

Afghan MP urges NATO to stop backing Karzai

BY WENDY SIMPSON

Afghan MP Malalai Joya is known as an outspoken critic of the government she was elected to serve. She has become a symbol of the country's struggle for democracy... and for that cause, she can't sit silently.

On a speaking tour of B.C., Malalai was in Abbotsford last Friday afternoon and spoke to more than 150 people, who packed the lecture theatre at the University College of the Fraser Valley. The message she delivered was very clear and straightforward — stop supporting the North Alliance government.

"As long as they are in power," she said, "There is no hope for the country or the people."

According to Malalai, President Hamid Karzai made a promise during his election campaign that he would not compromise or work with the country's fundamentalist warlords — and then he appointed them to his cabinet. The warlords, according to Malalai, are more dangerous than the Taliban. And indirectly, it's these fundamentalist warlords the U.S. and other NATO-led missions are supporting.

"The Afghan people are sandwiched between the Taliban, who are terrorists, and the Northern Alliance warlords, who are also terrorists, wearing suits and talking about democracy," she says, "And they are making a mockery of democracy." As are Afghan allies she adds, including Canada with its military role in backing the government.



Malalai Joya (left) with Satwinder Bains, director of UCFV's Indo-Canadian studies centre.

pendent position from the U.S. and NATO and take on a genuine reconstruction role in building schools, medical clinics and hospitals. Canada can do this, she says, by lending moral support to the "freedom-loving democratic parties" in Afghanistan and by supporting the non-government organizations in finishing key projects aimed at rebuilding the nation.

It will be these democratic parties and

According to biographical information provided by Malalai, she was born in Afghanistan but had to flee the country with her family at the age of four to the refugee camps of Iran and then Pakistan. She completed her education in Pakistan and began teaching literacy courses to other women before she returned to Afghanistan in 1998 when Soviet Union rule over the country ended. Then, under the Taliban reign, in which education for women was banned, she taught women in secret home-based classes, and established a medical clinic and an orphanage in the province of Farah.

In September of 2005 Malalai was elected to the 249-seat Wolesi Jirga, which is the National Assembly of Afghanistan, but it was two years earlier that she got international attention and began her rise to fame. As an elected delegate to the Constitutional Loya, where the new constitution for the country was to be adopted, she created an uproar when she spoke out against the warlords who, she says, dominated the grand assembly.

Accusing them of being felons and stating they were guilty of violence and mass slaughter, she further accused them of being responsible for turning the country into the nucleus of national and international war.

Since then, there have been four assassination attempts on her life and she was subsequently banned from parliament in May of this year. Malalai now lives under constant threat and travels in Afghanistan under a

Afghan MP 'cannot sit silent' while her people suffer

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burqa with armed guards.

Regardless, as she emphatically stated at the event, she remains committed to continuing the fight outside Afghan's parliament.

To a comment from a man in the lecture theatre on how brave and courageous she is, her reply was not about bravery but rather her responsibility to her people, and the fight against those who use the name of Islam against them.

"Speaking the truth is always risky," she said, "But, I cannot sit silent."

As Malalai continued to speak on behalf of her people she said, "Today we need security and liberation. But in the name of security, the foreign troops have deprived us of our liberation."

And to those who support the North Alliance government, she said they are going against the people of Afghanistan and supporting a government that is making a mockery of democracy.

In her ongoing fight for genuine democracy in Afghanistan, Malalai heads the Organization for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities (OPAWC). It's a non-governmental group to which