

# A LETTER FROM WARDAK

*Cecilia Bratten writes from Afghanistan, where she serves as Advisor for Police-Prosecution Coordination for the Justice Sector Support Program (JSSP), implemented in partnership between PAE-HSC, Inc. and NCSC, under the direction and funding of the U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics & Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). The JSSP program seeks to develop and strengthen the institutional and operational capacity of the Afghan criminal justice sector institutions to perform their respective roles in delivering fair and effective justice services to citizens.*



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At least once a month since my arrival in Kabul in October, the JSSP convoy of armored SUVs pulls out from our compound by the Kabul River, headed to Wardak Province to work with the Afghan criminal justice officials there.

The road trip from Kabul to Maidenshahr—capital of Wardak Province—is easy by Afghanistan standards. The trip takes an hour if there are no major traffic stoppages. Traffic jams are part of driving in Kabul and the slowest part of the trip to Wardak is through the city streets crammed with every variety of vehicle from donkey cart to taxi, from bicycle to city bus. Big heavily decorated jingo trucks take up the width of a street. The trucks are covered with flamboyant artwork on the side and back panels, brightly colored paint, flags and chains adorning every inch.

All sorts of push-vehicles clog the street before us, filled with everything—people, potatoes, bricks, and bread. The convoy has to navigate through the sea of vehicles and pedestrians. As a roving passenger and spectator, I enjoy the scenes as we pass through busy market streets. The produce market is both an artist's and a cook's dream, featuring carts piled high with fruits, vegetables and herbs. By contrast, the business materials district is filled with auto-parts stores. Perhaps most fascinating to me is the sight of children walking to school. Girls in blue skirts and white blouses have white

*chadors* on their heads, and hug their school books. Women with *burqa* and without move through the streets. All this would have been unimaginable six years ago...

On the southern edge of Kabul we pass through the livestock market spread out along a little river. The goats and sheep have one side of the road, the cattle and buffalo the other. The camels have their own little area on the side with the goats. After we cross the little river, the road opens up and the sharp mountain ranges appear more dramatic, as if etched against the sky. The road is one of the best in the country. It is the main road from Kabul to Kandahar, built by the coalition military forces.

This stretch of road between the outskirts of Kabul City and our destination, the Governor's Offices in the Wardak provincial capital of Maidenshahr, is the part of the trip that I enjoy most because the scenery is beautiful in all seasons. The colors of sky and earth vary depending on weather and the light. I have seen three seasons here—autumn, winter and spring.

During the winter, we drove in snow fall under dense grey clouds, but for most trips, we've had deep blue skies and dazzling sunshine. When the sky is bright, hard blue, the tan mountains look like cut outs.

During the autumn and spring months, the nomads, called *kuchi*, are camped out in fields along our route. Their tents are inconceivably small. I cannot imagine how they live off this hard land, in fields only recently cleared of mines. A de-mining operation is still working an area and mines are still the cause of numerous deaths and injuries throughout the country, especially among the nomads and their flocks.

The entrance to Maiden-Wardak is marked with a new metal welcoming arch. Several new gas stations have sprung up along the road as you approach Maidenshahr. There is new construction going up in the area of the Government Office complex where our meetings are held, but in general the province is poor and faces numerous development challenges—chief among these are a lack of potable water and electricity, limited telephone services, and a severe shortage of housing, medical facilities, and schools.

In Wardak, as the Police-Prosecution Coordinator for the JSSP, I have served as co-chair for the Police-Prosecution sub-committee with Wardak Chief Prosecutor Abdul Rahman. Over the past

several months the committee has worked together to identify the major problems and needs of the police and prosecutors. Committee members representing the police and the prosecutors have faithfully attended the Justice Project meetings and have displayed a commitment to improving the quality of their agencies in all areas from administration to equipment.

As a result of the Police-Prosecution sub-committee's work in identifying, prioritizing and communicating the needs of the prosecution and police, CFC-A is constructing a new building to house the Chief Prosecutor's offices along with the offices of the Ministry of Justice for the province, and is providing a fleet of eleven vehicles with contracts for fuel and maintenance. JSSP is assisting the Chief Prosecutor to plan the use of the new office space and to identify what equipment is needed. The list of shortages and difficulties is long, but with continued international aid for reconstruction and reform efforts, progress is underway.