

A MESSAGE FROM THE WOMEN'S FORUM ON AFGHANISTAN

On 20 September 2021, a number of Afghan women leaders met with global women leaders from Afghanistan, Argentina, Greece, Ireland, Liberia, Nepal, Turkey, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, and the United States. The group included a former president, ministers, ambassadors, high-level UN officials, judges, legislators, journalists, academics, artists, and human rights advocates. Margot Wallström, former Foreign Minister of Sweden, chaired the meeting, which was convened by the Roosevelt House Human Rights Program in collaboration with the Sisterhood is Global Institute and Women for Afghan Women.

The meeting expressed global solidarity with the women of Afghanistan ([SEE VIDEO](#)) and underscored the interdependence of women's equality and socio-political stability. The repression of women and girls leads to state fragility and failure, threatening regional and global stability. Afghanistan is heading in that direction under the Taliban. They must change course.

In light of early indications that the Taliban is not prepared to respect the fundamental human rights of women, decisions relating to engaging them and unfreezing of assets must be made in a manner that centrally involves women as decision-makers. Women must be appointed to represent Afghan-related interventions at the highest levels and to deal directly with the Taliban. We welcome women's leadership of UNAMA.

The immediate priority is humanitarian assistance, including to sustain the national education and health systems. Humanitarian actors – UN agencies, IFRC, ICRC, global NGOs – must live up to their professed commitments to gender equality in all aspects of their efforts to deliver assistance to the people of Afghanistan who are in desperate need. They must include women as decision makers, negotiators, project managers and direct recipients, and work with and through Afghan women groups and leaders on the ground and outside the country.

Efforts must continue to support the evacuation from Afghans who are at risk, especially women judges and women's rights advocates. Disappointment was expressed regarding the failure of the global community, particularly the United States and other Western countries, to readily provide refuge for these women, and a call was made to prioritize and facilitate the safe relocation of Afghan women who have put their lives on the line to defend and promote women's rights. Muslim women participating in the meeting called for a global dialogue within the religious community to clarify that the ideology of the Taliban and their efforts to deny women fundamental human rights are incompatible with the tenets of Islam.

Women's rights in Afghanistan - access to education, employment, political participation, resources and freedom of movement - will be a litmus test for the Taliban and the global community. We remind the UN Security Council of its recognition that gender equality and women's empowerment is critical to international peace and security. These words must be given real meaning in Afghanistan. We call on the Security Council to hold the Taliban accountable for the rights set forth in the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to which Afghanistan is a party. While we recognize the reality of the Taliban in power, official recognition should not precede their clear demonstration of respect for women's fundamental rights under international law. A human rights monitoring mechanism should be established by the Human Rights Council.

Women are standing up for their rights in Afghanistan and they will not be stopped. We are with them.

Feride Acar

Former Chair of UN CEDAW, Former President of GREVIO (Council of Europe), Founding Chair of Gender and Women's Studies Graduate Program at the Middle East Technical University in Turkey

Shaharзад Akbar

Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission

Mary Akrami

Executive Director, Afghan Women's Network

Rina Amiri

Senior Fellow, NYU Center for Global Affairs and Center for International Cooperation

Naheed Samadi Bahram

US County Director, Women for Afghan Women

Shukria Barakzai

Women's Rights Activist and Journalist, Former Member of Afghan Parliament and Former Ambassador

Anna Diamantopoulou

President DIKTIO, Former European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, Former Minister of Education and Former Minister of Development of Greece

Wazhma Frogh

Founder of the Women & Peace Studies Organization, Local Women's Peace-builders Networks, Afghanistan

Fatima Gailani

Former President of the Afghan Red Crescent Society, Former Commissioner of Afghan Constitutional Review Commission

Leymah Gbowee

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Founder and President of the Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa

Noeleen Heyzer

Former Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

Kyung-wha Kang

Former Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea, Former UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Former UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

Fawzia Koofi

Former Member of Afghan Parliament, Former Vice-President of the Afghan National Assembly

Zahra' Langhi

Co-Founder and CEO of the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace

Jennifer Lawrence

Award Winning Actress and Women's Rights Advocate

Susana Malcorra

Founder, GWL Voices, Former Foreign Minister of Argentina, Former Chef de Cabinet to UN Secretary-General

Robin Morgan

Writer, Co-Founder and President of the Sisterhood is Global Institute, Host of *Women's Media Center Live*

Jessica Neuwirth

Rita E. Hauser Director, Roosevelt House Human Rights Program, Former New York Director of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Co-Founder of Equality Now, Donor Direct Action

Lynn Nottage

Pulitzer Prize Winning Playwright

Hibaaq Osman

Founder and Director, Karama

Navi Pillay

Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Former President of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Former Judge of the International Criminal Court

Mary Robinson

Former President of Ireland, Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Zainab Salbi

Founder of Women for Women International

Habiba Sarabi

Former Minister for Women's Affairs, Afghanistan

Aryana Sayeed

Singer/Songwriter

Gloria Steinem

Author/Journalist/Women's Rights Activist

Margot Wallström

Former Foreign Minister of Sweden, Former UN SRSG for Sexual Violence in Conflict

Asila Wardak

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