

## Afghan women's leader Joya brings anti-war message to Vancouver

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Joya wrote her memoir with Vancouver writer and anti-war activist Derrick O'Keefe

By David Beers, [TheTyee.ca](http://TheTyee.ca), November 13, 2009

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Malalai Joya, the youngest woman ever elected to Afghanistan's parliament, is in Vancouver this weekend to speak and launch a book tour for her new memoir, *A Woman Among Warlords*.

The 31-year-old Joya has been called "the bravest woman in Afghanistan" by the BBC, having survived five assassination attempts, according to a press release announcing her visit. She grew up in refugee camps and worked as an underground activist during the Taliban regime. Today she tells Canadians: "Ending the war in 2011 is too late, this occupation of Afghanistan must end now."

"On behalf of the Afghan people I offer my condolences to those Canadian families who have lost loved ones in my country," Joya is quoted in the press release. "But I believe these troops are themselves the victims of the wrong policies of Canada, US and NATO -- these countries must stop supporting the warlords and end this occupation."

In an [interview last month](#) with *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Joya claimed "Afghan lives have been getting worse since 2001. The current situation of Afghanistan is a disaster and is getting worse." She explained how she could be opposed to the Taliban and also want Western military forces to leave her country.

"Fundamentalist terrorist bands of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban are much more powerful today than eight years ago, and they are a big danger for Afghanistan."

"The cultivation and trafficking of narcotics and the rule of the drug mafia is among the biggest challenges Afghans face today. In the past eight years the production of opium was increased by over 4,400% and now Afghanistan is the opium capital of the world. Many of the top drug dealers are part of the Karzai government and they enjoy immunity."

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Joya told her interviewer that "severe poverty" and "appalling corruption" characterize her land. But wouldn't a return to power for the Taliban make life even worse, especially for girls and women?

"Women's conditions in some cities have slightly improved since the Taliban regime. But if we compare it with the era before the rule of the fundamentalists in Afghanistan, it has not changed much. Afghan women had more rights in the 1960s to 1980s than today. Rapes, abductions, murders, violence, forced marriages, and violence are increasing at an alarming rate never seen before in our history. Women commit self-immolation to escape their miseries, and the rate of self-immolations is climbing in many of the provinces. Afghanistan still faces a women's rights catastrophe.

"The root cause of this ongoing catastrophe in Afghanistan is that the government is controlled by fundamentalists of both brands (jihadis and Taliban) who are constantly nourished by the United States and its allies. ...People suffer from such extreme insecurity that many have stopped sending their children to school, especially girls, fearing that they might be kidnapped or raped."

Joya, who wrote her memoir with Vancouver writer and anti-war activist Derrick O'Keefe, is appearing at several events Friday, Nov. 13, including a luncheon hosted by NDP MP Libby Davies, 12 noon at Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden, 578 Carrall Street and a talk at Langara College at 2:30 p.m. On Saturday, November 14 at 7:00 pm she speaks at Saint Andrew's Wesley United Church (1022 Nelson Street at Burrard). Her visit is being organized by StopWar.ca.

*David Beers is editor of The Tyee.*