

Afghan Human Rights Body Held to Account

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Citizens say that more needs to be done to confront legacy of conflict.

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) came in for some tough criticism during a series of debates organised by IWPR last month.

Participants in Balkh, Herat and Kapisa provinces said the body had not done enough to confront the legacy of war crimes committed in Afghanistan over more than three decades of conflict.

In Balkh, speakers said that the organisation could do much more to support women's rights.

Civil society activist Idris Barna complained that the AIHRC reached out to only a few women living in urban areas, rather than addressing wider issues of gender inequality.

"The commission only raises awareness among educated women, in a few cities, which is not at all effective because women's rights are more at risk in the villages and districts."

Rahmat Shah, an economic expert, criticised AIHRC chairwoman Sima Samar for remaining in her position for the last 12 years.

He said that this had undermined public trust in the AIHRC, adding, "I suspect Afghans believe that she was put in place as head of the commission by foreigners, and that foreign powers are behind the commission itself."

Taqi Wahedi, who represented the AIHRC in the Balkh debate, acknowledged that a lack of security often prevented them from working in more remote villages and districts.

Mirwais Amini, who spoke on behalf of the AIHRC in the Herat debate, insisted that the commission was independent. He explained that it aimed to monitor and promote respect for human rights in the country as well as citizens' access to their constitutional freedoms.

But other speakers stressed that ordinary Afghans knew little about the AIHRC, and that the media often appeared more outspoken on human rights issues.

Sayed Azim Keberzani, from the Herat provincial council, said that the commission had failed to monitor state bodies and identify rights violations.

"Afghans are not aware of the commission," agreed Shafiq Behruzyan, representing local civil society activists. He said that even those who had heard of the AIHRC and its work regarded it as a Western import. Human rights efforts needed to be home-grown, he said, if they were to have widespread public support.

Behruzyan also criticised the commission for its reticence on political issues, questioning why it has not taken more of a stand.

In December 2011, the commission was due to present a major report on three decades of human rights abuses in Afghanistan, which was said to include the names of former warlords who were currently high-ranking government officials. The report was never published.

In the Nejrab district of Kapisa province, speakers complained that they had been neglected by the commission.

Abdul Jamil Amin, chairman of the Nejrab development council, said that although the district covered a large area and its residents had suffered massive abuses, the AIHRC had done nothing to help them.

*This report is based on an ongoing series of debates conducted as part of the IWPR programme **Afghan Reconciliation: Promoting Peace and Building Trust by Engaging Civil Society**.*

Location: [Afghanistan](#)

Topic: [Human rights](#)

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