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CANADIAN VOICE OF WOMEN FOR PEACE

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

July 4th, 2007

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

The Canadian Voice of Women for Peace (VOW) joins the international condemnation of the undemocratic and heavy handed ousting of Afghanistan Member of Parliament Malalai Joya. We call upon you, the Prime Minister, to raise this issue with President Karzai and to take immediate steps to ensure the safety of Ms. Joya.

The ousting of Ms. Joya from Parliament and the threats on her life demonstrate that women in Afghanistan face open repression despite the supposed removal of the Taliban and despite the presence of foreign troops. There is a systemic resistance under the current regime in Afghanistan to increasing women's participation in government and public life. Ms. Joya's removal is a case in point.

Ms. Joya's case further demonstrates that women in Afghanistan are being denied the right to free speech. Ms. Joya was removed from Parliament for publicly criticizing other members of the legislature. Zakia Zaki, an "outspoken" and prominent female Afghan journalist was shot dead on June 6, 2007. And, Sanga Amach, a 22-year-old news presenter with a private television station was murdered a week earlier.

Further to these concerns, the current Afghan Parliament includes warlords and drug lords:

"Human Rights Watch estimates that 60 percent of the new legislators have links to warlords. The New York-based rights group singled out Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a powerful militia commander whose guns ravaged Kabul residents in the 1990s, and Mohammed Fahim, a former defense minister, who has been accused of war crimes. ... A European diplomat, who asked not to be named, reckoned that about 20 legislators still have active private militias and that at least 20 more have been involved in drug smuggling." (San Francisco Chronicle, Dec. 19, 2005)

Canada played a significant role in the 2005 parliamentary elections, contributing a total amount of \$13 million in funds through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). (Canadian International Development Agency, Sept. 14, 2005.) It is past time that Canada takes measures to protect the women in Afghanistan who are being silenced for questioning the failure of Parliament to address the wrongs of the past and the role of warlords in the new government.

Further, by supporting the current regime in Afghanistan and doing nothing to address the injustice faced by Ms. Joya and others, the Canadian government is failing to live up to its international legal obligations - most notably Canada's commitments to increase women's leadership and participation in civil society; to ensure the full contribution of women to peace-



building processes; and, to build women's capacity to meet the challenges of fundamentalisms and militarism - as provided in UN Security Resolution 1325, in the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*, and in the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*.

The Canadian Voice of Women for Peace rejects a military combat war-fighting role for Canada in Afghanistan and we stand fast in our insistence on a return to foreign policy which is UN mandated and principle centred which gives Canada a respected international presence. However, if the Canadian government maintains its involvement in Afghanistan, then we must see from it a greater commitment to ensuring a democratic government where women's rights are respected and where the security of women is not constantly under threat. We urge the Canadian government to consider an approach which would work to enhance democracy in Afghanistan, to provide for the safety of women, to ensure the full participation of women in decision-making and reconstruction processes and to support a form of economic development that works for the people.

We remind the Canadian government that a significant constituency within Canada opposes our role in Afghanistan. In March 2006, Ipsos-Reid reported that between 48% to 62% of Canadians not only questioned but opposed our engagement of troops in Afghanistan (Ipsos-Reid, Mar. 4/06; Strategic Counsel/Globe and Mail, Feb. 24/06). The plight of Malalai Joya and of other women not only bolsters the resolve of those opposed to the Canadian government's role in Afghanistan, but it is awakening many others to the debate and is increasing distrust of the Canadian government and its policies in Afghanistan.

We will be placing this letter on our website and sharing it with our colleagues in the peace movement, with like-minded feminist organizations, as well as with the broader Canadian NGO community.

Yours sincerely,

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cc. Minister of Foreign Affairs Minister, The Hon. Peter MacKay; Minister of National Defense, The Hon. Gordon O'Connor; Leader, New Democratic Party of Canada, Jack Layton; NDP Foreign Affairs Critic, Alexa McDonough, MP; NDP Defense Critic, Dawn Black, MP; Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, The Hon. Stephan Dion; Liberal Foreign Affairs Critic, Ujjal Dosanjh; Liberal Defense Critic, Denis Coderre; Leader, Green Party, Elizabeth May; Afghanistan's Ambassador to Canada, Omar Samad