

# AFGHAN PORTRAITS OF GRIEF

The Civilian/Innocent Victims of  
U.S. Bombing in Afghanistan



*When the U.S. bombed the caves of Tora Bora in search of Osama bin Laden in December 2001, nearby villages were struck as well. Zeriba Taj, age 3, was hit in the head by fragments of a U.S. bomb. Zeriba's father and three sisters were killed.*

GLOBAL  EXCHANGE

  
peaceful  
tomorrows

# FORWARD

We all knew that the US would bomb Afghanistan after September 11th—we just didn't know when. Most of us supported some sort of military action in response to the terrorist attacks. Many of us thought it would be good for Afghanistan for the Taliban to fall. I was sitting in an Afghan restaurant on October 7th, at the first gathering of the New York City area Afghan-American community since 9/11. In the room next to us we could hear CNN reporting breaking news that the bombing of Afghanistan had begun.

At this gathering of 200 Afghan-Americans, while person after person denounced the attacks on the U.S., speakers reminded us that none of the hijackers were in fact Afghan. Elders in the community cried in front of us, reflecting on the misery that Afghanistan had endured for as long as I had been alive. They denounced the Taliban and Al Qaeda for holding the country hostage by refusing to cooperate with the United States.

As the bombs fell, all I could think about was the family I had met just two months ago on my trip to Kandahar. It had been my first trip since I had left at the age of five. I traveled there to rediscover my family and learn about my roots. There I experienced the love and hospitality of people that had been strangers until now, and with whom I never expected to fall in love.

When the U.S. bombing campaign began I decided to return to Kandahar to be with my family and to film a documentary that would bear witness to the events. I found my family living as refugees near Kandahar in Pakistan, displaced when their village was destroyed by a U.S. bombing raid. I sat next to my cousin Nasriya with her 18 month old granddaughter on my lap, surrounded by the girls and women of the family as they recounted the bombing of their village. It was eleven thirty in the evening on October 22 in the tiny village of Chowkar-Karez. They were being bombed. Nasriya's daughter, five months' pregnant at the time, had been severed in half while standing in the doorway of their house trying to find out what was happening. Nasriya, like everyone else, ran out of their home trying to escape the falling bombs, only to be shot at by AC-130 helicopter gunships hovering 10 meters above.

The young girls proceeded to tell me how they had escaped, and showed me their bullet wounds. One girl, no older than six, quietly described how she had run out holding her older sister's hand. They didn't know which direction to run, it was dark and they were in the middle of the desert. The older sister asked to stop running and sit down. She placed her head down on her younger sister's knee. Almost immediately, she saw blood pouring out. The little girl then described picking up her older sister's heavy head off her knee and placing it on the ground. She continued to run and hid in an irrigation ditch until the next morning, only to wake to the sight of bodies and body parts strewn between the simple and closely clustered adobe-like houses of the village. It was not until the morning that she saw anyone else alive. That night, the village of 75 had lost a third of its residents. Nineteen of them were my family.

*My family were not Al Qaeda.*

*My family were not the Taliban.*

*They never supported either of them.*

*In fact, they had suffered for years because of them.*

While the Pentagon insists that even the women and girls of my family were legitimate targets, it is clear that the people in the village of Chowkar-Karez were innocent. Even though the Pentagon recognizes in the abstract that innocents could have been killed in the American war in Afghanistan, they refuse to recognize specific incidents or specific lives. Adding insult to the misery of that night is the absolute refusal to acknowledge the fact that my family died. I hope that the release of this report will inform the public about the innocent individuals who died as result of our war in Afghanistan. The people surveyed in Afghanistan by Global Exchange were just like Nasriya and my family.

Given all that has happened until now, the only opportunity left for us to help these particular families is the establishment of an Afghan Victims Fund. Many families have been left homeless and penniless because the breadwinner has been killed, leaving little or no hope that the rest of the family can survive on their own. The Afghans I talked to were happy that the Taliban were gone, and even thanked the United States. What they did not understand was why their friends and allies, the Americans, would not help them. The Afghan Victims Fund would show the Afghans and the international community that this war was not against the Afghan people, and that America cares about the lives of others.

Masuda Sultan  
Program Coordinator, Women for Afghan Women  
Board member, YAWA (Young Afghan World Alliance)  
September, 2002

## INTRODUCTION

During the last year, the victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks and their families have received a flood of compassion and support from people around the world. This is as it should be. The September 11 tragedy was a horror of almost unimaginable proportions. In its wake, countless profiles, television and radio specials, photo collections, and film documentaries have depicted the individuality and humanity of the victims and the survivors. The New York Times' yearlong "Portraits of Grief" series was particularly touching in capturing the personalities of the victims.

By portraying the faces and voices of the thousands of 9/11 casualties, these projects communicated the preciousness of each individual and helped to underscore the utter horror of the attacks. Through these stories, the human costs of the atrocity were made real, and the world responded with empathy. The unique tragedy of each loss was honored.

In striking contrast, the Afghan civilians who died during the U.S.-led military campaign have received scant attention in the U.S. media, and virtually no acknowledgment by the Bush Administration. When mentioned at all, which is rare, these men, women and children are often referred to collectively as "collateral damage"—a dehumanizing term that denies their humanity. The repeated use of that term amounts to a terrible refusal to acknowledge Afghans as fellow human beings.

In an effort to humanize the suffering of innocent Afghan civilians, Global Exchange, an international human rights organization, organized a ground-breaking delegation to Afghanistan in January 2002. Members of the delegation were September 11th victims' family members who wanted to establish personal connections with Afghan citizens who had lost loved ones in the U.S. bombing campaign. The delegates spent ten days meeting with Afghans impacted by the U.S. attack, helping document their stories in order to share them with the world. The delegates were extremely affected by the devastation the bombing had inflicted on a people who already experienced 23 years of war. They were disturbed by the lack of information about Afghan victims reported in the U.S. media and by the lack of assistance offered to Afghan victims by U.S. government aid agencies. The delegation pledged to publicize the plight of the Afghan victims and to investigate the cases of innocent Afghans killed, injured or harmed by U.S. attacks. This report is one attempt to fulfill that pledge.

On October 7, 2001 the United States military initiated aerial bombing of Afghanistan as part of its campaign to unseat the Taliban regime. From October through mid December, U.S. and Allied aircraft flew around-the-clock missions over

Afghanistan, striking hundreds of locations. While targeted at Taliban military sites, the air strikes sometimes went astray and hit non-military, civilian settlements and structures. On many occasions, the bombs hit their targets, but still had devastating impacts on the civilian population.

For the most part, the U.S. media portrayed the bombing campaign as bloodless, a flawless use of sophisticated weaponry. But Global Exchange knew from its own fact-finding and from foreign press reports that civilian casualties were, in fact, occurring. In February 2002, Global Exchange, with financial assistance provided by the 9/11 families (now formally organized as September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows) initiated a survey to determine how many civilians were killed during the U.S. bombing campaign.

The investigation was conducted to reveal the faces and stories of these largely unacknowledged Afghan victims. It

was intended to disclose the human costs of the conflict and to generate support for programs to aid those people whose families were harmed by the U.S. military campaign.

According to our survey at least 824 Afghan civilians were killed between October 7 and January 2002 by the U.S.—led bombing campaign. However, it was impossible for our survey to

be exhaustive and comprehensive. Continued bombing and inaccessibility prevented our surveyors from reaching many of the affected provinces. What we were able to document, are some of the circumstances of those 824 civilian deaths and the tragic repercussions they had on families.

Indeed, this survey was initiated as a way of showing the commonality of all human suffering. Even though an important distinction must be made between actions intended to harm civilians—such as the September 11 attacks in the U.S.—and actions, like the U.S. bombing, where civilian casualties are an unfortunate accident, the result of any death is the same. Parents, children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters and friends suffer and grieve whether they live in New York or Kabul. When we experience the death of a loved one, sorrow makes no distinction of nationality, language, race or ethnicity.

The stories in these pages are offered in an effort to honor the lives of the innocent victims and to acknowledge the suffering of those who survived them. We hope that by sharing their stories, the compassion and assistance that the world has extended to the families of the victims of September 11th will be extended to the civilian Afghan victims of the U.S. bombing campaign.



*Kristin Olsen (left) and Rev. Myrna Bethke (right) both lost siblings on Sept. 11, reach out to Arifah (center) who lost eight family members in the U.S. bombing campaign.*

## CASUALTY CHART BY PROVINCE

Number	Province	District	Village	Deaths	Injured	Stillborn	Disabled	Trauma
1	Kunduz	City Center	Zair Balah Hisar	4	0	0	1	0
		City Center	Now-abad	2	0	0	0	1
		Khan-abad	Charakari	20	3	0	2	2
		Khan-abad	Khvajabolak	25	1	0	1	1
		Khan-abad	Zair Dowara Khan-abad	5	0	0	0	0
		Khan-abad	Now-abad Choogha	17	1	0	2	2
2	Ghazni	City Center	Bahlol Village	4	11	0	10	22
		Moqhor	Center of Moqhor District	0	5	0	2	6
3	Paktia	Gardiz	Sokhan	6	5	0	2	2
		Gardiz	Niazi	54	6	0	1	10
		Gardiz	Chandarma Village	4	2	0	2	0
		Ozai	Asmani	3	6	0	3	4
		Ozai	Chakhri	4	9	0	4	4
4	Paktika	City Center	Tigay	8	6	0	1	3
		Yousef-Khail	Moz-Khail	10	12	0	2	4
5	Khost	City Center	Mayhad Chagha	36	0	0	0	0
		Nader Shah Kot	Sorki	11	2	0	5	2
6	Kabul	City Center	District 10	13	3	0	6	5
		City Center	District 11	14	4	0	1	4
		City Center	District 9	5	2	3	2	3
		City Center	District 4	2	0	0	0	3
		City Center	District 16	5	7	1	1	6
		City Center	District 5	4	6	2	4	11
		City Center	District 8	1	1	0	0	2
7	Nangarhar	Kaga	Kuram	20				
		Pachir Agham	Musa Khial	2				
		Pachir Agham	Kari Khial	3				
		Pachir Agham	Mado	41				
		Pachir Agham	Landi Khial	5				
		Pachir Agham	Murgai	1				
		Pachir Agham	Tawkal Khial	1				
		Pachir Agham	Zamar Khial	4				
Sorkh Roud	Sultan Par Mosque	8						
8	Balkh	Mazar-e-Sharif City Center		35				
		Deh-Da-Di		47				
		Shulgara		9				
		Tash-Kurghan		17				
		Shindin		4				
9	Kandahar			336				
10	Herat			26				
<b>Grand Total</b>				<b>824</b>				

## METHODOLOGY

In January 2002, Global Exchange organized a delegation to Kabul for four Americans who had lost loved ones on September 11. They went aiming to build people-to-people ties between Afghan and American survivors. While in Kabul, the delegation met with representatives from Afghan and Western non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to explore ways to help the innocent victims of the U.S. bombing campaign. The NGOs all agreed that it was necessary to conduct a survey to identify victims and assess their needs.

In March 2002, Global Exchange gathered together a five-person team to begin the survey. All of the surveyors were Afghans. They all had previous experience gathering information in Afghanistan for the United Nations or for western relief organizations.

The victims survey was carried out between March and the middle of June 2002. During this time, the surveyors traveled to 10 of Afghanistan's 32 provinces: Kabul, Ghazni, Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Balkh, Kandahar, Kunduz, Nangarhar, and Herat. The survey teams exercised extreme caution when documenting deaths and injuries, always relying on secondary source



*Jalaludin was injured when bombs fell on his house in the Pachir Agham District of Nangarhar. The bombs killed twelve of his family members, including his wife and daughter.*



*Eight people died in the house of Haji Akhtar Gul when the U.S. bombed the village of Niazi in the Paktia Province.*

confirmations to verify casualties. The surveyors had all been opposed to Taliban rule and so were very careful to distinguish between Talibs and civilians who were killed. Traveling in pairs or larger groups, the investigators interviewed individuals, families, government officials, local political leaders, religious leaders, international aid workers, hospital personnel, and respected community leaders. The surveyors' central goal was to identify and locate areas hit by U.S. bombs and to distinguish destruction there from damage that had occurred during Afghanistan's previous conflicts.

Whenever possible, the surveyors completed a claim form when talking with survivors. The form records the names and ages of family members killed, injuries sustained by survivors, and/or property destroyed. The form also includes a family's location to enable NGO aid agencies and the U.S. government to locate and assist affected families. The forms were all submitted to the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, the UN World Food Program, Islamic Relief and CARE.

In most cases, photographs were taken of the bombing site and/or the survivors.

## EXCEPTIONS

In two provinces there were significant deviations from the surveyors' standard methodology. In Herat, the survey team was not able to speak directly with families, but obtained a list of deaths and injuries from the local demining NGO, Organization Mine Action and Reconstruction, or OMAR.

In Kandahar—the province that, according to our survey, sustained the most civilian casualties during the U.S. military campaign—the surveyors determined that there was not sufficient time during their three-week stay to process a lengthy claims form for every individual. Instead, surveyors focused their energy on collecting the names of the deceased. While the surveyors did not employ the standard procedures followed in other provinces, they were still able to locate families in Kandahar who had suffered losses and would benefit greatly from humanitarian aid.

## CHALLENGES

As noted above, the surveyors carried out investigations in only ten of Afghanistan's provinces. Their ability to travel to all provinces or areas bombed by the U.S. was greatly limited by terrain and security risks. In some areas, especially where the Taliban were still operating, the surveyors did not feel it was safe to enter all the villages. For example, the survey teams were not able to travel at all to the province of Uruzgan, a remote and dangerous terrain that experienced some of the heaviest bombing. In Nangarhar province the survey team encountered intense hostility. When surveyor Ahmad Hashimi entered the Kuram village in Nangarhar, several villagers attacked the car he was traveling in and punctured its tires. They expressed great anger at both the Afghan and the American governments for not providing them with assistance to rebuild.

Since the survey's main objective was to conduct a needs assessment and profile survivors rather than simply to collect statistics, some deaths and casualties—while known to the surveyors and to members of the communities in which they worked—were not documented by the survey team. This was because either no family member survived or could be located to describe and verify the incident. Thus, our enumeration of deaths and casualties in any given village or province errs on the conservative side.

Time and distance provided other obstacles. Transportation and communications infrastructure in Afghanistan is virtually non-existent. Surveyors would typically spend as much as a day driving or hiking to an affected area. The most remote villages were never reached or investigated.

Migration proved another significant complication in the teams' efforts to document incidents. This was especially true in Nangarhar and Kandahar, where large numbers of people fled to Pakistan after the U.S. bombing campaign began. For a more comprehensive study, the teams said it would be necessary to survey a given region at least three times, at three-month intervals. This would allow enough time for villagers who had fled their villages to return. Also, the survey teams did not visit refugee camps in Pakistan to try to document refugees' stories.

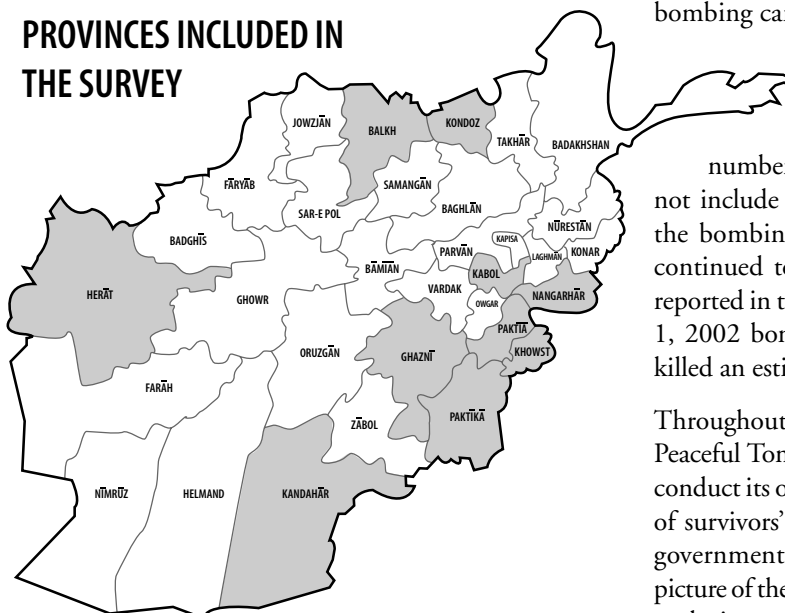
The survey teams found it virtually impossible to determine the impact of U.S. bombing on the nomadic Kuchi people. Although the team did document the reported deaths of at least 22 Kuchi individuals in the Maiwand district of Khandahar, nobody in the area knew their names. The constant mobility of the Kuchi people leaves them outside of the social network of most villages. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to verify the full and real impact of the bombing on these people.

Finally, the survey teams also experienced some difficulties in obtaining the names and an accurate count of women who were killed. Especially in the more conservative provinces and villages, it was not uncommon for male neighbors not to know exactly how many women lived next door or what their names were. Traditional customs also made it more difficult to speak with women survivors and to photograph them.

### Concluding Note on Methodology: A Conservative Survey

The cumulative impact of all these challenges resulted in Global Exchange's survey of civilian casualties being a conservative accounting of the victims of the U.S. bombing campaign.

### PROVINCES INCLUDED IN THE SURVEY



The 824 deaths confirmed by our surveyors represent only a portion of all civilian casualties. It is certain that the total number of civilian deaths is higher. The survey does not include bombing incidents after January 2002. Yet the bombing campaign continued after this date and continued to cause civilian casualties that were widely reported in the international press. An example is the July 1, 2002 bombing of a wedding party in Uruzgan that killed an estimated 50 people and wounded 100 others.

Throughout our survey process, Global Exchange and Peaceful Tomorrows have urged the U.S. government to conduct its own investigation of casualties and assessment of survivors' needs. We continue to believe such a U.S. government survey is essential for having a complete picture of the U.S. bombing's impact and getting assistance to the innocent, civilian victims of the military campaign.

## VICTIM PROFILES

**Victims:** *Freshta Shagad, 9-year-old girl and Ali Shagad, 1-year-old boy, Kabul.*

**Survivors:** *Roilya, 29-year-old mother; Sahib Dad, father; Sahgia, 3-year-old girl; Hasain, 11-year-old boy; Ali, infant.*



Freshta in Persian means “a great person.” Only nine years old, Freshta Shagad lived up to her name. Friends and family say she was never sad. Freshta was always laughing and smiling, especially when her father could afford to bring her fruit from the bazaar.

Described by all who knew her as cheerful and talkative, Freshta had a loving personality. It was only natural that she was very popular with all the children in Kabul’s Bemaroo suburb. Freshta spent her days imagining she was an adult with her girlfriends and her nights dreaming about having the opportunity to one day go to school. When playing with her friends, Freshta liked to pretend she was a schoolteacher.

Although she was often very busy taking care of the younger children on her block, Freshta’s parents never had to ask her for help around the house. Freshta’s 11-year-old brother, Husain, thought of her as a second mom to him and his sister. He remembers dozens of times when their baby brother, Ali, would cry while his mother was trying to wash the family’s clothes and how Freshta would eagerly help out. He recounts: “Freshta would jump up, take him outside and cheer him up. It was nice for her to give my mom the break that she needed. Freshta always did things like that. She would say, ‘Mom, sit down, don’t do the work. I will do it.’ Afterwards she would dance around the house. She never stopped smiling.”

Freshta was crushed along with her baby brother Ali when an errant U.S. bomb struck their home while the two children were sleeping with their mother, Roilya. With a prominent 3-inch scar across her face, Roilya apologizes as she tries to describe her children. “It hurts too much, my head, but I wish I could tell you beautiful stories about my children. But I just can’t. It hurts.”

The children’s father, Mr. Sahib Dad proudly recalls, “Ali was a beautiful boy.” Whenever Mr. Dad took Ali outside, people would say, “The boy is too beautiful, you can’t take him to the bazaar;” and “Keep that precious child inside the house.” Then Mr. Dad, turning self-conscious, says, “I don’t have more to tell you about Ali. He was only 12 months, so we did not know him that well. But I can say that he only cried sometimes. And he could say ‘baba’ and ‘mama,’ which made the family very happy.”

In this family, Roilya does most of talking. But her husband listens attentively, worried that recounting the events of her children’s death may cause her too much mental distress. “She gets headaches,” he explains. Though her loss is great, Roilya explains that she must try to make herself feel better because she has other children to care for. She adds that she has to help ease her children’s own pain about the loss of their siblings. And she is also busy with a new baby. In April 2002 Roilya gave birth to a baby boy who she named Ali. Filled with emotion, she exclaims, “He would really love the brother that he was named after.”



Photo: Linda Panetta

## VICTIM PROFILES

**Victim:** *Siddiqa Gulahmad, 18-year-old girl, Kabul. No photo available.*

Even though she was only 18 years old, Siddiqa Gulahmad had already distinguished herself as one of the best carpet weavers in Kabul. Her stepmother boasts that she made some of “the most beautiful carpets many have ever viewed.” But like many spirited young women, Siddiqa yearned for a different future. What she dreamed of more than anything was getting married to an honorable man.

Together with her older sister Rubia, Siddiqa would talk about the type of boy she wanted to marry. Rubia dreamed of going on drives in a nice car and having an attractive man by her side. But Siddiqa debated her sister, arguing, “Money and those things are not important if he is a nice boy.”

Lots of men actually courted Siddiqa and asked her family for permission to marry her. But her father, Mr. Gulahmad, hadn’t yet found the man he thought was good enough for his daughter.

Siddiqa never had a chance to marry. Her young life was cut short on an early morning last October when a stray bomb directly hit her house, killing eight members of the Gulahmad family.

Siddiqa’s death, was a grievous emotional blow, but it has also had a devastating economic impact on the family. Siddiqa began selling her carpets when she was 15, and her work provided a significant portion of the family’s budget.

Siddiqa’s younger sisters, who were away from home that October day, miss Siddiqa terribly. They remember her as a playful team leader. They lament, “If Siddiqa was alive we could play.” Siddiqa’s stepmother, Arifah, says the children say such things every single day. They turn on the tape recorder but no longer dance because Siddiqa is no longer there to take the lead.

**Survivor:** *Amina, 8-year-old girl, village of Khanabad in Kunduz Province.*

It was the morning of November 17, the second day of Ramadan, when bombs struck the small village of Khanabad. Amina was in the kitchen preparing tea and food for the children who were not fasting. Suddenly, the entire building came crashing down around her. She found herself squatting under a few intact beams. The entire room was dark and filled with rubble. Following a light shining through the wreckage, Amina managed to crawl out of what was left of the kitchen only to find her house, which had once stood a few yards away, in complete ruins.

Amina ran quickly to her uncle’s house for help. Her uncle and the neighbors who came with him could hardly grasp the horror of the scene. There were dismembered body parts strewn around the yard. Amina’s father, Jama Khan, was the only one found alive under the rubble, pinned down by two beams. The



neighbors dug him out. Digging deeper, they found his wife, Bibi Gul, his seven other children, his mother, and his brother and wife and their five children: in all, sixteen family members gone in an instant. Now Amina and Mr. Khan have only each other. It is questionable who takes care of whom. Amina says her father is very ill, emotionally and physically, often unable to sleep at night. Amina also complains of headaches and stomachaches and thinks of her mother all the time.

Their house was hit by U.S. warplanes in a battle to chase Taliban forces toward their last stronghold in Kunduz. But Mr. Khan reports the Taliban had fled two days before. When asked how she feels about the Americans, Amina’s face clouds up and she falls silent. Her father, a humble cobbler, says “They bombed our houses and killed our children. The Americans should help us.”

## VICTIM PROFILES

**Survivor:** *Esanullah, 9-year-old boy, Qargha District outside of Kabul.*



*Photo: Linda Panetta*

Ten days before Ramadan, 9-year-old Esanullah eagerly went running off to school, excited that particular day because he was going to collect his test scores. Esanullah is very bright and tests three grades above his age level.

On the way to school, one of his cousins stopped for a moment to pick up what appeared to be a shiny package of biscuits on the ground. When he picked up the package, it began to smoke. In a panic, his cousin threw the package into the air. The small but deadly package, a bomblet from an American cluster bomb, exploded, severely injuring Esanullah. His left leg was only hanging by a piece of badly mangled flesh. When he was taken to the hospital, the doctors told the boy's father that Esanullah's leg and arms were so badly injured that he might lose three of his limbs.

But although he was told that his son could die without the surgery, Esanullah's father would not consent to having his son's limbs amputated. Doctors from a German NGO who were present in the Kabul hospital heard the father's cries of anguish. They were able to arrange for Esanullah to go to Germany for medical care.

Esanullah spent three months in Germany, where the doctors were able to save his arms and legs. While they were able to piece his body back together, there remain wounds, both physical and emotional, that have yet to heal. Esanullah has difficulty walking and is in constant pain. His injuries require regular dressing and medication that the family cannot afford. Esanullah's father could not keep his job as a result of Esanullah's accident. He used to be a moneylender and changer, but he spent all his money on his son's medical expenses and has had to borrow money himself. Esanullah doesn't play anymore; he is afraid to go outside, afraid to touch anything. He pleads, "I just want my life back, the life I had before all of this happened. When will America give me my life back?"

**Survivor:** *Mullah Hamid, 45-year-old father, Naowabad village, Choughey Khanabad District, Kunduz Province.*  
*No photo available.*

Mullah Hamid is a 45-year-old street worker who had recently migrated to Naowabad from Badakhshan with his family. Mr. Hamid says that his family was extremely poor and had built a makeshift home out of mud and clay on the slope of a mountain.

On the 3rd day of Ramadan, (November 18, 2001) his humble home became a grave. American bombers began striking the side of the mountain. The entire side of the hill collapsed onto his house. Several neighbors tried desperately to remove the family from under the avalanche of rubble, but they were unable to reach them.

Mr. Hamid's entire family died that night: his wife, Kimya (30); his three daughters, Shogoofa (13), Feroza (3), and Parweenah (1); and his son, Abdul (12). Six of Hamid's neighbors were also injured. The Mullah of the village gave the order that they build a wall around the area and place a flag in the center to serve as a grave since the bodies could not be found.

The only part of the house still standing is a little room where Mr. Hamid currently lives with his donkey, his only remaining possession. Mr. Hamid survives on the charity of his neighbors. He is still haunted by the memory of his children's screams the night of the attack. He says he could hear their screams, but he could not get to them to save them.



*Kuduz resident, Mohammad Ismael, lost his house and seven members of his family, including his wife and 2-year-old daughter when the U.S. bombed the village of Khanabad.*

## VICTIM PROFILES

**Survivor:** *Janat, Qalaye Niazi, Paktia Province. No photo available.*

On December 28, 2001, all Janat's relatives, from little children to grandparents, were participating in the joyous celebration of his brother's wedding party. Janat says with pride, "I can tell you that my brother's wedding was beautiful!" The festivities continued until the early hours of the next morning, when suddenly joy turned to terror.

Three American bombers began attacking Janat's village. People ran in all directions, to the east and to the west. The airplanes seemed to follow their every step. As Janat's family scrambled about looking for their loved ones, the planes fired on them, killing them in their tracks. It is still not clear just how many people died that night. Estimates range from 52, according to the UN, to 107, according to hospital staff in nearby Gardez.

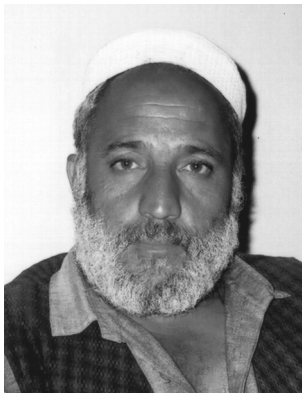
Janat survived because he had left to run an errand in Khost, to buy clothes for the bride, and was not in the

village when it was bombed. He returned to a scene of unimaginable carnage.

Janat says that every corner of the area was filled with insects and flies, with blood and pieces of flesh hanging all around. He says, "I still don't know how many members of my family died on that day." Janat searched among the dead for more than one week, but he was simply unable to identify most of the bodies in the burial. They were too destroyed. Janat hopes that some of his family and relatives simply fled and escaped. He can name 54 who are missing.

With a tremor in his voice, Janat says, "You would not believe that this was a village if I took you there. You would not think that it ever was a village, because there is nothing and nobody left. They are all martyred. You can't tell that there was once a beautiful groom and bride here. You would think that such a day never existed."

**Survivor:** *Mah Hashim, village of Mozkhkhal, Paktika Province.*



Mr. Hashim was filled with worry and anxiety last December. His little daughter was suffering from a terrible sickness, so he left his village to seek treatment, travelling to the center of the province. He stayed with relatives while his daughter was in the hospital for two days. The third day, he received

frightening news that the Americans had bombed his village. He immediately left for home.

On the way to his village, Mr. Hashim saw evidence of the attacks. He remembers seeing a car that had been completely burned. Only later did he discover that it was his car. When Mr. Hashim arrived home, villagers began offering him their condolences. His house had been completely destroyed and everything inside was lost.

Mr. Hashim inquired whether anybody had been killed. The people reported that everything was all right, that he had only suffered financial losses.

But then Mr. Hashim's five-year old began shouting. His voice rose above those of the villagers, telling his father that his other son, Gama Khan, was dead. Mr. Hashim recalls the shock: "I was out of sorts. I shouted and yelled and cried, falling down from the pain of the loss." His neighbors prepared Gama Khan's grave and Mr. Hashim buried his son.

Mr. Hashim says that the stress his family feels stemming from sadness and grief is compounded by the economic hardship of their many losses. They relied heavily on their son's income to support the family. He drove the family car as a taxi. The bombs not only took his life, but also destroyed the car, three rooms, and 24 cows and sheep. Mr. Hashim cannot conceal his anguish. He begs to know why his family was targeted. "I have a question. My family, we are good people. We did not have any sin. What was our sin, I ask the Lord. Why did this happen?"

## VICTIM PROFILES

**Survivor:** *Haji Lal Gul, Paktia Province. No photo available.*

On December 20, 2001 Haji Lal Gul and his 11-year old-son were driving to the city of Gardez in the company of the council of tribal elders from the province of Khost. They were destined for Kabul where they planned to congratulate Afghanistan's new President, Hamid Karzai, and attend his inauguration. But most of the members of the convoy never made it to Kabul.

The convoy came under heavy attack by the U.S. The Pentagon says it had received reports that Al Qaeda leadership was traveling in the vehicles, a claim that is heavily disputed by Afghan locals and the foreign press. Mr. Gul says the caravan was filled with unarmed villagers and tribal elders who supported the new Karzai administration.

Mr. Gul describes the wreckage as awful. Most of the vehicles were burned to a crisp. Those who ran from the scene, fleeing to nearby villages, were followed by

gunships. Mr. Gul lost his son in the attack and he himself was badly injured in the foot. He says that since that day, "I have very many worries and make myself sick."

Mr. Gul speaks longingly about his son. "My son was only 11 years old, but in his 11 years he was very wise. He was always asking me, 'Why don't we live in Kabul.' He felt that the village was no place for him to acquire the education he needed to eventually become a pilot of a large plane. He hoped to study English in Kabul. This way, he could read the textbooks that would give him the skill that would take him to faraway lands. He just could not wait to grow up so he could move to Kabul.

Unfortunately, Haji Lal Gul's son will never see the city he so admired. The irony of the boy, who dreamed of flying a plane, meeting his death at the hands of a pilot haunts his father.

**Survivor:** *Anefa, 25, Kabul.*

At 25 years-old, Anefa has been widowed for three years. Her husband, a soldier with the Northern Alliance, was killed fighting the Taliban. After his death, she had no means to support herself and her son. She moved in with her mother, her brother, sister-in-law and five nieces and nephews, becoming dependent on her brother for income.

Early one morning in October 2001, tragedy again struck this young widow. An errant U.S. bomb missed its target and hit Anefa's home, instantly killing her brother, his wife, all of their children, and a neighbor. The house and all the family's belongings were reduced to rubble. Only Anefa and her son survived.

Anefa was injured in the bombing, losing sight in one eye. Her eye is cloudy and causes her pain. A slash across her face is developing into a scar. When we met Anefa in January, she had moved in to a small room in her father-in-law's home nearby. A strict man and a Northern Alliance commander, he did not allow the men in our party to meet his daughter-in-law.

We learned later that he is physically abusive to Anefa, but she feels she has no choice but to stay. She has no income, and nowhere else to turn now since her closest family members are all dead. As Anefa struggled with

words, she pulled her six-year-old son tightly to her. He is neatly dressed and quiet but the frightened look on his face betrays the tragic experience of his young life, and that of his mother.



## VICTIM PROFILES

**Survivor:** *Azizolah, 20, Kabul.*

Azizolah was a healthy 20-year-old who worked with his father as a house painter. Living with his parents and sister, he was trying to save money so he could get married and start a family of his own. But that dream was dashed one morning last fall.

Azizolah woke up at about 3:30 in the morning and walked across the courtyard to use the bathroom. As he was returning to his bedroom, he heard a loud noise and blinding light and felt a sudden, sharp jab in his leg.

A U.S. bomb, aimed at the Kabul airport had just hit his family's home, one kilometer away. The debris penetrated his leg, leaving him in excruciating pain.

Lacking decent medical care, the leg became infected and had to be amputated above the knee. Azizolah's father, Aiotola, and his wife visited many aid agencies, searching for a wheelchair or a prosthetic leg for their son, but could find only a wooden leg. Azizolah tried it for awhile, but says that it is too painful to use. For now, he gets around on crutches but complains that his leg still gives him much pain.



Azizolah certainly counts himself as lucky—if he hadn't gotten up in the middle of the night he is sure he would have been killed. Several of his neighbors died in the bombing. Yet Azizolah feels his future and his family's future has been compromised.

Since his injury, Azizolah has been unable to work in the family painting business. This loss of income combined with the significant damage to their home presents a financial burden to the family. His family is borrowing money from friends and relatives to rebuild their home, and is now deep in debt. Aiotola explains that Azizolah's 23-year-old sister, who was so looking forward to returning to

school after the overthrow of the Taliban, must now forego her dream and search for work. And Azizolah's dream for his own family has been waylaid, with no means of providing for himself.

"What will I do now," Azizola asks, stabbing at the dirt with his crutch. "How can I work? How can I marry?"

**Survivor:** *Abdul Rashid, 9-year-old boy and Dad Muhammad, 45, Kunduz.*



Abdul Rashid, a 9-year-old boy from a small village near Kunduz, only remembers that there was an airplane in the sky when he went out to feed his family's animals one day last fall. Suddenly his eyes were wounded and his sight was gone. A piece of shrapnel from a U.S. explosive had blinded him. Abdul's 45-year-old father, Dad Muhammad, was also injured in the incident.

Months later, Mr. Muhammad, a poor farmer, continues to struggle with both his son's injury and his own. Mr. Muhammad's legs were damaged and he can no longer work in the fields the way he used to. He hobbles from place to place on crutches. His son Rashid can only see little bits of bright light from cars and electric lights. Doctors told his father that there may be hope to treat him abroad, but there is little that can be done for Abdul in Afghanistan.

*Abdul Rashid and Dad Muhammad attend a gathering for victims of the US bombing organized by Global Exchange.*

## VICTIM PROFILES

**Survivor:** *Mohammad, 40-year-old father, Qhazi Kariz, Daman District, Kandahar Province. No photo available.*

Mr. Mohammad's life changed forever on the 12th day of Ramadan (November 28) last year. At 1:30 a.m., his family was awakened by thunderous noise. Bombs were raining down on their house. He remembers that when the bombs hit, his children woke up and ran to their mother. Their six-year-old daughter, Palwasha, threw herself in her mother's lap. At that very instant, their home went up in flames.

All of Mr. Mohammad's children perished that night: four sons, Noor Ali (16), Salamu (12), Jaanaan (10), Mohammad Tahir (8), and their only daughter, Palwasha. His wife was taken to the hospital with serious injuries. She spent two months in the hospital, unaware of the fate

of her children. Mohammad could not bear to break the news to his wife. He told her that he had sent the children to Kabul province for their safety while she recovered.

When Mr. Mohammad's wife was finally discharged from the hospital, her neighbors came to offer their condolences for the loss of her children. That is when she learned the truth. Mr. Mohammad explains that from that moment on, his wife withdrew from all social life. He says that she has stopped eating and speaking. She never leaves the house and remains completely traumatized. It was very difficult for Mohammad to share this story with the survey team. He did not want to recall the details.

## KANDAHAR PROVINCE

	District	Village	Deaths				Injured			
			Man	Woman	Child	Total	Man	Woman	Child	Total
1	City Center	District 6	26	1	9	36	3	2	3	8
2	Daman	Shorandam, Sekandara Keleh, Qhazi Karez, Near Airport	45	5	10	60	5	6	6	17
3	Arghandab	Sheik Jal, Chinzai	16	5	4	25	5	2	7	14
4	Maiwand	Chumo Keleh, Tib Keleh, Baz Khan Keleh, Yekababa Keleh, Mullah Khan Keleh, Chokozai Village, Chomo Village	35	25	29	89	4	5	1	10
5	Pokhwayee	Spina Keleh, Tarkan Keleh, Qasim Keleh, Noorzoi Keleh, Toofan Keleh, Qasim Ziad	29	5	4	38	9	2	7	18
6	Dand	Kobi, Sera Keleh, Spina Ziarat, Serakala	17	5	15	37	12	2	8	22
7	Shah Wali Kot	Chookar Kariz,	29	9	3	41	16	8	3	27
8	Shahre-Safa	Near Shahre-Safa, Qhudrat Village	10	0	0	10	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>			<b>336</b>				<b>116</b>			

## VICTIM PROFILES

**Survivor:** *Arifah, 35 widow of Gul Ahmad, Bemaroo Village, Kabul Province*

Arifah's husband, Gul Ahmad, was a rug weaver and the entire family helped out with his business. Gul Ahmad had 7 children with Arifah and 5 children with his first wife, and they lived together in Bemaroo village of Kabul. Last October, when the U.S. bombing campaign began, Arifah's children were so frightened by the sounds of the bombs hitting the nearby Taliban military posts, that Arifah pleaded with her husband to take her children away to another village for safety. They left early the next morning and after delivering them safely, Gul Ahmad and Arifah's oldest son returned home in the afternoon to tend to business.

Only one day later, a neighbor alerted Arifah that the U.S. had bombarded the area of her home. He informed her that no one had remained alive.

Frantic, Arifah rushed home to see for herself. When she got to Bemaroo, she went directly to the local Mosque where the dead bodies had been gathered for identification and burial. Upon seeing the bodies, she immediately passed out. When she came to, she recognized the body of her eldest son and passed out again. Her husband, her son, her husband's first wife and children were all dead—a total of eight family members.

Left homeless with five children to care for, Arifah had no remaining relatives in the area to whom she could turn. Desperate for help, she wrote an English language letter with the help of her neighbor to the U.S. government explaining her situation and asking for assistance. She went to the U.S. Embassy to deliver the letter, but was shooed away at the gate. The guard scolded her, calling her a beggar, and refused to take her letter.

**Survivor:** *Sabera, 9-year-old girl, Kabul. No photo available.*

At the young age of 9, Sabera knows all too well the ravages of war. Shortly after she was born, warring mujaheddin factions killed her father. He was caught in the crossfire between fighting warlords that destroyed much of Kabul in the early 90s. But on October 20, 2002 it was the Americans who took the life of her mother, her grandmother and three siblings. She was out with her older brother when a bomb from American aircraft ripped through their home.

Sabera's only remaining family is her 26-year-old brother Abdul and an 11-year-old brother. Abdul is now doing the best he can to care for her, but he says she cries a lot and misses her mother tremendously. He reports that

Arifah's neighbors agreed to give her a room in their home, but after a few weeks the owner of the home returned from Pakistan and kicked them out.

Another neighbor agreed to give her a room in their home where the family is currently living in extreme poverty. They have no furniture and little food. Arifah cannot leave the home to work because there is nobody to take care of her children. Arifah does some sewing on a newly donated sewing machine to generate what little income she can for her family. At the time of this report, Arifah had just received word that she would have to vacate the home again, as the owners will be returning from Iran. Arifah is distraught by the hardship and insecurity of living hand-to-mouth day after day. She wonders where and how she can find and afford a permanent home for her and her children.

But Arifah has a solution. She wants to go to the U.S. to tell her story. She is certain that the people and government would help her, and other victims of the U.S. bombing like her if they could just hear and understand her story. But as of this writing, her visa had just been denied by the U.S. Embassy. They cited "insufficient evidence" that she would return to Afghanistan, despite having at least four children under age 14 to care for remaining in Afghanistan.



Photo: Linda Panetta

about the only thing that brings Sabera any solace is being enrolled in school in Kabul's Polikumbre district. What she wants more than anything is to be a teacher or a doctor. Abdul hopes to be able to keep her in school. He says that getting her to school presents some hardship since it takes him away from other household tasks and from finding work so he can properly feed the family. Sabera expresses love for her brothers and recognizes the sacrifice they are making, but she yearns to continue attending school. Abdul recognizes the excitement Sabera has for learning but points out the precarious nature of their existence, homeless and dependent upon the kindness of neighbors and friends since the day the bombs fell on their house.

## CONCLUSION

In conducting our survey, Global Exchange encountered many devastated families with a variety of needs. As a small advocacy organization not equipped to conduct relief work, Global Exchange was often frustrated by the human needs that were going unmet. Global Exchange did, however, do all it could to assist the families by connecting them with existing aid organizations. Compensation forms were submitted to CARE, the World Food Program, or to Islamic Relief in order to secure food aid and special assistance for widows and orphans.

Global Exchange also used contributions collected by Peaceful Tomorrows and the generous donations of compassionate people from all across the United States to provide vital services and aid where possible. It was our experience that even a small contribution could make a significant improvement in the quality of life of those suffering from the devastating effects of the bombing.

### For example

- Global Exchange volunteers secured a sewing machine for Arifah, an excellent seamstress, so that she could start to generate an income to support her family.
- We submitted Sabera's case to the charity Islamic Relief and helped arrange a stipend to ease her brother's financial burdens in order to keep Sabera in school.
- The head of Global Exchange's survey team was successful in getting the German NGO, Areoham, to accept Abdul Rashid for treatment in Germany. We worked with the Afghan government to get Abdul a visa and he is on his way to getting the treatment he needs to restore his eyesight.
- Global Exchange organized a series of workshops for victims' families to help parents cope with the trauma their children are experiencing. More than 60 families attended these workshops and private sessions with mental health professionals in Kabul in order to begin the long healing process that their children will need.

While we are pleased to have been able to offer this assistance, we are disappointed and frustrated that the task should have ever fallen to us. The final responsibility for assisting Afghan civilian victims lies with the U.S. government, whose military campaign resulted in their suffering.

Since January 2002, Global Exchange and Peaceful



*Victims of the U.S. Bombing shared their stories with a U.S. Delegation of religious leaders in June 2002.*

Tomorrows have been pressuring the U.S. government to establish an Afghan Victims Fund to assist the hundreds of families identified through our survey and others still to be identified. These people played no role in the September 11 attacks but they are now suffering greatly because of our war on terrorism. The U.S.

government has a moral responsibility to assist them. There are also many other compelling reasons why the U.S. government should create a fund to help the families of those who died.

### The Afghan People are in Desperate Need

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries on earth and its people are suffering badly. As our survey reveals, many of the families of those who died during U.S. air strikes are living in dire straits. Families whose homes were destroyed sleep in makeshift tents. Orphans are crowded in with overburdened relatives. Hospitals are overcrowded, understaffed and have inadequate supplies. Some people have lost their entire family.

### This Gesture of Goodwill Will Reduce Resentment Toward the U.S.

Assisting the Afghan people who were mistakenly hurt by U.S. bombs is not just morally right—it is also strategically wise. While many Afghans are happy to have the Taliban removed from power, civilians who suffered from the U.S. air strikes are outraged about what happened to their families.

We can let the Afghans—and the rest of the world—know that we care by acknowledging our mistakes and taking responsibility for them. This will diffuse resentment of the U.S. and bolster our security. The foundations of a more secure world will be built through compassion.

### Precedents Exist for Assisting Accidental Civilian Casualties

Precedents exist for assisting victims of U.S. military actions. The U.S. provided money to the victims of the Belgrade Chinese Embassy bombing in 1999. President Reagan ordered help for the victims of the downing of Iran Air Flight 655 in 1988. And recently military officials gave \$1,000 to each of 17 Afghan families whose loved ones were fighting on the side of the U.S. and were killed during a “friendly fire” incident.

If the U.S. government has in the past assisted people who were accidentally killed by the U.S. military, we should do so again.

## CONCLUSION

### **Humanitarian Assistance Will Cost Relatively Little**

Afghan relief organizations suggest an average grant of \$10,000 per family can rebuild homes, secure medical care, and compensate for the loss of breadwinners. Assuming 2,000 families seek compensation, this would amount to \$20 million, far less than the \$30 million we spent during each day of the bombing campaign.

### **Popular Support Exists for a Fund**

In the last six months, Global Exchange and Peaceful Tomorrows have made important strides in establishing a U.S. government Afghan Victims Fund. We have gained the support of dozens of members of the U.S. Congress as well as the support of many of the country's largest and most influential newspapers. Significantly, support for the idea stretches across the ideological spectrum. As Dana Rohrabacher, a conservative Republican representative, said during a trip to Kabul in April 2002, "Decent and honest people admit mistakes were made and make reparation." Sixty-nine percent of Americans agree and think the U.S. government should provide humanitarian assistance to Afghan civilians hurt during the war, according to a Global Exchange-commissioned poll conducted by Zogby International in June.

But the Bush Administration opposes this idea. Press reports suggest that the issue has ignited bureaucratic infighting between the State Department, which is

receptive to the idea, and the Pentagon, which fears setting a precedent that could apply to future conflicts. The White House refused a request from Peaceful Tomorrows to meet with families of 9/11 victims and discuss their experiences in Afghanistan and the compelling need for an Afghan Victims Fund. Repeated calls to the Defense Department requesting a meeting were also unsuccessful.

This resistance from the Administration is short sighted. American security depends in large measure on how we are perceived by people in other parts of the world, especially the Muslim world. By failing to provide assistance to Afghan civilians who were mistakenly hurt, the U.S. government is feeding the perception that we have little regard for the lives of those in other nations. This fuels global resentment toward us and makes Americans less safe.

It is critical that the survivors of the U.S. bombing campaign receive aid. For many Afghans, assistance means the difference between life and death, hope and despair. For Americans, assistance would be a powerful gesture of goodwill. By helping the Afghan civilian victims of the recent military campaign, we can extend sorely needed assistance to people living in desperate conditions, improve our image internationally, and move closer toward true reconciliation and lasting security.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY MAKERS

1. The U.S. government should investigate how many civilians were killed and injured in Afghanistan, the circumstances that led to these casualties, and how similar casualties can be avoided in the future.
2. The government should create an Afghan Victims Fund to assist civilians harmed by the U.S.-led bombing campaign. A \$20 million fund would likely be sufficient to meet the needs of survivors.
3. The U.S. government should implement a ban on the manufacture, sale, and use of cluster bombs. Because of their wide impact area, these bombs are often indiscriminate in who they harm. Also, the "bomblets" frequently fail to explode on initial impact, and lead to the death or injury of civilians. Cluster munitions are particularly attractive to children because of their unusual shapes and bright colors. U.S. Human Rights Watch and religious organizations have called for the ban of this lethal weapon.
4. As a gesture of a goodwill, the U.S. should provide increased funds to the United Nations Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (MAPA) the body that coordinates the clearance of mines and unexploded ordnances in Afghanistan.
5. The U.S. should work with its allies to expand the multinational peace keeping force in Afghanistan. Currently international peacekeepers are stationed only in Kabul. The rest of the country remains essentially lawless and under the control of warlords. To help guarantee the security of all Afghans, the U.S. should help expand the protection offered by international peacekeepers.
6. The U.S. should be commended for taking the lead in providing emergency aid to Afghanistan. Yet U.S. funding for long-term reconstruction efforts has been limited. The Bush Administration has asked Congress for \$250 million for reconstruction in Afghanistan. Congress should appropriate at least four times that amount, or \$1 billion. The U.S. should initiate a version of the Marshall Plan for Afghanistan that would consist of road building, irrigation construction, and investment in education and health services. Such an effort would truly demonstrate a U.S. commitment to the citizens of a reconstructed Afghanistan and represent an important step toward assuring international peace and security.

---

**Acknowledgments** This survey would not have been possible without the tireless effort of Marla Ruzicka, Ahmad Hashimi, Baz Mohammad and the survey team in Kabul, Afghanistan. Special thanks to Peaceful Tomorrows and Masuda Sultan for supporting this survey and advancing the case for an Afghan Victims Fund.