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Women's rights in Afghanistan

Ana Maria Gomes, author . – Mr President, gender responsiveness is a measure of good governance anywhere in the world, but even more so in Afghanistan after the suffering endured by women for decades there. There cannot be true peace and recovery in Afghanistan without priority being given to respecting the human rights of women.

This Shia family law allows marital rape, approves child marriage and bans wives from stepping outside their homes without their husbands' permission. Women's human rights and dignity cannot fall victim to pre-electoral negotiations with Islamic fundamentalists. The international community present in Afghanistan must put much more pressure on President Karzai and the Afghan authorities to come up with proper laws which respect the human rights of women, and policies that are committed to enacting those rights and respect their dignity.

Like the Shia family law, the delaying of the Afghan media law, which was passed by the Afghan Parliament months ago by two thirds of the Parliament, is a tool by President Karzai to continue control of the state media, vital propaganda ahead of the presidential elections.

The international community cannot allow this to go on. This law is fundamental to ensure that there is freedom of expression and of the media in Afghanistan. Without that, anything that we are doing in Afghanistan is not worth it. It is crucial that action is taken on these two laws and that the international community makes sure that the authorities in Afghanistan abide by their commitments, by their words, in terms of human rights, and respect in particular the rights of women.