

Malalai Joya

Afghan woman, activist, and author

Malalai Joya (born April 25, 1978) is an activist, writer, and a former politician from Afghanistan. She served as a Parliamentarian in the National Assembly of Afghanistan from 2005 until early 2007, after being dismissed for publicly denouncing the presence of what she considered to be warlords and war criminals in the Afghan Parliament. Because of her courageous action, she has received death threats and there have been four assassination attempts on her life.



April 8, 2011: Malalai Joya's presentation at University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). (Photo by Thomas Jacob)

Her suspension in May 2007 has generated protest internationally and appeals for her reinstatement have been signed by high profile writers, intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky, and politicians including Members of Parliament from Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain. She was called "the bravest woman in Afghanistan" by the BBC. In 2010, Time magazine placed Malalai Joya on their annual list of the 100 most influential people in the world. Foreign Policy Magazine listed Malalai Joya in its annual list of the Top 100 Global Thinkers. On March 8, 2011, The Guardian listed her among "Top 100 women: activists and campaigners".

"I started working as an activist when I was very young, grade 8. I worked in the refugee camps. [during war with Soviet Union when family were refugees in Iran].. in every house that I went everyone had different stories of suffering. ..no movie maker, no writer is able to write about these tragedies that we have suffered. Not only in Afghanistan, but also Palestine, Iraq. The children of Afghanistan are like the children of Palestine. They fight against enemies with only stones. These kinds of children are my heroes and my heroines." -Malalai Joya, November 5, 2007

After the Soviet withdrawal, Joya returned to Afghanistan in 1998 during the Taliban's reign and continued her social activism. She is an outspoken critic of the Karzai administration and its western supporters, particularly the United States.

She has traveled the world speaking out against the warlords, the Taliban, the corrupt U.S.-backed Karzai administration, and the ongoing U.S./NATO occupation. She calls for withdrawal of all troops from Afghanistan.

In a recent interview, published in Common Dreams, (<https://www.commondreams.org/further/2013/01/10-0>) Joya said

"as long as we have foreign military bases in our country, we have no independence. And when we have no independence, we have nothing, and all talk of democracy, human rights

and women's rights is a joke. Afghanistan is the second most corrupt country in the world. And Afghanistan is the worst place to be a woman, according to a recent international study. They are looting our rich mineral deposit mines worth three trillion dollars, and they are raking in money from the drug trade. [...]

"Whether the foreign troops stay or leave, war is going on. The presence of foreign troops only makes our struggle for justice harder, because the occupiers empower reactionary warlords -- and now also empower Taliban, along with killers from the past Russian puppet regime. At least if the foreign troops leave, one of the biggest evils will be gone. Then we will face internal enemies. If the occupation leaves, at least the Taliban will not get more powerful. If the troops honestly leave, the backbone of these terrorists will break. They will become like orphans, because their godfather is the U.S., which was also the godfather of Al Qaida.[...]

"The situation of women in Afghanistan was used as an excuse for the U.S. and NATO to occupy our country. But it is clear they were not fighting on behalf of women, because they have put into power the reactionary warlords who are sworn enemies of women. [...]

"The Afghan people are fed up. Fundamentalism and occupation are no longer accepted among the common people because of the brutalities and savagery they have experienced over the past decade. There is more openness, now, to progressive and democratic organizations and ideas. With the passage of time, I hope for the emergence of a powerful justice-loving alternative in Afghanistan. The U.S. is the main obstacle towards the development of such democratic forces."

Joya has written a memoir with Canadian writer Derrick O'Keefe. The US and Canadian version of the book was published in October 2009 by Scribner under the title of *A Woman Among Warlords: The Extraordinary Story of an Afghan Who Dared to Raise Her Voice*.