



# JAMILA MUJAHED

Words. Sarah Coleman Photography. AINA

**The voice was shaky, but unmistakable.** “Dear fellow citizens of Kabul, the Taliban have fled Kabul.” For the citizens of Afghanistan who tuned in to the first radio news broadcast after the Taliban left the capital city in November 2001, the excitement was palpable. Not only was music being played over the airwaves for the first time in five years, but Jamila Mujahed, once Afghanistan’s top female newscaster, was reading the news. Few were more surprised than Mujahed herself: she’d been sleeping when Northern Alliance troops knocked on her door just hours after the city’s capture and asked if she’d be the first voice on a resurgent Kabul Radio. She didn’t have to think for long. Rogue gunmen were roaming the streets outside, and the city was in rubble, but Mujahed grabbed her coat and slippers and left the house. She understood the enormous symbolic value her reappearance as a public figure would hold for Afghans.

For Mujahed, like other Afghani women, it had been a long wait. Under the Taliban, she had endured five years without employment, education, health care or freedom of movement. But though contained, the veteran journalist wasn’t cowed. Under her baby-blue burqah she focused on small acts of resistance, like writing articles that were smuggled out of

the country to be published. She also educated her five children, and secretly met with other journalists. Above all, she waited.

Now, Mujahed is making up for lost time. Charismatic and untiring, she has become the de facto women’s ambassador of the new Afghanistan. In February 2002, she launched *Malalai*, the country’s first monthly magazine for women, and in March 2003 —coinciding with International Women’s Day — she debuted the first radio station in Afghanistan dedicated to women. By providing information on politics, society and world news, Mujahed hopes to bring Afghani women into the 21st century, counteracting a culture that is still far too tolerant of intimidation and violence against them.

With an eye on the future of her profession, Mujahed is also involved in training 150 female journalists to report on current events and document an oral history of women’s lives in Afghanistan. In a satisfying twist, the project’s office is in a building where the Taliban used to torture and interrogate prisoners. The irony must please Mujahed who, with her passion for change and commitment to women’s rights, has shown that a tower of strength can be built on the ruins of a repressive regime. o