



 I think it's arrogance. At the end of the day, no US president wants to pull the troops out of Afghanistan and then be immediately on the receiving end of a video by Al Qa'eda going 'Ha ha, told you so'. The British are there because if they pull out, then the whole world is going to turn around and say to America – why has your biggest ally pulled out? I remember – who was it – John Reid or whoever was the Defence Secretary at the time they were deployed going 'Oh yes, they are just there to do security, they might never have to fire a shot.' What a fucking lying bastard.

There is nothing in Afghanistan worth having... You don't invade a country to get its goat reserves. Yeah, there's a trillion dollars worth of minerals under the soil which according to the *Financial Times* would cost over half a trillion dollars to extract and that's only when the country has become stable – once there's infrastructure there and everything else. If you want to start a mining operation, it would be easier to do in the North Pole than in Afghanistan. The Americans knew damn well that the Afghans are completely unconquerable because they funded and trained the same people to kick the Russians' arses. They threw out the British

before them, the Ottomans before them. But at the end of the day they know damn well that if they leave and the Taliban take over it will be seen as the latest Vietnam, it will be a defeat that will be more humiliating than they could ever imagine.

**Above:** Unemployed men waiting at the Kowtasangy interchange in Kabul hoping for a day's work.

The text from *Afghan Monologues* is part of the repertoire of **iceandfire** theatre's national outreach project, Actors for Human Rights. For more information [www.iceandfire.co.uk](http://www.iceandfire.co.uk)

### **"Afghanistan: 10 years on" Peace News' exhibition available for touring**

While the exhibition is about Afghanistan, it does not feature soldiers or warfare, and it does not contain any photographs unsuitable for children.

#### **Practical information:**

"Afghanistan: 10 years on" is available from 1 March 2012. Guy has asked that the exhibition venue has free entry to the public, and preferably is close to the city or town centre. The full exhibition consists of 32 photographs. We can supply a version to fit the space available. Each of the five sections begins with a large A1 (841mm x 594mm) photograph and a small A4 introductory text panel. Each section has five or six medium-sized A2 (594mm x 420mm) photographs, with its own small caption.

The local host will have to raise around £100 towards the cost of the exhibition. This covers transportation (in person, by public transport) and hanging costs, including around £30 for velcro fastenings for the photographs (which are replaced at each venue).

A copy of Guy's 27-minute film, *Fifteen Million Afghans*, about poverty in Afghanistan is also available to be screened on the opening night.

**If you are interested in hosting the exhibition contact the Peace News office on 020 7278 3344 or email your contact details to [admin@peacenews.info](mailto:admin@peacenews.info).**



**Inside: interview with Guy Smallman**

**A Peace News 75 special project**

**FREE**



# **Afghanistan: 10 years on**

## **A photographic exhibition by Guy Smallman**

On the tenth anniversary of the invasion of Afghanistan, *Peace News* is honoured to present a touring exhibition of photographs taken in Afghanistan by British photo-journalist Guy Smallman.

Guy has been to Afghanistan four times, working independently of the NATO media system. He is the only western journalist to have visited

the scene of the Granai massacre in Farah province, Afghanistan. Guy's photographs document the everyday realities faced by ordinary Afghan civilians, realities that are ignored or obscured in mainstream media coverage and in party political debates: struggles with poverty, drug abuse and unemployment, as well as the direct effect of the war.

**This exhibition is part of a series of special projects to mark *Peace News*' 75th year of publication. *Peace News* is a reader-supported nonviolent, radical, monthly newspaper.**

**For more information and to subscribe, visit [www.peacenews.info](http://www.peacenews.info) or call 020 7278 3344.**





# ➤➤ Afghan Monologues *continued*

## Heroin

In Kabul, I went to a place called the Russian Culture Palace. Basically, it's the world's biggest shooting gallery. After we got in there, these two Afghan cops approached us and said foreign media aren't allowed in here. And I just bullshitted them and said we've spoken to the Ministry of the Interior and it would be at our own risk and all this sort of thing.

Anyway, we got through this place and in every room there's just like piles of vomit and excrement and soiled underwear and people just smoking heroin, including off duty Afghan coppers. I mean it really was like I'd died and gone to hell. I noticed a lot of the guys were on crutches and my guide said 'well basically, if you've got back pain or something like that, taking heroin to alleviate pain is actually cheaper than going to see a doctor'. Afghanistan has never had a culture of heroin addiction before – ever. The main reason is there's no jobs and people go to Iran and they hope to come back with loads of money but instead they come back with a habit. It's another

country that's awash with cheap smack and that's where they start.

Anyway suddenly we are surrounded by all these teenagers who were not heroin addicts, they were clearly making a good living out of this and we were threatening their income. And they surrounded us and were like shouting and screaming and threatening us with used syringes.

Although my guide was hard as fuck, he did have a family and I was thinking if he gets stabbed and ends up getting HIV or hepatitis or something, I'm never going to be able to live with that – with the guilt. But he was brilliant – he remained very calm – he was very big as well – we were trying to move down a corridor and there were about 30 of them blocking us both ways and we came to a point where there was a big hole in the wall with the remains of a staircase going to the outside, he just looked at me and said 'look you go – I'll deal with this'. I have to say, that was the most scared I have ever been on a job, ever.



**Top.** Manhole covers are made from the remains of melted down tanks at Khan Engineering in Kabul.

**Above:** Heroin addicts experiencing withdrawal symptoms at a clinic run by the WADAN charity.



## Granai massacre

Just after the massacre happened in the village of Granai, I saw it on the news and it was just the usual thing – 'The locals say over 100 have died while the Americans say 20' and it's just like a few numbers shoved on a screen for 10 seconds and that's it. So, I went to the hospital in Herat and I met some of the victims there, in the burns unit. And there were three little sisters in the unit with their father and he was absolutely destroyed because the mother had died in the bombing.

I decided to go to Granai and see what happened for myself and I went all around Herat looking for a translator. And there would be a lot of 'yeah yeah yeah – I'm up for it – where are you going?' 'Granai, in Bala Balouk' ... 'Oh no, no way.'

Basically, the Taliban have got a policy of no foreigners under any circumstances – don't care if they're doctors ... no foreigners at all. I eventually persuaded this young lad to come along with me. And we picked a day when the Taliban were fighting a battle with the Italians – north of the village so we knew they wouldn't be there.

In simple terms, what happened on the day in question was the Afghan police had a confrontation with the Taliban outside the village and the Taliban took all their vehicles off them, blew up one and stole the others. The police then called for the Afghan National Army. They showed up, and were pinned down. So then they called the Americans – and then they got pinned down. And then as it was getting dark, the air support arrived and they strafed the Taliban's front line. And that kind of brought the battle to an end. Then these B11 bombers turned up from the Gulf – they'd come a long way. And the local people in the village had all gathered in the mosque and the mosque garden, they thought if they stayed in that

area – it's on every reference map as being a mosque - that would be a safe place to go. So the B11 bombers were circling overhead that night and they picked up a big cluster of heat signatures and dropped several bombs into the middle. Then the elders evacuated all women and children, and everyone they could find, to the far edge of the village because they didn't have a clue what was going on. And then a single, two thousand pound bomb was dropped into the middle of them. 147 people killed. 93 were children.

**147 people killed  
93 were children**

The version that appeared on the news was that these locals had died in fighting in the village. There was no fighting in the village. The NATO forces never came closer than 2km to the village. The whole thing was a fucking lie. They bombed innocent people at night who represented no threat to coalition forces whatsoever.

The good news is that Wikileaks has got a copy of all the cockpit footage and we're going to be seeing that sooner or later.

So we got to the village and went to the area around the mosque and it was just a mass of craters and snapped trees and the weird thing about it was the Afghan countryside is usually a symphony of birdsong and insect noises and it was just absolutely quiet. I mean, it was as if someone had just turned the volume down.

At this point that we were joined by some local children. And that was like being followed around by a bunch of little ghosts. They just stared blankly. Right through me. They didn't laugh, they didn't talk. It was like all their emotions had been wiped out. It was like something out of *Dawn of the Dead*. There was one little boy called Nazar. He was seven

years old and he lost his entire family. Both parents and all his brothers and sisters.

After that we went to the site where the main bombing happened. By now I'm really scared because the guys I'm with have said to me – OK if somebody spots you and calls the Taliban it will take them 25 minutes to get here. And we were already 35 minutes in. I'm thinking 'shit'. Because once we started going around these sites, most Afghans once they start talking they just don't shut up.

Then we go to this area where this two thousand pound bomb was dropped.

Human bodies actually have a very distinctive smell. But unlike when you walk close to a body and the smell becomes stronger, here it was fucking everywhere. It was all around you. And there were flies buzzing all around the rubble because there were loads of body parts in there but nothing big enough for people to recover. Fucking unnerving.

The guy taking me around was saying 'this is where we found my sister's body, this is where we found my nephew's head. My other nephew, his body was stuck in that tree and a farmer found a body in that field just the other day.'

After that they took us to the cemetery. 70 fresh graves. And finally at one end of the graveyard there was a massive grave which was 40 or 50 metres across. And in that were the remains of 50 people who had to be buried together as one because they were just in pieces – blown to bits. The Americans claimed in their report that a maximum of 25 locals died – fucking lying bastards. They have got the technology to see that graveyard from the air. Apparently the drones are over the area all the time.

It's the biggest number of deaths in a single incident in the entire war so far. I was the only journalist who went in to document it.

## The Afghanistan 10 years on exhibition is divided into five sections:

- 1 Heroin**  
Since 2001, there has been a massive increase in opium production. For the first time ever, over 60% of the opium produced in Afghanistan is processed into heroin before it leaves the country. This has had disastrous consequences for Afghan society. Particularly among unemployed men.
- 2 Rehab**  
The Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan (WADAN) run a number of rehabilitation clinics around Afghanistan. They have a remarkable success rate for treating and curing heroin addicts. Their residential programmes for men and women are found in many provinces including Helmand and Kandahar.
- 3 Granai**  
On the night of 4 May 2009, a number of NATO airstrikes were carried out on the village of Granai in Farah province. An internal report by the US military conceded that mistakes had been made resulting in the deaths of 25 civilians along with 65 insurgents. Meanwhile the International Red Cross, the Afghan government and the villagers themselves say that over 140 people were killed, and that all of them were civilians.
- 4 The Displaced**  
Afghanistan has up to one-and-a-half million people living as refugees within its borders. Many have fled the fighting between NATO and the Taliban, in the east and south of the country, while many more remain destitute due to poverty and internal disputes. More than half are children.
- 5 Unemployment**  
Unemployment is officially 40%. According to the National Workers' Union of Afghanistan it is 70%. Nine million Afghans – 36% of the population – live in absolute poverty, and a further 37% live just above the poverty line, according to the UN.



**Above:** A skills workshop run by the Organisation Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities. The charity teaches women literacy and also a trade so that they can support themselves

**Above left** Sayeed Hussain at the spot where his sister and nephew were buried after the bombing of Granai village.





# Afghan Monologues

On 4 October 2011, the tenth anniversary week of the invasion of Afghanistan, iceandfire launched the world premiere of *Afghan Monologues*. Christine Bacon wrote a documentary play that brings to the stage the real words of men and women from across Afghan society, as well as Western commentators from the front line. **Guy Smallman** is one of these voices.

“I’ve always been involved in social movements. I used to go round all those anti-globalisation demos and photograph people rioting and being beaten up by the police and that kind of thing. I saw a lad who got shot through the head in front of me at the Genoa demos. Saw a Catholic nun getting beaten up by a load of cops in riot gear – it was fucking appalling. But after a while I got sick of covering demos, to be honest. The opposition in this country – to sum it up in a sentence ... the anarchists have got all the passion and ideas, but lack the commitment and level of organisation to put them into practice. Whereas the left have got the commitment and the level of organisation but they seem to think that the best way forward is coming

up with their very own cure for insomnia because they’re so fucking boring... but ... Whether it’s some nuns singing Kumbaya on the Christian Aid contingent or whether it’s the Black Bloc burning down McDonalds, I support them all unconditionally. Because they’re all doing something, whereas most people do absolutely nothing.

“There’s no nice way of saying it – it’s like the Americans have invaded Italy and put the mafia in charge”.

Once you get into the whole photo journalism field, you really want to push the boundaries ... I wouldn’t say I was a danger junkie or anything

like that – there are certain kinds of photographers who just do wars and nothing else and to be honest, they’re scum. They’ve got this ‘I’m so fucking hard, I’ve just photographed a child dying in someone’s arms and I don’t fucking care’ and all that kind of thing. Perhaps the difference between me and other journalists who are on commission from newspapers and stuff like that is that they’ve always got to follow where the editor sends them whereas I’ve got more freedom.

I first went to Afghanistan in September 2008. I’d been looking for ways to get in there for a while. I didn’t particularly want to do the embedded thing with the military. The idea of having someone from the MOD looking at my pictures and deciding whether I can send them or not does not appeal to

me in the slightest. So, I met this guy from a charity that had this idea of replacing opium production with pomegranates. He was going out there for a series of meetings so I just said can I come with you?

I don’t pay for protection when I’m out there. It just draws attention to you. I dress like a local. Grow a beard. Well, my attempt at a beard. Actually a Taliban did say to me a while ago, you call that a beard? My mother could do better!

The first time I was only in Kabul and I went to a camp in a place called Chara-i-Qanbar. The people living there were from a place called Sangin in Helmand, which the British were in charge of until quite recently. No one’s ever controlled Sangin, no one ever will. And the people in the camp were mostly farmers and they’d fled the area because their villages were being turned into battlefields by NATO. And this camp was like a network of mud huts and open sewers and some families in the camp had been selling their youngest child so they could afford to feed the rest. So I did a story about that place.

There’s no nice way of saying it – it’s like the Americans have invaded Italy and put the mafia in charge.

“That government minister was a mass murderer and rapist in the civil war and now we have to look at him on TV like he’s done nothing wrong.”

The kind of people they have put in that parliament! I’ve been interviewing people from women’s groups and they say ‘That government minister was a mass murderer and rapist in the civil war and now we have to look at him on TV like he’s done nothing wrong.’ And all this money that’s going into the country, these people are just stashing it in bank accounts in Dubai – it doesn’t go anywhere near the people it’s meant for.

I’ve kind of concentrated on stories like unemployment – I mean that’s the big one. It’s the one thing that no one talks about. It’s actually the biggest issue in the country I would say, far more than the war. It’s the one thing that affects every province. According to the UN it’s 40% unemployment – it’s ridiculous. And this is a country that’s had billions thrown at it. Also, health care, education, the things that really matter to people there.



**Front page image:** Children look out over their refugee camp. The people living there were left destitute by poverty.

**Facing page:** A young girl begs on the streets of Kabul with her mother.

**Below:** Shop keepers watch as their unlicensed premises are demolished by Kabul municipal authorities.

