovernable or lawless) is one reason why insecurity in Afghanistan is markedly higher in the country's southern and southeastern areas. It is in these areas where the Taliban and warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar have historically centered their operations. Both groups are predominantly Pashtun and derive their strength from Pashtun tribes straddling the Afghan-Pakistani border. U.S.-led coalition forces have concentrated their anti-Taliban activity and the search for Al Qaeda operatives in this area, at times engaging in heavy clashes with opposition forces.

Nearly a third of Afghanistan's population lives in the country's southern and southeastern provinces. The south is the heartland of Afghanistan's Pashtun community and the cradle of the Taliban movement.⁴⁴ By all accounts and benchmarks, security has deteriorated sharply in this area over the past two years.⁴⁵ Opposition forces and well-armed criminal gangs operate

⁴² Scott Baldauf, "Inside the Afghan drug trade," *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 12, 2006. See also Ahmed Rashid, "Afghanistan: Taleban's Second Coming," BBCNews, June 2, 2006, HTTP://NEWS.BBC.CO.UK/2/HI/SOUTH_ASIA/5029190.STM (retrieved June 16, 2006).

⁴³ Many U.S. analysts, as well as Afghans, blamed Pakistan for nurturing, if not directly controlling, the growing insurgency in the south. See, for instance, Seth Jones, "The Danger Next Door," *The New York Times*, September 23, 2005. Afghan's love-hate relationship with Pakistan was at a particularly low point in the winter of 2005-2006, as anti-Pakistan protests erupted across the country in response to the rash of suicide bombings. For instance, the deadliest of these attacks, which killed twenty-two spectators at a wrestling match on the border town of Spin Boldak in Kandahar province, sparked anti-Pakistan and anti-Taliban riots across Afghanistan. "Protestors in Ghazni blame Pakistan for supporting terrorists," Pajhwok Afghan News, January 21, 2006; "Afghan demonstrators call for punishment of deadly bombers," Xinhua News Agency, January 18, 2005.

⁴⁴ See Ahmed Rashid, *The Taliban* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Haji Qadir Noorzai, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission Kandahar director, Kandahar, December 8, 2005. Noorzai explained that there had been a decrease in the number of complaints received from his office's area of operations—not because of improvements in security, but rather because the situation had grown so bad that it impeded proper reporting and investigation. "We've sent our delegations there in unmarked cars because of insecurity. Earlier we were getting lots of complaints, now less, not because there are less problems, but because people don't complain because we can't do anything about it, we're not that strong and the government isn't that strong," he told us.

extensively in this area, and the population receives little succor from the regional warlords nominally operating under government authority.

In past years, opposition attacks decreased markedly during the winter months, when cold weather hampered movement, particularly across the mountainous border to Pakistan. In 2006, the attacks have continued at an ever higher pace and intensity. As one tribal elder from Helmand province told Human Rights Watch:

The people have no rule of law, it's the rule of the gun. The Taliban will kill you, or the government will kill you—one is worse than the other. There is absolute oppression and terror—there is no peace here. Might is right, the gun rules.

After the fall of the Taliban, we were happy because the United States saved us from terrorism, we thought it would help us with aid. We had a good memory because the U.S. had helped [us] in the 1970s. Unfortunately, the situation is the reverse of what we hoped. Our people's hopes have turned to dust. This is because of poor management, the presence of the commanders who have been put in charge by the government.⁴⁶

In 2004, a more robust and aggressive strategy by the coalition managed to push the opposition forces out of some of these areas, prompting the U.S. and Afghan governments to pronounce (again) that the Taliban were on the verge of defeat.⁴⁷ But in 2005, Taliban and other opposition forces changed tactics, away from direct confrontations and instead began focusing on civilians and civilian institutions, such as teachers, low-level bureaucrats, schools, and aid workers, an approach similar to that used by anti-U.S. forces in Iraq.⁴⁸ At least nine clerics were killed in Afghanistan in 2005.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Haji Dr. Akhundzada, tribal elder from Kojaki district, northern Helmand province, Kandahar, December 7, 2005.

⁴⁷ President Bush and President Karzai appeared at a joint press conference in June 2004 at the White House, during which President Bush declared: "Three years ago, the Taliban had granted Osama bin Laden and his terrorist al Qaeda organization a safe refuge. Today, the Taliban has been deposed, al Qaeda is in hiding, and coalition forces continue to hunt down the remnants and holdouts. Coalition forces, including many brave Afghans, have brought America, Afghanistan and the free world its first victory in the war on terror," The White House, "President Bush Meets with President Karzai of Afghanistan," June 15, 2004, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/06/20040615-4.html>, retrieved on June 17, 2006. Similar sentiments came from General James Jones, NATO's top military official at the time, who said during an interview in Kabul in August 2004, "In terms of radical Islamic fundamentalism, Al-Qaeda and [the] Taliban reasserting themselves in this country -- it's over." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Afghanistan: NATO's Top General Says Taliban Defeated," August 13, 2004, available at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/08/252de1be-a326-4b7f-b8f1-cf52c8ab7d2e.html>, retrieved on June 17, 2006.

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Christian Willach, operations coordinator, ANSO, Kabul, December 4, 2005. It is unclear whether this shift in tactics reflected direct interchange between Iraqi and Afghan insurgent groups, or simply came about as Afghans emulated the Iraqi insurgents' effective methods of disrupting government control and

A particularly alarming development was the introduction of the previously uncommon tactic of suicide bombings. As one veteran Western observer of security conditions in Afghanistan explained, “Some of the new incidents are more serious, but overall incidents have not increased. But there is a new quality: terrorism against soft targets, suicide bombs in Kabul. There are more areas where the Taliban are active.”⁵⁰ Most of these attacks have taken place in southern Afghanistan, with nearly twenty in Kandahar province alone.⁵¹ A self-described spokesman for the Taliban, Mohammed Hanif, boasted to the *Christian Science Monitor* in February 2006: “I confirm that there are 200 to 250 *fidaeeyen* [dedicated soldiers] who are prepared to carry out suicide attacks, and the number is increasing day by day.”⁵²

It is unclear if this shift in tactics represents any real growth in the strength or popularity of the insurgency. But if the perpetrators of these attacks intended to intimidate the civilian population and disrupt the reconstruction and development process, they have by and large succeeded. Nearly all of the civilians we spoke with say they feel even more threatened than before, and they now express fear about moving in previously safe zones, such as city centers, which have become susceptible to attacks and bombings. A tribal elder from Kojaki district in northern Helmand province explained:

The Talibs target anyone working with the government. Every night there is the government of the Talibs. By day, the government can send maybe one or two motorcycles, that's all. It was better before the parliamentary elections [in September 2005].⁵³

Education in Afghanistan and its Importance for Development

Five years ago, Afghanistan was the world’s most distressing example of the failure to provide children with an education. The Taliban denied nearly all girls the right to attend school, and insecurity, poverty, and the abysmal quality of remaining schools left many boys without an

increasing chaos. U.S. and Afghan authorities have claimed that they have evidence of direct links between the two groups, while the Afghan groups claim they are relying on their own resources.

⁴⁹ The nine clerics were: Maulavi Abdullah Fayaz, Maulavi Mohammed Musbah, Maulavi Saleh Mohammed, Malik Agha, Mullah Abdullah Malang, Mullah Amir Mohammed Akhund, Maulavi Mohammed Khan, Maulavi Mohammad Gul, Maulavi Noor Ahmad. See “Afghanistan on the Eve of Parliamentary and Provincial Elections,” *A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper*, “Karzai condemns clerics’ killing,” Pajhwok Afghan News, October 18, 2005.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with long-time resident Western expert, Kabul, December 4, 2005.

⁵¹ Suicide bombings have not been limited to the south, but have also occurred in Kabul as well as in the north, where the city of Mazar-e Sharif witnessed two suicide bombings in the latter half of 2005 and German ISAF troops were attacked in Kunduz in 2006. “Escalating Violence Puts German Peacekeepers on Edge,” Deutsche Welle, May 31, 2006, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2036120,00.html> (retrieved June 17, 2006). For an incomplete list of suicide bombings in Afghanistan in 2005, see “Chronology of Major Suicide Attacks,” Associated Press, January 20, 2006; Abdul Waheed Wafa and Carlotta Gall, “3 Afghan Demonstrators Die in Clash With NATO Troops,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 2006.

⁵² Scott Baldauf, “Taliban Turn to Suicide Attacks,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 3, 2006.

⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Haji Dr. Akhundzada, tribal elder from Kojaki district, northern Helmand province, Kandahar, December 7, 2005.

education as well. Aside from refugees educated abroad and a minuscule number of girls able to attend clandestine home schools, the misogynistic rule of the Taliban left an entire generation of girls and young women illiterate.⁵⁴

However, opposition to non-madrassa based, so-called modern, education and to girls' participation predates the Taliban, when it first captured international attention. Education for girls was historically nearly non-existent in rural Afghanistan and almost exclusively confined to the capital. In 1919 King Amanullah seized the Afghan throne and began a rapid expansion of the country's secular education system, directly threatening the clergy's centuries-old monopoly on traditional madrassa education for boys. Amanullah's experiment with a secular and modern education system, particularly as it addressed the education of girls, aroused protest from country's religious establishment, who eventually supported the king's overthrow. With Amanullah's ouster, educational reforms were significantly slowed and in some cases reversed. Nevertheless, over the course of the twentieth century, and in particular during King Mohammed Zahir's long reign between 1933 and 1973, Afghanistan's education system steadily expanded, while continuing to be influenced by demands from the country's conservative culture and religious authorities.⁵⁵

After the Communist coup d'etat of 1978, the education system was dramatically revamped to reflect the governing ideology. The curriculum downgraded the importance of religion and emphasized Marxist-Leninism. The Communist's educational policies set off a serious backlash, as the religious establishment, assisted by the militant Islamic groups, cast schools as centers for Communist Party activity.⁵⁶ Schools became one of the first military targets for the mujahedin and the long war against the Soviet occupation.⁵⁷

With the fall of the Communist government in 1992, the country was divided among warring factions, many of them religiously-inspired mujahedin groups ideologically opposed to modern education and to educating girls. Millions of Afghans fled the country, particularly the educated. Of the schools not destroyed by war, many were shuttered because of insecurity, the lack of teachers and teaching material, or simply poverty.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Humanity Denied: Systematic Violations of Women's Rights in Afghanistan*, vol. 13, no. 5, October 2001.

⁵⁵ Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 69.

⁵⁶ S. B. Ekanayake, *Education in the Doldrums: Afghan Tragedy*, (Peshawar: UNESCO, 2000), p. 36.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Education under the Taliban went from wretched to worse. The Taliban focused solely on religious studies for boys and denied nearly all girls the right to attend school.⁵⁸ The Afghan government and its foreign supporters often cite the rehabilitation of the Afghan school system and the number of children in school as one of the chief successes of the international effort in Afghanistan.⁵⁹ Since 2001, the participation of children and adults in education has improved dramatically and, as explained below, there is great demand. Afghanistan has one of the youngest populations on the planet—although exact numbers do not exist, an estimated 57 percent of the population is under the age of eighteen.⁶⁰ Unexpectedly large numbers showed up when schools reopened in 2002, and enrollments have increased every year since, with the Ministry of Education reporting that 5.2 million students were enrolled in grades one through twelve in 2005.⁶¹ This includes, they told us, an estimated 1.82-1.95 million girls and women.⁶² An additional 55,500-57,000 people, including 4,000-5,000 girls and women, were enrolled in vocational, Islamic, and teacher education programs, and 1.24 million people were enrolled in non-formal education.⁶³ These numbers represent a remarkable improvement from the Taliban era. Indeed, more Afghan children are in school today than at any other period in Afghanistan's history.⁶⁴

Despite these improvements, the situation is far from what it could or should have been, particularly for girls. The Ministry of Education estimates that 40 percent of children aged six to eighteen, including the majority of primary school-age girls, were still out of school in 2005. Older girls have particularly low rates of enrollment: at the secondary level, just 24 percent of

⁵⁸ The gross enrollment ratio in primary school for 2000/2001 was 29 percent for males and less than 1 percent for females (down from 4 percent the previous year). UNESCO, "Gross and Net Enrollment Ratios, Primary," <http://stats UIS.unesco.org/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=51>, retrieved February 9, 2006.

⁵⁹ See, for example, most recently comments made by Afghan and other government officials at the opening of the London Conference unveiling the Afghanistan Compact on January 31, 2006. President Karzai said: "Where four years ago, education was in a state of total collapse, today more than six million girls and boys are attending schools." Prime Minister Tony Blair of the U.K. said: "There are millions of children back at school, many of them girls denied the chance to be educated during the period of the Taliban's rule." Both speeches are available at the website of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, available at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front/TextOnly?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate>ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1136906260508&to=true>, retrieved on June 17, 2006. As early as June 2004, at a meeting in the White House, President Bush told President Karzai: Afghanistan and America are working together to print millions of new textbooks and to build modern schools in every Afghan province. Girls, as well as boys, are going to school, and they are studying under a new curriculum that promotes religious and ethnic tolerance." President Karzai responded by saying: "We are sending today five million children to school. Almost half of those children are girls." The White House, "President Bush Meets with President Karzai of Afghanistan," June 15, 2004, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/06/20040615-4.html>, retrieved on June 17, 2006.

⁶⁰ Data available in Afghanistan's Second Report on the Millennium Development Goals, available at http://www.undg.org/documents/6666-Afghanistan_Second_MDG_Report.pdf.

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director, Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, March 11, 2006.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ For information on student enrollment in Afghanistan since 1970, see UNESCO data available at <http://devdata.worldbank.org/edstats/cd5.asp>.

students were girls in 2005;⁶⁵ and the gross enrollment rate for girls in secondary education was only 5 percent in 2004, compared with 20 percent for boys.⁶⁶ In six of Afghanistan's then thirty-four provinces, girls made up 20 percent or less of the students officially enrolled in school in 2004-2005.⁶⁷ Even at the primary level, girls are not catching up: the gap in primary enrollment between boys and girls has remained more or less constant despite overall increases in enrollment.⁶⁸

Enrollment also has varied tremendously by province and between urban and rural areas.⁶⁹ Many children in rural areas have no access to schools at all. Seventy-one percent of the population over age fifteen—including 86 percent of women—cannot read and write, one of the highest rates of illiteracy in the world.⁷⁰

Moreover, not all enrolled children actually attend school or attend regularly. The Ministry of Education told Human Rights Watch that 10-13 percent of children drop out each year,⁷¹ but true numbers may be far higher: the 2003 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) found seven provinces in which more than 20 percent of girls enrolled in school had not attended at all in the last three days.⁷² “Enrollment data is from the beginning of year so it does not reflect kids who drop out during the year,” explained senior staff of an NGO that runs education

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director of Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, March 11, 2006. Compare Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005 (in 2004-2005, girls made up 20 percent of secondary students).

⁶⁶ World Bank, “GenderStats: Database of Gender Statistics.”

⁶⁷ Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005. These provinces were Kandahar, Kapisa, Khost, Helmand, Paktika, Zabul. It should be noted that this figure is not the percentage of school-age girls enrolled in the area.

⁶⁸ There were 1.5 million girls and 3 million boys enrolled in primary school in 2004-2005. Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director, Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, March 11, 2006. See also *Millennium Development Goals Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Country Report 2005: Vision 2020*, pp. 31, 42; and C. Naumann, *Compilation of Some Basic School Statistics*, WFP CO AFG, Citing UNICEF RALS (Rapid Assessment of Learning Spaces), 2003/4 data, p. 4 (noting the 1:2 ratio of girls to boys in primary school).

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director, Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, March 11, 2006; and UNICEF, “On eve of new Afghan school year, UNICEF warns of continued threat facing women and children,” March 21, 2006.

⁷⁰ Central Statistics Office, Afghan Transitional Authority; UNICEF, “Afghanistan—Progress of Provinces, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003*, May 2004. In rural areas, 91.9 percent of women and 63.9 percent of men are illiterate, while in many villages 95 to 100 percent of women cannot read and write. Ibid. By comparison, Afghanistan falls far below the average literacy rate of low-income countries (U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), “Afghanistan Reconstruction: Despite Some Progress, Deteriorating Security and Other Obstacles Continue to Threaten Achievement of U.S. Goals,” Report to Congressional Committees, July 2005, p. 7), below the average of other countries in the region, and below the average of the least developed countries (UNDP, *Human Development Report 2005*, p. 261).

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director, Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, March 11, 2006.

⁷² These provinces were: Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Lagman, Nimroz, Samangan, and Sar-e Pol. Notably—perhaps incredibly—Badghis, Kandahar rural, and Zabul reported that 100 percent of girls enrolled in school had attended all three of the last three days. Central Statistics Office, UNICEF, “Days Attended in Last 3 School-days (among enrolled),” *Afghanistan—Progress of Provinces, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003*.

programs in many parts of Afghanistan.⁷³ Staff of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission offered a specific example: “Traveling around, we’ve seen that the Ministry of Education’s numbers of kids in school are not accurate in areas of Paktika.”⁷⁴

As low as they are, enrollment rates appear to have reached a plateau. The Ministry of Education’s director of planning told Human Rights Watch that the ministry expects the total number of students to remain unchanged from the 2005-2006 to the 2006-2007 school years and for new enrollments to slow in 2008 as refugee returns level off.⁷⁵

Reconstruction of the country’s education infrastructure has nevertheless been unable to keep pace with demand. According to the Ministry of Education, there were 8,590 schools in Afghanistan in 2004-2005, of which 2,984 had a dedicated school building, 2,740 were “buildingless” (held in tents or in open air); and the remainder were held in mosques or rented rooms and buildings.⁷⁶

Of these schools, far fewer admit girls than admit boys. Schools are officially designed as either a boys’ school or girls’ school, with 19 percent of schools designated as girls’ schools.⁷⁷ Twenty-nine percent of Afghanistan’s 415 educational districts have no designated girls’ school at all.⁷⁸ Some schools may admit students of the opposite sex, however: according to Ministry of Education figures, about one third of the country’s schools had students of both sexes enrolled in 2004-2005.⁷⁹ In total, the ministry’s data indicate that 49 percent of Afghanistan’s schools admitted girls at some level, compared with 86 percent of schools that admitted boys.⁸⁰

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO staff, Kabul, December 4, 2005.

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission incident investigator, Gardez, December 6, 2005.

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director, Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, March 11, 2006.

⁷⁶ Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005; Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director, Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, March 11, 2006. Director Karbalai told Human Rights Watch that some 2,000 new schools were supposed to be built in 2006-2007. The head of Herat’s education department, Mohammad Fahim, told journalists that 40 percent of students in Herat would study in tents in 2006. “Lack of Teachers, Classrooms Hamper Education in West Afghanistan,” Seda-ye Jawan Radio, Herat, BBC Monitoring South Asia, March 14, 2006, 1030 GMT.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005.

⁷⁸ Ibid. A province is divided into districts; educational districts often, but not always, correspond with administrative districts.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Draft data for 2004-2005 from the Ministry of Education lists 1,354 schools as “female” and 4,361 as “male.” An additional 262 are female schools with male students, and 2,560 are male schools with female students. Only 10 percent of educational district had no girls officially enrolled in school in 2004-2005. Ibid.

According to the head of the Ministry of Education's planning department, ministry regulations allow co-education up to grade three and, in remote areas, grade nine.⁸¹ But practice varies widely. For example, a teacher in Balkh province told Human Rights Watch that he did not know whether strict separation of girls and boys "is law but this is certainly a policy. It was not the case in the past. It only started with the mujahedin regime [in 1992]. It is not applied in private schools."⁸²

Demand for separation also comes from local residents.⁸³ Some communities refuse even to allow girls to attend a school that ever has boys in it; others allow girls to go in a separate shift or allow very young girls to attend classes with boys.

Official figures may over-represent the number of functioning girls' schools. (As explained below, the number of functioning boys' schools is also likely overstated because of closures following attacks.) Human Rights Watch received information about two instances of new girls' schools not being used for their intended purpose. Woranga Safi, the then-director of secondary education department at the Ministry of Education, described an incident in Takhar province that she said was a typical example of provinces failing to give attention to female education:

A brand new school had been built according to a plan established by the Ministry of Education in Kabul in cooperation with the provincial administration. It was a school dedicated for girls' education. It worked for a few days. It was then "hijacked" by local authorities and turned into a school for boys. The girls could not return to the school⁸⁴

In Kapisa province, Human Rights Watch visited a newly-built girls' school that police had taken over for their own use because girls from the local community did not attend it.⁸⁵

Secondary education, for which girls and boy are separated, is far less available to girls than to boys, and Human Rights Watch heard reports of certain provinces having no secondary schools for girls at all. However, neither the Ministry of Education nor UNICEF were able to provide us with a listing of provinces without girls' secondary schools. Human Rights Watch

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director of Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, December 15, 2005, and March 11, 2006.

⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Mazar-e Sharif, May 19, 2005.

⁸³ According to the director of Qala-e Wazir school in Bagrami district, Kabul province: "People in the community demand separate schools. It is important to respect the tradition." Human Rights Watch interview, Bagrami district, Kabul, May 10, 2005.

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Woranga Safi, Director of Secondary Education, Ministry of Education, Kabul, May 12, 2005.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdul Halim Khan, Tagab District Police Chief, Tagab District, Kapisa, May 7, 2006.

visited a girls' secondary school in Paktia, one of the provinces that does. According to the school's principal, it was the only school in the province offering education to girls grade eight or higher, and fifty-four girls were enrolled in these grades, including sixteen in class ten. No girls were enrolled in grades eleven or twelve in 2005-2006.⁸⁶

The Structure of Afghanistan's School System

Under Afghanistan's Constitution, education is compulsory and free from grades one through nine and free up to the undergraduate level of university.⁸⁷ Children begin grade one at age six or seven. Primary education consists of grades one through six, junior (or middle) secondary education grades seven through nine, and upper secondary education grades ten through twelve. Formal education options also include vocational education and teacher education (grades ten through fourteen) and Islamic education (grades seven through fourteen).

In "cold" areas, the school year begins after the Persian New Year in March; in "hot" areas, the school year begins in September. The school year usually lasts nine months, divided into two semesters, with a two-and-a-half month break at the end of the academic year. The school day is short, typically lasting from three to three-and-a-half hours, which allows teachers to work at other jobs or schools to operate multiple shifts.

In addition to formal schools run by the Ministry of Education, other forms of education are available in certain areas. This includes literacy programs, community-based schools, and accelerated learning programs which typically target, but are not limited to, girls who cannot go to a regular school. Accelerated learning programs educate children who have missed some years of school but seek to rejoin the formal education system by studying the formal curriculum at an accelerated pace. These programs may be administered by NGOs or the government, with the largest being the USAID-funded Afghanistan Funded Primary Education Program (APEP), implemented primarily through Afghan NGOs.

International donors have long played a role in education in Afghanistan, and, since the fall of the Taliban, education has been almost completely dependent on international support, provided directly to the government or to private contractors and NGOs. The largest international donors for education in Afghanistan are the United States (via USAID) and the World Bank. Other donors include Denmark, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, UNESCO, and UNICEF. Donor money has gone to school construction and rehabilitation, textbook printing and distribution, teacher training, and school equipment such as tents, blackboards, and carpets. According to the Agency Coordinating Body For Afghan Relief (ACBAR), since 2002, NGOs have assisted in repairing or constructing around 3,000 school buildings and in training 27,500 teachers.⁸⁸ In light of the very high numbers of children outside the education system, the focus of donors and the Ministry of Education has been on primary education largely to the exclusion of secondary.

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with high school principal, Gardez, December 6, 2005.

⁸⁷ Information in this section draws from Human Rights Watch's interviews with staff of the Ministry of Education and the following sources: Jeaniene Spink, Afghanistan Research & Evaluation Unit (AREU), "Afghanistan Teacher Education Project (TEP) Situational Analysis: Teacher Education and Professional Development in Afghanistan," August 2004; Anne Evans, Nick Manning, Yasin Osmani, Anne Tulley, and Andrew Wilder, "A Guide to Government in Afghanistan," AREU and the World Bank, 2004, <http://www.areu.org.af/publications/Full%20Guide%20to%20Government.pdf>.

⁸⁸ Holger Munsch, "Education," *Afghanistan: Findings on Education, Environment, Gender, Health, Livelihood and Water and Sanitation: From Multidonor Evaluation of Emergency and Reconstruction Assistance from Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom*, Arne Strand and Gunnar Olesen, eds., CMI Report, 2005, p. 9, citing ACBAR "Statement for the Afghanistan Development Forum," Kabul, April 4-6, 2005.

Education is universally recognized as critical for children's intellectual and social development, providing them with critical skills for leading productive lives as citizens and workers.

Education is also central to the realization of other human rights.⁸⁹ For girls, moreover, access to education correlates strongly with later marriage and childbirth,⁹⁰ which in turn correlate strongly with improved health, including significantly reduced maternal mortality.

Education not only benefits the children themselves, it also benefits the country's development. It is now well-established that increasing girls' and women's access to education improves maternal and child health, improves their own children's access to education, and promotes economic growth.⁹¹ For example, research has shown that an additional year of school for girls can reduce infant mortality by 5 to 10 percent, and that reducing the gender gap in education increases per capita income growth.⁹² Indeed, studies have found greater returns through higher wages on school investments for girls than for boys, particularly for secondary education.⁹³

The low numbers of girls receiving secondary education and higher education is especially troubling and carries profound consequences for the future participation of women in the social, economic, and political life of the country. Without higher levels of education, women's opportunities to secure skilled employment, gain leadership roles in local and national government, or to impart education as teachers themselves, are severely restricted. As one woman leader in Kandahar pointed out: "This young generation can be trained well but what about older girls? They will remain illiterate. An illiterate woman cannot be a teacher. How can she train the next generation?"⁹⁴ Some of the most important development benefits of girls' education for a country also take place at the secondary school level.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ See, for example, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 13: The Right to Education*, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1999/10, December 8, 1999, para. 1.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Barbara Hertz and Gene B. Sterling, "What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World," Council on Foreign Relations, 2004.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² For information on girls' enrollment and infant mortality, see T. Paul Schultz, "Returns to Women's Schooling," *Women's Education in Developing Countries: Barriers, Benefits, and Policy*, Elizabeth King and M. Anne Hill, eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); and M. Anne Hill and Elizabeth King, "Women's Education and Economic Well-Being," *Feminist Economics* 1 (2), 2005, pp. 21–46. For information on girls' education and economic growth, see David Dollar and Roberta Gatti, "Gender Inequality, Income, and Growth: Are Good Times Good for Women?" *World Bank Policy Research Report on Gender and Development*, working paper series no. 1, 1999, p. 12; and Stephan Klasen, "Does Gender Inequality Reduce Growth and Development? Evidence from Cross-Country Regressions," *Policy Research Report on Gender and Development*, working paper series no. 7, World Bank, 1999.

⁹³ See, for example, George Psacharopoulos and Harry Anthony Patrinos, "Returns to Investment in Education: A Further Update," *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2881*, 2002; T. Paul Schultz, "Why Governments Should Invest More to Educate Girls," *World Development*, 30 (2), 2002, pp. 207–25; and Shultz, "Returns to Women's Schooling."

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Kandahar city, December 8, 2005.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Economic and Social Council, Annual report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Katarina Tomaševski, submitted pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 2001/29, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/2002/60, Commission on Human Rights, 58th sess., January 7, 2002 ("Available evidence indicates that the key to reducing poverty is secondary rather than primary education"); Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

III. Attacks on Schools, Teachers, and Students

*The tactics of the Taliban have changed. Now there are attacks on mullahs and teachers.
Things are much worse.*

—A teacher from Kandahar province⁹⁶

When President Karzai stated in March 2006 that some 100,000 Afghan children who had gone to school in 2003 and 2004 no longer went to school, he said that this was in part “because some two hundred schools that we built were torched or destroyed.”⁹⁷

In fact, the number of schools put out of commission is even higher. Listing schools that were closed in 2005, provincial and district education officials told us of at least forty-nine in Kandahar,⁹⁸ fourteen in Ghazni,⁹⁹ and eighty-six in Zabul.¹⁰⁰ In January 2006, the director of education for Helmand province told journalists that 165 schools had been closed for security reasons.¹⁰¹ According to Nader Nadery, of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, “more than three hundred schools have been burned or, for the major part, have been shut down. . . . Most of the schools have been closed because of the fear of attacks by Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces, and, due to the insecurity that the people in the region [feel], parents are refusing to send their kids to schools.”¹⁰²

Attacks against schools, teachers, and students rose markedly in late 2005 and the first half of 2006. Human Rights Watch recorded at least 204 reported physical attacks or attempted attacks (such as bombs planted but found before they exploded) on school buildings from January 1, 2005 to June 21, 2006, based on reports to ANSO, the United Nations, the media, and our

Development and UNESCO, Financing Education—Investments and Returns: Analysis of the World Education Indicators, 2002 (benefits of secondary education to the individual in the labor force and for a country's economic growth).

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Dand district, Kandahar province, Kandahar, December 10, 2005.

⁹⁷ “Attacks Depriving 100,000 Afghan Students: President,” Agence France-Presse, March 8, 2006.

⁹⁸ According to education officials, closed schools included at least one in Dand district, five in Ghurak district, at least one in Khakrez district, two in Maiwand district, and forty in Maruf district. See section below on attacks on education in Kandahar city and province.

⁹⁹ An official in the provincial education department said that seven schools in Nawa district and two in Gilan district had closed in the last year; “four schools were burned in Giro district, one burned in Nawa.” Human Rights Watch interview with Fatima Mushtaq, department of education, Ghazni, December 18, 2005.

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Education Department Official, Qalat, March 10, 2006.

¹⁰¹ “165 Schools Closed in Helmand for Security Reasons,” Pajhwok Afghan News, January 22, 2006 (quoting provincial education director Haji Mohammad Qasim). See also “Statement of James R. Kunder, Assistant Administrator, Asia and the Near East, U.S. Agency for International Development,” Committee on House International Relations Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, March 9, 2006.

¹⁰² Golnaz Esfandiari, “Afghanistan: Militants Are Targeting Schools,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 22, 2006.

own interviews.¹⁰³ Of these attacks, 110 occurred in the first half of 2006. This represents a significant increase in attacks reported to ANSO or otherwise recorded by Human Rights Watch in previous years.¹⁰⁴ Although Human Rights Watch was not able to independently verify most of these reports, our count for 2006 is essentially consistent with that of the World Food Programme, which stated that as of June 19, 2006, 119 schools had been attacked in 2006, “seventy-two of them completely or partially burned, and twenty-five have been subject to threats.”¹⁰⁵

Who and Why

Schools in Afghanistan have historically been targets of violence directed at the central government or perceived foreign interference (and frequently, both). In the current environment, the perpetrators of attacks on teachers and schools, and their motives, vary.

In several cases that Human Rights Watch independently investigated, we were unable to determine with certainty who was behind the attacks or why schools and school personnel were targeted, but certain general conclusions are possible. As set out above, insecurity in Afghanistan has a variety of sources and the people we spoke with identified a combination of motives. These fall into three overlapping categories: first, opposition to the government and its international supporters by Taliban or other armed groups, chief among them veteran anti-government warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, (and including, at times, regional warlords with local grievances and criminal groups trying to restrict government activity); second, ideological opposition to education other than that offered in madrassas (Islamic schools), and in particular opposition to girls’ education; and third, opposition to the authority of the central government and the rule of law by criminal groups—particularly those in the narcotics trade—anxious to avoid interference with their activity.

In many instances opposition forces or criminals attack schools and teachers as easy to reach symbols of the government (and often the only sign of the government in the area). Armed

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch was not able to independently verify reports to other organizations. ANSO told us that they attempt to verify the reports they record. U.N. information is based on reports of attacks from January 2005 through June 21, 2006, only, and does not include information from UNICEF, which has chosen not to make their data public. These numbers should be understood as an approximation at best of the total number of attacks. Many attacks are likely never reported. The circumstances surrounding attacks in many parts of the country are impossible for humanitarian and human rights workers, journalists, and government officials to verify in person, precisely because insecurity prevents them from going there.

¹⁰⁴ See ANSO’s weekly security situation reports from 2003 and 2004, and Human Rights Watch, “*Killing You is a Very Easy Thing For Us: Human Rights Abuses in Southeast Afghanistan*, vol. 15, no. 5, July 2003, appendix, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/afghanistan0703/afghanistan0703.pdf>. As explained elsewhere in this report, the government does not centrally track attacks on schools, and UNAMA and UNICEF began recording such attacks only recently; accordingly, trend data are incomplete.

¹⁰⁵ World Food Programme, “Emergency Report n. 24,” June 16, 2006, <http://www.wfp.org/english/?ModuleID=78&Key=691#004> (retrieved June 20, 2006).

opposition groups have changed their tactics to attack “soft targets,” that is, low level government employees and symbols of government presence.¹⁰⁶ Teachers and schools, often isolated in rural areas, and with little or no security, present perfect targets for such attacks.

Another method of frustrating government policies is to stymie development projects. Opposition groups have explicitly adopted this position in some instances and targeted development agencies and NGOs. In several recent instances, opposition forces have killed foreign and Afghan staffers of development groups. The Taliban are most often blamed for these attacks, but it seems that other groups, at times with local grievances, or criminal groups eager to keep government influence at bay, are also responsible. For instance, ANSO reported that on February 4, 2006, in Saydabad district of Wardak province, “unknown men distributed night letters [threatening letters often left in public places at night] in the area. The night letter asked Afghans to join jihad and not to work for foreign organizations and the Afghan government. There was a specific warning to drivers who are transporting goods for organizations and government that they will be face severe consequences if they continue.”¹⁰⁷ It is possible that the Taliban issued this warning; on the other hand, the area is quite close to Kabul and is dominated by forces allied with Abdul Rabb al Rasul Sayyaf, a radical warlord with a history of abusive behavior and now a prominent member of the Afghan parliament.¹⁰⁸ Wardak was also the site of several attacks on schools in 2005, which a local government official there attributed to “[p]eople trying to stop the improvement of this place. They target schools because of improvement.”¹⁰⁹ Such warnings and attacks serve to maintain or strengthen local forces by weakening government authority.

Some attacks appear to be the result of tribal or private disputes surrounding the local disbursement of resources, including schools. The location of a school in southern Kandahar province, for instance, set off a long-running dispute between two tribes vying for government assistance. When one tribe attacked the school built on territory of the other tribe, it reflected local grievances as well as opposition to the government’s policies in that region.¹¹⁰

In other areas, schools are attacked not as symbols of government, but rather because they provide modern (that is, not solely religious) education, especially for girls and women.

¹⁰⁶ See Walter Pincus, “Growing Threat Seen In Afghan Insurgency: Defense Intelligence Agency Chief Cites Surging Violence in Homeland,” *Washington Post*, March 1, 1996.

¹⁰⁷ “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 06, February 2-8, 2005.

¹⁰⁸ For a description of atrocities committed by Sayyaf’s forces during the civil war in Kabul in 1992-1995, see Human Rights Watch, *Blood Stained Hands: Past Atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan’s Legacy of Impunity* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2005); for information about abuses by Sayyaf’s forces after the fall of the Taliban, including violence by troops that prevented girls from attending school in areas controlled by Sayyaf, see Human Rights Watch, “Killing You is a Very Easy Thing For Us”: *Human Rights Abuses in Southeast Afghanistan*, sec. “Denial of Basic Freedoms to Women and Girls.”

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with local government official, Wardak, December 21, 2005.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Shageh, Kandahar province, Kandahar, December 10, 2005.

In a March 25, 2006 statement issued by the self-styled spokesperson of the Taliban Leadership Council, Mohammed Hanif, the Taliban explicitly threatened to attack schools because of their curriculum:

In general, the present academic curriculum is influenced by the puppet administration and foreign invaders. The government has given teachers in primary and middle schools the task to openly deliver political lectures against the resistance put up by those who seek independence. . . . The use of the curriculum as a mouthpiece of the state will provoke the people against it. If schools are turned into centers of violence, the government is to blame for it.¹¹¹

The statement went on to target girls' education directly: "Another matter worth pointing out is that failure to observe the Islamic veil at girls' schools, co-education and visits by the American forces to schools are not acceptable to any Afghan. Therefore, we are strongly opposed to it and cannot tolerate it."¹¹² Around the same time, however, Hanif told a journalist: "We have not threatened anybody except those who work for Christians and for foreigners in Afghanistan. . . . We have never killed any teacher or any student."¹¹³ In fact, Human Rights Watch has documented many instances, set out in detail below, when Taliban attacks were directed at girls' schools exclusively, or explicitly targeted teachers and schools providing education to girls.

Similarly, on April 27, 2006, anti-government warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar reportedly issued a press statement vowing to continue jihad against foreign forces and stating that "now the infidel forces had been forming education system and syllabus for Afghans to divert our youth from Islam to Christianity."¹¹⁴

The rest of this section surveys cases of attacks on teachers, students, and school buildings in several provinces from 2004 to 2006 and the use of so-called night letters to terrorize teachers, students, and parents. It also discusses the impact of crime and impunity on education.

¹¹¹ "Taliban statement warns Afghan government to stop politicization of education," Afghan Islamic Press Agency, March 25, 2006. Hanif's statement seemed to contradict comments he had made in an interview earlier in the year, when he said "the Taliban are supporters of education. And the people who burn schools, they are not the Taliban. They are the enemies of Islam, they are the enemies of the Taliban. . . . Burning schools is not allowed under Islam." Scott Baldauf, "Taliban Turn to Suicide Attacks," *The Christian Science Monitor*.

¹¹² "Taliban statement warns Afghan government to stop politicization of education," Afghan Islamic Press Agency, March 25, 2006.

¹¹³ Kim Barker, "Afghan schools torched in war against education," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 16, 2006.

¹¹⁴ "Hekmatyar Vows to Continue Jihad Till Ouster of Foreign Troops," Afghan Islamic Press Agency, April 27, 2006.

Attacks by Taliban and Warlords on Education in Southern and Southeastern Afghanistan

The following case studies document attacks on schools in eight provinces in south and southeastern Afghanistan. These are the areas where there have been the greatest of attacks on teachers, students, and schools. Notably absent are the provinces of Uruzgan and Paktika, which have high levels of insecurity and low levels of development, but where insecurity has made it extremely difficult to get accurate information.

Kandahar City and Province

Kandahar city and its eponymous province comprise the second most important area in the country after Kabul. The city is the economic, political, religious, and cultural center of the Pashtun belt in the south and was the de facto capital of the Taliban while they were in government. Since the Taliban's overthrow, the international community, led by the United States has maintained a significant military presence there and made efforts to develop the area's economy (since late 2005, Canadian forces have taken the lead in providing security for Kandahar). Nevertheless, increasing insecurity has significantly constrained much of the development work, limiting it by and large to the city limits.

A representative on the Kandahar provincial council provided her impression of the impact of rising insecurity on education, particularly for girls, in Kandahar in December 2005:

The security situation was fine, but during the last two years it is growing worse day by day. In the first three years there were a lot of girl students—everyone wanted to send their daughters to school. For example, in Argandob district [a conservative area], girls were ready, women teachers were ready. But when two or three schools were burned, then nobody wanted to send their girls to school after that.¹¹⁵

In 2004-2005, 19 percent of officially enrolled students in Kandahar province were girls.¹¹⁶ Outside of the city, however, only 10 percent of enrolled students were girls, and no girls were enrolled in four of Kandahar's fifteen educational districts.¹¹⁷ According to USAID, two hundred schools in Kandahar were closed for security reasons by early 2006.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with provincial representative, Kandahar, December 11, 2005.

¹¹⁶ Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005. These data include numbers of students enrolled in Maruf district, despite the fact that all schools closed down there in 2004.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Whether girls attend in the districts where they are officially enrolled is a separate issue.

¹¹⁸ "Statement of James R. Kunder ... Committee on House International Relations Subcommittees on Oversight and Investigations.

Girls' schools in Kandahar city, in the past relatively secure, came under attack in 2006. ANSO, U.N. sources, and the press reported the following attacks in the city at the end of 2005 and in 2006:

- December 27, 2005: a hand grenade was thrown at Mirwais Mina girls' school in district 7. The school was empty at the time, but the windows were blown out and the walls, roof, and doors damaged. A suspect was arrested in February 2006.¹¹⁹
- January 7, 2006: unidentified men tied up two school guards and set fire to a co-educational primary school in Loya Wiyala village just outside Kandahar city.¹²⁰ The attack followed threatening letters, according to provincial deputy police chief Colonel Abdul Hakim Angar.¹²¹
- January 8, 2006: men set on fire Qabial co-educational primary school in Kandahar city, after locking three janitors inside.¹²² The men were rescued. According to provincial deputy education director Hayatollah Rafiqi, on the same day more than a dozen armed men also set fire to classrooms and school documents at Zeray primary school in Kandahar province.¹²³ As a result, female students were unable to take exams.¹²⁴
- Early March 2006: a homemade bomb was left next to the house of a teacher at Zargona Girls' High School in Kandahar city.¹²⁵
- April 18, 2006: night letters warning women and girls not to attend schools and offices were found in district 10.¹²⁶

Human Rights Watch interviewed a number of education officials from rural districts in Kandahar who described attacks on schools in their areas.

Maruf District, Kandahar

In 2004, the Taliban aggressively campaigned to close the schools in Maruf district, Kandahar, a partially mountainous area on the border with Pakistan. According to an education official from the area, in 2003 “all the people of the community contributed and helped the schools People were sending kids to school. Then the people who had been through the difficulty of migration were very happy to send their children—girls and boys.”¹²⁷ But the following year,

¹¹⁹ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

¹²⁰ “Coed school torched in Kandahar,” Pajhwok Afghan News, January 8, 2006.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “Suspected Taliban torch another school in Afghanistan,” Agence France-Presse, January 9, 2006.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

¹²⁵ Michael den Tandt, “In Afghanistan, to Teach is to Live in Fear,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 9, 2006.

¹²⁶ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with education official from Maruf district, Kandahar, December 9, 2005.

he explained, the Taliban began to threaten and beat teachers, and shot a principal (*mudir*). They also threatened a school full of children. Around the same time, several schools were burned or blown up. The Taliban went from village to village, calling meetings at the mosque and ordering all schools to be closed. They were successful: all forty schools in the district closed in 2004 and did not open again in the 2005-2006 school year.¹²⁸

In June 2004, around three hundred students were attending Sheikh Zai Middle School, located on the outskirts of a community in the mountains of Maruf district.¹²⁹ Girls attended grades one through four; boys went until class six. There were ten registered teachers but only six were present on the day the Taliban came in June 2004. That morning, a person came to the school and warned the head teacher that the Taliban were coming. The head teacher got on his motorbike and went to the district center to inform the authorities. In the meantime, members of the Taliban arrived at the school. According to a man from the district who spoke with the teachers and some of the students shortly thereafter, the Taliban “went to each class, took out their long knives . . . locked the children in two rooms [where the children] were severely beaten with sticks and asked, ‘will you come to school now?’”

The six teachers later told residents what happened to them. According to a resident, the teachers told him that:

They were taken out of school, their eyes were tied, they were continually hit, and they were taken to the nearby mountains on foot. . . All six were separated and nobody knew where the other was. One by one the teachers were asked why they didn’t obey what had been announced on radios and in the mosque. They said they hadn’t heard about it and the only thing they wanted was to educate children. The Taliban asked them individually, “Why are you working for Mr. Bush and Karzai?” They said, “We are educating our children with books—we know nothing about Bush or Karzai, we are just educating our children.” After that they were cruelly beaten and let go. . . .

The teachers were so cruelly beaten that until now they are handicapped. One of them had his leg broken and he can’t walk and can’t work. One of the others still has problems with his hand and can’t use it.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Hayatullah Rafiqi, head of Kandahar provincial department of education, Kandahar, December 8, 2005; and with education official from Maruf district, Kandahar, December 9, 2005.

¹²⁹ The account of the incident at Sheikh Zai Middle School is based on Human Rights Watch’s interview in December 2005 with a teacher from the district with first-hand information who did not wish to be identified in this report. According to school officials, 450 students were officially enrolled in the school, indicating, as explained elsewhere in this report, that official figures may significantly overestimate the number of children actually attending school.

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with education official from Maruf district, Kandahar, December 9, 2005.

In the meantime, the head teacher returned home. The same Maruf resident, who spoke with the head teacher three days later, described what the head teacher said happened that night:

About 7 or 8 p.m., when people started eating dinner, the Taliban came to his house. They knocked on his door and when he came out, they abused him and grabbed him and pushed him, saying, “How many times have we informed you to close your school?” The headmaster said that he hadn’t heard anything about that. They hit him with a gun butt on his head. The children started crying. The people from the nearby houses came out. One of the Taliban made a burst with his Kalashnikov [assault rifle], and some of the bullets hit the head teacher in the upper thigh. He fell to the ground. The people took him to the local doctor. He had two bullet wounds, and the doctor said it was dangerous and he should go to Quetta [Pakistan] or he would die. His bones were broken, and they didn’t join connected and now they overlap.

The head teacher and his family resettled outside of the district because they were afraid to return.¹³¹

Around the same time, the Taliban also went to another co-educational primary school in Samai village, in the same part of Maruf district. According to an eyewitness, in the mid-morning men armed with Kalashnikovs, rocket propelled grenades, and other weapons encircled the school and began “kicking and breaking the doors.”¹³² Then the eyewitness, who was hiding outside, saw them enter the school. After about an hour, he said, he saw the students—girls and boys—running away. The teachers remained and later told the witness that “the Taliban told them to ‘[s]top educating people because you shouldn’t follow the foreigners, and whoever told you to give this education is naughty, and you should not continue the work. . . . This time we are leaving you, but the next time you will be killed.’” The teachers also said that the Taliban “took the books and papers and tore them apart and broke the windows and doors of the school.” After that, the witness said, “everyone was afraid for his life, so we all decided not to go to the school and the school was closed.”¹³³

In the same period, three other schools in the district were destroyed: two primary schools and a middle school. A man who saw two of the schools afterwards described them as follows: “The roofs were made of wood and were set on fire. Some of the mud walls were broken and gone.”¹³⁴ At the middle school, he said, “the roof was down, the windows gone, just the ruins were there.”

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Human Rights Watch interview, Kandahar December 10, 2005.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with education official from Maruf district, Kandahar, December 9, 2005.

All schools in the district closed after these incidents. Then in late July or early August 2004, the Taliban came to a mosque in the district, made announcements against the government and against education, and threatened a school headmaster. “After the evening prayers,” an eyewitness said:

[S]ome Taliban stood up and made an announcement. They had a full printed document signed by their commanders: Mullah Daudullah and Mullah Akhtar Mohammed . . . At the top it was printed: “the students of Islam [a translation of Taliban].” The rest was all handwritten. The subject I saw was a notice to all the Ministers of Afghanistan. First they explained the needs of jihad and the benefits of jihad that you get from God if you do it. They noted that the Americans had come to Afghanistan again so you should fight against them as you did the Soviets. If you cannot do jihad, don’t send your children to the army. Close the schools. Don’t have any relations with the government. There were some other points I don’t remember. After that they said that if anyone was found guilty of doing those things, he will be killed.¹³⁵

After they made the announcement, some of the Taliban individually threatened a headmaster of a primary school to keep the school closed.¹³⁶

The teacher from Maruf concluded his description of recent events: “During jihad I was a student, now I am a teacher here. I have seen war for thirty years. Everything is destroyed.”

Ghorak District, Kandahar

Schools in Ghorak district of Kandahar, on the border of Helmand and Uruzgan, have been under attack at least since 2003. According to an education official from the district, six schools in the district were closed and three were open, all for boys.¹³⁷ The official listed the status of the following schools in December 2005:

- Bahram Middle School—open with one thousand students, twelve teachers
- Zurkhabad Primary School—closed for the past three years
- Azim Khan Primary School—closed for the past three years
- Kai Kuk Primary School—open with one hundred students, six teachers
- Hassan Abad Primary School—open with eighty to ninety students, six teachers

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with education official from Ghorak district, Kandahar, December 10, 2005.

- Weshtal Primary School—closed for the past one and a half years
- Gul Khani Primary School—closed for the past three years
- Bai Kush Primary School—closed for the past three years because of night letters
- Afghana non-registered girls’ school—closed for the past three years after two people were killed. “The teacher was afraid, everyone was afraid, and the girls’ school was closed.”

When Human Rights Watch asked why the schools closed three years before did not re-open, the official answered, “there is no security and security is even worse now. . . . Don’t even talk about girls—there aren’t even any boys in school! There are no teachers!”¹³⁸ When we asked if the three open schools would remain so, the official responded: “I would say that either they will be closed today or tomorrow. There is no future there. The students are afraid, but even these are the students who live very close to the school—otherwise, no one is coming.”

In late 2002 or early 2003, teachers and education officials in that district received threatening letters. Then Zurkhabad Primary School, a tent school, was burned down in the middle of the night, and the two guards sleeping inside were severely burned. According to the local official, the community reported the night letters and the school burning to government officials under district chief Mohammed Isa Khan but no investigation was conducted. The following year, another primary school made of mud and brick was burned. The district chief’s commander of security arrested three teachers on the allegation that they were responsible.

When we asked who burned these schools, the official said he did not know. “Either the Taliban or others who are against the government,” he said. “Nobody knows where they come from. They only come at night and not in the centers. From far away regions they come, but nobody recognizes them.”

Sometime in late 2004, education officials in the district received more night letters, which they forwarded to the head of the provincial education department. Shortly thereafter, armed men, whom the official described as “anti-government elements,” targeted the official. He described what happened:

After the letters, they came to my house in my village. The [armed men] surrounded the village. I was not there at the time. The village helped save me. I didn’t go to the mosque as usual because I had work. These people surrounded the mosque and moved through the streets looking for me. People

¹³⁸ Data from the Ministry of Education confirm that there are no registered girls’ schools in the district. Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005.

came out and they left. I was the only guy in the village involved with the government or with education. They asked my father and my relatives where I was, and they announced that if there was anyone present in the village who was in the government, the people should bring them out because if they find them later, then nobody can complain about what they would do.

The official fled with his family to another city, leaving his house and land behind. However, he remained officially in his job.

Then, around mid-2005, in his own village, his office in the Kai Kuk school was burned at night. Upon hearing the news, he said, he went immediately there and saw that the lock on the door was broken and a table and chair were burned. “Some of the things they took away and the rest they burned,” he explained. “They took away registration forms, examination papers were missing. We looked through the burned pages, but we didn’t find these documents. The registration papers had the names of the students on them, not just for this school but for other schools as well, because this was the district office.” Many students stopped coming to the school after that. “We went to those students who aren’t coming now but who came before and they said, ‘What can we learn? And we will even lose our lives.’ It’s because of the insecurity now. When there are enemies moving all around you, what can you learn?”

Afterwards, night letters were found in the mosque informing people not to help the government or send children to the army. By late 2005, the official said, the threats had driven all district officials from the district.¹³⁹

Khakrez District, Kandahar

According to a head teacher from Khakrez district, there are ten official boys’ schools in the district, dating back many years.¹⁴⁰ Although the schools closed during “the first period of the mujahedin,” they were open under the Taliban, albeit with different curricula. There are no schools for girls, the head teacher said, because “there is no security for girls.”¹⁴¹ In 2005, at least four schools were closed, three following attacks. (The fourth closed because there were no teachers, he said.) Although there are 1,900 students in the district, “now less than half are in school because parents are afraid. In the first week [after the last attack], no students came. Now there are more because the district chief came and ordered them to attend school.”¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with education official from Ghorak district, Kandahar, December 10, 2005.

¹⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Khakrez district, Kandahar province, Kandahar, December 10, 2005.

¹⁴¹ Data from the Ministry of Education confirm that there are no girls’ schools registered in the district.

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Khakrez district, Kandahar province, Kandahar, December 10, 2005.

In May or June 2005, opposition groups closed three schools in the cold weather areas of the district: Chenar Manukheil, Tambil, and Khaja Alam. According to the head teacher:

The anti-government elements attacked two on one day, and then Khaja Alam a day later. These are not school buildings, but open air schools under trees. The equipment, the carpets were looted. They held the teachers for one day, roughed them up a bit, threatened them, then released them. . . . They've stopped teaching because there's no school now, but they're still there in the areas.¹⁴³

Then in September or October 2005, a written threat was posted on the school door of Lycee Shah Maghsood Alaye Rahman. "You are helping the U.S.," it read. "Stop it, stop this work. If you are hurt, don't complain."¹⁴⁴

On the night of November 12, 2005, the head teacher's office in this school was burned, and the teachers received threatening notes. The police investigated and concluded that four people were responsible, the head teacher explained. The police followed their tracks to the mosque and found them there; two of the men, he said, were jailed.¹⁴⁵

Panjwai and Dand Districts, Kandahar

Panjwai district is just west of Kandahar city. Yet it is a world apart, a place where attacks by opposition groups have effectively stopped most development work.¹⁴⁶ Teachers and schools have borne the brunt of the insurgents' campaign of intimidation, which has included murders of teachers, attacks on schools, and dissemination of night letters.

Hayatullah Rafiqi, director of the provincial department of education, told Human Rights Watch that a Panjwai teacher, Abdul Ali, was killed by insurgents around October 2005. "It really affected all the teachers, and the schools closed down," he told Human Rights Watch. Furthermore, at least thirteen teachers were threatened by name, several by night letters.¹⁴⁷ "How can we expect schools to open?" Rafiqi asked.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Haji Qadir Noorzai, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission Kandahar director, Kandahar, December 8, 2005.

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Hayatullah Rafiqi, head of Kandahar province department of education, Kandahar, December 8, 2005.

The attacks also shut down most development work in the district. A major Afghan NGO, Co-Ordination for Humanitarian Aid (CHA), which was heavily involved in education projects in the district, told Human Rights Watch that it stopped its operations there (accelerated learning classes for older girls who had fallen behind during the Taliban's rule) after Abdullahi's murder, and after insurgent groups threatened CHA's staff as well as parents of students. "They warned the parents that if you let the children go to classes, they will kidnap and kill them or bomb the classes so we couldn't continue," an education official with CHA said.¹⁴⁸

In October or November, Kwaja Hamad Maimandi co-educational primary school in Serwan village was set on fire, a day after the National Solidarity Program opened. The school re-opened in February 2006.¹⁴⁹

The attacks on Panjwai were severe enough that opposition groups used them to intimidate people in other districts. The CHA official said that night letters in another district of Kandahar province warned against accelerated learning classes by invoking Panjwai: "If you go to classes you will face the problems of Panjwai," the night letters said. Schools in Dand, between Panjwai and Kandahar, also suffered because of the violence in Panjwai. As the head teacher of Dand explained, "The schools close to Panjwai are anxious, but the others are okay. The teachers at these schools are there, but they are intimidated. The parents are very afraid too."¹⁵⁰

Dand itself has witnessed attacks on school personnel. According to the head teacher from the area, in early October 2005 the thirty-one-year-old custodian of the Haji Jom'eh middle school in Belandai village, Sultan Mohammad (also known as Bodo), son of Haji Mohammad, was bringing dinner from home when insurgents, whom locals identified as Taliban, abducted him. "The Talibs took him from the village to a nearby grove of cypress trees. They hanged him with his turban, then they tossed his body into the irrigation canal."¹⁵¹

The next day, the teacher said, "People didn't see him [Bodo] in school. They looked around and found his body in the canal. . . . The day after, we found a threatening letter in the Ministry of Education office. It said to the teachers 'if you go to school, this is what will happen to you.'" After that, "all teachers have been hiding. . . . All the schools in the district closed, because teachers said we will only work after an investigation. There has been no investigation yet." While the middle school remained closed, the other twenty-seven schools re-opened, but

¹⁴⁸ Document prepared by Co-ordination for Humanitarian Aid (CHA) and given to Human Rights Watch on December 22, 2005.

¹⁴⁹ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006 (reporting that the incident happened in October); and "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 48, November 24-30, 2006, p. 18 (reporting that the incident, which appears to be the same, occurred in November).

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with head teacher, Dand district, Kandahar province, Kandahar, December 10, 2005; "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 41, October 6-12, 2006, p. 16.

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with head teacher, Dand district, Kandahar province, Kandahar, December 10, 2005.

many students did not return, he said. “The four schools closest to Haji Jom’eh are heavily affected by the incident. For example, at one, out of 130 students, only forty students attend school, at another only twenty-five of 120 students go.”¹⁵²

The head teacher of Dand ended his interview with Human Rights Watch by confessing that he had also been targeted by opposition groups the previous week. “There was a night letter specifically naming me too. I was returning from prayers, there was a notice posted. It said “if you keep teaching, you know what will happen.” So I went to the elders and they said that anyone who harms me is doing a bad thing. But as of two nights ago, I’ve fled the village because the elders said if we lose you, the whole village will mourn. We don’t have anyone like you, so leave the village, vary your routine, just do your business and leave, stay in the city.”¹⁵³

On January 20, 2006, Sufi village school in Dand district was set on fire, according to a report received by ANSO.¹⁵⁴ On February 4 and 5, hand grenades were left at a school in Panjwai that was under construction, and arson was attempted at Kawaka Mayweed school in Spirant village but stopped by school guards.¹⁵⁵ On May 19, 2006, a school was reportedly burned down in Chaplani Village in Dand.¹⁵⁶

Shageh, Kandahar Province

Insurgent attacks on schools have effectively ended what little government representation there was in several areas of Kandahar province—a fact to which regional school officials explicitly attested. Shageh’s head teacher explained:

There are nine schools in the district, one middle school [grades one to nine], the rest are primary. In half of the district, schools don’t function because the Taliban are very strong and there is no security. In the areas under Karzai’s control, there are nine schools.

One teacher, Ramazan, was killed in [June 2004]. He was warned several times orally, and then he was shot in the foot. Later, during the school holiday, he left his house in the afternoon and was found shot. No one saw what happened. Of course if we find out who shot him we will attack them.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 04, January 19-25, 2006, p. 15.

¹⁵⁵ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

¹⁵⁶ “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 021, May 18-24, 2006, p. 14; and e-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006, p. 14.

One month ago [an Afghan NGO] built a school, but there are no students there because of security. Parents say if we send students they will face Mullah Omar and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

They [opposition groups] have threatened me, said “you’re getting paid by the U.S. and we will kill you.” About five months ago I received an oral warning like that. The three women teachers were also threatened about five months ago. They were told not to cooperate with the U.S., but they still teach.¹⁵⁷

* * *

In addition to the above incidents, ANSO and U.N. sources report the following incidents in other districts in Kandahar province in 2006:

- January 18: an anti-tank mine was found buried on the main route leading to a school in Shorandam village in Daman District. An Afghan National Police team was informed and disposed of the device.¹⁵⁸
- February 3: night letters threatening students and teachers were left at Ghazi Mohammed Ayb School in Maywand district, and a school was set on fire in Ashuka, Zherai district.¹⁵⁹ According to U.N. sources, as of October 2005 schools in these two districts and in Arghistan district were closed due to activities of armed opposition groups.¹⁶⁰
- April 21: an explosion, believed to be the result of a device buried there earlier, destroyed a boundary wall at Haji Kabir school in Zarre Dasht district.¹⁶¹
- April 22: an improvised explosive device was detonated inside Haji Malim School in Spin Boldak district, and local security forces recovered and defused another device in the same school in the area. No casualties were reported.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdul Rahman, head teacher, Shageh, Kandahar province, Kandahar, December 10, 2005.

¹⁵⁸ “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 04, January 19-25, 2006, p. 15.

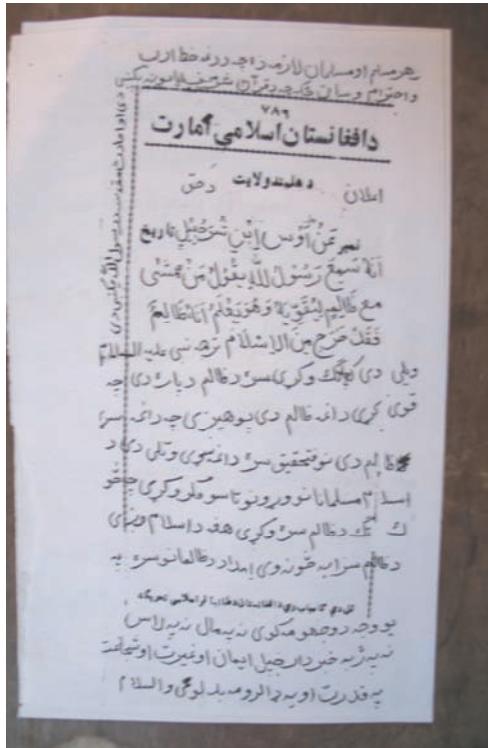
¹⁵⁹ “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 017, April 20-26, 2006, p. 14; and e-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

¹⁶⁰ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

¹⁶¹ “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 017, April 20- 26, 2006, p. 14.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Taliban Night Letter from Helmand



This is an obligation on every Muslim to respect this letter because there are verses of the Koran versus in it and because there are Allah's Messengers' words in it.

In the Name of God

Afghanistan Islamic Emirate

Helmand Province

Righteous Statement

[Arabic verse from the Koran]

Translation: God's Messenger (Peace be Upon Him) has said: He who launches a joint attack with the despicable and the vicious, or he who support the vicious, should know that he is a vicious person and indeed, he has withdrawn from Islam.

Muslim Brothers: Understand that the person who helps launch an attack with infidels is no longer a member of Muslim community. Therefore, punishment of those who cooperate with infidels is the same as the [punishment of] infidels themselves. You should not cooperate in any way -- neither with words, nor with money nor with your efforts. Watch out not to exchange your honor and courage for power and dollar.

Wa-Al Salaam

Helmand Province

Helmand province is one of the least secure areas of Afghanistan. The province borders Pakistan and is quite close to the Iranian border to the west; it has witnessed clashes between Taliban and coalition forces on a daily basis. Helmand is also one of the centers of poppy cultivation and heroin production in the country. As a result, development in the province has nearly ground to a halt, and schools and teachers are by and large unable to operate in most areas of the province. The difficulty of operating in Helmand allows us to present only a part of the picture there. The United Kingdom has recently assumed responsibility for securing Helmand, and has dispatched a force of some 3,300 troops there.¹⁶³

All together, according to the director of education for Helmand province, eighteen schools in the province had been burned down and a total of 165 schools had closed because of threats as of January 2006.¹⁶⁴ Even before the series of attacks on schools and teachers described below, only 6 percent of students in Helmand were girls in 2004-2005, and no girls were enrolled in school in nine of Helmand's sixteen educational districts.¹⁶⁵

On December 14, 2005, in Zarghon village in Nad Ali district, two men on a motorbike shot and killed a teacher in front of his students. An eyewitness told Human Rights Watch that around 10:30 in the morning, thirty-eight-year-old Arif Laghmani was shot at the gate of the boys' school where he taught. "I saw these two men," he told Human Rights Watch. "One of them fired a full magazine in Laghmani's chest. . . . I was afraid for my life and hid around a corner. I did not know who the victim was. After the killers fled, I went to the gate and saw Laghmani laying dead. . . . It was awful. . . . We have been receiving night letters, but no one thought they would really kill a teacher!"¹⁶⁶ According to press reports, the night letters commanded Laghmani to stop teaching boys and girls in the same classroom.¹⁶⁷

Four days later in Lashkargah city, the provincial capital, at around 11:00 in the morning, two men on a motorbike opened fire around Kart-e Laghan school, killing a student and the gatekeeper.¹⁶⁸ The police chief of Lashkargah, Lt. Gen. Abdul Rahman Sabir, told Human

¹⁶³ John Reid: "British task force has a vital job to do in southern Afghanistan," U.K. Ministry of Defense press release, January 26, 2006,

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/MilitaryOperations/JohnReidbritishTaskForceHasAVitalJobToDoInSouthernAfghanistan.htm> (retrieved June 20, 2006).

¹⁶⁴ "165 Schools Closed in Helmand for Security Reasons," Pajhwok Afghan News, January 22, 2006 (quoting provincial education director Haji Mohammad Qasim). See also "Statement of James R. Kunder Assistant Administrator, Asia and the Near East, U.S. Agency for International Development," Committee on House International Relations Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, March 9, 2006.

¹⁶⁵ Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005.

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview, December 21, 2005.

¹⁶⁷ "Taliban militants burn down three Afghan schools," Reuters, January 28, 2006; "Militants set fire to a school in southern Helmand," IRIN, February 21, 2006.

¹⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission staff member, Kandahar, March 10, 2006. See also "One Schoolboy and School Staff Shot Dead in Southern Afghanistan," Xinhua

Rights Watch that the men “shot indiscriminately,” hitting ninth-grade student Gulam Rassol in the chest, and the school’s gatekeeper, Salahudin (son of Abdul Ghaffor), a thirty-five-year-old father of five, in the stomach.¹⁶⁹ Two other students were also injured by bullets, he said.¹⁷⁰

The press and government officials blamed the attacks on “anti-government elements” or more specifically, the Taliban. However, Helmand is also a hotbed of criminal activity, where locally powerful criminal figures (some of them even allegedly in government positions) have an interest in disrupting government control and threatening the activity of international forces.

Human Rights Watch received information about five other killings of teachers and education department officials around the same time. The victims were:

- Habibullah, son of Yar Mohammed, head teacher in Qala-e Gaz, Grishk district;
- Mohammed Zahir, son of Habibullah, teacher in Qala-e Gaz, Grishk district;
- Lal Mohammed, son of Khoodai Raheem, deputy head of the education department of Washer district;
- Moolah Daad, son of Sardar Mohammed, an education department investigation officer of Naw Zad district; and
- Allah Noor, son of Najibullah, an education department investigation officer of Kajaki district.¹⁷¹

The attacks on education continued in 2006. According to ANSO, U.N. sources, and press reports:

- January: fires were set at a school in Tornera located in Grishk district; at a school in Nahri Sarraj district; at Shakhzai Middle School in Mawzad district; at Koshti school in Garmser; and at Shapshuta Middle School in Washer district.¹⁷²
- On or about January 28: three schools in the villages of Mangalzai, Hazarhash, and Sarkh Doz in Nawa district were set on fire.¹⁷³ According to news reports, desks,

General News Service, December 17, 2005 (quoting deputy provincial governor Haji Mohaiuddin); and Kim Sengupta, “Taliban Attacks on Schools Create ‘Lost Generation,’ ” *The Independent*, February 28, 2006 (the school had “4,200 pupils, about half of them girls”).

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with the police chief Lt. Gen. Abdul Rahman Sabir, December 21, 2005; and Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Kandahar, March 10, 2006.

¹⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with the police chief Lt. Gen. Abdul Rahman Sabir, December 21, 2005.

¹⁷¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission staff member, Kandahar, March 10, 2006.

¹⁷² E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006; and “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 03, January 12-18, 2006, p. 17 (police report that a school was burned in Washer district on January 15).

chairs, and books were burned in two of the schools, which were boys' schools; the third was coeducational and consisted of large tents which were completely destroyed.¹⁷⁴

- January 29: a boys' primary or middle school in Malgir Baizo, Grishk, was set on fire and furniture and stationery destroyed.¹⁷⁵
- February 7: unidentified gunmen set a boys' middle school on fire in Loymanda, Nad Ali district, but residents were able to put it out.¹⁷⁶
- On or about February 20: the boys' high school in Zarghan village where Laghmani was shot in December was set on fire.¹⁷⁷ Haji Mohammad Qasim, head of Helmand's educational department, told journalists, "All the books, desks and chairs have been burnt, but no one was killed or injured in the incident." Around 1,200 boys were enrolled at the school, he said, but the school had been "sealed" after Laghmani was shot. Afghan officials blamed the Taliban, but Qari Yousef Ahmadi, a self-declared spokesman for the Taliban, denied Taliban involvement.¹⁷⁸
- April 1: men attempted to burn a school in Sayed Abad Village, Nad Ali District. Villagers intervened and, although they came under small arms fire, "successfully drove off the arsonists and saved the school."¹⁷⁹
- April 4: a school and the home of an administrator were set on fire in Baghram district.¹⁸⁰
- On or about May 30: gunmen in four vehicles set fire to a middle school in Group Shash, Nad Ali district, and left handwritten pamphlets on the gates of other schools warning teachers not to come to school. The provincial governor's spokesperson blamed the "enemies of the country" (a term used by Afghan officials to refer to Taliban), but self-described Taliban spokesman Qari Yousaf Ahmadi expressed ignorance about the incident and told journalists that burning schools was not Taliban policy.¹⁸¹

¹⁷³ See "Taliban Militants Burn Down Three Afghan Schools," Reuters, January 28, 2006; "Rights Body Condemns Recent Attacks on Teachers and Schools," IRIN, January 31, 2006; "Militants set fire to a school in southern Helmand," IRIN, February 21, 2006; U.N. Department of Safety and Security Weekly Security Situation Report, January 29–February 4, 2006. Roman spellings of village names vary.

¹⁷⁴ "Suspected Taliban Rebels Burn Three Schools in Afghanistan," Associated Press, January 28, 2006 (quoting Helmand provincial administrator Ghulam Muhiddi).

¹⁷⁵ "School set on fire in south Afghanistan," BBC Monitoring South Asia (Pajhwok News Agency), January 29, 2006; e-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

¹⁷⁶ "Residents Fight Back, Foil Plot to Torch School in Southern Afghanistan Province," Pajhwok News Agency, February 7, 2006.

¹⁷⁷ "Militants set fire to a school in southern Helmand," IRIN, February 21, 2006.

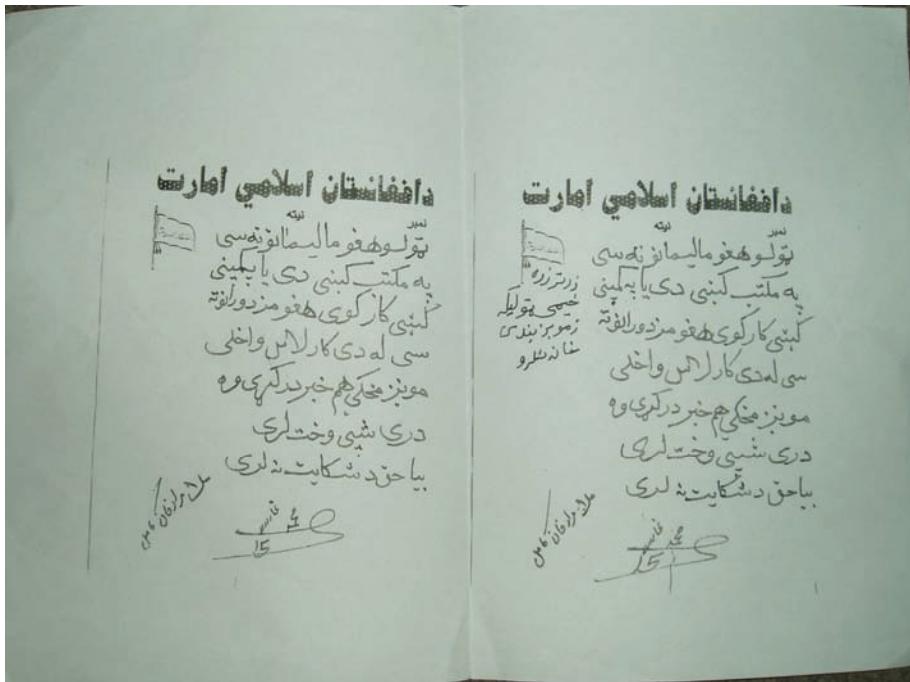
¹⁷⁸ "Another school set alight in Helmand," Pajhwok Afghan News, February 21, 2006.

¹⁷⁹ "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 014, March 31-April 6, 2006, p. 20.

¹⁸⁰ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

¹⁸¹ "School Torched, Teachers Warned in Helmand," Pajhwok Afghan News, May 30, 2006.

Taliban Night Letters from Zabul



Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

This is to warn all the teachers and those employees who work with Companies to stop working with them. We have warned you earlier and this time we give you a three days ultimatum to stop working. If you do not stop, you are to blame yourself.

Mullah Murad Khan Kamil

Zabul Province

Zabul province has been a hotbed of insurgency since the fall of the Taliban and subject to tremendous insecurity, some of it associated with the cross-border narcotics trade. With the assistance of U.S. forces, security improved last year in the provincial capital and along the Kabul-Kandahar highway. However, Zabul remains one of the most dangerous and least developed areas of Afghanistan. As in Helmand, the obstacles to Human Rights Watch and other NGOs operating in the province allow us to present only a partial picture of insecurity there.

Only 9 percent of Zabul's students were girls in 2004-2005, and four districts in the province had no girls enrolled at all in school that year.¹⁸² In March 2006, a provincial education

¹⁸² Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005.

department official gave Human Rights Watch similar figures: only 3,000 (8 percent) of the 37,743 officially enrolled students in Zabul were girls.¹⁸³ Due to insecurity, he said, only ninety-five of the province's 181 schools were open.¹⁸⁴

Zabul was the scene of one of the more gruesome attacks on a school official in Afghanistan—the decapitation of a headmaster on the night of January 3, 2005. The brutality of the attack shocked even battle-hardened Afghans and sent ripples through the community of teachers and development aid workers.¹⁸⁵ According to provincial education department director Mohammad Nabi Khushal, four “[a]rmed militants entered the house of the headmaster . . . and brutally beheaded him in front of his children.”¹⁸⁶ The victim, Abdul Habib, reportedly worked at the Sheik Mathi Baba School, one of Zabul’s two high schools, both located in the provincial capital, Qalat.¹⁸⁷ Director Khushal told journalists that insurgents had occasionally put up posters around the city demanding that schools for girls be closed and threatening to kill teachers.¹⁸⁸

General insecurity has also had an effect on education. Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission researchers found in 2005 that: “In Qalat district of Zabul province interviewees reported that they do not send their children to school because of security fears (kidnapping and threats from armed men) and because the children have to work.”¹⁸⁹ The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission’s report highlights that in Zabul, like in other areas across southern Afghanistan, it is difficult to distinguish between insurgent activity and the action of criminals, because in some cases the two groups share a common purpose in weakening the government, or even work directly to support one another.

¹⁸³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with education department official, Qalat, Zabul, March 10, 2006.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. By comparison, Nabi Khushal, the director of education in Zabul, told a journalist in January 2006 that one hundred of the province’s 170 registered schools had been closed over the past two years, mostly in remote areas, due to deteriorating security. Declan Walsh, “Afghan teacher of girls beheaded,” *Irish Times*, January 5, 2006.

¹⁸⁵ For instance, the incident was singled out to indicate the challenges facing educational development in Afghanistan by James Kunder, USAID’s assistant administrator for South Asia and the Near East, testifying before the Committee on International Relations of the U.S. House of Representatives on March 6, 2006. Testimony available at <http://www.usaid.gov/press/speeches/2006/ty060309.html>.

¹⁸⁶ “Afghanistan: School Teacher Beheaded in the South,” Xinhua General News Service, January 4, 2006.

¹⁸⁷ Carlotta Gall, “High School Teacher Is Beheaded in Afghanistan,” *The New York Times*, January 5, 2006 (quoting spokesman for the provincial governor, Gulab Shah Alikhe).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *Economic and Social Rights in Afghanistan*, May 2006, p. 34.

In 2006, the following threats and attacks were reported:

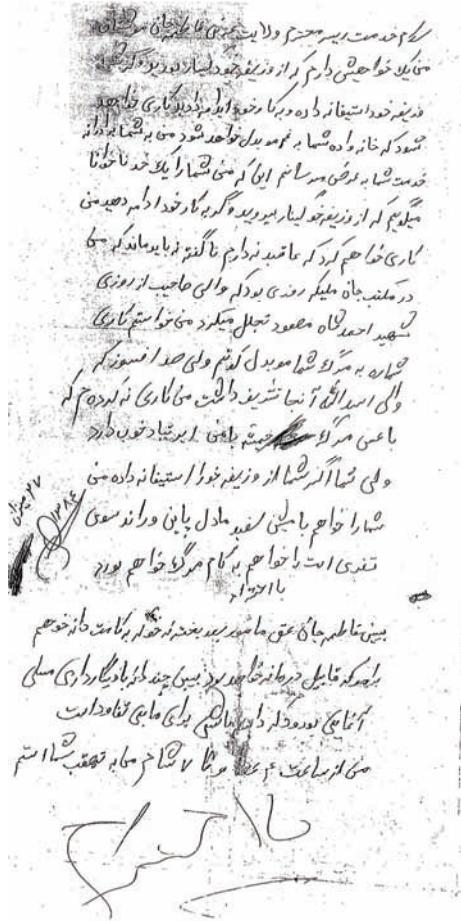
- On or about January 12: threatening letters were distributed in schools in Naw Bahar, Argandab, and Daychopan districts directed at teachers and students and ordering the schools to close.¹⁹⁰
- February 8: a boys' high school in Qalat city was burned during protests against cartoons printed in a Danish newspaper that were widely believed to be derogatory to the Prophet Mohammed.¹⁹¹
- April 6: a school in Khomchina village, Mizan District was set on fire.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

¹⁹¹ "Four killed in new Afghan cartoon protests," Agence France-Presse, February 8, 2006; "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 07, February 9-15, 2006, p. 16.

¹⁹² "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 015, April 7-12, 2006, p. 10.

Taliban Night Letters From Ghazni



کارخانه مسکن پروری و دلایل ساخته اند که اینجا
نهاد خواهیم داشت / از زمانی که همانندی را در پیش
نمی نهاد است تقاضا نداشته بود / اینها که طبق
جیوه کلم خانه وادی هم / فرمودند که شور من بپوشید
خدمت شاید بخوبی سازمان ایوان را می خواست / ایا بخود نباشد
که بخوبی از زیر زمینه خود را بخوبی کار خود را کاملاً می خواهد
کارخانه خواهیم کرد که مقابله نداشتم / ناگفته نباشد که
در مکانی بدان میلکه روند بودم / حالی حاجب از روی
نهاد احمدیه وادی مانع تجهیز میکرد / مخواست که
چنانچه هر چهار چهار ماه میری کشتم و لایحه اسناد
والی اسلامیه آنها شرید / داشت مطالبه نداشت
با عین مردم / می خواست / با این این برخیار خود را
و لی چهار اسرارها از وزیر خود را استیناند داده
سیارا خواهم با این اتفاق مدل چیزی و رواند سمعی
تندی است / اخواهم بیکام مرد خواهم بود
با این این

بن شناخته باش عن ماسنی بعده خود را کاملاً خارج خواهم
آمد که تابع در خانه خود / نیز چون که طرفداری را در میان
کوچکی سعدی داشت / اینها برای مالک گذشت
که اینها عزیز می باشند / اینها بخوبی ایست

Greetings toward the respected director [of education] of Ghazni province, Fatima Moshtaq. I have one request, that you step aside from your duties. Otherwise, if you don't resign your position and continue your work, something will happen that will transform your family and you to grief. I am telling you this as a brother, that I consider you a godless person. I am telling you to leave your post and if you continue your work, I will do something that doesn't have a good ending. It should not be left unsaid that one day in the Jan Malika school I heard Wali Sahib praise Ahmad Shah Masood, I wanted transform your life to death and with much regret Wali Assadullah was present there and I didn't do anything to cause your death. But if you don't resign your work, I will attack you and take you to death.

With respects,
27 Meezan 1384

At the bottom (last paragraph):

Look dear Fatima consider your poor employee who will suffer. He was in front of the house look at how many body guards you have for instance the one who was there but if you have them it doesn't matter to us. I was following you from 4 in the afternoon till 7 at night.

With Respects.

Ghazni Province

The historic city of Ghazni, about four hours drive south of Kabul, was the center of an empire covering much of northern India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and eastern Iran in the eleventh century. Today it is capital of one of Afghanistan's more volatile provinces. The international community largely suspended operations there in May 2003, when a French UNHCR employee was killed in Ghazni city. The city itself is relatively calm, but much of the province is beset by opposition groups, including the Taliban, those associated with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and local criminal gangs. Broadly speaking, areas south of the ring road are considered seriously unsafe, while northern areas are calmer.¹⁹³

Local education officials blame the Taliban for some of the attacks on education in Ghazni. One official from Gilan province, one of the least secure in Ghazni province, said: "Some Talibs are from the community and some are coming from Zabul. Those coming from Zabul taunt our Taliban and say, 'If there are no schools running in Zabul,... how come the schools are running in Gilan?'"¹⁹⁴

In other cases, evidence indicates criminal responsibility; for instance, a particularly brutal attack during which killed two education officials in early December 2005 was blamed on robbers, because the officials were robbed of the payrolls they were carrying, contrary to the usual practice of the ideologically motivated groups.¹⁹⁵

Overall, in 2004-2005, 31 percent of students officially enrolled in school in Ghazni were girls. But enrollment was much higher in districts north of the ring road than those south of it. The two districts (out of eighteen) with no girls enrolled were in southern Ghazni.¹⁹⁶

A teacher from troubled Gilan district, south of Ghazni city, described his school: "We have two shifts, one from first to sixth grade, one from seventh to twelfth in the evening. There are about five to six hundred students. There are eighteen teachers, forty students in one class." The school has frequently faced security problems, he told us. "Last year in April [2005] our school was closed by the Taliban for two months, they threatened us and told us this school must be closed. Night letters are regularly sent."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ For instance, Ghazni's northwestern mountainous district of Jaghori, a mainly Hazara area, is generally calm and demilitarized and the scene of significant reconstruction activity. For instance, there are twice as many girls' schools in Jaghori than in any other district in Ghazni. Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005.

¹⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Gilan district, Ghazni, December 19, 2005.

¹⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with educational officials in Ghazni, December 19, 2005.

¹⁹⁶ Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005.

¹⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Gilan district, Ghazni, December 19, 2005.

A teacher from Deh Yek district told Human Rights Watch that in his district girls' education, while only offered from grades one to three, was the focus of attacks:

The boys' schools have not been threatened, they haven't had problems; the focus has been on girls' education and on television and people with antennas. The attacks are meant to make sure that there are no girls' schools next year. The teachers want greater pay in order to face the threats. Even some of the elders now say 'get rid of the girls' school, we'll built a clinic instead.'¹⁹⁸

An official in the provincial education department described problems in Andar district:

There are a lot of problems in Andar—the biggest is the security problem. The teachers are threatened and told not to go to school. . . . At the moment there is no school for girls in Andar though we are trying for it. . .

A lot of night letters have been sent to teachers and students, even to the mosques. The teachers, headmasters, and *modirs* [principals] were and are threatened continuously. The police and ANA [Afghan National Army] are very weak—they are not in a position to bring any security or peace. Usually the night letters are signed by Jaish al-Muslemin or Taliban. No schools have been burned in Andar, but three schools were burned in Giro in May this year.

. . .

In Hale Khojiri school, some teachers were threatened and told if they continued to go to school, their blood would be on their own hands.¹⁹⁹

In addition, the official said that he had been personally threatened.

In the first half of 2006, the following attacks were reported by ANSO, the United Nations, and the press:

- On or about January 16: "anti-government elements" burned three tents at Mateen Shahid School in Dihyak district.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Deh Yek district, Ghazni, December 20, 2005.

¹⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Haji Khudaye Nazar, Ghazni province department of education director of human resources, Ghazni, December 19, 2005.

²⁰⁰ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

- February 13 or 14: a school in Agho Jan village, in southern Gilan district, was set on fire. There were mixed reports about the damage, ranging from several rooms being saved to the building being completely gutted.²⁰¹
- April 16: a secondary school in Muqur district was set on fire and around two hundred books, including Qurans, were burned.²⁰² The attacker fled in a Toyota Corolla, ANSO reported.²⁰³ According to the United Nations, a school in the same district was destroyed on April 30.²⁰⁴
- May 28: “a group of unknown men” set fire to a school in the Khogianai area of Jaghatu District in the night.²⁰⁵

Paktia Province

Paktia’s provincial capital, Gardez, was the location of the first PRT established in Afghanistan. The province, nevertheless, continues to suffer from serious violence and insecurity, with little sign of a turnaround. A western resident of Gardez said bluntly: “We’re in the middle of an insurgency here. [Over the past two years] I’ve seen a massive decline in security here.”²⁰⁶ In Paktia, the insurgency, broadly referred to as the Taliban, combines groups opposed to the central government, tribes determined to preserve their freedom of action, and criminal networks whose profits may be supporting the opposition groups and tribes and who in turn may collaborate with these groups.

In 2004-2005, 24 percent of students officially enrolled in school were girls; in two of Paktia’s fourteen educational districts no girls were enrolled in government schools at all.²⁰⁷ One of those districts is the restive Zurmat region, where two Afghan employees of the German NGO Malteser were killed by insurgents, allegedly the Taliban, in August 2004. The murders led to a drastic reduction in NGO activity in the entire province, although a few continue to operate in the relative safety of Gardez and neighboring areas. Aid workers brave enough to continue their work do so at great risk. One Western aid worker told us: “Our staff in Zurmat received night letters, about two weeks ago, specifically naming them.”²⁰⁸

²⁰¹ “School set ablaze in Ghazni,” Pajhwok Afghan News, February 14, 2006; “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 07, February 9-15, 2006, p. 18.

²⁰² “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 016, April 14-19, 2006, p. 21; e-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

²⁰³ “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 016, April 14-19, 2006, p. 21.

²⁰⁴ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

²⁰⁵ “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 022, May 25-31, 2006, p. 19.

²⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Western observer, Gardez, December 5, 2005.

²⁰⁷ Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005.

²⁰⁸ Rights Watch interview with U.N. official, Gardez, December 5, 2005.

A tribal elder from Zurmat described the situation thus: “At night, the government is the Taliban. They rule by their night letters.”²⁰⁹

In October 2005, Taliban forces shot and killed two men at a mosque in Zurmat, according to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. The two were a school custodian and another person, Raz Gul (son of Abdul Gul), and Mohammed Wali (son of Wali Mohammed).²¹⁰ The gunmen took two others but later released them.

Education has nearly halted in the area. The tribal elder told us: “There are three lycees in Zurmat but none for girls. The conditions don’t exist, because of the government of the night. Some teachers have been threatened, for instance [name withheld], a teacher at Lycee of Sahrak school.”²¹¹

The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission also described an attack on a school in Zurmat in August or September 2005, and “another attack by a bomb in front of a school. It injured several students, but the Taliban denied involvement.”²¹² The denial was noteworthy because the Taliban do not always explicitly deny (or acknowledge) their involvement in attacks.

In the first half of 2006, the following attacks were reported by ANSO and U.N. sources:

- April 20: at around 5 p.m. in Dowlat Khan village, Zurmat district, an improvised explosive device consisting of an anti-tank mine and a remote control device was detonated near a school.²¹³
- April 29: an attack on a local government office in Laja Manja also resulted in damage to a school.²¹⁴

Logar Province

Logar, just south of Kabul, is a relatively well-to-do agricultural province. Nevertheless, the area has witnessed an ongoing campaign against schooling, particularly for girls.²¹⁵ Even before

²⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Haji Mohammad Shakir, tribal elder of Zurmat, Paktia, Gardez, December 5, 2005.

²¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with staff of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission-Gardez Incident Investigation Unit, Gardez, December 6, 2005.

²¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Haji Mohammad Shakir, tribal elder of Zurmat, Paktia, Gardez, December 5, 2005.

²¹² Human Rights Watch interview with staff of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission-Gardez Incident Investigation Unit, Gardez, December 6, 2005.

²¹³ “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 17, April 20-26, 2006, p. 11.

²¹⁴ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

the recent wave of attacks, in 2004-2005, only 31 percent of students enrolled in school were girls, and in one of Logar's eight educational districts no girls were enrolled in school at all.²¹⁶ Both the Taliban and the forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami are reportedly active in Logar, and both have an interest in challenging the central government's writ in this previously relatively quiet area.

In the first half of 2006, ANSO and the United Nations reported the following incidents:

- April 18: rockets struck Kochi school in Puli Alam district.²¹⁷
- May 2: during the night, unknown men set alight a madrassa (religious school) where boys studied in Pul-i Jala, Khawar district.²¹⁸
- May 9: unknown individuals set on fire Qala-e Now Shahr high school in Charkh district at around 4 a.m. Police subsequently found a hand grenade attached to a mortar with wires in a bag inside the school. (Authorities in Logar province could not confirm the report).²¹⁹
- May 12: night letters were distributed in Azra district asking people to stop working with the government and cooperating with foreigners, and stating that girls should not attend schools because it is disrespectful of Islamic and Afghani tradition and culture.²²⁰

Charkh District, Logar

Residents of Charkh district told Human Rights Watch about attacks on both boys' and girls' schools in 2004 and 2005.

Around September 2004, a mine was exploded at night in a girls' school in Qala-e Now. A teacher from the area described what happened:

It was during the night. . . . I was sleeping and I was woken up by the sound. We went out and saw the building of the girls' school was destroyed, the roof came down, the door was burned. . . . There were a lot of flames and smoke. I was a little bit scared when I saw that!

²¹⁵ By mid-2003, it was clear that there was a concerted effort to stop girls' education in Logar. See, for instance, Pamela Constable, "Attacks Beset Afghan Girls' Schools: Officials Say Sabotage Intended to Undermine Progress," *The Washington Post*, September 8, 2003.

²¹⁶ Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005.

²¹⁷ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

²¹⁸ "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 18, April 27-May 3, 2006.

²¹⁹ "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 20, May 1-17, 2006, p. 6.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

It might have been a remote-control mine. Everyone was saying that, and we found pieces of the mine. I saw them myself. It was a piece of steel. It was not too far away because there were walls surrounding the building. It hit the wall and fell to the ground.²²¹

The next day, he said, they moved the school to a private home.

For one week after that just a few girls came and then we encouraged them to come. But there were some who never came back at all—maybe 10 percent. . . . I have a girl relative who went to that school. Although we were worried about her, we didn't forbid her to go because it's her future, but I still feel worried. I feel there is a security problem. But now we are watchmen—we made a schedule and each person has one night. . . . We guard both the girls' and the boys' school.²²²

Now, he said, the girls' school “is not very accessible because of mines. Before we didn't have a girls' school. Now it's difficult—sometimes there are rockets, mines, [threatening] flyers distributed. . . . And it is a little bit far away. Most years we have four to five security incidents at this school.”²²³

Although not physically attacked, the teachers and students of Modana boys' high school in Mulanachuk were threatened with night letters in April or May 2004 and again in May or June 2005. According to a teacher at the school, the first time it happened, letters were left on the doors of the school, the walls, and the trees. The letter, he said, read: “If you come to the school it will be dangerous for you. . . . If you continue being a teacher, you shouldn't complain to us. Stop your teaching or otherwise you shouldn't complain to us if something happens to you.” He said the letters were “written like a warning, that they might attack or kill us. These weren't the specific words but this is what I thought they meant. Of course we were worried because it was a strong warning because we thought they would attack us. But we didn't stop teaching.”

When the teachers found the letters the next morning, they tore them down, but not soon enough to keep the students from finding them, he told us. “They were spread around widely. We even collected copies from the students. The students were discussing among themselves that the teachers and the school would be attacked, but we said, ‘don't worry, they don't have

²²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Logar, Ghazni, December 20, 2005.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

the power.”” The teacher never found out who left the letters, which were unsigned, but he noted that they “were typed in Dari and Pashto.”

In May or June 2005, letters were left again. The teacher could not remember the exact words of the second letter, he said, “but the message was the same: teachers don’t go to school.”²²⁴

Around the beginning of December 2005, rockets were fired in the district, destroying a government office and landing near the boys’ school.²²⁵

Baraki Barak District, Logar

A local education official from Baraki Barak district told Human Rights Watch of an attack on a girls’ school in Padkhwad-e Roghani village around June 22, 2005.²²⁶ According to the official, insurgents associated with the Taliban and with Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami faction operate in the area, and people are afraid of them. Around 650 girls attended the school, studying in grades one through four. The school was located in tents placed within the surrounding walls of a private home; however, some people in the village felt the location was too close to one of the two boys’ high schools in the village.

The official visited the site the day after the attack and described what he learned. At around midnight:

A group of armed men tied both school guards with a strong rope and then beat them very badly. They also brought some petrol with them, and in front of guards, they put the petrol oil on all school tents and carpets and they burned them. Also in order to frighten the villagers they fired their guns in the air at least two times. And then they escaped.

The following day, the official said, he saw “the girls really looking shocked. Some of them were even crying.” The school reopened that day, and the head of school “told the students that they will continue the school in open air.” Many girls returned to the school, the official said, but “there are a few families who are scared to send their children to school.”

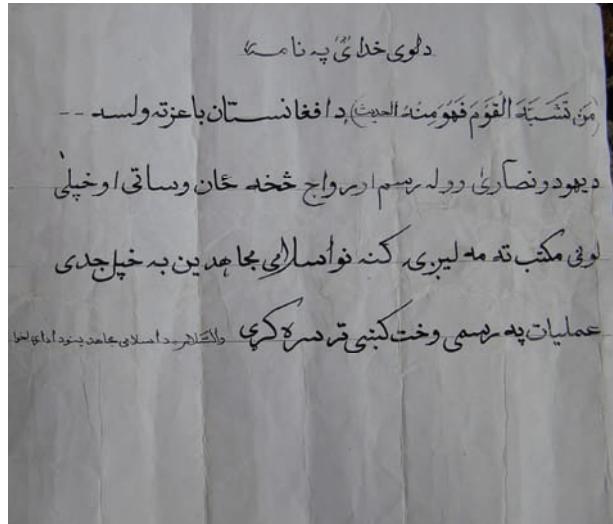
²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Human Rights Watch individual interviews with persons from Logar involved in education, Ghazni, December 20, 2005.

²²⁶ The following account is based on individual interviews with an official from the district education department, who did not wish to be named, and the relative of a teacher in the school, in Kolangar, Logar, on July 1, 2005. ANSO also reported the incident. “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 26, June 22-29, 2005.

This incident followed a failed attempt to break into the school some twenty-five days before, the official explained.

Night Letter from Wardak



By the Name of the Great God

A Hadith [a saying of the Prophet Mohammed]: Whoever acts like them is one of them [Arabic].

Respected Afghans: Leave the culture and traditions of the Christians and Jews. Do not send your girls to school, otherwise, the mujahedin of the Islamic Emirates will conduct their robust military operations in the daylight.

Wa-alsallam

By the office of the Islamic Mujahedin

Wardak Province

Wardak province, southwest of Kabul, straddles the road from Kabul to Kandahar. Abdul Rabb al Rasul Sayyaf, a warlord with a long record of human rights abuses as far back as the 1980s to the present, exercises a great deal of political and social influence over the province from his neighboring stronghold of Paghman.

Efforts to educate girls in Wardak have faced serious difficulties. According to official statistics from the Ministry of Education, in 2004-2005, only a quarter of students enrolled in school were girls²²⁷; in one district, Saydabad, the education director placed the proportion lower,

²²⁷ Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005.

stating that girls and women made up only around one-fifth of the district's students, even counting those attending NGO schools, some of which may not provide formal education. There was one high school for girls that, in 2005, ran only through grade ten.²²⁸

Wardak experienced a series of attacks on schools in 2005 and threats against schools, teachers, and other education officials. In December 2005, Human Rights Watch interviewed several teachers and education officials from the province who at first denied there were any security problems, then admitted that problems did exist, but blamed the Taliban—even though the province's distance from the Pakistani border and the influence of Sayyaf's forces make such a contention unlikely.

Human Rights Watch collected evidence of mines being left in two girls' schools in Saydabad district shortly before the September parliamentary elections. The anti-tank mine left at Malalai girls' school, the official told us, destroyed the chairs and the tables, but not the roof and walls. The official visited the school shortly afterwards. "The mine was very big and heavy, but the person who was doing it didn't set it up right . . . so it was not totally blasted," he told us. The school principal called him and the Afghan National Army, he said, but the army did not respond, so he and others cleared the mine shrapnel and searched the school themselves. "We asked the ANA and the police to search for them but they didn't. Nobody pays attention, so that's why we requested the search for the people who made this violence."²²⁹

An anti-tank mine was also left in another girls' school in Shehabad district around the same time but was found before it exploded. Around 180 to two hundred girls in grades one to six attend the school, a teacher told us.²³⁰ According to the teacher, at around 7:00 in the morning, shortly before classes were to start, children were arriving at the school and discovered a clock in one of the classrooms. When her son came and told her about it, she went to investigate and described what she saw:

It had a round shape and a timer. There were two wires coming out of it connected to the timer. The clock was set for 9 a.m. It was a little bit far away from the mine. There were wires connecting it to the bomb. The mine was round. It was put on the side of the class. A bag was put on it. . . . I started taking students out of the school and sent my son to call his father. . . .

²²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with district education director, Saydabad district, Wardak, December 21, 2005.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Wardak, December 21, 2005.

He informed the education director who made contact with the PRT and ISAF in Ghazni, but the PRT was on a mission so they didn't come until the afternoon.²³¹

When the PRT came, they exploded the mine in a field, other eyewitnesses confirmed.

In response, the teachers moved the school into the courtyard of a private home to finish the school year, but expressed concern that this would not be a permanent solution. “That’s why we have bought you to see all of these problems because we see the commitment of villagers to keeping the school. We want the authorities to provide security for the school so we can continue to work. It is very difficult for us to keep it. There is no bathroom, no water supply. . . . We were scared but we didn’t stop running the school. I didn’t even let my children go to the school building because there was no door, no window, no wall, so we didn’t feel secure studying there. I am worried that there is no guard, so how can I take the students there?”²³²

Teachers in a home-based school a few kilometers away described the impact the incident had on them and their students:

We were scared. . . . Some of our girls are small and they were afraid when they heard the news. . . . They kept asking us will it happen in this area. So we encouraged them because the students were worried and scared about this. In the lower grades some didn’t come for one or two days, but the girls in the higher grades like to come so they brought them with them.²³³

It is unclear who planted the mine; however everyone we spoke with told us that they believed it was not the Taliban but rather people from the area opposed to girls’ education. Shortly before the incident, a night letter was left in the local mosque saying that the school should be closed. A local official told us that it “may have been the work of some thugs of a commander who are now in jail” because they were later caught at a police check post with a rocket in their car.²³⁴ The official was afraid, he told us, to say the name of the commander out loud: “The people in the village know him. He hasn’t been caught—he’s still there.”²³⁵

Around the same time, night letters were left at two schools in the district, the local education official said. “Almost every school has received threats. Now we have gotten used to it. It looks

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Human Rights Watch group interview with women teachers in home-based school for girls, Wardak, December 21, 2005.

²³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with local official, Saydabad district, Wardak, December 21, 2005.

²³⁵ Ibid.

strange to you but we are used to it.”²³⁶ He added that around the same time, rockets were fired at night which he believed were aimed at the Ansari boys’ school, but they missed and fell nearby.²³⁷

The attacks continued in 2006. According to ANSO, the United Nations, and press reports:

- April 3: a school in Sheikh Yasin village, Chak district, was set on fire; a suspect was arrested on May 4.²³⁸
- May 10: unknown men fired four rocket propelled grenades at a girls’ school run by an NGO in a private house in Doh Ab village, Saydabad District, at night. The buildings were damaged but there were no reports of casualties.²³⁹
- May 11: At around 1 a.m, two rockets were fired at a girls’ school in run by the NGO Aid Afghanistan in Tangi.²⁴⁰ A third rocket was also fired towards another building of the school in a different part of the village. The school’s principal, who lived nearby, went looking for the perpetrators, believing they fired the rockets from an open field just outside the village. He did not find them but did find four un-exploded explosive devices planted around the school building. Shots were then fired at him, but he escaped and called the authorities, who arrived some four hours later at around 6 a.m. According to the NGO’s director, the school suffered minor damage, including broken windows but no persons were hurt. However, as of May 16, the school was closed and its 300 students unable to go to school. Posters had also been put up in the village, threatening the principal and his family because he was involved in girls’ education.²⁴¹

Laghman Province

Laghman district, southeast of Kabul on the heavily trafficked road to Jalalabad and on to Pakistan, had until early 2006 been considered relatively safe.²⁴² However, the frequent passage of coalition transports drew attacks from opposition groups in 2006, including on government officials.²⁴³ Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s forces are particularly active in Laghman, and are generally viewed as the prime suspect behind attacks on schools, in light of the group’s rhetoric of

²³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with district education director, Saydabad district, Wardak, December 21, 2005.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

²³⁹ “ANSO Security Situation Summary,” Weekly Report no. 20, May 11-17, 2006, p. 5.

²⁴⁰ Email from Hassina Sherjan, President, Aid Afghanistan, to Human Rights Watch, May 18, 2006.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² For instance, as of April 3, 2006, ANSO considered the province as “low risk” for the aid community.

²⁴³ “District chief, bodyguards killed in E. Afghanistan,” Xinhua press agency, April 5, 2006.

attacking the central government as a “tool of Western imperialism” and its commitment to fundamentalist religious education.²⁴⁴

Laghman’s relative quiet has allowed more girls to enroll in school. In 2004-2005, 39 percent of students enrolled in school in Laghman were girls.²⁴⁵ But even here, attacks on teachers and schools have taken place and seem to be occurring with increasing frequency.

Education officials from Laghman told Human Rights Watch that in January 2006 unknown armed men with covered faces burned a school some three kilometers to the west of the provincial capital of Mihtarlam.²⁴⁶ The men tied up the officials, ordered them not to work in schools again, said they were against education, and then set the school on fire.²⁴⁷

Also in 2006, according to ANSO, the United Nations, and press reports:

- On or about January 27: a group of unknown men set fire to Haider Khani girls’ school in Mihtarlam city, destroying two classrooms.²⁴⁸ The men also held two local engineers and another man from the village hostage overnight, releasing them unharmed the next morning. According to U.N. reports, the school was set on fire again around March 18.²⁴⁹
- On or about January 30: men broke into Bagh-e Mirza girls’ school, tied up two guards, and attempted to set a fire in a classroom. Villagers heard noise and intervened and the men escaped.²⁵⁰
- February 8 or 9: around twenty armed men set fire to Mandrawol girl’s school in Qaeghayi district after tying up several janitors or guards. Schoolbooks and copies of the Quran were reportedly burned.²⁵¹

²⁴⁴ "Hekmatyar Aligns with Al Qaeda," Arab News, December 26, 2002, available at <http://www.arabnews.com/?page=4§ion=0&article=21448&d=26&m=12&y=2002>.

²⁴⁵ Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005.

²⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Aseerudin Khottak, Head of Laghman Education Department, and Seedajan Adil, Headmaster of Mashakhel Boys Middle School, Laghman, March 23, 2006.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 05, January 26-February 1, 2006, p. 10; "School set ablaze in Laghman," Pajhwok Afghan News, March 18, 2006; "Taliban Sets Fire on Girls School in Afghanistan," Xinhuanet, January, 27, 2006; e-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

²⁴⁹ "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 05, January 26-February 1, 2006, p. 10; and e-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Aseerudin Khottak, Head of Laghman Education Department, and Seedajan Adil, Head Master of Mashakhel Boys Middle School, Laghman, March 23, 2006. "Another School Torched in Afghanistan," Agence France-Presse, February 9, 2006 (citing education department head Aseerudin Khottak); "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 07, February 9-15, 2006, p. 9.

- On or about March 18: the administration department and the storeroom of a boys' school that girls attended was set on fire in Mashakhil village, Mihtarlam district.²⁵² Police later arrested suspects.²⁵³
- April 11: one of two rockets fired near Mihtarlam city fell between a school and health clinic in the Shahr-e Now area, damaging the school.²⁵⁴
- May 1: unknown individuals started a fire at Armul Primary School in Mihtarlam district. According to ANSO, villagers managed to control the fire, but one library and the hall of the school were partially burned.²⁵⁵ However, District Education Department Director Asiruddin Hotak told journalists that the whole building, including the library, administrative block, and classrooms, was gutted.²⁵⁶ According to the school's principal, Nasima, twelve teachers were teaching 650 girls at the school. A self-described Taliban spokesperson said that the Taliban were not involved.²⁵⁷ On May 12, the National Security Directorate reportedly arrested an Afghan man suspected of being involved.²⁵⁸

Human Rights Watch visited rural Laghman in June 2005 and collected information about threats against girl students in November 2004. One teacher told us that she used to teach first grade in a girls' school located in the next village, about a twenty minute walk from her own.²⁵⁹ (There was a boys' primary school in her village but no girls' school.) Around November 2004, she found a letter left on the route. "I remember the letter very well," she told us. "It was a clear threat to me and all students going to that school." The letter read, in Pashto: "To all girls' students and school teachers, teaching in girls' schools! We warn you to stop going to school, as it is a center made by Americans. Any one who wants to go to school will be blown up. To avoid such a death, we warn you not to go to school." Because of the letter, she said,

I along with my family decided not to go to school because those who are warning us are quite powerful and strong. We are ordinary people and we can not challenge them. Also I asked the girls from my village not to go back to school. At that time the school was in tents, but now there is a nice building. All the girls from my village would really like to attend that school, which has very clean rooms, black boards, and a good environment, but the problem is

²⁵² "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 012, March 16-23, 2006, p. 19; e-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006; "School Set Ablaze in Laghman," Pajhwok Afghan News, March 18, 2006;

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ E-mail from U.N. staff to Human Rights Watch, May 4, 2006; "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 15, April 7-12, 2006, p. 9.

²⁵⁵ "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 18, April 27-May 3, 2006, p. 10.

²⁵⁶ "Miscreants Set Ablaze Girls' School in Laghman," Pajhwok Afghan News, May 1, 2006.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ "ANSO Security Situation Summary," Weekly Report no. 20, May 11-17, 2006, p. 11.

²⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Laghman, June 7, 2005.

security—what will happen if they really plant bombs on our way? That's the reason.²⁶⁰

A fourteen-year-old girl who lives in the village where the school is located confirmed that girls from the neighboring village no longer attend. “I am very upset for my colleagues from other villages who cannot come to school,” she told us. “They were coming to our school and we were happy to study together, but I know something has happened and now no one is coming from that village.” After the other girls stopped coming, she said, the men in her village put a guard in the school, and she and all her friends continued to wear *burqas* to and from school. “We attend school with fears and worries,” she explained, “but we are happy at least to use this chance.”²⁶¹

The teacher said she was not sure who was responsible, but that she and her family suspected the local commander, who is allied with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami.

Human Rights Watch also spoke with other individuals in the area connected with education who did not wish to be named about the girls’ school. One man told us that “once during the last year when the school didn’t have any building and the students were studying under tents, the school was burned. They burned all the tents and carpets and blackboards. But then, recently, the villagers with the help of [an individual in the community], managed to build the school.”²⁶²

A teacher at another girls’ school in rural Laghman described a night letter left in the mosque at the end of November 2004. When her husband brought it to her, she said, she remembered reading the following:

These girls’ classes in the village are made by Americans. It is not a school; it is a place for bad women. This is a place for revelry. We warn you to stop sending your girls to these classes or you cannot imagine the consequences. Your classes will be blown up by a bomb, or if any of your daughters is raped or kidnapped, you can not complain later on. We now ask you to stop sending girls to school.²⁶³

The school then closed for a month, until the mullah decided that it could reopen. But one quarter to one third of the girls never returned, she told us. Although the letter was unsigned,

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with fourteen-year-old girl, Laghman, June 7, 2005.

²⁶² Human Rights Watch interview, Laghman, June 7, 2005.

²⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Laghman, June 7, 2005.

she said, people in the village believed they knew the local people responsible. However, “if we give details and names, then we have to leave our houses and become refugees. So we prefer not to name them.”²⁶⁴

Night Letter from Kapisa



Taliban Islamic Movement Representative of Parwan and Kapisa Provinces

Warning

Date: (not mentioned)

Number: (Not mentioned)

- 1) This is a warning to all those dishonorable people, including ulema and teachers, not to teach girls. Based on the information given to us, we strongly ask those people whose names been particularly reported to us, not to commit this act of evil. Otherwise, it is they who bear all the responsibilities. They have no right to claim that they have not been informed.
- 2) This is to inform all those who have enrolled at boys' schools to stop going to schools. An explosion might occur inside the school compounds. In case of getting hurt, it is they who bear all the responsibilities. They have no right to claim that they have not been informed.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

Impact of Crime and Impunity on Education

Not all attacks on teachers, students, and schools stem from political or ideological opposition to the central government and its international supporters. Much of the insecurity plaguing Afghanistan is a result of a breakdown in law and order, driven in large part by the country's exploding narcotics trade and abetted by the tremendous weakness of the country's police and judiciary.

Aggravating the problem is that in many areas of Afghanistan, security forces are essentially simply reconstituted local militias, either directly or indirectly involved with the armed groups attacking teachers and schools. A police official from Wardak told Human Rights Watch:

If the police were clean, they would be effective. In theory, yes, the police could provide the security that you want to schools, but they're not strong or clean enough. People want good police to protect their children. If the police are polluted, don't expect too much from this country.

The police are connected with the Taliban, sometimes, Al Qaeda, and criminal networks. It is easy to understand why the police have not protected schools and investigated their attacks. Sometimes they are involved in the crimes or agree with the criminals.²⁶⁵

In this environment of impunity, criminal activity is a systemic threat to the well-being of the Afghan people, as politically motivated groups also engage in common brigandage, extortion, and intimidation to finance themselves and establish regional authority. Children are frequent targets of criminals and criminal acts. Various, often unidentified armed groups and individuals have targeted children, in some cases on the way to school, for kidnapping for ransom, rape, forced marriage, and other crimes.²⁶⁶ Lawlessness, and especially attacks on children, seriously obstruct education throughout the country.

Rumors about kidnappings of children swept Afghanistan in 2004 and 2005, fueled by a number of apparently real cases throughout the country. From July to December 2004, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission officially registered fifty kidnapping cases in

²⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with police officials, Wardak, April 2, 2006.

²⁶⁶ See, for example, World Bank, *Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction—the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, March 2005; Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: Women still under attack—a systematic failure to protect*, no. ASA 11/007/2005, May 30, 2005; Commission on the Status of Women, U.N. Economic and Social Council, "The Situation of Women and Girls in Afghanistan," 50th sess., U.N. Doc. E/CN.6/2006/5, December 30, 2005, paras. 27–46. See also Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, "Evaluation report on General Situation of Women in Afghanistan," March 2006.

Kabul, staff told us, but they believe there were many more unreported cases.²⁶⁷ In 2005, at least fifty-one child kidnappings and attempts were reported by ANSO.²⁶⁸ The kidnappings had a powerful effect even on those not directly connected with the incidents. For example, the director of a girls' school in Herat told us in July of 2005 that in the last year, "the rumor of kidnapping children has affected attendance of our students . . . nowadays it is again improving."²⁶⁹ Similarly, a teacher in Mazar-e Sharif also told us that when a kidnapping occurs, "parents don't send their boys and girls to school for some time."²⁷⁰ A teacher from Deh Yek district in Ghazni said school attendance at his school decreased severely after a nine-year-old boy was kidnapped and sexually assaulted in May 2005.²⁷¹

In Kandahar city, Human Rights Watch interviewed a mother who withdrew her three daughters from primary school after a girl in one daughter's class was kidnapped and killed.²⁷² Her cousin's husband found the classmate's body around the time of the Persian New Year (March 21) in 2005, the mother said, "dead with her books all around her. He took her to the hospital and found out that the girl was from the school where my daughters attended." After that, she said, "I took them out and since then they have never gone back. . . . They were afraid. They themselves didn't want to go."²⁷³ The mother emphasized that she thought education was "a good thing." "The girls are very smart—they ask the boys all the time about their books. I can see that they are interested. . . . We understand that school is good for the future. It's just the talk of the community, the threats that prevent us from allowing our girls to continue."²⁷⁴

Although parents of boys also told us they feared crime against their children and boys have been the target of well-publicized kidnappings,²⁷⁵ the fear of violence and the likelihood that it will never be punished has an especially profound effect on girls and women, both because they are targeted for gender-based violence and because of the additional stigma and other consequences that fall on female victims.²⁷⁶ Teachers, students, and NGOs report that sexual harassment of girls en route and threats of gender-based violence are significant problems for

²⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Hangama Anwari, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Kabul, May 7, 2005.

²⁶⁸ See ANSO weekly security reports for 2005.

²⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with director of girls' school, Herat, July 18, 2005.

²⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Mazar-e Sharif, May 19, 2005.

²⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Deh Yek district, Ghazni, December 20, 2005.

²⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with mother, Kandahar city, December 8, 2005.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ For example, another mother in Kandahar city told us that a man in a police uniform tried to take her twelve-year-old son one evening at the end of Ramadan, but that people on the street stopped him, believing he was an imposter. After that, she said, "he's going to school but he's very careful and very afraid." Human Rights Watch interview with mother, Kandahar city, December 8, 2005.

²⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch previously documented how physical and sexual violence, including by soldiers of warlords, kept girls from going to school in: Human Rights Watch, "*Killing You is a Very Easy Thing for Us: Human Rights Abuses in Southeast Afghanistan*, pp. 77-81.

girls' education.²⁷⁷ In cases of forced marriage or other forms of gender-based violence, there are few avenues for redress. Social stigma often prevents women and girls from reporting such cases, and even if they do, the lack of clear legal standards, the apathy and lack of appropriate training of the police, as well as the dominance of local warlords and their supporters who might be implicated result in virtual impunity for perpetrators. According to an Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission staff member:

There are probably many hundreds of cases that Afghans don't want to register because they consider it shame to the family. For instance, I know a woman [whose] daughter was kidnapped four months ago, but it has not been reported to the police. But she has consulted me—just sharing her grief with me. Her daughter was twenty or twenty-one years old and teaching at a high school. . . . The father says it's not good to look for her and tell people [what happened].²⁷⁸

In addition to the physical and psychological harm caused by these attacks, they also serve to limit the participation of women in civil society and the public sphere and their rights to work, to privacy, and to health care. The fear of sexual violence, based on years of bitter experience, is so great that even an unconfirmed rumor of an attack will deter many parents from sending their children, particularly their daughters, to school. Under these circumstances, groups opposed to girls' education have also used threats of gender-based violence to stop parents from sending girls to school.

Several incidents in the southeastern province of Nangarhar province in 2005 illustrate the problem of gender-based violence, the lack of redress, and the immediate impact on girls' education. The provincial capital, Jalalabad, straddles the important road linking Kabul to the Pakistani cities of Peshawar and Islamabad. Human Rights Watch documented in 2003 a pattern of criminality and impunity by local security forces in Jalalabad, under the command of Hazrat Ali, commander of the security forces in the Eastern Region, and associated with Hazrat Ali's brother-in-law Musa, a local commander, and Musa's son, Sami, himself a more junior local commander.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with director of girls high school, Herat province, July 18, 2005; Human Rights Watch interview with NGO staff, Kabul, December 4, 2005. A sixteen-year-old girl in Nangarhar told Human Rights Watch that she dropped out of the seventh grade because she was not willing to wear a burqa to walk to school, and when she wore only a large scarf (*chador*), "boys and men in street were looking at me if I were stranger, they threatened me, and some people were stopping their cars and asking me to go with them . . . Then I felt scared of going to school without a burqa, as I cannot accept to wear a burqa, I decided not to go to school." Human Rights Watch interview with sixteen-year-old girl, village in Jalalabad district, Nangarhar, June 7, 2005. See also The Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, *Report Card: Progress on Compulsory Education: Grades 1-9*, March 2004, p. 3.

²⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview, May 27, 2005.

²⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Killing You Is a Very Easy Thing for Us*, p.29.

In 2005, Human Rights Watch received further reports from Jalalabad, including reports that Sami had kidnapped a tenth grade student in Jalalabad city earlier in that year.²⁸⁰ According to a teacher in the city, the student's father pulled her out of school after Sami started following her to class.²⁸¹ But Sami then abducted her from the market and took her to Dubai for around two months, the teacher said; when they came back her father was forced to accept the marriage. A local official with detailed information about the case also confirmed details of this story, but could not be identified due to a history of reprisals by Hazrat Ali and members of his family.²⁸² The teacher said one of his students dropped out after the kidnapping.

According to the local official, fear of these kinds of kidnapping has had a tangible effect on girls' mobility in Jalalabad. "Much of the time, girls in grades four to six, the family stops them" from going to school. "Mostly they are afraid of gunmen kidnapping girls. Other commanders [kidnapped girls as Sami did]; then when the family goes to them, they are married. So people are cautious."²⁸³

In a second case, the father of a seventeen-year-old girl told Human Rights Watch that armed men he believed to be connected with a local strongman attempted to kidnap his daughter in Jalalabad at the end of January 2005. As his daughter was walking home from class, the father told us, three armed men in a red Toyota pick-up repeatedly approached her and asked her to get in the car.²⁸⁴ She threw stones at the car and people nearby chased the men off. Later, however, when she was riding in a rickshaw, the men in the truck reappeared and followed her. Soon after she arrived home, the men knocked on the door. When her grandmother opened it, they ordered her to bring the girl out. The grandmother brandished a large axe, shouting, "as long as I am here you won't be able to take my girl from me! I know how to punish you bastards!" This attracted other people and the men fled. The father told us that he asked around and heard that the car belonged to armed men under a local commander; he then spoke with a high level official under the commander who promised to punish the men and assured him that there was no need to follow the issue. But when he did follow up, he was told that the men had "escaped." He said he also went to government officials and was advised "not to follow such case" because "it might create insecurity for me and especially for my daughter," which he took as further evidence that the men were protected by a powerful strongman. He dropped the matter, and his daughter stayed home from school for several months, he told us. "Now," he said, "she is returning but she is scared and is under strong stress due to all of this. She is scared of going out and her psychological condition is also not very good."²⁸⁵

²⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with local education officials and aid workers, Nangarhar, June 6, 2005.

²⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Nangarhar, June 6, 2005.

²⁸² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with local official, May 27, 2005.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Jalalabad, June 6, 2005.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

A third case was recounted to Human Rights by a nineteen-year-old woman in a Nangarhar village.²⁸⁶ The woman spoke to us about her cousin, who, at the time of the presidential elections in 2004, was studying in the eighth grade and working to register voters. One evening, when the work ran later than expected, the driver who was taking her to her family's village raped her. The cousin arrived at her uncle's house injured and with torn clothes; when the village found out, she doused herself with petrol and lit herself on fire. After four days, the young woman said, her cousin died.

It is very sad to explain all this, but such a terrible experience made us all afraid. Now even though I am in tenth grade, I don't go to school anymore and neither do my cousins. Because the question to us and our families is not only losing someone but also the family's honor is very important to us. We Afghans pay a lot of respect to issues of honor and maybe some people in village know that [my cousin] was innocent, but it doesn't matter if she was innocent or not—she was working out of the house and such thing can happen to any other girl. So that's why we can't go to school anymore.²⁸⁷

Because girls and women are both specially targeted and more deeply affected by violence, providing girls with equal access to education will require additional measures of protection for them.

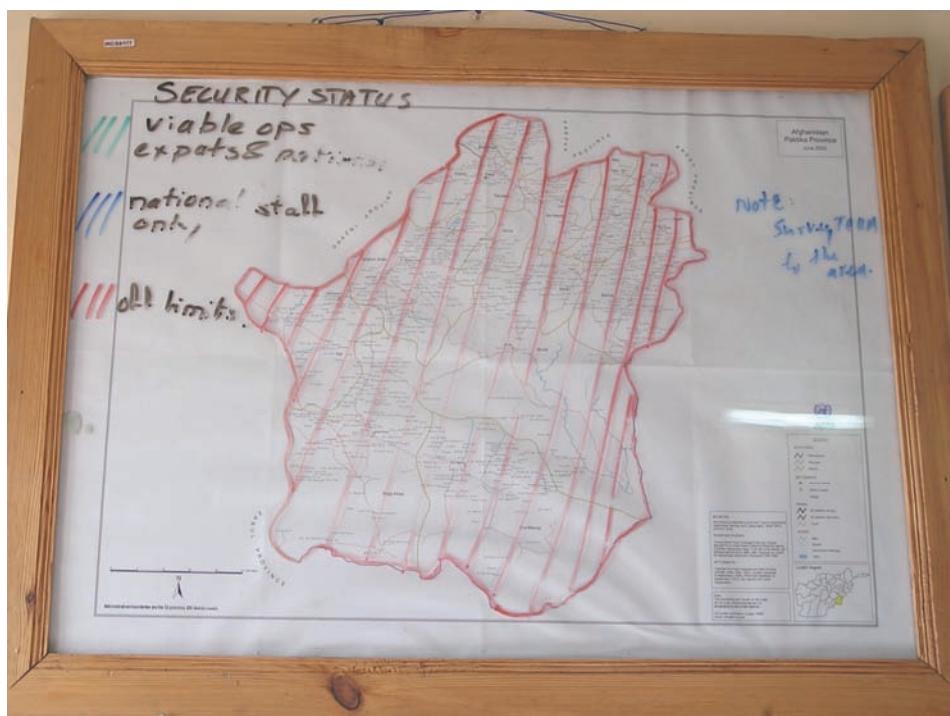
Criminal behavior is a problem not only for teachers and students but also for education providers, particularly NGOs. “There has been a massive increase in criminality” in the last year, ANSO staff told Human Rights Watch.²⁸⁸ Many recent attacks on NGOs, they said, are criminally, not politically, motivated.²⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch also heard reports, which we were not able to verify, of corrupt individuals destroying schools in order to obtain new construction contracts. The impact of insecurity on the ability of NGOs and government to provide education is discussed in the next section.

²⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with nineteen-year-old woman, village in Nangarhar province, June 7, 2005.

²⁸⁷ Ibid. Human Rights Watch heard conflicting information about whether the alleged rapist, who, we were told, was connected with a local commander, was arrested.

²⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Christian Willach, operations coordinator, ANSO, Kabul, December 4, 2005.

²⁸⁹ Scott Baldauf, “Mounting Concerns over Afghanistan,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, (quoting ANSO).



An international organization's security map indicating that all of Paktika province was off limits to staff.
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IV. The Indirect Impact of Insecurity on Education

When a family wants to send their daughters to school but they see the school is not close or it's not a good building or there are not qualified teachers, many parents don't send their children to school because they see some danger, some problem. It's circular. . . Three components are very important: 1. security, 2. teachers, 3. buildings. All are impacted by security.

—Mohammeed Azim Karbalai, Director of Planning
Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul,
December 15, 2005.

Regardless of the motivation for attacks on teachers, students, and schools in Afghanistan, their effect is devastating and far-reaching: parents are afraid to send their children to school, teachers are afraid to teach, and schools are shut down. Education providers—the Afghan government and NGOs—are forced to withdraw from insecure areas or are unable to expand to areas that desperately need them. In every respect, girls, who have much more limited access to education to begin with and who are typically the first to be pulled out of school because of insecurity, are disproportionately affected.

This climate of insecurity has seriously retarded, and in places even stopped, the crucial task of educating Afghan children. The problem is particularly acute outside of larger urban areas and off major roads, although early 2006 saw new attacks on previously secure schools in urban areas. In southern and southeastern Afghanistan, where a new rash of suicide bombings and targeting of teachers and schools has directly put schools in the line of fire, insecurity has cast an even more serious pall. Yet it is impossible to gauge the exact impact of insecurity on education because no one—including the government and the United Nations—has a comprehensive view of the number of schools and other educational settings operating in the south and southeast at any given moment (the failure to monitor attacks on education is discussed in the section on government and international responsibility below).

Even when schools continue operating, students may not attend after a threat or an attack. Each incident affects the risk assessment that parents and students undertake nearly every day. Single episodes, even from far away districts, accumulate to establish a pattern: in a country as traumatized by violence as Afghanistan, teachers, parents, and students are keenly attuned to fluctuations in this pattern and decide to continue—or stop—their education based on how they view the general climate of insecurity and how it will manifest itself in their immediate

environment.²⁹⁰ Parents have an even lower threshold for insecurity when it comes to the school attendance of their daughters, as noted above.

One senior Western education expert explained: “The closure of a school is bound to have a ripple effect so that many other schools close around [one affected school] for no particular reason except that the school was burned. When it reopens, fewer girls come back, more boys.”²⁹¹ This “ripple effect” magnifies the gravity of each attack and raises fears elsewhere. For example, after the office of the Afghan NGO Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (CHA) in Panjwai was attacked in April 2004 and two staff members were killed, residents of a neighboring district subsequently decided not to go forward with an accelerated learning program aimed at women and girls.²⁹²

A staff member of a major international NGO with extensive experience in education provided a similar assessment, describing how threats against schools can create a climate of fear:

[The problem with nightletters] happened in Pol-e Khumri [near Kabul] last spring. And so many times in the southeastern provinces: Logar, Wardak, Ghazni. People cannot make decisions very easily. For a month or two months you cannot see any children in school because they may fear very bad news from people who distributed night letters or attack or bomb the school. For weeks you cannot expect to have children back in schools.²⁹³

Without an effective government or credible media that can track and speak definitively about the security environment, Afghan parents and students are forced to assess their risk based on rumors and incomplete information. “There is a sense of insecurity and fear; maybe it happened to someone’s daughter, it creates a sense of concern. Because of limited reporting, a very limited number of attacks are getting reported, but people fear the worst,” said Horia Mossadeq, of Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, which has investigated the state of Afghanistan’s educational system for several years.²⁹⁴ For example, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, which investigated rumors in Mazar-e Sharif about the kidnapping of students in 2004 and 2005 that decreased student attendance, found only

²⁹⁰ For example, education staff of an NGO working in eastern Afghanistan noted that when there is fighting “in some villages, people don’t want to put their children in danger so they keep them home for a while.” Affected areas, he said, included Laghman (Alishing district), Nuristan, and parts of Kunar. Human Rights Watch interview with NGO education staff, Kabul, December 22, 2005.

²⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with U.N. expert, Kabul, December 5, 2005.

²⁹² Human Rights Watch interviews with NGO staff, Kabul, December 15 and 22, 2005.

²⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO education staff, Kabul, December 15, 2005.

²⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Horia Mossadeq, Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, Kabul, December 4, 2005.

one incident in that city.²⁹⁵ Local investigators with the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission believed that local individuals opposed to education magnified the incident in order to discourage school attendance.²⁹⁶

In another example, the mother of five girls attending school in Kandahar explained how she assesses the incomplete information about security circulating around her community. She keeps her daughters at home, she said, “at times when the security gets particularly bad. When people talk about it. There is no official announcement but the community talks about the situation getting worse so we stop them from going.”²⁹⁷

Insecurity not only impedes education when it keeps children and teachers home, shuts down schools, and prevents the government and NGOs from opening new schools; it also exacerbates other factors that keep children from enrolling in or staying in school in Afghanistan. These include:

- insufficient development aid and services;
- schools that are too far away or simply unavailable, especially girls’ schools in rural areas and girls’ secondary schools;
- school facilities that are physically inadequate or culturally inappropriate;
- a shortage of qualified teachers, especially female teachers;
- the poor quality of education offered;
- poverty that requires children to work for income or in the home, or that places school supplies and transport out of reach;
- negative attitudes about girls’ education or girls being seen outside the home; and,
- early marriage of girls.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with director, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Mazar-e Sharif, September 11, 2005.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with mother of five daughters, Kandahar city, December 8, 2005.

²⁹⁸ Information about barriers to education is drawn from sources that include Human Rights Watch interviews with education staff from NGOs that provide or support home-based schools, Kabul, December 7 and 15, 2005; Central Statistics Office, and UNICEF, *Afghanistan—Progress of Provinces, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003*; Education working group, “Results and Discussion of Education Data collected in the Afghanistan National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2003,” April 2005,

<http://www.mrrd.gov.af/vau/NRVA%2003%20Downloads/NRVA%202003%20Education%20report%20English%20April%202005.pdf> (retrieved February 9, 2006); World Bank, *Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction—the Role of Women in Afghanistan’s Future*, pp. 32, 48; Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission , *Economic and Social Rights in Afghanistan*.

Because decisions about whether to send children to school are complex, it is often impossible to point to a single reason children are kept out.²⁹⁹ The statements of a school official from Maywand district, Kandahar, illustrate this complexity: around three to four years before, he told us, girls in his district went to school for one year. But they stopped, he said, “because of the threat from the outside and because of the cultural norms of society—people teased those who sent their girls, and there were no separate schools or female teachers available.”³⁰⁰

What is clear, however, is that insecurity heightens the effect of existing barriers to education on girls and women, making it especially troublesome that there are far fewer girls’ schools than boys’ schools. “Anything in security terms is more serious for women,” said a staff member of an NGO providing home-based education. “Distance, permission to leave home, quality.”³⁰¹

Insufficient Development Aid and Services

Even before the recent upswing in suicide bombings and attacks on education, the aid community in Afghanistan faced increasingly widespread and lethal violence in 2004 and 2005. Although worse in the south and east, attacks also spread to the north and west, where more NGOs operate.³⁰² NGO staff are literally paying with their lives.

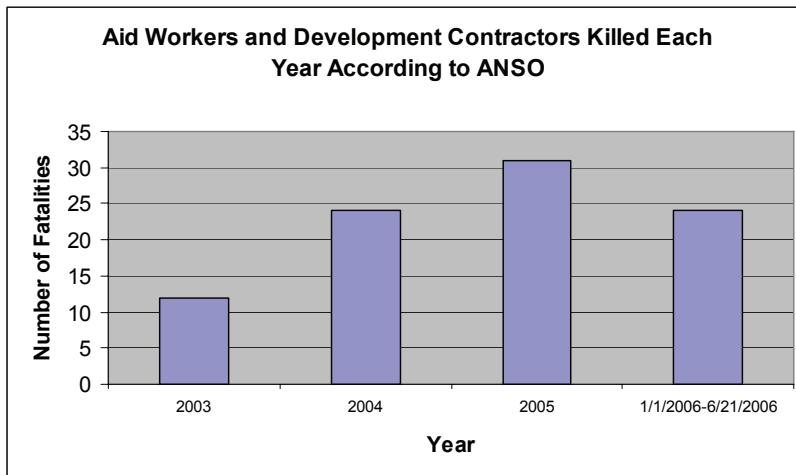
Everyone we spoke with who was involved with development in Afghanistan told us that insecurity—including ideological targeting of NGOs and general criminality—had hurt their work. These included staff of more than fifteen international and national NGOs, as well as the World Bank, USAID, a USAID contractor, U.N. staff, and government officials.

²⁹⁹ See, for example, Education working group, “Results and Discussion of Education Data collected in the Afghanistan National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2003,” p. 24.

³⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Maywand director of district education, Kandahar city, December 10, 2005.

³⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO staff, Kabul, December 17, 2005.

³⁰² See, for example, ANSO and CARE, “NGO Insecurity in Afghanistan,” p. 2.



At minimum, the threat of violence has caused NGOs and government officials to take precautions such as changing their vehicles, removing NGO logos, using more secure but less direct routes, and not traveling before or after certain hours.³⁰³ NGOs also described difficulties recruiting people to go to insecure areas and having to open and close field offices depending on the security climate. For example, one Afghan NGO staff person told us that the organization closed its office in Logar the previous year when “a mine was laid in front of the door.” (In this case the office was able to reopen when “local people came and said, ‘please come back and we will guarantee security.’”)³⁰⁴

Interruptions in operations and other constraints slow the pace of work and can hurt the quality of services provided. For example, a staff member of an NGO in Kandahar told us:

Security has held us back. I used to go out a lot more, but more and more I feel that I can't do that as much as I would like to. We always have to be careful when we do women's activities—our words, statements, physical appearance—so that because of our activities women are not targeted. It hinders our progress—something that can take a month may take us four to five months because we have to be so careful. This makes us look bad to someone in Washington. This is not rocket science, so why is it taking so long? But it is the insurgency that hampers us from moving faster.³⁰⁵

³⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with Afghan NGO staff, Kabul, December 15, 2005 (describing precautions taken in Ghazni).

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Rangina Hamidi, Afghans for Civil Society, Kandahar, December 8, 2005.

Several NGOs and others told us they could not monitor projects in the way they would like.³⁰⁶ For example, some must bring project representatives into provincial centers instead of traveling to projects and seeing them for themselves.³⁰⁷ Another NGO staff member noted that insecurity in parts of Paktia and Nangahar “does prevent staff from making field visits. Last year in these provinces there were moments when we didn’t let staff in and couldn’t carry out training, monitor and supervise, distribute materials, and that slows our training.”³⁰⁸

International organizations have severely restrained their foreign staff from traveling and working in many areas of the south and southeast. An American USAID contractor noted: “Security very much impacts our movements and our staff here in Kabul. In the provinces we just don’t get out as much. Our monitoring and evaluation team are Afghans. I’d love to go with them, but when I go security and movement are compromised.”³⁰⁹ A World Bank official confirmed:

Security does affect my work. . . . I know my project would move faster if I could go there. I have projects in Helmand, Zabul, Kandahar. Kandahar, I go. Helmand, Zabul, no one is going, not even the deputy minister. . . . There are NGOs who work there but it’s very difficult to monitor. So security is huge there.³¹⁰

Some NGOs and other agencies have been forced to close down operations because of insecurity. A senior U.N. official, who did not wish to be named, told Human Rights Watch in December: “Areas are becoming more insecure. There are areas where no agencies can operate; the government can’t operate; PRTs aren’t there. More and more areas are closed off to us.”³¹¹

“Security is a defining concern for us,” said a staff member of a prominent education provider. In several districts, she said, the organization has had to turn over its schools to the government and other organizations because it “couldn’t send in national staff to ensure quality of programming.”³¹² Another NGO worker described why the organization had ended its already limited work in Paktika: “The central government does not have enough power and

³⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with international NGO staff members, Kabul, December 3, 5, and 15, 2005.

³⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO staff, Kabul, December 4, 2005.

³⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with international NGO staff, Kabul, December 2, 2005.

³⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Larry Goldman, Deputy Chief of Party, Afghanistan Primary Education Program (APEP), Creative Associates, Kabul, December 14, 2005.

³¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with World Bank official, Kabul, December 4, 2005.

³¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with U.N. official, Kabul, December 5, 2005.

³¹² Human Rights Watch interview with international NGO staff, Kabul, December 2, 2005.

control in Paktika, and because there are different anti-government groups there, nobody can work with open hands there because there are a lot of threats.”³¹³ Oxfam, which was one of the few international humanitarian organizations working in rural Zabul and Kandahar, drastically scaled back its work to Kandahar city in late 2003 after some of their staff were threatened and beaten, and their vehicle hijacked.³¹⁴ Similarly, employees of an NGO working primarily in the north and west told us that they phased out their program in Kandahar in mid-2005 “primarily due to insecurity and availability of resources . . . but if security permits we would definitely like to go back. But for education, we would think several times before doing it there. That area has strong Taliban influence. First, there is the physical presence of the Taliban. Second, even when they are not there, their influence is felt.”³¹⁵

Moreover, many NGOs who have historically worked in other parts of Afghanistan have not expanded to the south or southeast. As one staff person noted simply: “Security impacts where we choose to work. If there is a high risk that staff will lose their lives, then it’s a [key consideration].”³¹⁶ Staff of an Afghan NGO that has weathered serious security problems explained to Human Rights Watch why he had urged the coordinator of a joint NGO program not to expand the program to Helmand:

I said, “please don’t include Helmand province in your target areas because we will have to hire staff two times: we will send staff and they will be killed.”

This is not a joke. We cannot take charge of working there. This is the main place where the Taliban operates. It’s close to Pakistan and they can easily infiltrate during the night.³¹⁷

The government of Afghanistan suffers from problems similar to those of NGOs. Increasing insecurity and targeting of educational staff has placed nearly unbearable burdens on the Afghan government’s already inefficient bureaucracy. Local Ministry of Education officials and district heads from different areas in southern and southeastern Afghanistan told Human Rights Watch that they were greatly limited in what they could do because of the threats directed at them and their educational staff.

For example, the head of the education department in Saydabad district of Wardak province, about an hour’s drive south of Kabul, told Human Rights Watch: “I cannot go out after dark. .

³¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO staff, Gardez, December 5, 2005.

³¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with OXFAM staff, December 10, 2005.

³¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with international NGO staff, Kabul, December 13, 2005.

³¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO staff, Kabul, December 4, 2005.

³¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Afghan NGO staff, Kabul, December 15, 2005.

. . I have a lot of responsibility for my schools and the district but [security] concerns make it so that I cannot travel freely outside.”³¹⁸

An experienced teacher who works with the Ministry of Education’s Teacher Education Program in northwestern Afghanistan, described the problems faced there:

I set up my course in Murichag, [Badghis,] with eight women teachers, three months ago. They wrote night letters saying, “We will close your school.” So we closed the program. After a few days, we convinced people that this program is good, so we managed to succeed. On November 25, 2005, we tried to hold a meeting with teachers from Ghor, Herat, and Badghis. But there was fighting between two commanders in Ghor, so no one from Ghor could come and visit.³¹⁹

Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director of Planning for the Ministry of Education, explained that the insecurity has significantly impeded the Afghan government’s efforts to increase the educational rate throughout the country:

An important policy of the ministry is balanced education in all provinces and all districts so each year we have a plan. So each year we plan for the construction—each province has to have a certain number of schools constructed, but if we have some security problems, we don’t achieve these targets by the end of the year. We ask NGOs and companies that have to go to these areas—they don’t go if they have security problems. It is the main obstruction, problem for the reconstruction of schools.³²⁰

Insecurity, and the attendant difficulty of government agencies, foreign reconstruction agencies, and NGO aid workers working in insecure areas, has also distorted national-level reconstruction policies in Afghanistan. Southern and southeastern Afghanistan, which have suffered most from insecurity, have witnessed a significant drop in reconstruction activity.

A senior Western education expert working in Afghanistan expressed his concern about this phenomenon: “We are very concerned about disparities that we’re creating. We’re not covering

³¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with district education director, Saydabad district, Wardak, December 21, 2005.

³¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Teacher Education Program trainer for Badghis, Kabul, December 3, 2005.

³²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director of Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, December 15, 2005.

the whole country. There are some places in the country that have never seen a U.N. operation.”³²¹

The failure to provide adequate aid to southern and southeastern Afghanistan has had significant political impact because it has fostered resentment against the perceived failures and biases of the central Afghan government and its international supporters. “Insecurity leads to driving NGOs away, which leads to low development, which leads to local resentment which leads to insecurity,” explained a U.N. observer.³²² The then-provincial U.S. commander in Helmand told journalists in January 2006 that recent attacks on schools and the killing of a teacher had left many residents of the province, including influential tribal leaders, hedging their bets. “People are straddling the fence. They do not want to commit to the government yet.”³²³



Home-based school in Kandahar City. © 2005 Human Rights Watch/Zama Coursen-Neff.

³²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with U.N. staff, Kabul, December 5, 2005.

³²² Rights Watch interview with U.N. official, Gardez, December 5, 2005.

³²³ Declan Walsh, “The Wild Frontier,” *The Guardian* (London), January 31, 2006.

Shortage of Schools and Infrastructure

An estimated 80 percent of existing schools in Afghanistan were either damaged or destroyed during the years of war.³²⁴ Despite the construction or refurbishment of more than 1,100 schools since 2001, Afghanistan still has far fewer schools than it needs: more than half of rural communities had no primary school at all in 2003.³²⁵ As explained in the background section above, there are many more boys' schools than girls schools, despite the greater impact of distance on girls; the shortage of girls' schools is even more acute at the secondary level.

An analysis of the 2003 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) found that many parents said they didn't send their children to school because it was "too far away." But parents are more likely to consider schools too far away if they perceive the route to be risky: the researchers concluded that the reason for not sending a child to school did not "always refer literally to distance. The actual distance a child walks to school may be short but if for example, the journey is unsafe or girls must walk through a busy bazaar then it is considered by respondents to be 'too far away.'"³²⁶ As an education specialist for an Afghan NGO explained:

Security is a very big issue all over Afghanistan and sometimes it is an obstacle for education, but why are we thinking about security? To me it is not security but accessibility—it's walking distance that stops girls from going to school. If a school is very nearby or in a house, then the issue is not security. There is no need to walk a long distance and be targeted by bad guys.³²⁷

The mother of two girls in Kandahar city who attended after-school classes told us she was considering pulling them out of the classes because they have to walk home. "Education is good but security is bad," she explained. "It's the walking I fear. . . Of course I am scared. There are bomb blasts constantly so of course I'm very worried. I pray all the time that they will be protected. May God protect them. . . I hope that God can take this fear from me. . . When there is security, I will not prevent my daughters from doing anything."³²⁸

³²⁴ World Bank, *Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction—the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, p. 32.

³²⁵ The Ministry of Education reported in 2004-2005 that 964 schools had been constructed and 236 had been rehabilitated by 2004-2005. Ministry of Education, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Development Plan: Education Priorities for Improvement," 1384, box 6. Regarding rural communities without schools, see Vulnerability Analysis Unit, MRRD, in collaboration with World Bank & WFP VAM, "National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2003 Policy Brief," n.d., <http://www.mrrd.gov.af/vau/NRVA%2003%20Downloads/NRVA%202003%20Policy%20Brief%20October%202004.doc> (retrieved February 9, 2006).

³²⁶ Education working group, "Results and Discussion of Education Data collected in the Afghanistan National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2003," pp. 23, 24.

³²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Waheed Hameedi, CHA, Kabul, December 15, 2005.

³²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Kandahar, December 8, 2005.

Two eighteen-year-olds in the ninth grade in Parwan province told us that distance to school prevented many girls in their villages from attending. One said that she was the only girl from her village who made the thirty-minute walk to her school. “This school is a bit far and the way is not very secure. . . . I have many girl relatives my age. They don’t come to school because they don’t feel safe coming here.”³²⁹ The other woman explained:

The majority of girls in my age are illiterate—they don’t go to school. It is because the school is far, and their families don’t let them to come to school. I come with my other sisters, and if I was alone to come by myself, I would’ve never come because I don’t feel safe coming alone to school. We walk through the main road of village because walking on the fields is unsafe.³³⁰

Similarly, elders of Qala-e Wazir village in Bagrami district of Kabul province, only about ten kilometers south of the capital, explained to Human Rights Watch:

There are two schools in the area, Qala-e Wazir and Sheraki, and they are far. We don’t like to send our kids to these schools for security reasons: kidnappings and murders and because of the heat during the hot season—it’s too hard to walk. . . .

We are scared when our children go to school because of dangers, because the streets are not safe. There are no proper roads. The kids walk through the fields. When the wheat is high, we can’t see anything. It’s not safe.³³¹

And a grandmother in Laghman said:

Yes, we send our boys to school, but not our girls. It is not safe for girls to go to school—the way is not good, they have to walk through fields that we don’t think is safe for them to cross. . . . Our younger girls ages six to nine were going to school, but their teacher got married and she went very far from here. Now my grandchildren [six- to nine-year-old girls] have not gone to school for months. For the older ones, as I told you, they don’t go.³³²

³²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with eighteen-year-old woman in grade nine, village in Parwan province, May 2005.

³³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with eighteen-year-old woman in grade nine, village in Parwan province, May 2005.

³³¹ Human Rights Watch group interview with Khaja Mohammed Shah Siddiqi, head of the shura [local council], and twelve elders, Bagrami district, Kabul, May 11, 2005.

³³² Human Rights Watch interview with grandmother of school-age children, village in Laghman province, June 7, 2005.

In Herat province, the director of a girls' middle school explained: "Compared with the population of the area, the number of girls is low. The area where school is located is safe, but families who live far away don't let their girls to come to school."³³³

Hangama Anwari of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission confirmed: "All over Afghanistan security is the biggest issue, especially when it comes to girls. . . . If it takes more than ten minutes to reach a school, parents won't send their girls to school. They send their boys though. Part of the problem is warlords and commanders."³³⁴ Similarly, the Afghan Human Rights Commission found in research in 2005 that the most common reason interviewees gave for not sending girls to school was "distance too far; worried about security"—actually conflating these two factors; far fewer interviewees cited this reason for not sending boys.³³⁵

The problem is especially acute at the secondary level, where there are far fewer schools. The statements of elders in Bagrami district, Kabul, illustrate this problem. As one said:

If we had a high school in this part of the village, we would send our girls to this high school. We can assure you that. We are not against teenage girls being educated. We have some of them going to high school already. However, it is the tradition here not to allow grown up girls to go to school if they have to go far and to cross other villages. There is competition between villages and it is not good at all for these girls to risk being in contact with boys from other villages. Now we allow only girls from first to sixth grades to go to school. If we had a school on this side of the village, the older girls would attend. . . .

In this village, if grown up girls are not allowed to go to school, it is for reasons of honor and security. We are not against them been educated—to the contrary.³³⁶

A mother in Parwan province also explained to Human Rights Watch:

³³³ Human Rights Watch interview with director of girls' middle school, Herat province, July 18, 2005.

³³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Hangama Anwari, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Kabul, May 7, 2005.

³³⁵ Of those surveyed, 56.2 percent (1,624) gave reasons for not sending girls to school: 838 of those persons cited distance and security as a reason for not sending girls, compared with 411 citing distance and security as a reason for not sending boys. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *Economic and Social Rights in Afghanistan*, p. 32. This survey likely underestimates the effect of security as researchers were unable to go to the most insecure districts and provinces, including Uruzgan. Ibid., p. 8.

³³⁶ Human Rights Watch group interview with Khoadja Mohamad Sha Sidiki, Rais of the Shura, and twelve elders, Bagrami district, Kabul, May 11, 2005.

If there is a high school for girls in our village, yes, why not? I will send my daughter to school, but if she has to go to city [*Charikar*] or even to district [*Sayed Khey*] I think she will not be able to go. It is not safe for girls to go to cities. Nobody sends their daughters in such far places. My son, he is a man, he can go. For him it is not a big risk, but for a girl who is young also, it is dangerous to go to city.³³⁷

A staff member of an NGO that runs schools in the north, northeast, west, and southeast explained how, in the areas in which they operate, they try to overcome these barriers:

Security problems and distance from schools are especially problems for girls. Plus, age—girls who become older, parents prefer not to send [them], plus there is a preference for boys' education in many families. Some families are quite sensitive to girls' education—they don't want girls to be sent. . . . So we find that distances have a much greater impact on girls.

So we decided to establish schools nearer their homes, community-based schools. This also decreases security problems, distance problems, encouraging girls to come to school.³³⁸

Where schools do exist, families may find them inadequate, unsafe, or culturally inappropriate.³³⁹ In many areas, school are held in tents, private homes, donated structures, mosques, and outside.³⁴⁰ For example, a teacher in Nesh district, Kandahar, where there are no girls' schools, told Human Rights Watch: "Most of our schools are mobile, they have no set place, no tent. They are held under trees, in mosques, wherever we can. The teachers move the blackboards and equipment, and the students receive some supplies from the Ministry of Education and UNICEF."³⁴¹

³³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with mother of a boy and a girl attending school, village in Parwan province, May 2005.

³³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO education staff, Kabul, December 15, 2005.

³³⁹ In 2003, 25.8 percent of families surveyed gave "inadequate facility" as a reason for not enrolling children in school. Central Statistics Office, UNICEF, "*Afghanistan—Progress of Provinces, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003*, pp. 68-69.

³⁴⁰ In 2002, only 29 percent of schools functioned in a dedicated school building; 10 percent were held outside. "Of the schools with buildings, 30 percent have been completely or mostly destroyed, 8 percent have sustained minor damage or only require cosmetic repair, and another 7 percent are partially destroyed." Evans, et al, "A Guide to Government in Afghanistan," p. 125, citing Rapid Assessment of Learning Spaces (Ministry of Education and UNICEF update, July 31, 2002).

³⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Abu Zaher, head teacher of Nesh district, Kandahar province, Kandahar, December 10, 2005.

In insecure areas, parents and children may also place greater importance on secure buildings and thus may be less likely to send children to tent or open air schools, or schools without a surrounding wall.³⁴² Director Mohammed Azim Karbalai gave an illustrative example of the vicious circle formed by the failures of reconstruction due to insecurity in southern and southeastern Afghanistan:

In Afghanistan the main demand from families is a safe environment inside schools, so if they don't have a building, then families don't allow their children to go. Especially in Zabul and Uruzgan we have this problem. We haven't reconstructed a lot of schools and families complained that they didn't have suitable buildings for schools. But at this time we cannot do anything in this area.³⁴³

Human Rights Watch also interviewed a group of women and girls from a returnee camp in Paktia who said the camp elders were threatening them for leaving the camp to attend teacher training and their students for attending their schools in the camp: "Most schools are in tents, so our elders want a school in the camp. . . In Gardez [the provincial capital], the security is better, so girls are encouraged to attend school."³⁴⁴

In addition, there may be no separate school or shift for girls, the teachers may be male, or there may be no water, toilets, or wall around the school, all of which keep girls from attending school.³⁴⁵ Other infrastructure problems include a lack of school furniture, educational supplies, science and laboratory equipment for secondary schools, and heat during cold weather.³⁴⁶

Shortage of Teachers

Experienced and professionally qualified teachers, especially women, are in short supply. The lack of female teachers keeps girls, especially older girls, from attending school. "In some

³⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with NGO education staff, Kabul. December 12, 2005 (regarding demand for surrounding walls).

³⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director of Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, December 15, 2005.

³⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch group interview with TEP trainees, Gardez, December 6, 2005.

³⁴⁵ According to the Asian Development Bank, one third of schools had no water source and less than 15 percent had toilets for children in 2003. World Bank, *Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction—the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, p. 42 (citing ADB, 2003, p. 8). By comparison, the Rapid Assessment of Learning Spaces found in 2002 that "Fifty-two percent of the schools lack water facilities, and 75 percent lack sanitation facilities." Evans, et al, "A Guide to Government in Afghanistan," p. 125, citing Rapid Assessment of Learning Spaces (Ministry of Education and UNICEF update, July 31, 2002).

³⁴⁶ See Education working group, "Results and Discussion of Education Data collected in the Afghanistan National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2003," April 2005.

remote areas there are no women teachers, and parents won't send their girls to school," NGO education staff explained.³⁴⁷

The exact number of teachers and where they are is still not known. The Ministry of Education estimated that it had around 140,000 teachers in 2005-2006, but many others working with the ministry dispute this figure.³⁴⁸ According to the ministry, around 28 percent of teachers were female in 2004-2005, and most were in Kabul city, leaving an extreme shortfall in most areas.³⁴⁹ For example, the ministry reports that there were just seven female teachers in Uruzgan in 2004-2005, twenty-eight in Zabul, and 172 in Kandahar.³⁵⁰

The problem is particularly acute in rural areas where qualified women are unable or unwilling to travel to or live. "Women teachers won't go to remote areas because the salary is low, there is no facility available for living," said an NGO staff person.³⁵¹ Security problems may also prevent women from teachers even when they already live in the community. For example, a teacher in Deh Yek district, Ghazni, described the situation in his village: "There is a girls' school up to third grade, built in 2002-2003. But we have no women for teaching girls. . . . There are women teachers in our district, but they are afraid to teach because of the Taliban." Their fears appeared well-founded—at least two male teachers houses had been bombed, he said, after they received night letters warning them against teaching girls.³⁵²

The government's teacher training program and NGOs have focused on training local women. However, the lack of educated or even literate women in rural areas makes it difficult even to find women to train and can limit the quality of education provided.³⁵³ The government and NGOs also face problems sending women to rural areas to train female teachers there. A staff member of the government's Teacher Education Program explained:

³⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO education staff, Gardez, December 5, 2005.

³⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director, Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, March 11, 2006.

³⁴⁹ According to draft data from the Ministry of Education, in 2004-2005 there were 121,838 teachers, of whom 28 percent of whom were female. Of those, 35 percent were in Kabul. Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005. There are far more male teachers than female teachers in all provinces except in Kabul city, where there are more women than men teachers. Spink, AREU, "Afghanistan Teacher Education Project (TEP) Situational Analysis," p. 13.

³⁵⁰ Ministry of Education, *Education Management Information System* (draft), 2004-2005. According to these data, there were fewer than one hundred female teachers in 2004-2005 in the following provinces: Badghis, Kapisa, Khost, Nuristan, Paktika, Uruzgan, and Zabul.

³⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO education staff, Gardez, December 5, 2005.

³⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Dey Yek district, Ghazni, December 20, 2005.

³⁵³ For example, a senior education provider told us: "I just sent teachers to a training center in Jalalabad and encouraged women teachers and trainers but the literacy level is so low that where can I get the teachers from?" Human Rights Watch interview, Kabul, December 5, 2005.

Our original object was to include women teachers. . . . We don't have special measures to make sure that the trainers are women, but our original goal for master trainers was fifty-fifty. But there are limits because the women core trainers can't travel. There are some provinces women couldn't go to. Some could have *mahram* [a close male relative to accompany her], but some couldn't get anyone to go with her. So we had to limit assigning women to the provinces. They are doing work here in Kabul.

[The problems are]: security, transport, accommodation. Regarding security, in Wardak, in Ghazni, a woman traveling to visit schools is so unusual. You need to have a team so that women don't look like a woman alone. We don't have women traveling alone with a man because people are not used to it and women don't feel comfortable. In Mazar and Herat, we sent women but they need transportation—they don't feel comfortable sitting in a taxi and we can't afford to hire a car. . . . So the only place they can work comfortably is Kabul.³⁵⁴

Other barriers to recruiting more women teachers include:

- low salaries (1,800-2000 afghanis (U.S.\$37-\$41) a month), depending on the teacher's qualifications, which result in experienced teachers seeking other, or second, jobs;³⁵⁵
- the failure to develop efficient accreditation procedures and equivalence exams for women educated in Iran, Pakistan, and elsewhere that keeps many qualified teachers from teaching;³⁵⁶ and,
- extremely low participation rates by older girls—the next generation of teachers—in secondary education and in teacher training colleges.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview TEP staff, Kabul, December 3, 2005.

³⁵⁵ "We lack senior teachers—ours get 1,800 afghanis [U.S.\$37]," an education official from Maywand district told us. "Everyone wants to be a trader or a businessman or a shopkeeper to earn more—they can get 150-200 afghanis (U.S.\$3-\$4) per day." Human Rights Watch interview with district education for Maywand district, Kandahar city, December 10, 2005. A teacher from rural Ghazni said, "Our pay is another big problem. The 2000 afghanis pay is too low—it discourages teachers. Trained teachers instead work for NGOs." Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Deh Yek district, Ghazni, December 20, 2005. See also Spink, AREU, "Afghanistan Teacher Education Project (TEP) Situational Analysis," p. 16.

³⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with former teacher trained in Iran. Kandahar, December 8, 2005; Spink, AREU, "Afghanistan Teacher Education Project (TEP) Situational Analysis," p. 34 (describing complicated, bureaucratic, and costly process for accreditation of returning teachers that deters most teachers from going through it).

³⁵⁷ There were only 375 female students in pre-service training in Afghanistan's sixteen functioning teacher training colleges in 2004, 285 (76 percent) of whom were studying in Kabul, where Pashto language was not offered. Another 4,241 students attending in-service training, around half of whom were women. Ibid., pp. 17-19.

One teacher told Human Rights Watch that corruption further diminished his salary, that he and others had to pay a portion of their salaries—300 out of 1,800 afghanis (U.S.\$6 out of \$37)—to Kandahar provincial education department officials in 2004. Security problems led them to conclude that the meager pay was not worth it. “The teachers gathered and said that for 1,500 afghanis it’s not worth the risk of being accused of diverting from our religion,” he told us. “Big officials go by helicopter, even just to go to Spin Boldak [a major crossing point across the border to Pakistan, less than one hundred kilometers from Kandahar on a busy road]. They get their pay [regardless]. But we who were getting only 1,800 afghanis are open targets to the Taliban!”³⁵⁸

Several individuals involved in training teachers with government and NGO programs told Human Rights Watch that the Ministry of Education needs to do more to attract and retain women teachers, including creating special measures for recruiting women, adopting more flexible accreditation programs for women teachers, and providing housing and protection at teacher training programs offered in urban centers so that women from rural areas can participate.³⁵⁹ Much more must be done to keep girls, many who would become teachers, from dropping out of school.

Low Quality of Education

The low quality of education also deters some parents from sending children to school. A staff member of an NGO that provides community-based education noted that the low quality of education and the low returns on education discourage children, especially girls, from attending school: “There’s the practical aspect of education—most children who do go to school for three years don’t know how to read and write. If they do, they lose it quickly because there’s nothing to read. . . . so there’s a problem with motivation to go to school, especially girls, because what are they going to do with it?”³⁶⁰

Parents and children may also be less willing to take security and cultural risks if the value and quality of education is perceived as low. “‘Too far and too dangerous’ can be an excuse,” an education specialist for an international NGO noted. “Why take even a small risk if you don’t see the benefit?”³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Maruf district, Kandahar, December 10, 2005.

³⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with TEP staff, Kabul, December 3, 2005; and NGO education staff persons, Kabul, December 2 and 4, 2005.

³⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with staff of NGO providing home and community-based education, Kabul, December 7, 2005.

³⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO education specialist, Kabul, December 2, 2005.

Classes are typically very large—with an average of seventy-one students per teacher at the primary level³⁶²—and meet for only around three hours a day. Schools lack teaching materials and schools supplies; many teachers rely on poor teaching methods such as rote-learning, use corporal punishment, lack knowledge of basic subjects, and are frequently absent;³⁶³ the curriculum is poor (although steps have been taken to reform the curriculum); and teachers and students may discriminate against children from minority ethnic groups.³⁶⁴

According to women in Kandahar: “Most parents see that the standard of education is too low and they see that their children are not really learning anything—there are too many free periods without teachers.”³⁶⁵ A high school student in Kandahar city confirmed, noting that the previous day, her class had a teacher for only one class period, “the rest of the time was spent chatting. The principal teaches various classes but went off to Mecca,” she said. “Compared with Pakistan’s schools, it’s not even a school.”³⁶⁶

Many teachers have not finished grade twelve.³⁶⁷ For example, the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit found in 2004 that in Wardak:

[O]nly 6 percent of teachers have more than a grade 12 education. In Kandahar, more than 65 percent of teachers have not completed 12th grade. Some in-service teacher training is now being provided by NGOs, but most teachers have had little or no formal teacher training over the course of their careers. Training is still lacking for education administration, head teachers and school management.³⁶⁸

Some teachers have no formal education at all.³⁶⁹

³⁶² The ratio varies by province and drops dramatically at the secondary level. Spink, AREU, “Afghanistan Teacher Education Project (TEP) Situational Analysis,” p. 11 (citing data from the Ministry of Education and noting that data on the numbers of teachers and students are incomplete).

³⁶³ See Ibid., pp. 30-31; Education working group, “Results and Discussion of Education Data collected in the Afghanistan National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2003,” p. 27.

³⁶⁴ See Ibid., p. 32 (citing UNHCR, “Returnee Monitoring Report 2003-2004,” unpublished document, 2004).

³⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch group interview with women who served on the constitution commission secretariat to women’s affairs, Kandahar city, December 8, 2005.

³⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with eleventh-grade student, Kandahar, December 8, 2005.

³⁶⁷ Although the Ministry of Education told us in March 2006 that 71 percent of teachers (99,300 of 140,000 teachers) had finished grade twelve or higher, information from the Teacher Education Program (TEP), which is affiliated with the ministry, indicates otherwise. See Spink, AREU, “Afghanistan Teacher Education Project (TEP) Situational Analysis,” p. 14, citing the Ministry of Education the National Development Plan (50 percent); and Human Rights Watch interview with TEP staff, Kabul, December 3, 2005 (40 percent).

³⁶⁸ Evans, et al, “A Guide to Government in Afghanistan,” p. 125.

³⁶⁹ According to a representative of TEP program: “About 20,000 teachers have no formal education—mosque education, some literacy, that’s it.” Human Rights Watch interview with TEP staff, Kabul, December 3, 2005. See also Agha Khan Development Network, “Survey Results from the Rural Education Support Programme,” Baghlan,

International donors, the Afghan government, and NGOs are all providing forms of teacher training, with a significant example being the internationally-funded Teacher Education Program (TEP), a joint project of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education.³⁷⁰

Poverty

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world.³⁷¹ Poverty keeps children from attending school because they have to work for income or in the home, or because they cannot afford school supplies or transport. Research by the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit in 2005 found that 50 percent of households surveyed contained working children, that these children may be the family's primary income earners, and that "[a] household's poverty and the opportunity costs involved in sending working children to school are primary factors inhibiting the enrolment of both boys and girls (especially girls)."³⁷² Both the opportunity costs and the actual costs of education increase as children grow older.³⁷³ The Afghanistan-based Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium estimated in 2004 that in Kabul province the average annual cost of sending a child to first grade was 350 afghanis (U.S.\$7), to fifth grade 1,000 afghanis (U.S.\$20), and to ninth grade 1,700 afghanis (U.S.\$35).³⁷⁴ These costs range from 4 to 20 percent of the per capita income of around U.S.\$300.³⁷⁵

Where poverty forces parents to choose among children, they are generally more likely to send sons rather than daughters to school (in part because of expectations of higher future earnings from boys). According to the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit's 2006 study on household

Afghanistan, 2004, cited in Spink, AREU, "Afghanistan Teacher Education Project (TEP) Situational Analysis," p. 14 (10 percent of 3,332 teachers surveyed in Baghlan province had never attended any form of formal education).

³⁷⁰ Since 2003, some 52,000 teachers have received short term training courses, which included pedagogy, language arts and mine risk education etc. Education and Vocational Training—Public Investment Program, March 29, 2005, pp. 7, 15, cited in Munsch, "Education," p. 3.

³⁷¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2005*, p. 45.

³⁷² Pamela Hunte, "Looking Beyond the School Walls: Household Decision-Making and School Enrollment in Afghanistan," *AREU Briefing Paper*, March 2006, p. 5, <http://www.areu.org.af/publications/Looking%20Beyond%20the%20School%20Walls.pdf> (retrieved April 4, 2006). The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission reached similar conclusions in 2006, based on research it conducted the previous year. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *Economic and Social Rights in Afghanistan*, pp. 14-18.

When asked about causes of not enrolling their children in school in the 2003 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 17.2 percent of parents cited domestic work, 7.1 percent cited household income, and 5.2 said school was expensive. Vulnerability Analysis Unit, MRRD, "National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2003 Policy Brief," The World Bank, *Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction—the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, p. 47.

³⁷³ The Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, *Report Card...*, p. 2.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ According to Afghanistan's Central Bank governor Noorullah Delawari, per capita income in 2005-2006 reached U.S.\$293 dollars. "Afghanistan's per capita income likely to rise, says central bank," Agence France-Presse, April 1, 2006.

decision making and school enrollment: “Parents may desire education for both sons and daughters, but be constrained by a combination of poverty (which inhibits the enrolment of both boys and girls) and their fear of negative social pressure (specifically in relation to girls’ enrolment).”³⁷⁶

Security problems may increase the cost of education, such as making it necessary to pay for transport or spare another person to accompany children to school. Access to transport generally especially affects girls’ access to education, as the parents, teachers, and school administrators of girls’ schools in Gardez, Herat, and Kandahar city with whom we spoke emphasized.³⁷⁷ A mother in Kandahar explained why she thought her daughters were the only ones in her neighborhood who went to school:

I hired a driver for my daughters so they won’t hear people talking about them while they are walking. We can afford to buy it. In Pakistan, I’ve seen school buses pick girls up for school directly in front of the house so they don’t have to walk. If that happens, more and more kids will go to school.³⁷⁸

The director of a girls’ middle school in Herat Province explained why he thought most girls in his area did not go to school:

Only around fifty students manage to arrange their own transportation: they rented a mini-bus as a group and it is good, but not all people can pay money for transportation. If there is any support from the government side to provide girls school with transportation, it can be a good way to encourage girls’ education.³⁷⁹

Negative Attitudes About Education

Opposition to secular education and to any education for girls predates the Taliban, which imposed the harshest restrictions observed in the last century. While there is now considerable demand for education, negative or conservative attitudes about education still keep many children out of school. These include beliefs that education is not important, that girls should not be educated, or that girls can be educated only, for example, by trusted female teachers, separated from boys, and behind school walls. However even in very conservative areas that

³⁷⁶ Pamela Hunte, “Looking Beyond the School Walls...,” p. 5.

³⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch group interviews with directors of girls’ schools, Herat, July 18, 2005; administrator and teachers at girls’ high school, Gardez, December 6, 2005; trainees at a teacher education seminar, Gardez, December 6, 2005; and secondary school teachers, Kandahar, December 11, 2005.

³⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Kandahar, December 8, 2005.

³⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with director of girls middle school, Herat province, July 18, 2005.

Human Rights Watch visited, people told us that they wanted education for their girls and for their boys.

In the 2003 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), when individuals were asked about reasons children were not enrolled, 15.0 percent answered “not necessary” and 4.4 percent answered “feel ashamed.”³⁸⁰ Mahmad Omar, of Kandahar, explained to a journalist why he was educating some of his sons but not his daughters: “School is not for girls,” he said. “I don’t let them go. Girls should be at home. If they go to school, people will see them on the street, and that would be very shameful for me. . . . After they go to school, girls think that they can go anywhere, that they do not have to wear the *hijab* [head covering], and that they don’t have to hide their faces. Islam does not accept that.”³⁸¹ Practices such as early marriage of girls also result in their being taken out of school when they are engaged or married. The prohibition on married girls attending school was officially rescinded by presidential decree in 2004 but this is not necessarily known or enforced at the local level.³⁸²

Resistance to educating girls increases as girls grow older, also the point at which most girls typically must travel farther to reach a secondary school, if one is available at all. A teacher in a girls’ school in Wardak explained that while there was a high school for boys in the village, there was none for girls, so no girls were attending secondary school. “The girls cannot go beyond sixth grade. It’s our culture—they can’t leave the village. One thing is culture, the other is security.”³⁸³ A girl in Parwan told Human Rights Watch: “We are concerned about the future, the next year, because the school now is up to ninth grade. For the next year we suggested extending the school into a high school. We as girls can not travel out of district. We need at least a high school for girls, and otherwise our education will remain incomplete.”³⁸⁴

Insecurity may reinforce conservative beliefs about girls’ education, for example by exposing girls to real physical risks either at school or en route and by preventing or discouraging female teachers from going to certain areas. The World Bank has noted:

[I]t is difficult to separate the issue of cultural barriers to mobility from those of security—how much of the constraint on women’s mobility, and allowing girls to walk to school, is related to the poor security situation—which may in

³⁸⁰ Central Statistics Office; UNICEF, “Afghanistan—Progress of Provinces, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003, pp. 68-69.

³⁸¹ Wahidullah Amani, “No School Today,” IWPR, December 23, 2005.

³⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Horia Mossadeq, Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, Kabul, Dec. 4, 2005 (noting that in many schools, the principal and teachers do not like engaged girls to attend); World Bank, *Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction—the Role of Women in Afghanistan’s Future*; Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *Economic and Social Rights in Afghanistan*, 32.

³⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview, Wardak, December 21, 2005.

³⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with twenty-two-year-old woman in grade nine, village in Parwan province, May 2005.

fact improve as political stability comes about? How much of the demand is constrained by the lack of supply of female teachers, which in turn may be related to security as well as differing cultural norms?³⁸⁵

A man heading a girls' school in Parwan explained how insecurity affects his efforts to encourage girls to come to school:

More girls can attend school with the emergence of a better cultural environment. And that is only possible with establishment of overall security. When the security of an area is guaranteed, families will not feel unsafe to send their daughters to schools, and, on the other hand, irresponsible persons will not have any chance to go around and disturb people, especially women and girls attending schools.

I think security is the first priority—once it is safe, people are more interested in getting education. They will feel secure to send their daughters to school.³⁸⁶

Because of insecurity problems in the area as well as “traditional society,” he said, “I would estimate only 10 percent of female students’ participation in the school, while 75 percent of boys are normally attending the school in the area.”³⁸⁷

Moreover, according to a teacher trainer in Paktia, people ideologically opposed to education nurture parents’ fears about girls’ education: “In Paktia, the cultural problem for educating girls is that people feel shame about sending their daughters to school. But there’s also the influence of people who oppose girls’ education. . . . People who oppose the government, are under foreign influence, say girls’ education is against religion. Paktia is a border region, Pakistan has influence and agents who tell people their daughters will get stolen; people fear that their daughters will run away.”³⁸⁸

Culture in Afghanistan varies widely among individuals and groups. One man’s description of how his heavily Pashtun community in Maruf district, Kandahar, reacted when the schools were closed there illustrates this variation, even within a single community:

³⁸⁵ World Bank, *Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction—the Role of Women in Afghanistan’s Future*, p. 32.

³⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with male head of girls’ school, village in Parwan province, May 2005.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Shahghasi Zarmati, TEP trainer in Paktia, Kabul, December 3, 2005.

Ours is a Pashtun community and they are a very religious people who have always preferred madrassas to school, but when a school was there they sent their children. . . .

[When the schools closed] there were different kinds of people with different thoughts. Those who have children or relatives with the Taliban were very happy, but those who wanted education and culture were very sad. If the Taliban find out now that there is a teacher or a student, then they will be very cruel to them.

I have six sons [all previously enrolled in school]. I cannot send my children anywhere to get educated. You yourself judge—I've got money, I'm educated. But if I cannot send my children to school, how can a farmer, a shepherd, a carpenter send his children?³⁸⁹

An education official in Maywand district, Kandahar, told Human Rights Watch: “It was long ago when people didn’t understand the need for education. Now everyone wants education but can’t get it.”³⁹⁰ And a tribal elder from northern Helmand said: “The people want schools, even for girls. We are losing a golden opportunity now to lift our children.”³⁹¹

One reason for greater openness to education now is Afghans’ exposure to school as refugees.³⁹² An estimated 4 million Afghans fled from war to Pakistan and Iran between 1980 and 2001. In refugee camps, schools were organized and many Afghans developed an appreciation for education, or were exposed to education for the first time. As a district education director in Wardak explained to Human Rights Watch: “I was a teacher and I graduated from Kabul University in 1357 [1978-1979]. I didn’t like girls’ education, but since I moved to Pakistan as a migrant, although I was a mujahed fighting the communists, I changed.”³⁹³ Staff of an NGO providing community-based education in the southeast described the change as follows: “In the past years it was very difficult to establish girls’ schools in rural areas, but people went to Pakistan and other countries and they have come to understand the importance of education because in camps they had schools for girls and boys. They have changed their ideas.”³⁹⁴

³⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with representative from Maruf district, Kandahar, December 9, 2005.

³⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with district education director for Maywand, Kandahar city, December 10, 2005.

³⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Haji Hamdan Ahmad Khan, tribal elder from Kojaki province, northern Helmand, Kandahar, December 7, 2005.

³⁹² See also Pamela Hunte, “Looking Beyond the School Walls . . .,” p. 3.

³⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with district education director, Saydabad district, Wardak, December 21, 2005.

³⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO education staff for the Eastern district, Kabul, December 22, 2005.

Returned refugees may find themselves in conflict with the members of their community who stayed in Afghanistan. A woman in Kandahar told us: “I was a teacher in Zargona high school before the elections, and I had students taken out of school—some were my relatives. I talked with mothers who told me that they didn’t want anyone to point at them, and some of them started crying and wanted to go back to Pakistan.”³⁹⁵

A member of a women’s group in Kandahar city pointed out that “[w]hile culture is an issue, security is more important because even those people who want to break tradition are not able to.”³⁹⁶

NGOs cited measures that had allowed them to introduce education into communities for the first time, when they have the security to operate. Rangina Hamidi, with Afghans for Civil Society in Kandahar, described one approach that NGOs have been forced to employ:

I’ve been working here for three years. Yes, it’s a conservative society but there are methods to deal with it. It’s true that a majority of people don’t send girls to school. But that’s because they haven’t seen the benefit of education in their lives and less because traditions are hard to change. So we suggest that home schools for girls be created. Our income generation projects have been successful because they are home-based. We give them an opportunity to earn money but also within their tradition and we give them information about the outside world. It’s long-term development so that the next generation of women hopefully their daughters will have better lives. But this is long term.³⁹⁷

Human Rights Watch heard examples of women and girls, and their male family members, taking great risks to get education when opportunities are available, even in very culturally conservative environments. For example, one young woman in her late teens attending a teacher education seminar told Human Rights Watch, “We need education—we lied to come here. I told my mother I went to get water. I had to get my brother to convince my other brother and my mother to allow me to attend the workshop.”³⁹⁸ Researchers from the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit also found:

If a daughter is enrolled in school, the fear of being shamed by extended family members in other households, neighbours and others is widespread. “People talk,” and often this is too humiliating for members of a household—both

³⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with women provincial representative, Kandahar, December 11, 2005.

³⁹⁶ Women’s group discussion, Kandahar city, December 8, 2005.

³⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Rangina Hamidi, Afghans for Civil Society, Kandahar, December 8, 2005.

³⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch group interview with TEP trainees in Gardez, December 6, 2005.

male and female—to bear. . . . However, both villagers and urban-dwellers are aware that widespread changes are occurring in gender relations in both the public and private spheres, and many parents—fathers and mothers—choose to ignore gossip, take the social risk and send their daughters to school.³⁹⁹

Asefa, age eighteen, told a journalist that “[m]en in the street laugh at me, and call me names. They say, ‘Why are you going to school? You’re a girl and you don’t need this.’ But I begged my family for months to let me go, and they finally did.”⁴⁰⁰ But many of her friends had dropped out, she said.⁴⁰¹

Even individuals who are willing to take these risks cannot do so for long without protection or support from government, community, and religious leaders. For example, a teacher from Deh Yek district in southern Ghazni told us that despite great demand for girls’ primary education, “this year we had more girl students than we could handle,” he said, the bombing of teachers’ homes and threats against girls’ education may prove successful. “It’s a real possibility that girls’ schools won’t operate next year,” he concluded. “Generally the people support girls’ education. It’s the ignorant jihadis and the Taliban against the government who fight this. . . . The ignorant people say if you educate your girl, she will become independent, she won’t get married.”⁴⁰²

The experience of teachers in Gardez, Paktia, who were attending a short teacher education seminar well-illustrates the need for protection for teachers and students.⁴⁰³ One told Human Rights Watch, “As returned refugees who were educated outside the country, we are now having problems, now we’re not allowed to learn because of tribal persecution. We were educated in Pakistan, but our parents and tribal elders now threaten us.”⁴⁰⁴

According to five eyewitnesses, on Saturday, December 3, 2005, a local *malik* named Yousuff Khan Berzat and his strongmen threatened the teachers as they prepared to leave the camp for the seminar and threw a rock at their car. According to one witness, Yousuff Khan said that “nobody should go [to the seminar] and if anyone goes then we will snatch off what you are wearing [or ‘we will make you lose your chastity’]. You are disgracing women. Nobody needs your education. Now that you got educated you have brought a bad name to us.” The teachers missed one day of the seminar but then sought help from local government officials. Yousuff Khan was arrested on Sunday, but released the same day.

³⁹⁹ Pamela Hunte, “Looking Beyond the School Walls...,” pp. 5, 7.

⁴⁰⁰ Wahidullah Amani, “No School Today,” IWPR, December 23, 2005.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Human Rights Watch interview with teacher from Deh Yek district, Ghazni, December 20, 2005.

⁴⁰³ The following account is taken from Human Rights Watch interviews with the teachers and with a male eye witness, Gardez, December 5 and 6, 2005.

⁴⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch group interview with TEP trainees in Gardez, December 6, 2005.

On the day that we interviewed the teachers, they said the tribe was deciding whether to banish them. This was no idle threat—we interviewed another teacher there who had already been banished for her work. “The Iskanderkhel tribe will decide whether to cast out whoever goes to the workshop,” one woman explained, “they will be thrown out of the camp. There are ten girls from the refugee camp, all Iskanderkhel tribe. We’ve all faced problems. But if I don’t work, there will be no money for the family. . . . We don’t have any security, if we become teachers, we can’t go to teach, our students will be threatened.”⁴⁰⁵ Another girl said: “We are afraid but we wish to continue teaching and also get educated ourselves. There are a lot of people among those against us who can’t even offer prayers correctly and we want to educate people. But there is no security.”

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

V. The Inadequate Response of the Afghan Government and its International Supporters to Attacks on Education

I think we know girls don't go to school. We need programs or strategies that we can use to get girls to go to school. . . . It's hard to do because of the security situation and the low capacity of the government, I would like to see NGOs used more because they can go to places where the government cannot. But the government sees NGOs as sucking up money. We need a government that is in the driver's seat.⁴⁰⁶

—Education expert, World Bank, Kabul, December 4, 2005.

The Afghan government and its international supporters have largely failed to provide adequate assistance to promote and protect the development of Afghanistan's education system. Neither the Afghan government nor the international community have developed a strategy to end attacks on girls, teachers, and schools; to keep schools open; or to make education accessible to insecure and rural areas. Such a strategy must include preventing attacks, monitoring attacks and their effects, and responding to attacks once they occur (these ideas are developed more fully below in the Recommendations).

There are signs that the Afghan government and the international community are now beginning to recognize the crisis posed by the escalating attacks on education. As cited at the beginning of this report, President Karzai has made strong statements deplored such attacks and reiterating the importance of education. "If you stop sending your children to school because one school is set ablaze or a child is threatened, or if a teacher is martyred, then you make your enemy succeed and make yourself fail," he said on International Women's Day 2006. "If a million times they are threatened, send your children back to school a million times. If a million times schools are torched, build them a million times so that this nation can be freed from fear and horror."⁴⁰⁷ The Special Representative of the Secretary General, Thomas Koenig, who assumed his position in January 2006, immediately condemned attacks on schools and appealed to those who disagree with the country's development "to leave Afghanistan's children alone."⁴⁰⁸ And the U.N.'s Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Verner Munoz Villalobos, condemned attacks on schools after an attack in Kunar province killed and wounded several students.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with World Bank official, Kabul, December 4, 2005.

⁴⁰⁷ "Attacks depriving 100,000 Afghan students: president," Agence France-Presse, March 8, 2006. Shortly thereafter, President Karzai appointed Hanif Atmar, who had established a good track record as an effective administrator at the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, as the Minister of Education.

⁴⁰⁸ See "New U.N. chief in Afghanistan appeals to militants to stop attacking schools," Associated Press, February 23, 2006.

⁴⁰⁹ "Special Rapporteur On Right To Education Condemns Attack On Salabagh School In Afghanistan," U.N. Press Release, April 19, 2006.

Notwithstanding such useful statements, not much has improved on the ground in terms of monitoring, preventing, or responding to the attacks on teachers, students, and schools. As pointed out above, the effect of insecurity on education is a particularly sensitive topic for the government and international community. The resuscitation of the educational system after the fall of the Taliban is one of the major successes of the present government and its international backers, and, as already pointed out, is often touted as such. But the lack of monitoring and the pressure to present a positive image about advances in education in Afghanistan have impeded accurate reporting on the impact of insecurity on education.⁴¹⁰ Human Rights Watch encountered a shared impression by the Afghan government, UNICEF, and some NGO education providers that reporting attacks and school closures could cause donors to cut off much-needed funding. This concern may well be valid but is not a justification for covering up the problem.

Compounding the problem is that the Ministry of Education is severely constrained by a lack of institutional capacity and funding, a point emphasized by everyone involved with education at every level with whom we spoke. One U.N. official explained: “It’s hard to say if the government is doing enough because of the lack of capacity. They can’t even do a survey to find out how many girls attend in a district. When the level is so low, it’s hard to say they are not doing enough. How can they do more? Certainly things are happening but without management.”⁴¹¹ The Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit also noted in 2004:

In addition to limited resources, the system is plagued with few qualified educators, managers or technicians. There is a complete absence of any information technology, and there is no communication system to connect Ministry of Education and provincial education departments (PEDs). Physical facilities at provincial departments and district education subdepartments are very basic with little or no electricity, let alone means of communication, computers, or transport to support school activities. Furthermore, institutional capacity in the provincial education departments and district education subdepartments is limited, with little experience in priority setting, data-supported planning, or management of service delivery.⁴¹²

Although the situation has improved somewhat in terms of basic equipment and infrastructure, the Ministry of Education has still not formulated an adequate response to the current crisis. It is clear that any response must be formulated and implemented from Kabul, because the educational system in Afghanistan is, like every other part of the government, extremely centralized. In its survey of the Afghan government bureaucracy, the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit explained:

⁴¹⁰ U.S. GAO, “Afghanistan Reconstruction.”

⁴¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with U.N. official, Kabul, December 5, 2005.

⁴¹² Evans, et al, “A Guide to Government in Afghanistan,” p. 116.

[A]lmost all key decisions are made in Kabul. Even the provincial and district offices have very limited decision-making authority, and community managed schools are unheard of, except those sponsored by NGOs and donors. From curriculum development, to teacher training, to approving the recruitment of teachers and school heads, selection and production of texts, and, especially, controlling financing and spending, the central Ministry of Education almost completely dominates decision-making. With few exceptions, a culture of dependency on the center pervades the education sector in Afghanistan.⁴¹³

Failure to Monitor Attacks

One sign of the lack of a strategy is that there is currently no domestic or international institution in Afghanistan that has a full picture of the attacks on education that are taking place and their impact. Collecting and analyzing this information is necessary to understand the causes and extent of the problem. Yet even in areas where the government is present, it is reluctant to share, or even gather, information that may indicate that schools are not operating properly.

The Ministry of Education told Human Rights Watch that it does not monitor attacks on schools or their effects. This reflects in part the ministry's lack of basic data on education, including an accurate count of schools, teachers, and students. In addition, as documented above, attacks on schools have driven even local educational officials out of some districts. However, the failure to monitor also reflects a conscious attempt to avoid bad news. "I don't think we have this information," Deputy Ministry Mohammad Sediq Patman told us. "We don't bring information [on security incidents] to the center because it will have a negative effect on our morale."⁴¹⁴

Probably the most comprehensive record of attacks is interspersed among the weekly security summaries distributed by the NGO security organization ANSO. ANSO does valuable work, but does not disaggregate this information to present a coherent picture of the security conditions specific to the education process. Furthermore, ANSO's information represents an essentially ad hoc system of record-keeping, without a focus on educational facilities, teachers, or students.

The United Nations also seems to lack a centralized, coordinated information clearing house on security threats to education. Both UNAMA and UNICEF are now independently collecting information, but, as far as we understand, do not share this information with each

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammad Sediq Patman, Deputy Minister of Education, Kabul, December 14, 2005.

other. UNICEF does share its information with the Ministry of Education, but relies on its zonal offices, which are not present in every zone, to collect the data. As a result, UNICEF's database contains only a fraction of the total number of attacks and lacks even incidents widely reported in the press. UNAMA's human rights capacity has always been too small to provide adequate coverage and analysis of the country's myriad human rights problems. UNAMA recently began tracking attacks through its gender, security, and human rights units, based on information from a range of sources, including its own staff and security reports, but this information is not comprehensive and was not shared with all parts of the United Nations as of May 2006.⁴¹⁵ In addition, the World Food Program seems to be collecting information about attacks on schools, although it is unclear if this information is independently gathered or represents collaboration with other U.N. bodies.⁴¹⁶

The World Bank and USAID, the two largest international donors to education in Afghanistan, also do not have a clear view of the extent of the problems caused by insecurity. A World Bank education staff member told Human Rights Watch that it does not currently monitor attacks on schools, although such an effort would be useful: "We don't touch attacks on girls' schools. We only hear about them. Tracking them would be useful."⁴¹⁷ USAID only collects information about attacks on its own education projects.⁴¹⁸

Beyond basic notation of incidents of insecurity, there is little monitoring of the impact of such attacks, especially beyond the immediate wake of the event. UNICEF notes, regarding the cases it records, when a school has closed down. Areas to monitor should also include the effects of threats and violence against students and teachers, and student attendance, especially that of girls, in the aftermath of an incident when schools do not shut down. The impact on schools in surrounding areas should be recorded as well.

Human Rights Watch found nobody monitoring early warning signs for attacks, such as night letters, a school being located very near a district government office or being the only representation of government in an area, or other factors.

Failure to Prevent and Respond to Attacks

The lack of information about attacks on education reflects the overall institutional weakness of the Afghan government bureaucracy and the failure of the government and international community to prioritize this issue. Such information is critical both for addressing the effects

⁴¹⁵ E-mail from staffer of UNAMA human rights unit, June 17, 2006.

⁴¹⁶ World Food Programme, "Emergency Report n. 24."

⁴¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with World Bank official, Kabul, December 4, 2005.

⁴¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Richard Steelman and Chris Broughton, USAID, Office of South Asian Affairs, Washington, D.C., April 11, 2006.

of individual attacks and for crafting a strategy to prevent future attacks. However, information alone is not enough. Afghan and international institutions responsible for education must work closely with international and Afghan institutions responsible for security. No such cooperation is evident now. There is no institution in Afghanistan currently willing to take responsibility for securing the access of Afghan children to education, there is no nationwide policy for preventing attacks on schools, and there is no policy for ensuring individual schools receive assistance after an attack.

The Ministry of Education takes the position that ensuring security for education is beyond its mandate and capabilities. Mohammed Azam Karbalai, the head of the Ministry of Education's planning department, explained that: "The Ministry of Education can't do anything about security. Maybe the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, or ISAF or other forces."⁴¹⁹

Karbalai went on explain that when the ministry receives word that a school building or tent has been destroyed, "we refer it to the Ministry of Interior, and we try to reconstruct the building if it is possible. Also, we are working with the governor of provinces to pay attention to schools."⁴²⁰

The Afghan police do not prioritize protection of educational facilities, and at any rate are viewed as incapable of carrying out a strategic response. Mohammed Sediq Patman, the deputy minister of education, suggested that the police lacked the ability to resolve this crisis. "The police cannot go there [places where schools are attacked]. . . We don't have this tradition in Afghanistan for police to protect schools. The people protect the schools."⁴²¹

Human Rights Watch heard numerous complaints about the Afghan National Police's failure to investigate, or in some cases, respond at all to attacks on schools. While responses vary from place to place, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Watch reported to the Security Council in March that:

The police failed to adequately investigate these and other cases [of school burnings and killing of teachers in 2005 and early 2006] and in only a few cases has anyone been arrested in relation to attacks on schools. The police complain of limited capacity and lack of access to more insecure areas, reinforcing an environment of impunity and a climate of fear, particularly for those

⁴¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Azim Karbalai, Director of Planning Department, Ministry of Education, Kabul, December 15, 2005.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Sediq Patman, Deputy Minister of Education, Kabul, December 14, 2005.

individuals, officials and community leaders supporting the Government's development agenda.⁴²²

Education officials at the local level consistently complained that they could not count on governmental security forces for assistance. One education official from Ghazni province put it succinctly: "There is police there in [our district in Ghazni] but very weak. There is no army. The police is so weak that if anybody goes to them and asks for help, they say if you can provide us with security we will go with you, but otherwise not."⁴²³

The international response also lacks coordination. According to UNICEF, its policy is to provide tents and to replace damaged textbooks and furniture within five days; it seems unlikely that it would be able to do so given that, based on its records of attacks, it has been unaware of many of the attacks that have taken place. UNAMA and UNDP are drafting recommendations about responding to attacks. However, at present, there are no broader policies for systematically rebuilding schools, or preventing or addressing the ripple effect of attacks on schools and teachers. Officials in the Afghan government and international agencies working on education in Afghanistan by and large turn to international security forces for a response. As we set out below, these forces have failed to provide the necessary security environment.

Nationbuilding on the Cheap: the U.S.-led Coalition, ISAF, and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)

For the past four years, when the international community has discussed security in Afghanistan, it has generally missed the mark, by focusing on whether and how many (or how few) troops international donors had contributed, and how many men the Afghan National Army and National Police could field. Instead of asking whether ordinary Afghans were secure, and feeling secure, the debate among security officials centered around the size and combat ability of the combined forces.

The international community, led by the United States, simply failed to provide Afghanistan with the political, economic, or security assistance commensurate with the nation's needs after the fall of the Taliban.⁴²⁴ A March 2004 evaluation of the peacekeeping efforts in Afghanistan

⁴²² "Advisory Services and Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights: Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan and on the Achievements of Technical Assistance in the Field of Human Rights," U.N. Doc E/CN.4/2006/108, March 3, 2006, para. 28.

⁴²³ Human Rights Watch interview with education officials, Ghazni, December 19, 2005.

⁴²⁴ In the first year after the Taliban, over four-fifths of spending in Afghanistan focused on the fight against Al Qa'eda and the Taliban, while less than a tenth went to humanitarian assistance and less than one-twentieth for reconstruction. Bhatia, Lanigan, and Wilkinson, *Minimal Investments, Minimal Results: The Failure of Security Policy in Afghanistan*.

by the British Department for International Development was blunt (but by no means alone) in its appraisal:

Whatever assessment criteria one uses—whether it is compliance with the terms of the B[onn] A[greement] or broader international standards. . . there have been significant shortcomings in international efforts to consolidate peace. There has been a major mismatch between the ambitions of the international community and their willingness to commit the requisite military, political and financial resources. It has been . . . a ‘bargain basement’ model. This is an attempt to rebuild a collapsed state according to a favourable model but with minimal resources.⁴²⁵

Security assistance to Afghanistan has consistently lagged far below that of recent post-conflict situations, such as East Timor, the Balkans, and, of course, Iraq. Security assistance to Afghanistan has also consistently lagged behind the obvious and tangible needs of the country. For instance, by mid-2002, when Afghan and international observers loudly and clearly issued warnings about growing insecurity and criminality, the United States fielded only about 10,000 troops, concentrated on the southern border, while NATO countries fielded about 4,000 troops, stationed only in Kabul.⁴²⁶

Halfway through 2002, U.S. interest and resources were increasingly channeled to Iraq.⁴²⁷ The often heated debate between the United States and its allies over the Iraq war also affected peacekeeping in Afghanistan, as some allies signaled their dissatisfaction by withholding assistance even in Afghanistan, while others sought to indicate their broader support for the United States by committing to helping the United States in Afghanistan, but not in Iraq. As explained eloquently by Ahmad Rashid, one of the most experienced observers of Afghanistan:

How is it, then, that Afghanistan is near collapse once again? To put it briefly, what has gone wrong has been the invasion of Iraq: Washington's refusal to take state-building in Afghanistan seriously and instead waging a fruitless war in Iraq. For Afghanistan the results have been too few Western troops, too little money, and a lack of coherent strategy and sustained policy initiatives on the part of Western and Afghan leaders. The Bonn conference created the scaffolding to build the new Afghan structure, but what was consistently

⁴²⁵ Jonathan Goodhand with Paul Bergne, “Evaluation of the Conflict Prevention Pools, Case Study: Afghanistan,” Department for International Development, March 2004, p. 23.

⁴²⁶ For more analysis of the post-Taliban security problems in Afghanistan, see Saman Zia-Zarifi, “Losing the Peace in Afghanistan,” *Human Rights Watch World Report 2004*, available at <http://hrw.org/wr2k4/5.htm>.

⁴²⁷ Rashid, “Afghanistan: On the Brink”; Seymour Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), pp. 45-52; 65-71.

missing were the bricks and running water. Inside the scaffolding there is still only the barest shell.⁴²⁸

The chief indicator of the international community's confused security strategy in Afghanistan was the fact that since the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan has had two separate foreign troop contingents, with two different missions: first, that of the United States (and members of its coalition) and second, the NATO-supplied, U.N.-mandated International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF. The U.S.-led coalition (under the official name of Combined Forced Command—Afghanistan, or CFC-A) has maintained a force between 16,000 and 23,000 in Afghanistan (compared with the 140,000 to 180,000 posted in Iraq, a country of comparable size and population, but incomparably easier terrain). The U.S. forces remain focused on carrying out the United States' strategic interests by fighting against Al Qaeda and allied Taliban forces in southern and southeastern Afghanistan. This force did not have as its mission the protection of Afghans or of humanitarian aid providers, except to the extent that such actions pacified or mollified local populations, and, as pointed out above, the United States opposed the deployment of peacekeeping troops in Afghanistan until 2003.

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) did have as its primary mission providing security, but the United States' putative allies, quick to wag a finger in disapproval of the perceived failure of the United States to embrace peacekeeping, lacked the will and the capacity to provide effective security assistance to Afghanistan. Afghan political leaders, NGOs, experts, and even Lakhdar Brahimi, the Special Representative of the United Nation's Secretary General and head of U.N. operations in Afghanistan, failed in their repeated calls on the U.N. Security Council to expand the geographic coverage and mandate of the ISAF. Afghans repeatedly told Human Rights Watch that they were amused, offended, and bewildered by the spectacle of the Secretary General of NATO traveling from one capital to another, "hat in hand," as the Secretary General put it, to beg for the logistical support necessary to allow NATO to begin its expansion.⁴²⁹

The shortchanging of security in Afghanistan has continued to date. In 2005 the United States declared that it would withdraw 2,500-3,000 of its relatively modest contingent. NATO began moving into southern Afghanistan in late 2005, as a Canadian force took over security responsibilities in Kandahar, a Dutch force moved into Oruzgan, and a fairly large British force (numbering about 3,300) was dispatched to Helmand, the hotbed of narcotics trade and opposition activity. But this expansion took place fitfully and only after tremendous hand-wringing, as NATO capitals faced the possibility that the transatlantic alliance would face real combat—and significant numbers of casualties—for the first time in its history.

⁴²⁸ Rashid, "Afghanistan: On the Brink."

⁴²⁹ "NATO Members Bridge Differences, Achieve Unity at Istanbul Summit," U.S. State Department press release, June 29, 2004, available at <http://usinfo.state.gov/is/Archive/2004/Jun/29-386230.html>, retrieved on June 17, 2006.

The slow withdrawal of U.S. forces and the nervous expansion of NATO troops caused many Afghans, up to and including President Karzai, to worry about the international community's commitment to Afghanistan's security at precisely the moment when the threat posed by opposition groups and criminals was soaring.⁴³⁰ Predictably, those opposed to the central government were heartened by the indications, and have stepped up their campaign of words and attacks in order to intimidate Afghans into following their will.

The Provincial Reconstruction Teams

Unwilling or unable to provide sufficient military and economic resources for Afghanistan, and facing deteriorating security and slowing reconstruction in Afghanistan, the United States and NATO have offered the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) as the answer.

The PRTs have not been incorporated into any coherent nationwide development strategy by the Afghan government until very recently, and still lack an effective coordination mechanism with international donors. It is impossible to thoroughly assess the conduct of the PRTs because there exists no (public) nation-wide, systematic monitoring of PRTs, their projects, and the funding they receive.⁴³¹ The major, publicly available, analyses carried out by governmental or academic institutions of donor countries have criticized the current PRT strategy as being incoherent and lacking sufficient resources.⁴³² As a result, these commentators have generally called on the United States and NATO to refocus their efforts on providing security and governance.⁴³³

The United States unveiled the concept of PRTs in late 2002. The PRTs were initially formed as a result of the United States' refusal to either commit sufficient troops for a more traditional peacekeeping mission or to allow other countries to create a U.N.-mandated "peacekeeping mission." The PRTs are small military units (ranging in size from 80 to over 300) incorporating a small contingent of civilians with a development or diplomatic background with a mandate to carry out development and humanitarian projects in a "hearts and minds" campaign to win over the local population and extend the writ of the central government.⁴³⁴

⁴³⁰ Rubin, "Afghanistan's Uncertain Transition ...," p.9.

⁴³¹ Jakobsen, "PRTs in Afghanistan"; Goodhand with Bergne, "Evaluation of the Conflict Prevention Pools: Afghanistan."

⁴³² Ibid.; "The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned," United States Institute of Peace, October 2005.

⁴³³ Barnett Rubin, Testimony before the Committee on International Relations of the U.S. House of Representatives, March 9, 2006; Michael McNeerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?," *Parameters* (U.S. Army War College Quarterly), Winter 2005-2006, p.32.

⁴³⁴ The exact size and civilian component of PRTs varies. The largest PRT, operated by Germany in Kunduz, numbers about 375 staff; most PRTs are closer to one hundred military and civilian personnel. Generally, civilians account for 5 to 10 percent of a PRT's total size. Michael Dziedzic and Colonel Michael Seidl, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Military Relations with International and Nongovernmental Organizations in Afghanistan," United States Institute of Peace Special Report, September 2005, p. 4.

The PRT terms of reference state that they will “assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified area of operations, and enable SSR [security sector reform] and reconstruction efforts.” Each PRT is under the direct command of its own donor country, with its development strategy and military rules of engagement determined from its national capitals. The PRTs also operate Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) projects throughout their areas of operations in order “to support the Government of Afghanistan in maintaining and expanding security throughout the country, to support stabilisation, reconstruction and nation-building activities . . .”⁴³⁵

This program began slowly, with three U.S. PRTs in southern Afghanistan. It took nearly a year before the first NATO PRT ventured outside Kabul. As a result, until this year, most of Afghanistan’s southern provinces had no PRT presence at all.⁴³⁶ As of this writing, the United States (and coalition partners) maintained fourteen PRTs, while NATO countries had established nine under ISAF command.⁴³⁷

The PRTs faced a skeptical, and at times hostile, reception from development aid workers, who doubted whether they could effectively provide security assistance, and worried that the militarization of aid would jeopardize civilian aid projects and increase the risk to aid workers without materially improving humanitarian assistance.⁴³⁸

Most aid organizations in Afghanistan took the initial position that the PRTs violated the core principles of international humanitarian assistance—concern for humanity, independence, and impartiality,⁴³⁹ as set out by the United Nations and the world’s largest humanitarian relief organizations.⁴⁴⁰

PRTs have been successful to some extent in improving security in the limited areas they operate.⁴⁴¹ but their performance as aid providers has generally been viewed as ineffective or

⁴³⁵ “NATO in Afghanistan Fact Sheet,” available at <http://www.nato.int/issues/afghanistan/040628-factsheet.htm>.

⁴³⁶ Rashid, “Afghanistan: On the Brink.”

⁴³⁷ Information available at http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/prov_reconstruction-en.asp.

⁴³⁸ Dziedzic, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Military Relations with International and Nongovernmental Organizations in Afghanistan.”

⁴³⁹ Save the Children, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Humanitarian-Military Relations in Afghanistan*, 2004, p.3, available at http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/darfur/uploads/military/Military%20PRTs%20in%20Afghanistan_Sep04%20by%20SCU_K.pdf.

⁴⁴⁰ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182, “Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations,” December 19, 1991, available at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dha/res46182.htm>; The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, available at <http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/index.asp>.

⁴⁴¹ Jakobsen, “PRTs in Afghanistan”; Goodhand with Bergne, “Evaluation of the Conflict Prevention Pools: Afghanistan.”

inefficient.⁴⁴² As put in a 2005 overview of the relations between PRTs and humanitarian aid providers in Afghanistan:

When military forces provide assistance to a civilian population during conflict, it is not for humanitarian purposes but, rather, to further policies of their national governments, provide force protection, and meet their international legal obligations. ... Redundant assessments conducted by military personnel, inadequate coordination with civilian assistance providers leading to duplication of effort, and a disregard for the long-term capacity of the local population to sustain their projects are among the most frequently voiced criticisms of military PRT assistance projects.⁴⁴³

Notwithstanding such criticism, most aid organizations operating in Afghanistan have had to accept the existence of the PRTs, in part because of a recognition that there are areas of Afghanistan where civilian humanitarian groups simply cannot operate due to insecurity,⁴⁴⁴ and in part because of a recognition that for now at least, the PRTs are the best that the international community is willing to offer the people of Afghanistan.⁴⁴⁵ Nevertheless, communications with nongovernmental organizations have been and remain spotty and hampered by mutual suspicion and incomprehension by both sides.⁴⁴⁶

However, Human Rights Watch heard consistent criticism about the failure of PRTs in southern and southeastern Afghanistan to provide durable, useful reconstruction. As one long-term Western observer in Ghazni told us, “The PRTs build schools, but there is no follow up to see if there is a teacher there a year later.”⁴⁴⁷

At this point it is incontrovertible that PRTs have been unable to materially improve either Afghanistan’s security situation or meet its development needs, particularly in the south—a fact admitted by the U.S. government.⁴⁴⁸ The PRTs can be a useful tool for providing security, and maybe even limited reconstruction, in some areas. However, they are not sufficient for providing the security and development necessary for the people of Afghanistan.

⁴⁴² Perito, “The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams”; Jakobsen, PRTs in Afghanistan.”

⁴⁴³ Dziedzic and Seidl, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams,” p.9.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Jakobsen, “PRTs in Afghanistan.”

⁴⁴⁶ Rubin, Testimony before the Committee on International Relations of the U.S. House of Representatives; Perito, “The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned”; Dziedzic and Seidl, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams.”

⁴⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with U.N. official, Gardez, December 5, 2005.

⁴⁴⁸ U.S. GAO, “Afghanistan Reconstruction”; Perito, “The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams.”

VI. Legal Standards

The government of Afghanistan is obligated under international human rights law to ensure the right of everyone to education. This right must be met in a non-discriminatory manner.

Threats, intimidation, and attacks against students, teachers, and school officials, as well as on the schools themselves, undermine the right to education. Ensuring this right, crucial for Afghanistan’s future development, means providing the necessary security so that students—girls and boys—and their teachers can safely and securely attend school—and that there is a school to attend.

Attacks by the Taliban and other groups on students, teachers, and schools are not just criminal offenses. They are human rights abuses that infringe upon the right to freedom of education. When committed as part of the ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan, these attacks are serious violations of international humanitarian law, which are war crimes, as are acts and threats of violence with the primary purpose spreading terror among the civilian population.

The Right to Education

Afghanistan is one of the most socially conservative and impoverished countries in the world. Nevertheless, the government of Afghanistan is obligated to ensure that all Afghan children receive an adequate education, and that girls are educated equally as well as boys.

Afghanistan’s Constitution, adopted in 2004, provides that education “is the right of all citizens which shall be provided up to the level of the B.A. (*līsānīs*), free of charge by the state” (article 43). The state must “devise and implement effective programs for a balanced expansion of education all over Afghanistan, provide compulsory intermediate level education” (article 43), and “adopt necessary measures for promotion of education in all levels” (article 17). The state must also “devise and implement effective programs for balancing and promoting education for women, improving of education of the nomads and elimination of illiteracy in the country” (article 44).⁴⁴⁹

The Afghan government in its National Development Strategy, outlining a framework for the country’s development, has also committed to “expand access to Primary and Secondary education, increase enrollment and retention rates, strengthen curriculum and quality of teachers,” and “remove gender disparities with respect to both access to education and quality of

⁴⁴⁹ Constitution of Afghanistan (1382) (adopted in January 2004, the year 1382 in the Afghan calendar by the Constitutional Loya Jirga (Grand Council)).

education.”⁴⁵⁰ By the end of 2010, the government has set as a benchmark that “net enrollment in primary school for girls and boys will be at least 60% and 75% respectively; a new curriculum will be operational in all secondary schools, female teachers will be increased by 50%; 70% of Afghanistan’s teachers will have passed a competency test, and a system for assessing learning achievement, such as a national testing system for students, will be in place.”⁴⁵¹

Afghanistan’s international legal obligations also bind it to ensure the right to education in a non-discriminatory manner. The right to education is set forth in the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), of which Afghanistan has ratified.⁴⁵²

Recognizing that different states have different levels of resources, the right to education is considered a “progressive right”: by becoming party to the international agreements, a state agrees “to take steps . . . to the maximum of its available resources” to the full realization of the right to education.⁴⁵³ Accordingly, international law does not mandate exactly what kind of education must be provided, beyond certain minimum standards: primary education must be “compulsory and available free to all,” and secondary education must be “available and accessible to every child.”⁴⁵⁴

Although the right to education is a right of progressive implementation, the prohibition on discrimination is not. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the international body that interprets the ICESCR, has stated: “The prohibition against discrimination enshrined in article 2(2) of the [ICESCR] is subject to neither progressive realization nor the availability of resources; it applies fully and immediately to all aspects of

⁴⁵⁰ I-ANDS (Afghan National Development Strategy) Summary Report, pp. 21, 43.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴⁵² International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 003 UNTS 3 (entered into force January 2, 1976), art. 13; Convention on the Rights of the Child, U.N. Doc. A/RES/44/25 (entered into force September 2, 1990), art. 28; Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), U.N. Doc. A/34/46 (entered into force September 3, 1981), art. 10. See also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, U.N. Doc A/810 (adopted December 10, 1948), art. 26. Afghanistan ratified the ICESCR in 1983, the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994, and CEDAW in 2003.

⁴⁵³ ICESCR, art. 2(1). See also Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 28. But see Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 13: The Right to Education*, para. 44: “The realization of the right to education over time, that is ‘progressively,’ should not be interpreted as depriving States parties’ obligations of all meaningful content. Progressive realization means that States parties have a specific and continuing obligation ‘to move as expeditiously and effectively as possible’ towards the full realization of article 13”; and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 3: The Nature of States Parties Obligations*, contained in U.N. Doc. E/1991/23, December 14, 1990, para. 2: “Such steps should be deliberate, concrete and targeted as clearly as possible towards meeting the obligations recognized in the Covenant.”

⁴⁵⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 28.

education and encompasses all internationally prohibited grounds of discrimination.”⁴⁵⁵ Thus, regardless of its resources, the state must provide education “on the basis of equal opportunity,” “without discrimination of any kind irrespective of the child’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.”⁴⁵⁶

While international law permits the maintenance of separate educational systems or institutions for girls and boys, these must “offer equivalent access to education, provide a teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard as well as school premises and equipment of the same quality, and afford the opportunity to take the same or equivalent courses of study.”⁴⁵⁷

CEDAW details areas in which the state must eliminate discrimination and ensure access for men and women on an equal basis:

- (a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;
- (b) Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality.⁴⁵⁸

Particularly relevant to Afghanistan, where so many girls and women have been excluded from education, are the provisions of CEDAW requiring the state to ensure:

- (c) The same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;

⁴⁵⁵ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 13: The Right to Education*, para. 31. See also, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 11: Plans of Action for Primary Education*, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1999/4 (May 10, 1999), para. 10; and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 3: The Nature of States Parties Obligations*, para. 2 (stating that the obligation to guarantee the exercise of rights in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights without discrimination is “of immediate effect”).

⁴⁵⁶ Convention on the Rights of the Child, arts. 28(1), 2(1). See also ICESCR, arts. 2, 13; CEDAW, art. 10. The Committee has interpreted the prohibition on discrimination and the right to education in article 2(2) and 13 of the ICESCR in accord with the Convention against Discrimination in Education, adopted December 14, 1960, General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 429 UNTS 93 (entered into force May 22, 1962), and the relevant provisions of CEDAW. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 13: The Right to Education*, para. 31.

⁴⁵⁷ The Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, has found that certain separate educational systems or institutions for groups, under the circumstances defined in the Convention Against Discrimination in Education, do not constitute a breach of the Covenant. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 13: The Right to Education*, para. 33 and note 16.

⁴⁵⁸ CEDAW, art. 10.

- (d) The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely;
- (e) The same opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;
- (f) Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.⁴⁵⁹

International Humanitarian Law and Attacks on Schools

Threats, intimidation, and violent attacks on students, teachers, and the school buildings themselves are criminal offenses in violation of the laws of Afghanistan. They are also human rights abuses that undermine the right to education under international human rights law. And when these attacks are committed as part of the ongoing internal armed conflict in Afghanistan between armed opposition groups, including the Taliban and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, and Afghan security forces and foreign armed forces, particularly the U.S.-led Combined Forces Command Afghanistan (CFC-A), international humanitarian law applies.

International humanitarian law—also known as the laws of war—is the set of rules governing the conduct of parties to international and internal armed conflicts. Because the current conflict in Afghanistan is not between two governments, but between a government and opposition armed groups, it is considered an internal armed conflict (the participation of foreign forces on behalf of the Afghan government means that it is an “internationalized” internal armed conflict.) Applicable law can be found in article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and customary international humanitarian law. Afghanistan is not a party to the Protocol Additional of 1977 to the 1949 Geneva Conventions Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), but most of its provisions are considered reflective of customary international law.

International humanitarian law is binding on states and non-state belligerents, such as the Taliban and the Hezbe-e Islami. International humanitarian law requires parties to an armed conflict to respect civilians and other persons no longer taking part in hostilities. The law forbids at all times attacks directed at civilians or civilian objects: operations may only be directed against military objectives.⁴⁶⁰ Schools are protected as civilian objects, unless being used by the enemy’s armed forces.⁴⁶¹ Students, teachers, and school administrators fall under the protection granted to civilians as long as they are not taking a direct part in hostilities.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ See International Committee of the Red Cross, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), chapters 1 and 2, citing, for example, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II) (adopted June 8 1977, and entered into force December 7, 1978), art. 13.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., rules 7 and 9, citing various treaties and other evidence of state practice. Article 51(3) of Protocol I states that “[i]n case of doubt whether an object which is normally dedicated to civilian purposes, such as a place of worship, a

International humanitarian law also forbids acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population.⁴⁶³ Thus the threat of attacks, such as those made through night letters, with the intent of keeping students and teachers away from school out of fear of violence, also violates the protection provided civilians.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child also requires states to “take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict.”⁴⁶⁴ This is reflected in international humanitarian law, which provides that children are entitled to special respect and attention.⁴⁶⁵ One of the “fundamental guarantees” in Protocol II is that: “Children shall be provided with the care and aid they require, and in particular: . . . They shall receive an education, including religious and moral education, in keeping with the wishes of their parents, or in the absence of parents, of those responsible for their care.”⁴⁶⁶

Afghanistan ratified the Statute of the International Criminal Court in 2003. Although Afghanistan retains primary responsibility and duty to prosecute individuals for war crimes, if it is unwilling or unable to do so, the International Criminal Court is empowered to exercise its jurisdiction over the most serious crimes of international concern. Under the statute, war crimes during an internal armed conflict include attacks intentionally directed against the civilian population and against civilian objects, including “buildings dedicated to . . . education . . . provided they are not military objectives.”⁴⁶⁷ Afghanistan has yet to adopt implementing legislation that would put the provisions of the Rome statute into effect in domestic legislation but by ratifying the statute is obligated to do so.

house or other dwelling or a school, is being used to make an effective contribution to military action, it shall be presumed not to be so used.”

⁴⁶² Ibid., rules 1, 5, and 6, citing Protocol II, art. 13(3).

⁴⁶³ Ibid., rule 2, citing Protocol II, articles 13(2) and 4(2)(d). The U.N. Secretary-General has noted that violations of article 4 (prohibiting “acts of terrorism”) have long been considered war crimes under customary law. U.N Secretary-General, “Report on the establishment of a Special Court for Sierra Leone” S/2000/915 (2000).

⁴⁶⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 38.

⁴⁶⁵ *International Humanitarian Law*, rule 135, citing Protocol II, art. 4(3).

⁴⁶⁶ Protocol II, art. 4(3).

⁴⁶⁷ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, (adopted July 17, 1998, and ratified by Afghanistan February 10, 2003), art. 8(2)(e)(iv).

VII. Recommendations

Human Rights Watch urges that access to education be used as a key benchmark to measure the success of Afghan and international efforts to bring security to Afghanistan.

We suggest this benchmark for three reasons:

- on a political level, because teachers and schools are typically the most basic level of government and the most common point of interaction between ordinary Afghans and their government (and its foreign supporters);
- on a practical level, because this benchmark lends itself to diagnostic, nationally comparable data analysis (the number of operational schools, the number of students, the enrollment of girls) focused on outcomes instead of the number of troops or vague references to providing security; and,
- on a policy level, because providing education to a new generation of Afghans is essential to the country's long-term development.

Using this benchmark and placing the well-being of the Afghan people at the center of the security policy in Afghanistan will help implement policies that respond to and strengthen the inextricable link between development and security.

Recommendations to the Taliban, Hezb-e Islami, and other armed groups

- Immediately stop all attacks on civilians and civilian objects, including teachers, students, and their schools.
- Cease all threats against teachers and students, such as through the use of night letters.
- Publicly declare an end to such attacks and threats.
- Provide and facilitate safe, rapid, and unimpeded access to impartial humanitarian assistance to civilians in need.

Recommendations regarding the impact of insecurity on education

Notwithstanding the responsibility of those groups attacking teachers, students and schools, it is the duty of the government of Afghanistan and its international supporters to ensure that Afghans receive an adequate and non-discriminatory education.

- The government of Afghanistan and the coordinating body of the Afghanistan Compact should make access to education a benchmark for measuring compliance

with the Compact, which sets out security as one of the three pillars of activity for the next five years.

- The government, with the assistance of the international community, should devise and implement a strategy to monitor, prevent, and respond to attacks on education. An effective strategy will require coordinated action by diverse institutions, and, to this end, the government should craft a process that involves all relevant institutions from the start, including the president's office; the ministries of interior, justice, women's affairs; the Afghan National Army; the Afghan National Police; the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission; UNAMA; UNICEF; UNDP; UNIFEM; ISAF; and the Combined Forces Command Afghanistan (CFC-A). The strategy should include the following elements:

Monitoring Attacks

- The Ministry of Education and international agencies responsible for education should cooperate to create a national database with accurate, up-to-date information collected from provincial education offices, U.N. bodies, NGOs, PRTs, donor agencies, and other sources about attacks on educational staff and facilities, the status of schools, school attendance, and the long-term impact of attacks on education. Monitoring should pay special attention to attacks on girls' schools and the effects of attacks on girls' education.
- UNAMA and relevant U.N. agencies, including UNICEF and the WFP, should share information with each other about attacks on schools.
- The government, including the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, and donors should continue to follow and denounce attacks that undermine the right to education.

Prevention

- Using information gained from monitoring, the government and international donors should identify schools at greatest risk of attack and ensure that they receive resources and protection accordingly. This should also involve:
 - identifying a list of risk factors, such as night letters being circulated and a school being the only sign of government in the area, and monitoring for these factors;
 - communicating with parents and students more accurate information about security threats so that they are not forced to rely on rumor and incomplete information.
- The government and donors should identify and implement measures that make education safer for students and teachers. These could include providing transport to school, enhancing security of routes children and teachers use to

- get to schools, constructing secure buildings and school walls, and providing appropriately trained school guards.
- The government and international donors should work with local communities to mobilize and support community protection efforts. These could draw on measures already taken by some communities, such as rotating volunteer night watchmen, placing monitors along roads at times children go to and from schools, and seeking commitments from community leaders to support and protect education.
 - Provincial and district department of education should work with NGO educational providers to create local contingency plans for addressing threats to schools in medium and high risk districts. Information about these plans should be provided to teachers and families with school-age children.
 - The Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police should prioritize the protection of educational facilities and staff, while ensuring that school security remains the responsibility of civilian authorities.

Responding to Attacks

- The ministries of interior and justice, and other relevant Afghan security services, should work closely with the Ministry of Education, NGOs, and the international community to better respond to cases of attacks, threats, and intimidation against teachers, students, and schools. This should include full investigations and the prosecution of perpetrators in accordance with international standards. The Ministry of Interior should investigate all those implicated in such attacks, including local military authorities, civilian officials and those associated with them, and powerful individuals and groups with connections to officials who may be involved in attacks and threats in some provinces.
- The Afghan government should enact legislation implementing the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to render war crimes, including attacks intentionally directed against buildings dedicated to education, violations of Afghan law.
- The Ministry of Education and its international funders should establish an emergency fund to immediately rebuild damaged schools and to work with local communities that have been subject to attack to increase security and boost the confidence of parents and community leaders to send children to school. UNICEF should continue its policy of providing tents to destroyed schools and improve its capacity for rapid response (which will require improved monitoring of attacks).
- Provincial and district departments of education should work with NGO educational providers to minimize interruptions to the educational process

following an attack, such as reopening schools quickly and finding alternative venues.

- In order to focus on providing development more broadly to insecure areas, including the south and southeast, and to better coordinate development plans for these areas, international donors, the Afghan government, the United Nations, and nongovernmental organizations should consider holding regular meetings to discuss these goals and come up with a plan and timetable to reach them.

Recommendations regarding education generally

- Education in Afghanistan remains almost entirely dependent on foreign assistance. The overall amount of foreign assistance to Afghanistan has been far less than that disbursed in several recent post-conflict areas and far less than Afghanistan needs, according to the World Bank and the Afghan government. International donors should increase support for construction schools and establishing other acceptable learning spaces, and for programs geared toward improving the quality of education, including teacher training, with the goal of providing girls and boys with equal access to schools.
- Basic information about the educational system in Afghanistan remains highly inadequate. Such information is vital for creating effective education policies generally, and for crafting responses to attacks on the educational system. The recent EMIS data are an important first step. The Ministry of Education should disaggregate this information by sex and region, and it should at minimum include:
 - numbers, locations, and condition of infrastructure of schools and other learning spaces; whether they are, in practice, for girls or boys or are coed; and whether there is other government infrastructure in the community;
 - all areas where girls and boys, or girls alone, have no access to education and areas where girls have no access to secondary education;
 - children's school attendance and drop-out rates (as compared with enrollment);
 - numbers and locations of teachers, especially female teachers.
- Measure progress on education in Afghanistan on a national, provincial, and district basis, and not on national level numbers alone.

Recommendations regarding improving girls' and women's access to education

The Ministry of Education, in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the President, and their international partners, should better address girls' problems in attending school. This will require leadership and political will at the highest levels and accountability at the provincial and district levels.

- The Ministry of Education should make equal access for girls and women a priority at all educational levels—not only at the primary level. Among other things it should:
 - Condition the creation of new schools on equal access for girls in each area. Where girls and boys are offered different forms of education, such as in madrassas and home-based schools, the ministry should ensure that girls and boys have equal access to formal education credentials.
 - Become a more public advocate for education, especially for girls.
 - Require teachers and administrators, as well as other government officials, to educate their own children, regardless of gender, as a condition of employment.
- The government, with the international community’s support, should continue and enhance efforts to increase girls’ attendance at all educational levels, including:
 - prioritizing work in communities with low or zero girls’ participation in education;
 - implementing programs targeted at increasing girls’ attendance, such as WFP’s food incentives program, which provides basic foodstuffs to families who send their daughters to school; and
 - initiating a public awareness campaign on the economic, social, and public health benefits that accrue from girls’ education.
- The Ministry of Education should do more to increase the number of female teachers, especially in rural areas. For example, it should consider developing more flexible programs to accredit women teachers, including those trained outside of the country. It should address limits in women’s access to teacher training programs, for example, by providing where possible safe residences at teacher training institutes.
- The Ministry of Education should work with local communities to overcome local barriers that prevent children, and girls in particular, from attending school. For example, the ministry should identify whether schools are available, safe, and acceptable to local cultural sensitivities; whether routes are safe; whether transportation is available; and whether individuals in the community are blocking girls’ access. The ministry should hold provincial and district officials accountable for improving access for all children in their districts and provinces and reward those who do.
- The Ministry of Education should drastically increase the representation of women in the ministry at the national, provincial, and district levels.
- President Karzai should remove any appointed leaders who oppose girls’ education, including governors, police chiefs, cabinet ministers, and education officials.
- The Council of Ulema, the highest religious authority in Afghanistan, should publicly state that it supports girls’ education at all levels.
- The Ministry of Education should widely publicize and enforce the 2004 presidential decree lifting the prohibition against married girls and women attending school.

- The Afghan government should make greater efforts to discourage under-age marriage, which results in many girls being withdrawn from school. Efforts should include publicizing laws on the minimum age of marriage.
- The government of Afghanistan should ratify the Convention against Discrimination in Education, which sets criteria and standards for girls' and women's right to a non-discriminatory education.
- The U.N. Special Rapporteur on Education, who expressed concern about the systemic targeting of schools on April 16, 2006, should visit Afghanistan and raise with international actors and the Afghan government concerns about the continued gap between girls' and boys' access to education, problems created by insecurity, and their disproportionate impact on girls.

Recommendations regarding international military, peacekeeping, and reconstruction operations in Afghanistan

- ISAF, contributing states to the U.S.-led Coalition, and UNAMA should assess whether current force configurations are sufficient to provide security to the civilian population, as set out in the first pillar of the Afghanistan Compact.
- ISAF and the U.S.-led Coalition should measure security not by numbers of troops or the presence of armed groups, but rather by the security needs of ordinary people: whether conditions are sufficiently secure for people to conduct their lives. Measurements could include the number of operational schools and clinics, open roads, and distances that are safe to travel.
- All PRTs should improve national-level coordination among themselves and with Afghan authorities, the United Nations, and local communities. PRTs should improve communication with national and international NGOs. This coordination, as well as work with local communities, will be especially important to ensure that PRTs take all possible action to improve security for students, teachers, and schools.
- All PRTs should establish transparent benchmarks that include access to education for evaluating security in their areas of operation.
- Countries contributing troops and staff to PRTs should ensure that their mandates and rules of engagement specifically include protection of the civilian population.
- The High Commissioner for Human Rights should substantially increase its human rights monitoring presence around the country to act as a deterrent and expand the information gathered on abuses. The United Nations should hire sufficient human rights monitoring and protection staff to reliably cover all areas of Afghanistan, as well as address specific concerns, such as abuses against women and minority groups. The current number of monitors outside the capital, sixteen positions (some vacant), is insufficient. UNAMA should press for responses from regional leaders regarding

human rights abuses and should regularly publicize its findings and recommendations for appropriate government action.

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