



Hamid Karzai has been accused of trying to win votes in Afghanistan's presidential election by backing a law the UN says legalises rape within marriage and bans wives from stepping outside their homes without their husbands' permission.

The Afghan president signed the law earlier this month, despite condemnation by human rights activists and some MPs that it flouts the constitution's equal rights provisions.

The final document has not been published, but the law is believed to contain articles that rule women cannot leave the house without their husbands' permission, that they can only seek work, education or visit the doctor with their husbands' permission, and that they cannot refuse their husband sex.

A briefing document prepared by the United Nations Development Fund for Women also warns that the law grants custody of children to fathers and grandfathers only.

Senator Humaira Namati, a member of the upper house of the Afghan parliament, said the law was "worse than during the Taliban". "Anyone who spoke out was accused of being against Islam," she said.

The Afghan constitution allows for Shias, who are thought to represent about 10% of the population, to have a separate family law based on traditional Shia jurisprudence. But the constitution and various international treaties signed by Afghanistan guarantee equal rights for women.

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