

“I will never accept that
ignorance and intolerance
should hide my face
ever again.”

— Mehria Azizi, filmmaker

AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED

AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED: Guide for Facilitators

Potential audiences for AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED screenings and events

- Public policy makers, including elected officials and government agencies that monitor the Afghan peace and democracy process
- Peace, human rights and women’s rights organizations
- Faith-based congregations, particularly within the Muslim community
- Students in women’s studies, public policy, international affairs, political sciences, Middle East and Asian studies departments
- International non-governmental relief agencies and institutions such as the UN, World Bank and IMF
- Associations for women journalists, Afghan refugees, immigrants and cultural organizations

Notes to facilitator

Created as the culmination of a unique training program for Afghan women journalists, AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED explores the effects of the repressive Taliban regime and the subsequent U.S. military campaign on the lives of Afghan women and their families.

As facilitator, be prepared for a complex conversation about the intersection of gender, culture and human rights. Strong group facilitation skills are helpful in engaging participants in a discussion after watching the film to guide their analyses of the film’s content and messages, and to enable the audience to clarify and process what it has learned.

Suggestions for opening the event

Welcome participants to the viewing event and express your gratitude for their attendance.

- If it is a small group, ask participants to introduce themselves and to tell the group their reason for attending the event. If it is a large group, have participants turn to a neighbor they do not know and introduce themselves.
- Briefly introduce the film and the agenda for the viewing event.
- Ask participants to notice their reaction to the film as they watch and to be prepared to share one thing that came up for them while watching.

Suggested questions for discussion with the audience

1. How did watching this film affect you emotionally? Is there an image from the film that stands out for you that you would like to share? *Note: If you are facilitating discussion in a large group, ask each person to share one thing that struck them with another audience member they do not know.*
2. What lessons did the film reveal about contrasts and similarities between the Taliban and post-Taliban eras in Afghanistan? What do you think are the long-term challenges women face in their struggle for human rights in Afghanistan?
3. In the film we see a contrast between the young, urban women who are carving out new roles for themselves in Afghan society and their rural counterparts, who are maintaining traditional social norms and cultural codes. What are the challenges to human rights organizing in this context?



4. Discrepancies between local cultures and universal notions of human rights sometimes seem to exist. Is it appropriate for people who do not share those cultures to advocate abolition of certain cultural practices? Can you think of an example where a U.S. cultural norm conflicts with universal human rights standards?
5. The media often portrays the myth that women who wear veils or burqas, by choice or not, are inert and passive, and in need of rescue from outside agents. What message did you garner from AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED about the veil's current role in society and women's relationship to it? Where do you think this myth comes from?
6. In Herat, the filmmakers met a young woman who lost her husband and family members during the American bombing campaign. What was your reaction to this scene? Is it possible for a foreign power to engage in simultaneous projects of waging war on a country and "liberating" its women, as they claimed to do in Afghanistan? Should the U.S. pay reparations to civilian families whose loved ones who were killed or whose property was destroyed in the war? Should the U.S. be held accountable, under international law, for killing civilians in the bombing campaign?
7. What is the U.S. government's appropriate role in this period of Afghan history and what is the U.S.'s responsibility to women in Afghanistan?
8. Advocates of women's rights, human rights and antimilitarism have confronted new and complex challenges since September 11. What are some of these challenges?
9. Afghanistan is a country that has been scarred by the impacts of perpetual war, poverty and human rights challenges. How will Afghanistan's history impact efforts to heal and rebuild a new political foundation?
10. AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED highlights the power of film as a tool for empowerment and social change. How can this film be used to support the human rights work of U.S. organizations?

Suggested questions for Afghan policy, culture, or history panelists:

1. What is U.S. government policy in regards to women in Afghanistan? What have been U.S. successes and failures in this regard?
2. After days of travel in the mountains, the filmmakers met a woman from Badakshan who told them of her fight to improve health conditions in her community. While the Afghan health sector has benefited from international donor assistance, as little as 12 percent of women report access to health care today. Afghanistan's maternal and child mortality rate remain among the highest in the world and one in five children die before their fifth birthday. What are the barriers to women's health care and how are these hurdles impacting the Afghan peace and democracy process? What can U.S. people and organizations do to improve women's access to health care?
3. The film focuses heavily on stories of Taliban oppression of women. Long before September 11, global women's organizations had been addressing the situation of the Taliban government. Some critique the U.S. and other governments for not taking more proactive steps, before the U.S. bombing campaign, to address the human rights situation in Afghanistan. What does the U.S. need to do to better promote and respect human rights and international law around the world today?
4. How can we forge transnational alliances that link the work of U.S. women's groups and women's groups in various parts of the world in a way that are mutually beneficial? What are some of the tensions among transnational groups around defining and enforcing universal human rights? Are there different approaches to assessing universal rights for women?

5. What progress has been made on Afghan women's political participation? Women won language in the new Afghan constitution that includes equal rights for women and a goal of 25 percent participation in the elected governing body (a requirement that does not exist in the U.S. Constitution). How can North American activists and scholars learn from the Afghan political process underway and support women's evolving participation in the democratic processes in Afghanistan?
6. The new Afghan constitution reversed the Taliban ban on girls in school and school is now compulsory for girls through grade nine. While urban schools are seeing the highest enrollment rate by girls ever, Afghanistan still faces challenges in girls' education. Thirty-four percent of primary students in the country are girls, yet in some rural areas, only one percent of girls attend school. Education provides a stepping stone to all areas of public life for women, so why is participation still so low in certain areas?

Resource Materials: Courtesy of Women's Edge Coalition

FACT SHEET: Facts on Afghan Women's Political Participation

http://www.womensedge.org/pages/referencematerials/reference_material.jsp?id=291

FACT SHEET: Facts on Afghan Women's Health

http://www.womensedge.org/pages/referencematerials/reference_material.jsp?id=290

FACT SHEET: Facts on Afghan Girls and Education

http://www.womensedge.org/pages/referencematerials/reference_material.jsp?id=289

Evaluation Form

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

We appreciate hearing about your community and classroom activities. In order to better understand how individuals and communities are using our films and outreach resources, please take time to submit an event evaluation form online at www.itvs.org/outreach/events/evaluation.htm.

Acknowledgements and Credits

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To purchase a tape, contact Women Make Movies at www.wmm.com.

An Independent Lens premiere, November 16, 2004 at 10:00 P.M. on PBS.
Check local listings at www.itvs.org.

To download FREE outreach and educational materials for this film, go to www.itvs.org/outreach/afghanistanunveiled For more information about ITVS's Community Connections Project, go to www.itvs.org/outreach or contact outreach@itvs.org.

Discussion Guide Credits

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