

**Question for written answer E-001838/2014
to the Commission (Vice-President / High Representative)**

Rule 117

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Subject: VP/HR - Women's rights in Afghanistan

On 4 February 2014 a troubling new addition to the Afghanistan legal code known as Article 26, which bans relatives of an accused person from testifying against them, was passed by the Afghan Parliament. This change in the legal code makes it much more difficult for Afghan women to testify against those who attack them and prevents any witnesses within the family from stepping forward.

This goes beyond the standard law of not allowing spouses to testify against each other and makes all forms of familial testimony impossible. It is particularly troubling given that Afghanistan has a long and painful history of domestic abuse, forced marriages and honour killings.

According to Women for Women International, 'over 87 % of Afghan women have experienced physical, psychological or sexual violence or forced marriage at some point in their life'. Furthermore, according to Amnesty International, 'most violence against women and girls [including domestic violence, forced or child marriage] occurs within the family and as family members are often the ones who witness abuses, the provision would make the investigation and prosecution of violence against women extremely challenging'.

We applaud Baroness Ashton's statement asking for Article 26 to be amended. As foreign troops begin to leave Afghanistan it is important that we make it clear that we will continue to be advocates for the rights of Afghan women.

1. What political action is being considered with regard to ensuring that the Afghan Government releases the report they promised in July 2013 on the enforcement of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women?
2. This is yet another example of a series of setbacks for women's rights in Afghanistan. As foreign troops leave Afghanistan, what plans does the European External Action Service have to continue to safeguard women's access to education and to protect them against violent crimes?