



## Medica Afghanistan Human Rights Day

Press Release  
Zahra Khawari

**“Nothing can bring back my Zahra Jan. But we can save the lives of other girls.”**

That was the call of the father of Zahra Khawari, the ambitious veterinary student from Daikundi, who was found dead in November 2017. The family reported that she died after taking poison as a result of actions by her dissertation supervisor at Kabul University.

Medica Afghanistan in cooperation with the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association (AIBA) is representing the family in a suit to fulfill Mr. Khawari’s calls for change in higher education. Presently, we are investigating the matter in cooperation with other lawyers and the government.

*“Every student, especially if she is a woman, is at risk of various kinds of harassment at higher education. This is a serious issue. This is a constitutional issue. The government is legally responsible to ensure that nothing impedes a person’s right of education. This involves keeping teachers and universities in check. We call upon our government to take their responsibilities seriously.”*

Humaira Rasooli, Executive Director, Medica Afghanistan

The right of education and the right of women’s equal access to education is a constitutional right. This means that the government is legally obliged to (1) respect, (2) protect and (3) fulfill this right, failing which, there should be an answer and there should be accountability. Officials need to step up and account for why this happened. The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), in particular, should adequately respond to questions by Zahra’s family, civil society and the scores of teachers and students who are protesting against the government’s systemic and persistent failures to protect students.

What went wrong in Zahra’s case? Were there measures at Kabul University to prevent, punish and redress students’ grievances? And were these measures adequate?

*“What’s most important to a student? A safe environment. That is only possible if there are laws and policies which are strictly monitored by MOHE. Laws bring order in a society. They bind teachers, staff and students. They stop the possibility that a person can do a cruel act and get away with it. My role in this case now is work with all related organs to take action and bring reform in the universities so that everyone can get their education safely.”*

Yalda Ahmadi, Lead Counsel in Zahra Khawari’s case, Medica Afghanistan

Zahra’s death could have been prevented. We, Afghanistan, lost a bright mind, a potential for the future, a future of Afghanistan where the young can thrive and lead.

As we collectively mourn this loss, we urge all to take action. We urge our government to:

- Ensure a fair and transparent inquiry into the incident;
- Meet the students of Kabul University and *really* listen to what they need. Involve them in the reform process. They will know what needs to be done;
- Make a public apology;
- Prosecute and/or discipline *all* responsible individuals;
- Compensate Zahra’s family.

No student should have to suffer the same fate again.

After Zahra Khawari’s case became public, students have also started to share other problems they face, including sexual harassment. We call upon the government to expedite their review of the Anti-Harassment Law.

For more information, the story has been reported [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

- <http://dev.pajhwok.com/en/2017/11/21/hundreds-students-rally-after-classmate-commits-suicide>
- <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=2017112816042169>
- <http://www.etilaatroz.com/53901>

Our review of the MOHE’s harassment policy can be found [here](#).

- <http://www.medicaafghanistan.org/medica/index.php/en/comments-on-ministry-of-higher-education-anti-sexual-harassment-policy/>

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