



Afghans
For Progressive
Thinking (APT)

Two Years After Afghanistan's Fall:

What Was Life Like Under the Taliban Rule?

Third Edition



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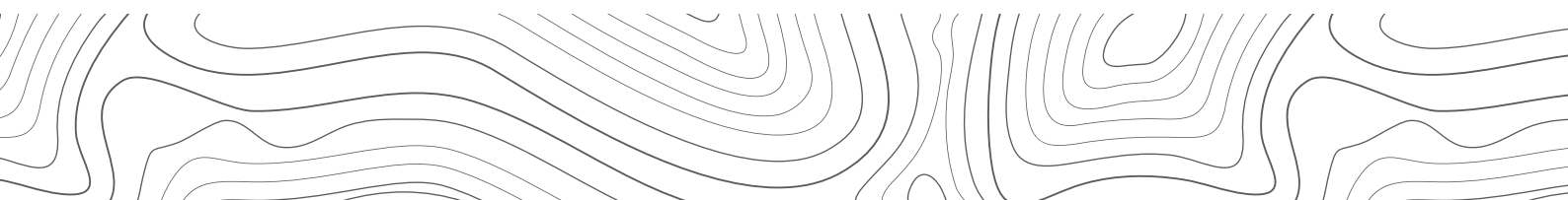


Introduction

The Taliban resurgence has had a devastating impact on young women and girls in Afghanistan. The scope and the severity of restrictions are almost unparalleled. Today, two years into their rule, the Taliban has banned girls and women from school and both public and private universities and has prohibited them from most employment. In this booklet, young Afghan women, the emerging drivers of social and political activism in Afghanistan, promulgate the startling facts and realities on the ground.

Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) is firmly committed to helping women and girls reclaim their voices and advocate for the full resumption of their rights. Through the Mentorship Program offered by APT, 30 young women from different provinces were provided with the opportunity to work in groups to shine a light on current barriers and share their opinions in an attempt to influence both national and international audiences.

Publishing articles of this scope would not have been possible without the support and tireless efforts of Caitlyn O'Flaherty who equipped these young women writers with reflective writing skills, edited the articles, and provided valuable feedback throughout the process.



About Us

Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) is a youth-led nonprofit organization in Afghanistan that actively addresses human rights crises, with a specific focus on women's rights, while simultaneously promoting girls' access to education through creative and impactful initiatives.

APT's initiatives encompass a range of key areas. It connects female university students in Afghanistan with mentors from abroad, forging valuable relationships and providing guidance. APT also facilitates networking opportunities for youth, both within and beyond Afghanistan's borders, to encourage open dialogue, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas and experiences. In addition to these endeavors, APT is preparing to equip a team of young women with expertise in the "Internal Family System (IFS)" trauma healing technique. This training will empower them to offer healing sessions to others and create safe spaces for family members in need of support.

Furthermore, APT offers a platform for young women to express themselves by writing and publishing their stories, particularly significant under Taliban rule.

Over the course of its 13-year existence, APT has successfully fostered meaningful engagement among young men and women. Through discussions and dialogues, they have influenced policies prior to the collapse. These conversations center on critical topics and propose solutions for a better Afghanistan and a better world. APT's work has played a pivotal role in shaping policies on both national and global levels, owing to the development of leadership and critical thinking skills among its participants. Since its inception in 2010, APT activities have impacted and inspired over 60,000 youth and children to build a vision for a just and inclusive society.

You may read more about APT at: www.aptyouth.org



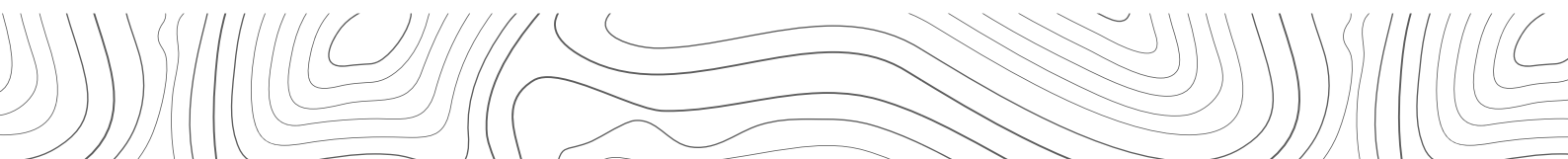
Reflecting on Two Years After the Taliban Takeover: How Life Has Changed for Citizens, Particularly Women in Afghanistan

The Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan in August 2021 has had significant consequences, particularly for women. This article aims to examine the factors behind these transformations, focusing on the economic impacts, challenge accessing resources like food and healthcare, and curtailment of rights and gender equality. Additionally, the article will evaluate the effects of the Taliban takeover on services and infrastructure, with specific attention to healthcare systems, as well as the sociocultural impacts of Taliban policies on the experiences of Afghan women.

The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan has sparked deep concern, particularly among women, and the consequences on our lives are extensive and deeply unsettling. Our vibrant traditional clothing has been substituted with darker shades, a symbolic representation of the restrictions on our daily lives. The lively marketplaces once filled with laughter and animated conversations now require caution as we grapple with how to navigate and make choices in this altered environment. The sweet voices of young girls attending schools have faded into silence, and our dreams of education have been suppressed by a strong hand. Imagine a world where someone else dictates what you wear, where you can go, and what you can do – that's the new reality for Afghan women. We once had the opportunity to learn, work, and dream like anyone else, but those opportunities have vanished. It's as though our door to a better future has been forcibly closed. The fundamental idea of treating men and women equally has been significantly impacted in Afghanistan as the women are excluded from the social-economic sphere in the country. Women who were previously active members of society have been muted, and our participation has been severely limited.

Compared to two years ago, work opportunities for women have considerably decreased. Many women lost their jobs or face significant challenges in them. Some women are forced to work from home. So much unemployment affects families economically, forcing them to beg in the streets to survive. Female doctors are not allowed to treat male patients. Female judges, prosecutors, and lawyers are not allowed to participate in judicial decisions. As of April 2023, Afghan women are no longer allowed to work for the UN. (Medicamondiale.org, n.d).

Almost 80% of those in need in Afghanistan are women and children, largely a result of the economic crisis and relentless restrictions put on women in society. As women-headed households endure rising hunger, mothers are forced to send their children to work to earn enough money to purchase food, causing a sharp uptick in child labor (International Rescue Committee, 2022). Limiting Afghan women has



caused a humanitarian disaster; according to the Asian Development Bank, the poverty line in Afghanistan has now reached 49.4% (2020).

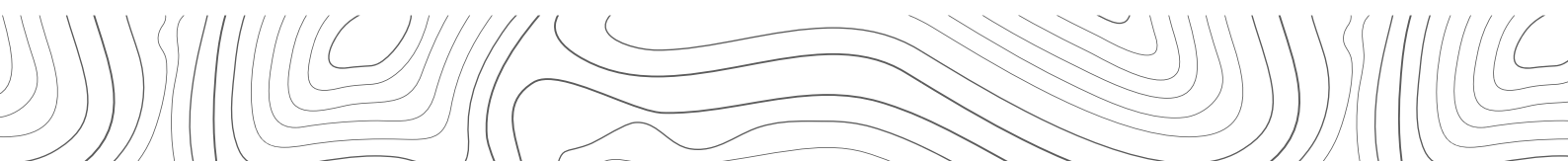
The Taliban takeover in Afghanistan has had a devastating impact on the lives of its people, particularly women. The restrictions and limitations imposed on women have resulted in lost opportunities and economic hardships that plunged countless families into poverty. The once vibrant marketplaces and educational institutions have been silenced, leaving women marginalized and isolated. The disregard for basic human rights and gender equality has created a deep crisis, with women and children bearing the brunt of the consequences. The international community must rally together to support and empower Afghan women, ensuring their rights are upheld and their voices are heard. We call on the international community to:

- A) Invest on girl's education in Afghanistan
- B) Support us in amplifying our voices
- C) Put economic, political and diplomatic pressures on the Taliban to reverse their harmful policies toward women
- D) Put travel ban on Taliban officials for not respecting women rights
- E) Increase financial support for women and girls in pursuit of education
- F) Provide scholarship opportunities for women and girls in Afghanistan

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The Uncertain future of education in Afghanistan

Since the Taliban came, the future of education in Afghanistan has been darkened by uncertainty, illiteracy, and immigration. Our future goals have become impossible dreams. One of those seemingly impossible dreams in the current situation is to study. Education is the right of every woman and the basic need of every person in a society. But women in Afghanistan are deprived of this right.

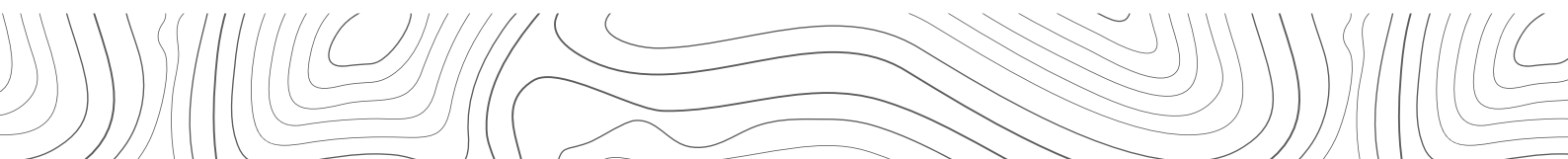
Afghanistan has been one of the country's worst affected by violence against educational institutions. To begin with, as the humanitarian crisis continues, the resilience of Afghans and communities hosting Afghan refugees is being stretched to the limit. The future looks dark. Afghanistan is already experiencing another brain drain, which will likely have detrimental effects on development and stability. Afghanistan doesn't have any community-based literacy classes or a strong higher education system, despite attempts toward progress.

The Taliban's history with education, particularly their targeting of women and girls, is deeply concerning. Today, in Afghanistan, more than 1.1 million girls and young women do not have access to formal education (UNESCO 2023). The situation worsened when a ban was instituted preventing females from attending universities. It affected over 100,000 students attending government and private higher education institutions.

The suspension of education for Afghan girls and women by the Taliban has had severe implications for the future of Afghanistan's growth. Education is a fundamental right that empowers individuals and promotes gender equality. It is imperative that immediate action be taken to ensure equal access to quality education for all Afghan girls as part of broader efforts towards sustainable development in the country.

As the ban on education continues, and there is no indication by the Taliban that it will lift, the future for young women seems more uncertain than ever. Gone are the days when girls could plan and dream of bright futures ahead. Now, the future looms ever darker for them. They don't have much choice but to get married at a very young age. Families are already marrying off their young children to shift the responsibility of caretaking to husbands. Another riskier option is to leave all they know, and run from their home country in hopes of continuing their educations and being independent. Moreover, as we, young women in Afghanistan, look to the future, we see no identity, no dignity, and no rights or status in our home society.

Therefore, the international community must continue to support the Afghan people and collaborate to address the root causes of the barriers. Some of these barriers could be caused by persistent long-wars and unrest in the country (Inayatullah,



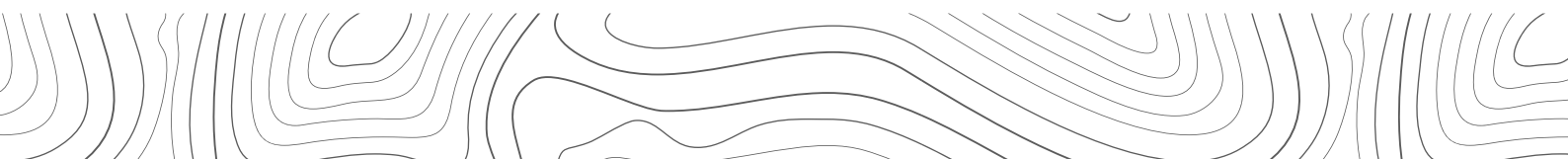
2022, p. 37). “There exists a number of barriers to women’s education in Afghanistan under the Taliban, which include physical, cultural, and psychological” (Inayatullah, 2022, p. 43). In Afghanistan, unethical social norms and cultural practices are also some of the challenges that hinder girls’ education in many ways. These norms also lead to many women and girls being denied access to education.

In conclusion, the uncertain future of education in Afghanistan poses significant challenges for the young generation, especially women and girls. While resources such as the Sustainable Development Goals offer a glimmer of hope, the ongoing conflicts, poverty, and gender inequality make progress difficult. The recent return of the Taliban and their decisions to suspend girls’ and women’s access to education threatens to undo the gains made over the past two decades. The negative effects of this uncertain situation on the education of Afghan women cannot be overstated. Restrictive cultural norms, rising poverty, and the lack of educational facilities are among the major barriers women face. The international community needs to continue to support the Afghan people through the ongoing humanitarian crisis while navigating an ultraconservative organization governing the country. Ultimately, a brighter future for Afghan youth and women, including access to quality education, can only be achieved through collaborative efforts between governments, NGOs, and local communities to address the root causes of conflict, poverty, and gender inequality.

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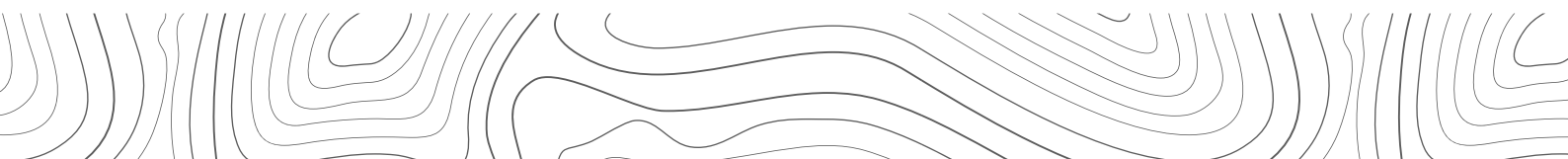
Understanding Mental Health Within Afghanistan: How people are coping under the challenges of the Taliban regime

The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021 has resulted in widespread oppression and grave consequences for Afghan society. The Taliban's rule has systematically stripped away women's rights and neglected essential services. Harsh measures, such as denying education to most girls, banning women from attending universities, and prohibiting their employment have had a profound impact on the mental well-being of Afghan women. This has manifested in various psychological issues including sadness, insomnia, loss of hope and motivation, anxiety, intense fear, aggressive behaviour, social isolation, and even suicidal ideation. According to a report by U.N Women, the International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, there has been a significant increase in feelings of anxiety, isolation, and depression observed between April and June (2023). Notably, approximately 70% of the participants reported a worsening of their emotional states, representing an increase from 57% in the previous quarter.

In Afghanistan, psychological distress affects a staggering number of individuals. Mental health problems impact every household due to decades of war, political violence, instability, and poverty. The ongoing crisis, marked by displacement, loss, and uncertainty further exacerbates mental health issues. Sadly, the country's healthcare system is strained due to the loss of funding from international donors, resulting in limited access to mental healthcare services. Consequently, the majority of people living with mental health problems lack the necessary care. A meagre 3% of those seeking medical assistance at health centres being offered help for their mental health, falling far below the recommended target (Reliefweb, 2021).

Furthermore, the Taliban's regime has brought about many new difficulties, forcing individuals to use various coping mechanisms to deal with their worsening mental health. One prominent approach is the use of art, especially painting, by many girls to express and showcase their emotions. This creative activity allows them to process their experiences and find solace in self-expression. In addition, religion plays a significant role in helping Afghans cope with their struggles. Many people rely on prayer and other religious practices to gain inner strength and resilience in difficult times. They turn to their faith as a source of healing and guidance. These coping mechanisms demonstrate the resourcefulness and resilience of Afghans in navigating mental health challenges amidst adversity.

The support of international organizations and NGOs is crucial in addressing mental health challenges in Afghanistan. Their efforts in implementing various programs and projects cannot be overstated, and specific examples of these



initiatives should be highlighted to emphasize their impact. To improve mental health support in the country, policy changes should prioritize mental health and well-being, and more resources should be allocated towards mental health services and infrastructure. Community-based interventions should also be implemented to ensure accessible and effective care. Collaboration between government, NGOs, and local communities is necessary to address the diverse mental health needs of the Afghan population. With policy change and community-based interventions, a supportive and inclusive mental health system can be established in Afghanistan.

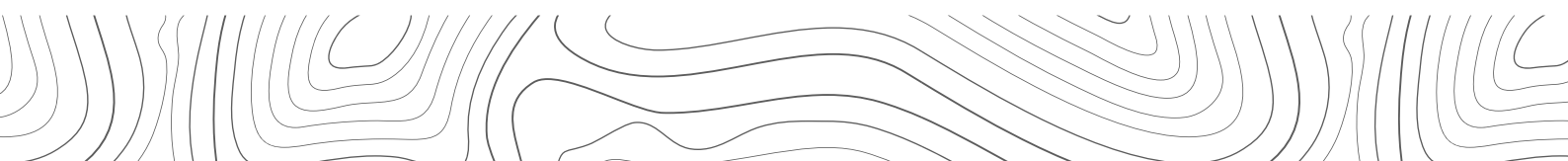
In conclusion, the Taliban regime's takeover in Afghanistan, their oppression of Afghan citizens, and the anguish it has caused have given rise to serious mental health issues that need to be addressed. Afghan women who have experienced violence are severely affected by a variety of psychological issues.

However, despite this political instability, Afghan people's perseverance can be observed in the ways they use art and religion as methods of coping. Improved mental healthcare and early intervention are essential to address the long-term effects of this ongoing trauma. By bringing light to this widely misunderstood area, we can help eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness and give citizens of Afghanistan the assistance and care they require.

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Evaluating the Consequences of Taliban Restriction: How the ban on Afghan women working on local and international NGOs is impacting Afghanistan

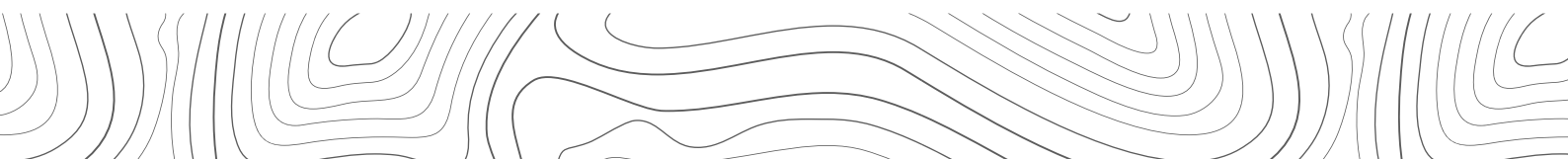
Women in Afghanistan bear the burden of heavy responsibilities—fighting for their rights as human beings, suffering the pressure of educational and employment restrictions, and refusing to give up their dreams for a bright future. Afghan women are situated in a condition where they cannot access their fundamental right to work. Thousands of Afghan women are seeking jobs every single day, but they are not hired by organizations simply because of their gender. This paper is going to demonstrate the negative consequences of current employment restrictions that Afghan women suffer and the impacts on Afghan women and future generation of Afghans.

Women's participation in the workforce is essential for economic growth and development, as well as for promoting gender equality and social inclusion. Addressing this issue will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including the Afghan government, civil society organizations, and the international community. The long-term impact of these restrictions remains to be seen, but it is clear that they pose a significant challenge to the country's stability and progress. The Taliban's restrictions on women's access to education and employment opportunities might also result in poverty, inequality, and limited economic growth due to the lack of female labor. Only by promoting gender equality and empowering women to participate fully in the workforce can Afghanistan hope to achieve sustainable development and stability.

Taliban rule has had a devastating impact on Afghan women's employment. Their policies have rapidly turned many women and girls into virtual prisoners in their homes, depriving the country of one of its most precious resources—the skills, and talents of the female half of the population. Most of the women who were working and had income have now lost both. Moreover, the majority of women were the main wage earner for their families. Therefore, their unemployment affects not only the quality of their lives but of their children and families as well.

In addition, female employment diminished 25% in the fourth quarter of 2022, a stark difference from the 16% increase measured in early 2021 (International Labor Organization (ILO), 2023) This data shows most of the female workforce has been removed. It is also mentionable that the recent crisis had a major negative effect on women-owned businesses. Most of these businesses suspended their activities, and the remaining closed permanently. (The World Bank, 2023)

These changes have resulted in an increase in the pace of an already rapid downward movement toward regressive gender norms and blanket discrimination against women. It has caused Afghan women to fear appearing in public or social settings, increased their feelings of being a burden on their families, and caused loss of confidence, self-worth, and pride. Afghanistan's women are a fundamental



part of society and a powerful economic engine. The Taliban has taken this from them by reducing the opportunities for women in both public and private settings.

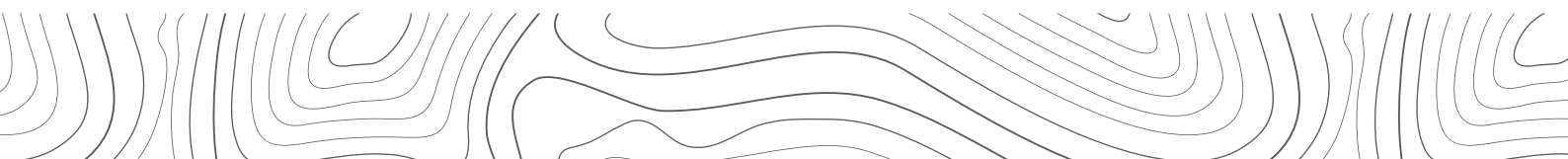
In addition, employment restrictions on women have impacted humanitarian efforts. The distribution of food and medicine, winterization support, agricultural support, reproductive and maternal health, psychosocial support, education and livelihood trainings, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) projects and shelter, and distribution of non-food items have all partially or fully stopped.

The spaces where Afghan women can work are disappearing fast. At first, the restrictions were only on clothing and wearing hijab, but as each day passes, the Taliban create more obstacles for women. An alternative option for supporting women is to provide a work environment for women online, through non-governmental organizations. This could prove as a good option for women who are heads of their family as it also provides them with safe and secure environments to work. Non-governmental organizations can also support women by providing programs for the growth and development of women while the county remains under the control of the Taliban. With access to these online opportunities, women get access to work and can grow their talents as active members in society.

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Perspectives on the World's Engagement with the De Facto Authority: What Afghan women are saying about the world's interaction with the Taliban

This article explores the diverse perspectives of Afghan women regarding the world's engagement with the Taliban, the de facto authority in Afghanistan. It delves into the multifaceted experiences and opinions of Afghan women who have been directly impacted by the Taliban's rule, as well as those who observe international interactions from abroad.

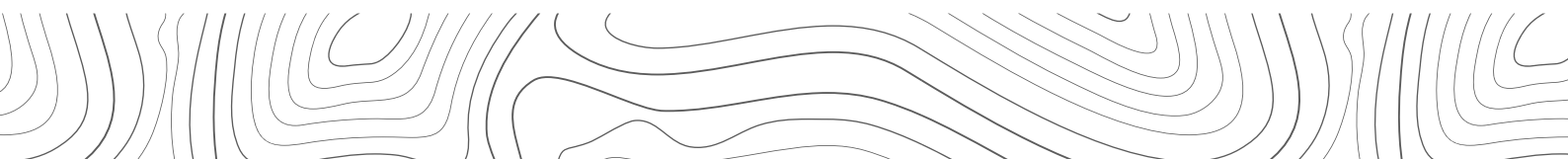
Today, the Taliban in Afghanistan has curtailed women's freedom by prohibiting them from visiting entertainment parks, gyms, and sports clubs, justifying these restrictions as being against Islamic principles (Haram). As they are deprived of their rights to education, employment, travel, and leisure activities, they find themselves confined and imprisoned by the current government.

"Afghan women and girls are facing both the collapse of their rights and dreams and risks to their basic survival," said Halima Kazem-Stojanovic, a core faculty member of SJSU's Human Rights Institute and a scholar on Afghanistan. "They are caught between Taliban abuses and actions by the international community that are pushing Afghans further into desperation every day" (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Therefore, we, as Afghan women who currently live under the Taliban, ask for:

- **Gender Equity and Human Rights**
 - . Afghan women emphasize the significance of international pressure to uphold gender equity and human rights. They believe that the world's engagement should prioritize these fundamental principles.
- **Security Concerns**
 - . Many Afghan women continue to face security risks, which deter them from speaking out openly. Ensuring their safety is paramount for meaningful engagement.
- **Inclusivity**
 - . Afghan women underscore the importance of their active participation in peace negotiations and governance. They advocate for representation in decision-making processes.

Fawzia Koofi, the former Deputy Speaker of the Afghan Parliament, stressed that the people of Afghanistan feel betrayed because the current gender apartheid in Afghanistan under the Taliban are not recognized. (United Nations, 2022). Generations of Afghan women — 55 percent of Afghan society — are excluded from public life and have become prisoners within the walls of their own homes. When they protest on the streets, they are silenced with violence, arrests, and torture. Koofi



voiced their hope that the Council would act on their behalf, facilitating a stronger mechanism for political dialogue — the only solution to the problem (United Nations, 2022).

To us Afghan women, engaging with the Taliban is essentially ignoring half of society. Taliban is a radical and violent group that destroys any rights and freedoms of citizens with successive orders. This is a group that has adopted gender apartheid in Afghanistan, so engaging with and strengthening this group is against humanitarian and humanitarian laws.

In conclusion, the perspectives of Afghan women on the world's engagement with the Taliban are varied and complex as they believe that it might cost them hard-won rights, and express deep concern about the consequences of such interactions. The Taliban's history of denying women basic rights and freedoms makes it difficult for Afghan women to trust any engagement with this group. The international community must prioritize the promotion of gender equity and human rights in Afghanistan, especially for women who have been disproportionately affected by decades of conflict and political instability. The world must not turn a blind eye to the plight of Afghan women, but instead, work towards creating a safer and more inclusive society for all.

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THE END

