

WOMEN'S FORUM ON AFGHANISTAN

A Call to Action

10 May 2022

Recent events have further confirmed our deep concern that promises relating to women's rights were made by the Taliban for cynical, political reasons only. One after another, these promises have been broken. The ban on secondary school education for girls, the announcement that women would no longer be permitted to learn to drive, and the dress code requirements for women recently announced by the Taliban further deprive Afghan women and girls of their fundamental human rights.

For all those governments and UN officials who said they would judge the Taliban by their deeds, not their words, it is time for bold action. The Taliban are scared of the power of women, but it is the power of women that is needed in Afghanistan, where the political, economic and humanitarian crises are escalating. This is the legacy of international forces that withdrew from Afghanistan last year, and the international community has a responsibility that requires a meaningful response to the deteriorating situation in the country. Women in Kabul are on the streets protesting, risking their lives to make their voices heard. Listen to them – like women around the world they will not stand by and accept this assault on their rights. We call on all governments to stand up for Afghan women, and to make it clear to the Taliban that any discussion of recognition will depend on recognition of and respect for their rights. We also call on political leaders in the Islamic world to make it clear to the Taliban that there is no religious justification for banning girls from school and women from work. And given all indications to the contrary, unless the Taliban gives some meaningful indication that it is willing to engage in a serious political dialogue that includes the rights of women and girls, the UN should consider rescinding the travel ban exemption that has been granted to those in the Taliban leadership who are on the UN sanctions list.

It is time to put the rhetoric of the world on “women, peace and security” to the real test. The leverage of the international community right now is economic. Billions of dollars have been pledged for humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. The United Nations and donor countries can use these funds to empower Afghan women. Women are well placed to lead transformational changes, which are needed for the effective delivery of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. The challenges posed by Taliban control over the country are not the only challenges to be addressed. There is a long and well-known history of corruption over the past twenty years, and it is critical for the international community to do things differently. Empowering women in the process of humanitarian aid delivery could well result in better aid distribution and more accountability. It would also create much needed pressure on the Taliban to recognize the need for and contribution of women and women's organizations to the future of Afghanistan. This is the responsibility of donor countries and United Nations and international organizations. Humanitarian aid to Afghanistan should be sustained and increased to address the urgent needs of the Afghan people, and women should be at the heart of a transparent process to distribute humanitarian aid.

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The Women's Forum on Afghanistan has called on the United Nations and donor countries to:

1. Ensure the inclusion of women-led organizations to implement aid distribution and other projects;
2. Provide more transparency in the process of identification of aid recipients to ensure that aid is delivered strategically and based on actual need; and
3. To create monitoring mechanisms that include Afghan women to advise donors on the effectiveness of aid delivery and help ensure that aid and funding for aid are not diverted to or by the Taliban from their intended destination.

There is no indication that these recommendations have been adopted – their implementation would have a significant impact on the distribution of aid as well as a political impact that would give real meaning to the recognition that women have a critical role to play in the promotion of peace and security.

The Women's Forum on Afghanistan is a new initiative created by Afghan and global women leaders to work for the well-being and human rights of the Afghan people, and inclusive solutions to the social, economic, and political challenges the country is currently facing.
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