

# Malalai Joya: My country is using Islamic law to erode the rights of women

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After six years in control, this government has proved itself to be as bad as the Taliban – in fact, it is little more than a photocopy of the Taliban. The situation in Afghanistan is getting progressively worse – and not just for women, but for all Afghans.

Our country is being run by a mafia, and while it is in power there is no hope for freedom for the people of Afghanistan. How can anyone, man or woman, enjoy basic freedoms when living under the shadow of warlords? The government was not democratically elected, and it is now trying to use the country's Islamic law as a tool with which to limit women's rights.

In 2007 more women killed themselves in Afghanistan than ever before – that shows that the situation hasn't got any better. The murder of women in Afghanistan is like the killing of birds, because this government is anti-women. Women are vulnerable – recently a 22-year-old woman was raped in front of her children by 15 local commanders of a fundamentalist party, closely connected to the government. The commanders then urinated in the face of the children. These things happen frequently.

I utterly condemn this undemocratic act of those in power against Sayed Pervez Kambaksh. This situation has exposed the corruption of the government, which is inherently undemocratic, which does not believe in women's rights and which is willing to go to extreme lengths to prevent freedom of speech. Mr Kambaksh has not broken any law, but he is a "real" journalist, one who is not afraid to write articles exposing the corruption of the fundamentalists in power. This has been a bloody year for journalists in Afghanistan, and they are now in a lot of danger.

If Mr Kambaksh is killed for his "crime", then tomorrow it will be someone else. The situation that the press is faced with gives you a clear indication of the level of freedom and democracy in the country as a whole.

I would like to appeal to the UK and democratic countries around the world to speak up in defence of Mr Kambaksh, who must be released as soon as possible. He is an innocent man whose life is in real danger. I therefore thoroughly endorse *The Independent's* campaign for justice for Mr Kambaksh.

The country's parliament is like a zoo, it is corrupt and chaotic. It is run by warlords who should be tried for their crimes. As the people running our country were not democratically elected, it should be no surprise that they are imposing these undemocratic sentences.

There are countless examples of human rights abuses – from rapes to imprisonments and killings. I want to raise international awareness of these issues but I have been forced to stay in Kabul after my passport was seized by the government.

The economic situation is also terrible – official figures put unemployment at around 60 per cent but in reality it is much closer to 90 per cent. Hundreds died in the winter from hypothermia, and women were so poor that they tried to sell their babies because they could not feed them.

*Malalai Joya is an Afghan MP suspended from the country's parliament for criticising her fellow delegates. She spoke to Rachel Shields*