Karzai pressured to scrap women's law

by UPI

THE HAGUE, Netherlands -- Afghan President Hamid Karzai is being pressured to rescind a new law the U.N. says legalizes spousal rape and severely limits women's rights, ministers said.

Scandinavian foreign ministers attending a conference on Afghanistan at The Hague, Netherlands, Tuesday challenged Afghan leaders to respond to a published report on the new law, while U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton talked privately with Karzai on the issue, The Guardian reported Wednesday.

During a news conference after her meeting, Clinton said women's rights were critical to U.S. foreign policy.

"This is an area of absolute concern for the United States," she said. "My message is very clear. Women's rights are a central part of the foreign policy of the Obama administration."

The British newspaper reported Karzai signed the controversial law in March. Although the text has not been published, U.N. officials, human rights activists and some Afghan lawmakers said it included provisions specifying a woman cannot refuse to have sex with her husband and needs her spouse's permission to seek work, education or visit a doctor.

During the conference, sought by the United States to rally international support for Afghanistan, Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb called on the Karzai government to respond to reports about the new law, a move supported by Iceland and Norway, which expressed concern about the trend in women's rights.

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