



MADRE

speaks

Spring/Summer 2009 www.madre.org

AFGHANISTAN: The Surge Is No Solution



inside



MADRE responds to attacks in Gaza, supports projects in Kenya, works with new partner in Guatemala



MADRE

**Demanding Rights,
Resources & Results
for Women Worldwide**

121 West 27th Street, # 301
New York, NY 10001
Telephone: (212) 627-0444
Fax: (212) 675-3704
e-mail: madre@madre.org
www.madre.org

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From the Executive Director

VIVIAN STROMBERG

Dear Friends,

As news reports come in of new deployment of US troops to Afghanistan, even after all I have seen, I am surprised by how deeply it pains me. Yes, we knew it would happen but somehow I still hoped that humanity, or at least common sense, would prevail.

Here, in the United States, we can only begin to imagine the suffering another escalation of the US war in Afghanistan will cause. But Afghan women know exactly what it will bring—from very real experience.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, we have seen extremist and fundamentalist forces grow in strength and numbers during eight years of US military attacks and occupation. And we will see more. Escalating troop numbers will not make Afghanistan healthy. Nor will it bring an end to the abuse of women's and children's rights. That can only come from harnessing the political will of the international community to negotiate a peace within the context of international law.

In this issue of MADRE Speaks, we underscore the brutal impact of current US policy and we call for a plan that will end the occupation, support the demands of the Afghan women's movement, and address critical humanitarian needs.

MADRE will work to support the wide-reaching Shuhada Organization. You'll find a description of their work inside, including healthcare and education programs and Afghanistan's first shelter for women escaping violence.

I am proud that MADRE will be supporting Shuhada's work. Just as I am proud of the results of our work in Iraq, the Sudan, Nicaragua, Kenya, Guatemala; of our emergency responses during the past year to the crises in Gaza, Haiti, Cuba and once again in Darfur; of our powerful advocacy of international women's human rights policy.

Yes, there is work to be done, daunting work. But this is what women all over the world do every day: we wake up, we see what needs to be done to keep our children, our families, our communities safe and healthy, and we do it.

I am so grateful for the strength of your support as, together, we do what needs to be done to make sure MADRE's sisters around the world, their families and communities, are safe and healthy, and empowered to advocate for their own rights.

Sincerely,



©Harold Levine

MADRE launches Service for Change program!



- Travel with us to visit and work side by side with our partners around the world.
- Renovate homes and schools, work in community centers, pick crops—and make a real difference in lives of our sisters and their families.
- Learn first hand from the women of our sister organizations about the issues facing their communities.
- Meet the women who are fighting for human rights for themselves and around the world.

Visit www.madre.org regularly for Service for Change opportunities or contact Natalia Caruso at (212) 627-0444 to inquire about arranging a group trip.

MADRE Speaks ■ Volume XXV, #1 ■ MADRE is an international women's human rights organization that works toward a world in which all people enjoy the fullest range of individual and collective human rights; in which resources are equitably and sustainably shared; in which women participate effectively in all aspects of society; and in which people have a meaningful say in decisions that affect their lives. ■ MADRE's vision is enacted with an understanding of the inter-relationships between the various issues we address and by a commitment to working in partnership with women at the local, regional, and international levels who share our goals. ■ Since we began in 1983, MADRE has delivered over 25 million dollars worth of support to community-based women's organizations in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Balkans, and the United States.

Newsletter Staff EDITORS: Yifat Susskind and Diane Tosh; DESIGN: Amy Thesing

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AFGHANISTAN

The Surge Is No Solution

In February, President Obama pre-empted his own policy review on Afghanistan by deciding to send another 17,000 US troops into that war. This, despite the fact that US Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said he's not sure how to resolve the crisis there. We believe that sending more US forces to Afghanistan will only exacerbate the crisis.

Afghan women and families are already being killed in record numbers and more combat operations will mean more civilian deaths. Each of these killings is a grave violation of human rights. The Taliban will benefit from the spiraling death toll because more Afghans will view it as a legitimate resistance to a brutal invasion. According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "the mere presence of foreign soldiers fighting a war in Afghanistan is probably the single most important factor in the resurgence of the Taliban."

The US has been bombing Afghanistan since 2001, when the Bush Administration accused the Taliban government of harboring al-Qaeda. MADRE opposed the bombing from the start. We knew that more violence was the wrong response to the atrocities of 9/11 and we knew that the primary victims of the US war would be Afghan women and their families. In fact, within weeks of the first bombing raids, the civilian death toll in Afghanistan had greatly exceeded the number of people killed in the US on 9/11. And, the war did not bring the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks to justice.

The US and NATO did manage to oust the Taliban in 2001. Afghan women then gained some relief from a regime that publicly beat and executed women, and denied them education, healthcare, employment, participation in public life and any recourse from widespread domestic abuse. But that relief was short-lived. Today, a resurgent Taliban controls most of Afghanistan's southern provinces and is encroaching on Kabul, the capital.

Even more short-lived was the credibility of the notion that the US was in Afghanistan on behalf of women's rights. For the US immediately allied itself with forces



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Women's human rights activist, Malalai Joya, who was suspended from the Afghan Parliament for her outspoken radicalism, visits a girl's school in Farah Province.

whose human rights record was scarcely better than the Taliban's.

The US has no right to occupy Afghanistan. Moreover, the occupation is harming—not helping—Afghan women's struggle for human rights and real democracy. Afghan women deserve international support to create an environment in which they themselves can fight for their rights. That means ending the US/NATO occupation that is fueling the Taliban and other reactionary forces.

Afghanistan was never "the right war." It was the opening salvo in Bush's "war on terror," a failed and unjust policy that President Obama should renounce, not extend with a troop surge in Afghanistan.



Seven Reasons to Oppose a Troop Surge

1. More troops will mean more civilian casualties.

- Each year that the occupation drags on, more Afghan civilians are killed. In 2008 alone, more than 2100 civilians were killed, a 40 percent jump over 2007.
- The Taliban is known to attack villages where US soldiers have been. More US troops will make more civilians vulnerable to reprisal attacks.

2. More troops will not resolve the crisis.

- President Obama says the main goal is to stop al-Qaeda and prevent Afghanistan from being used as a base to launch attacks against the US. But he hasn't explained how a troop surge would further that goal or produce any positive results for people in Afghanistan.
- Even Defense Secretary Robert Gates has written that, "the United States cannot kill or capture its way to victory."
- Intensifying the war will not address the underlying reasons for the resurgence of the Taliban, namely:
 - popular outrage and fear of US attacks on civilians,
 - the corruption of the Karzai government,
 - and the support given to the Taliban by Pakistan.
- These are political problems that cannot be solved by force.

3. A troop surge has already been tried—and it failed.

- In 2007, the number of US/NATO troops was increased by 45 percent. During that surge, more civilians were killed than in the previous four years combined.



©Jawad Jalali (UNAMA Photos)

MADRE supports teachers and human rights advocates who put their lives at risk to educate young women, despite the closing of hundreds of schools throughout Afghanistan, since the US occupation began.

(PHOTOS ACROSS THE TOP OF PAGES 3-7) page 3: ©Shuhada Organization; page 4: ©Jawad Jalali (UNAMA Photos); page 5: ©Jawad Jalali (UNAMA Photos), ©Sayed Barez (UNAMA Photos); page 6: ©Shuhada Organization, ©Sebastien Rich (UNICEF); page 7: ©Shuhada Organization



Manufacturing the Taliban

4. Rampant abuses of Afghan women's rights cannot be eliminated by force.

- The Bush Administration justified the invasion of Afghanistan by pointing to the Taliban's systematic abuse of women. But subsequent US policies in Afghanistan did not uphold women's human rights. As a result:
 - 1 in every 3 Afghan women experience physical, psychological or sexual violence
 - 70 to 80 percent of women face forced marriages in Afghanistan
 - Every 30 minutes, an Afghan woman dies during childbirth
 - 87 percent of Afghan women are illiterate
 - 30 percent of girls have access to education in Afghanistan
 - 44 years is the average life expectancy rate for women in Afghanistan

5. US troops are backing an unpopular, corrupt government

- The US hand-picked Afghan President Hamid Karzai, betraying many Afghans' hopes for genuine democracy. Karzai's government is seen as somewhere between inept and predatory.
- In its efforts to defeat al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the US has brought to power notorious warlords, drug lords, and brutal militia leaders.
- 60 percent of Afghanistan's Parliament are either warlords or have ties to warlords. One MP, Mohammad Mohaqiq, is accused of nailing prisoners to walls.
- Other government officials also stand accused of war crimes, but are protected from prosecution by a general amnesty.
- Fear of US-allied warlords and militias leads to increased support for the Taliban, which promises to restore law and order.

- In 1979, the Carter Administration launched the biggest covert CIA operation ever. According to Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the aim was "to induce a Soviet military intervention" in Afghanistan in order to weaken the Soviet Union.
- Once the Soviets invaded, the CIA, together with Pakistan's secret service, worked to expand the Afghan opposition to the Soviets into a 'holy war.' They hoped that Muslim countries within the Soviet Union would turn against it, and ultimately, destroy the Soviet Union from within.
- To that end, the CIA trained and funded thousands of Islamic Mujahideen (holy warriors), including Osama bin Laden.
- The war turned millions of Afghans into refugees. To create their corps of "holy warriors," the US encouraged Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to open thousands of hard-line religious schools for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Out of these madrassas, came the talibs (students), who later became the Taliban.
- By 1989, the Soviet Union had been badly defeated in Afghanistan. Having achieved its aim, the US left the country to be ravaged by the warring gangs it had helped organize.
- Civil war raged until 1996, when the Taliban seized power. Despite a reign of terror unleashed by the regime, particularly against women, the US supported the Taliban until 2001.
- Asked if he regretted his role in the creation of the Taliban, Brzezinski, more recently an advisor to President Obama, said: "What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?"

Afghan Women: Confronting the Legacy of US-Supported Extremism

- Most people in the US assume that Taliban-style extremism is deeply ingrained in Afghan history and culture. In fact, it's a recent imposition and a product of US intervention.
- Since the mid-1800s, Afghan governments have slowly but steadily advanced progressive reforms in democratization, education and women's rights. Gains were made despite widespread poverty and opposition from socially conservative local leaders.
- In 1923, Afghanistan's first constitution granted women suffrage and other rights consistent with the moderate version of Islam practiced by most Afghans.
- During the 1960s and 1970s, women won more rights, participated in government and benefited from higher education.
- But progressive reforms came under attack by Islamists opposed to modernity, women's rights, and democratization. These forces were supported by the US to counter nationalists, socialists and others in the region who might ally with the Soviet Union.
- Throughout the 1980s, many progressive Afghans were killed or exiled, but others carried on the fight for human rights.
- Even during the worst days of the Taliban (1996-2001), Afghan women ran underground networks to deliver medical care to women, operated clandestine schools for girls and secretly documented and publicized Taliban atrocities abroad.
- Today, Afghan women remain a vital progressive force for rebuilding their country, advancing human rights, and fostering peace in Afghanistan and the region.



Before the US-funded Taliban took over Afghanistan, women comprised more than half of all students and teachers at Kabul University, half of all government workers, 40 percent of doctors and 70 percent of all schoolteachers.

6. US Troops are Undermining Humanitarian Operations

- The US has militarized humanitarian aid by creating "provincial reconstruction teams" (PRTs) that blur the line between combat operations and aid delivery.
- The PRTs use humanitarian aid as a bargaining chip to extort information from civilians. The practice turns urgently-needed aid into a weapon of war and endangers recipients by associating them with the US military.
- Aid operations are already threatened by the occupation. Half the country is now inaccessible to UN aid workers. Attacks on aid workers have risen 400 percent since 2005, leading many agencies to scale back their programs.

7. Most Afghans Want the US Out

- Afghans have a long and proud tradition of resisting foreign occupation. The current US troop build-up is no exception.
- Afghan community groups, women's organizations, and student movements have protested the occupation, but their voices are rarely heard in US media.
- More than 90 percent of Afghans polled by the BBC say they oppose the Taliban, but less than half see the US-led occupation as a positive alternative.



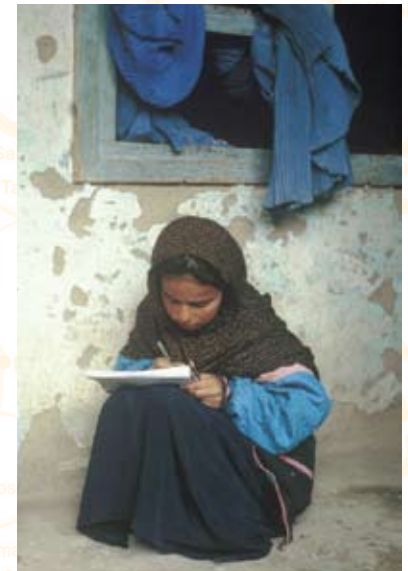


A Surge in Solutions, Not Troops

We know that elements in the military and Congress exerted great pressure on President Obama to ratchet up the war on Afghanistan. To achieve a more rational and peaceful outcome, we need to exert a counter-pressure. MADRE calls on the Obama Administration to chart a whole new course in US-Afghan relations, based on the understanding that the US needs to engage with the rest of the world, not just occupy it.

Here are 10 things we want to see on Obama's to-do list for Afghanistan:

- Set a timetable for the withdrawal of US and NATO troops.
- End US missile strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- Demilitarize aid operations and fund reconstruction efforts that benefit Afghans, not US corporations.
- Promote peace talks between all parties involved in the conflict. Negotiations should include women's organizations and other progressive forces and uphold the principle that human rights, including women's human rights, are non-negotiable.
- Compensate families and communities hurt by US military operations and pay war reparations.
- Support local models of governance, such as the Loya Jirga, not a charade of procedural democracy that empowers war criminals.
- Support demands of the Afghan women's movement to end violence against women, ensure women's access to critical services such as healthcare, education, food and water, and give real meaning to hard-won legal reforms meant to protect women's rights.
- Create a fund to meet Afghans' urgent humanitarian needs. After 30 years of intervention and war, the US owes Afghanistan nothing less.
- Support Afghan civil society, particularly women's organizations, which are a crucial counter-force to warlordism, terrorism and government corruption, and key to rebuilding Afghan society.
- Recognize that ultimately, decisions about what happens in Afghanistan should be made in Afghanistan, not Washington.



© WFP / Pascale Micheau

With schoolrooms scarce, and attendance dangerous for young women, girls study wherever they can.

Afghan Women Want a Surge in Diplomacy, Development and Democracy, Not Troops

For citations and more information, visit www.madre.org/afghanistan.



© Wangki Tangni



© Terry Allen

Spring 2009 Program Highlights

PALESTINE: Gaza Emergency Response

► Just days into the devastating Israeli military attacks on Gaza, MADRE joined with our sister organization, the Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS), to provide emergency medical aid. PMRS increased its clinic activities throughout Gaza, bringing hundreds of volunteers to join a team of 70 medical professionals. Working in partnership with the Israeli organization, Physicians for Human Rights, PMRS delivered essential supplies like first aid kits, water and blankets. Now PMRS is planning a longer-term response to aid children traumatized by the conflict.



© PMRS



© PMRS

NICARAGUA: Fighting for Women's Reproductive Rights

- For more than two years, Nicaraguan women's health advocates have fought against a total abortion ban that endangers women's lives and violates their basic rights. Since October 2006, women have been denied the right to an abortion, even in cases where pregnancy puts a woman's life at risk.
- MADRE brought together activists from the Autonomous Women's Movement (known by its Spanish acronym, MAM) in Nicaragua with human rights lawyers from the International Women's Human Rights Law Clinic to prepare an international legal challenge. Over the course of many months, we gathered evidence and built a case in defense of women's health and reproductive rights.
- In October 2008, MADRE brought two representatives of this effort to testify before the UN Human Rights Committee on the destructive effects of this abortion ban. The impact of this effort was immediately felt, with reports that the testimony was generating international pressure to change Nicaragua's harmful policy.

NICARAGUA: Harvesting Hope

► MADRE and our sister organization Wangki Tangni provided organic vegetable seeds to 80 women. The initiative will feed 1,100 people. Wangki Tangni also conducted trainings for the women on organic soil

◁ *At left:* A baby receives care at a PMRS rural health center; PMRS volunteers and ambulances provided emergency medical aid during the attacks on Gaza.

© Zenab



© Muixil



preparation, fertilization, and pest control, as well as women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and Indigenous rights. The trainings equip participants to make connections between different struggles they face and fight for their rights more effectively.

the union grew to over 2,000 members. MADRE and Zenab provided seeds to 500 women in 20 villages. Zenab's local coordinator visited villages and worked with union leaders to ensure that plantings were successful and farmers were well-prepared for this winter's harvest. The result was a bumper crop that fed hundreds of families and gave new hope to the women we work with.

GUATEMALA: Muixil

NEW PARTNER! ▶ MADRE is pleased to announce our new partnership with the Asociación de Mujeres Sufridas del Área Ixil (Muixil). Muixil is an Indigenous Ixil women's organization which spearheads sustainable income-generating activities for women in the Guatemalan highlands. MADRE and Muixil have started two small-scale communal pig farms. These have provided better nutrition and bolstered economic self-sufficiency for over 100 women and their families.



© Muixil



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IRAQ: Art Action for Peace

▶ In partnership with the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), MADRE supports the activities of a group of young Sunni and Shiite artists and poets who have united to demand peace. In July 2008, OWFI organized a Summer Festival to bring together nearly 1,400 people and to feature musical performances and readings by young women and men advocating peace and women's rights in Iraq.

SUDAN: Women Farmers Unite

▶ With Zenab for Women in Development, MADRE has supported women in eastern Sudan to found the country's first Women Farmers' Union. In 2008

KENYA: Women's Water Tap

▶ In August 2008, the women of the Umoja Women's Group welcomed Vivian Stromberg, MADRE Executive Director, and Rose Cunningham, Director of Wangki Tangni. Together with women from eight communities along the river, they held a three-day long consultation to prepare for the construction of a well to provide safe water for their families. Nowadays, women must walk miles to a river to collect untreated water, a threat to the health of the women and their families. This





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consultation helps to ensure that all participating communities benefit equally from this project.

HAITI & CUBA Emergency & Disaster Relief

► After a series of storms devastated Haiti and Cuba in August and September 2008, MADRE sent emergency aid to both countries. The storms wreaked havoc, causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damage as well as a humanitarian crisis in Haiti, as crops and whole communities were wiped out by flooding. As people begin the long-term process of rebuilding, MADRE strengthens their efforts through our Emergency and Disaster Relief Fund. The Fund is made possible by the generous support of MADRE members.

HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY

► In November 2008, MADRE participated in the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) Conference, in Cape Town, South Africa. The gathering brought together women's human rights advocates from across the globe. MADRE Communications Director Yifat Susskind spoke on a panel on ending violence against women, featuring Charlotte Bunch of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, Geeta Misra of CREA, and Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda of the World YWCA. To view a video clip from this event, visit our website.

Renewing Our Commitment to Afghan Women

In 1989 Dr. Sima Samar (Dr. Sima, as she is called in Afghanistan) founded the Shuhada Organization, her country's first non-governmental association. Shuhada is dedicated to the welfare and progress of the people of Afghanistan, with a primary focus on the empowerment of women and girls.

Shuhada began by providing healthcare and education—two vital needs for women and their families in Afghanistan. During the Taliban regime, the Shuhada Organization ran underground schools for girls in Kabul.



© Shuhada Organization

Recognizing the devastating toll of violence against women, Shuhada opened Afghanistan's first women's shelter in 2003. The shelter provides a safe living and learning

environment for women who are at risk for violence. Many of the women at the shelter had been made destitute by the war and by fierce discrimination against widows and other women who don't have a male "guardian" and cannot earn a living.

The shelter provides women with employment and classes in literacy, computers and English. Girls who are at the shelter go to school and several of the young women are studying nursing. In fact, a few have already graduated from nursing school and are now proudly practicing their profession.

The shelter is a life-saving intervention for women who can reach its doors. But to ensure that all Afghan women enjoy freedom from violence, Shuhada runs a Women's Human Rights Education Program.

Last year, more than 2,000 women benefited from Shuhada's human rights training and legal consultations, resulting in a reduction of forced marriages and other forms of violence against women in the communities where Shuhada works.

MADRE is proud to support the work of the Shuhada Organization.

myMADRE Keep up to date with MADRE by reading our blog at www.madre.org/mymadre. You'll find out more about MADRE projects with women on the frontlines of today's global crises. And you can join the conversation about how to make human rights a reality for all women and families.

Easy Ways to Give to MADRE

JOIN OUR SUSTAINER PROGRAM. A no-hassle, tax-deductible way to support MADRE's work. Give a fixed amount on a monthly or quarterly basis through a secure, automatic credit card deduction.

ARRANGE A MATCHING GIFT. Ask at work—many employers will match your gift to MADRE, doubling your contribution at no cost to you.

HONOR A LOVED ONE. We will send a beautiful card to the person you are honoring. It's a wonderful way to give an anniversary or graduation gift, just say "I'm thinking of you" to a special person, or honor someone's memory.

REGISTER FOR MADRE. Getting married? Give your guests the option of donating to MADRE in lieu of giving another kitchen appliance you'll never use.

Contact MADRE at (212) 627-0444 or by e-mail at fundraising@madre.org.

Who Inspires You?

This March, for Women's Month, MADRE asked our members to tell us who inspires you. We created a beautiful video tribute, including images from across the globe, to the women you honored. To view the video, visit www.madre.org.

ENSURE THAT YOUR VALUES LIVE ON THROUGH THE JOCELYN CIRCLE

Including MADRE in your will is simple and powerful, and guarantees your continued support for women's human rights for generations to come. Dozens of other MADRE members have chosen to make a lasting impact on the world by joining the Jocelyn Circle, a special group of supporters who have included MADRE in their wills or estate plans. Please call Vivian Stromberg at (212) 627-0444 for more information.

This Mother's Day, send a beautiful card through MADRE. You'll make a difference in more than one mother's life.



To Rebecca,

The work you do brightens the lives of the people around you every day. To a friend who is a wonderful mother,

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!

Visit www.madre.org/mothersday to send a card. And visit our webstore for beautiful hand-made Mother's Day gifts from around the world.



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Provide Resources for Children's Education

MADRE's Helping Hands Campaign is collecting school supplies for children in Kenya, the Sudan and Nicaragua. For many of these children, Helping Hands is their only source of pencils, notebooks and other critical learning supplies. So please make an individual donation, create a collection box to put in a classroom, or start a school-wide collection drive for MADRE. Any donation you could make, however small or large, would make a huge difference in the lives of these kids.

STUDENTS NEED:

- Children's books in English and Spanish
- Notebooks, folders, binders
- Markers, Crayons, Colored Pencils, Highlighters
- Pencils, pens, pencil sharpeners
- Puzzles and Educational Toys
- Math Flashcards
- Glue, Tape, Glitter
- Children's Scissors
- Classroom Educational Decorations in English and Spanish
- New Children's Undergarments and Shoes



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HOW TO DONATE:

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