

## Interview with Malalai Joya

Written by The Capitoline Magazine  
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By A.Hart, [The Capitoline Magazine](#) , June 23, 2016



A few weeks ago, I contacted Malalai Joya's Defense Committee (MJDC), to ask if I could interview Ms. Joya via email, to which they graciously agreed.

**Seldom will one ever encounter a woman like Malalai Joya; her bravery and courage has inspired millions and will remain an inspiration well after the war lords are driven out of her native home of Afghanistan. For those of you who are not familiar with Ms. Joya, the following is a brief introduction. Raised in several refugee camps in Iran and Pakistan, she grew up only knowing the turmoil of her country. At a young age she began to combat against some of the oppression that women faced and still face in parts of the Middle East and around the world. When Joya heard about secret schools established to educate young women, she was quick to offer her support by becoming a teacher. She later established a free medical clinic and orphanage in different parts of the province of Farah, where she grew up. In 2003, Joya, at the young age of 25, did what very few men and women alike had the courage to do. She publicly “denounced her country’s powerful NATO-backed warlords.” Later in 2005 she became the youngest person in Afghanistan’s new Parliament to be elected. She was later suspended from this position in 2007 because she openly criticized the corruption that was going on in the government pertaining to the “warlords and drug barons.” Due to her outspokenness she is accompanied twenty-four/seven by armed guards and is forced to sleep in safe houses. In her book, Joya gives you an inside look into what life is like having grown up in a refugee camp, living through the Taliban regime and surviving the oppression that women face, all the while encouraging all women to do their part in the fight for equality. Since Joya’s book “A Woman Among the Warlords” was published in 2009, she has survived several assassination attempts.**

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“A chilling, vital memoir that reveals hidden truths about Afghanistan and directly addresses the misguided policies of the United States,” –Kirkus Reviews

“It would take a specifically hardened male chauvinist not to be both touched and amused by Joya’s examples of the repression of women in Afghanistan.” –The Associated Press

### INTERVIEW WITH MALALAI JOYA

**1. Could you tell me a little bit about your early life and what you would consider was your “call to action,” (or what was it that made you decide to either go into politics and stand up to the warlords)**

I was born on April 25th, 1978, in the Farah Province of Afghanistan. During Russian invasion of Afghanistan, in 1982, when I was 4 years old, my family fled Afghanistan to live as refugee in neighboring Iran. I got involved in humanitarian work while in eighth grade. When I started working amongst our people, especially women, it was very enjoyable for me. I didn’t know much about politics. I learned from people who were uneducated, non-political but belonged to a political situation. I worked with different committees in the refugee camps. I remember that in every house that I went everyone had different stories of suffering. I remember one family we met. Their baby was just skin and bones. They could not afford to take the baby to a doctor, so they had to just wait for their baby to die. I believe that no moviemaker, no writer is able to write about these tragedies that we have suffered. And the suffering of my people was the driving force behind my activism.

**2. You have sacrificed so much to get to where you are. Do you have any regrets or things that you wish you could have done differently?**

I love to live and want to move forward beside my people who fought for freedom, democracy and justice, till end of my life and in any available situation, so we can see an independent, modern and progressive Afghanistan. I never regret the way which I have chosen and I find it the only way of struggle in the present situation. And through your platform I want to assure my oppressed and suffering people that I will stand by my commitment. For me quitting this path is

equivalent to political death.

### **3. Do you believe that there has been any real, tangible progress in Afghanistan concerning the advancement of women's rights since the publication of your book, "A Woman Among Warlords," in 2009?**

The situation of Afghanistan is more disastrous today than it was from 2001- 2009. The US/NATO imposed a government comprising the most inhuman and mafia bands who are sworn enemies of our people. Under the US puppet regime in Afghanistan, our unfortunate people suffer from poverty, lack of security, violation of women rights and human rights, corruption, drug-lords and many more problems. Tens of thousands of Afghan are fed up with the situation and seek dangerous routes to get asylum in Western countries. You may have heard about the shocking killing of 27-year-old Farkhunda in the heart of Kabul who was accused of burning the Quran. In another heartwrenching event 19-year-old Rukhshana was brutally stoned to death by the Taliban. She was accused of eloping. Girls like Shirin Gul are publicly lashed by armed groups, mostly for running away from home. 16-year-old Shakeela was raped and later killed by a powerful warlord who was also a provincial council member. These examples are just the tip of the iceberg that I shared with you. Forced-marriage, child-brides, acid attacks, domestic violence, attack on schoolgirls etc. are sky-rocketing. Afghanistan is still a hell for its women, but the Western media portray few showpiece women in the Afghan parliament as proof of progress, while most of such women themselves are part of the problem.

### **4. In what seems to be a world with stagnant progress, what makes you persevere and continue to speak out against violence and oppression?**

The first demand of men and women of my country is justice. Right now, people of Afghanistan are squashed between four enemies, warlords, Taliban, occupation forces and ISIS terrorists. All of them are the products of the US and are used as tools for the advancement of strategic, economic and geopolitical interests of the US government in the region. Our history and the history of the many other countries prove that no nation can donate liberation to another nation. Liberation should be achieved in a country by the people themselves, and our people can fight the medieval Taliban and their Jihadi brethren-in-creed if they are not supported and armed by their foreign masters who shamelessly try to portray themselves as friends. We should fight against imperialism and fundamentalism who are the biggest threat to the world, and endanger the very existence of humanity by waging wars all over the world. Fortunately we are witnessing glorious uprising of people against war-mongers in different parts of the world. Brave Kurdish women and men, even people in Europe and inside USA are rising every day to say no to war,

occupation and injustice. The big powers and terrorists are facing a conscious world which is a biggest power that cannot be defeated. This gives me hope and strength to fight for the prosperity of my people and accept risks.

### **5. Has fear for your and your family's safety in Afghanistan and your travel in general increased since the release of your book in 2009?**

My life has been at risk since my speech in 2003. The publication of my book and its translation in many languages of course posed extra security risks for me. Still I am receiving death threats and my life is in danger as I have to live underground and have to use burqa in public to be safe. For this reason, I cannot live with my family and even with my child. It will be dangerous for my family too and unfortunately, they cannot live in my own province where everyone knows them. They also have to be very careful.

### **6. Do you think that in the near future that there will be a true democratic revolution in the Afghani Government? If not, do you think we will see such a revolution in our lifetime, and what do you think needs to happen for this to occur?**

Unfortunately no, we can't expect democratic revolution from government which is imposed by White house and lead by criminal warlords. Struggle against fundamentalism is the most important priority in my view for the women's movement. Only in a society based on secular values, women can find a chance towards emancipation. So beside women's rights and democracy, secularism should be slogan of any serious pro-women group in Afghanistan. Situation of Afghanistan is directly linked with international affairs. Our country has been turned into a burning point in Asia. Afghanistan as a heart of Asia is important for superpowers and each of them tries to have a footing there. So if a major change occurs in the balance of power in the world level, it will have direct impact on Afghanistan. When our fundamentalists are deprived of foreign support and backing, then Afghan people and its progressive forces will have an upper hand to raise up to install a democratic government. Unfortunately I don't think any such turn will take place in the near future, but I am hopeful to see a just and democratic Afghanistan in my lifetime.

### **7. If you could give young women who are being oppressed and want to stand up for themselves advice, especially those throughout the Middle East, what would it be? Also, who were your role models that gave you the courage to stand up for yourself?**

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I try my best to give them hope, strength and courage as much as I can. Always telling them that we must try to increase our political knowledge that telling them about women rights and role of women in the society. Try to let them know their own identity. I believe women rights is not a bunch of beautiful flowers that someone gifts us, we should struggle to achieve our rights with our own might. In almost all Islamic countries, fundamentalism is the prime obstacle for women's rights and justice. Women of these countries should become united against fundamentalism which is a fatal virus. Women can't progress unless this misogynist epidemic is defeated. Despite their anti-West slogans, the fundamentalists are foot soldiers of big powers so the struggle against fundamentalism is fruitless without struggle against imperialism as their guardians and backer.

Preface written and interview conducted by A. Hart, posted by W. Huston in her absence.

Quotes from "A Woman Among Warlords"

Photo Credit: Time Magazine