



---

## **Open letter: Afghan people demand that world leaders: “TALK TO ME, NOT ABOUT ME!”**

Date: 30-04-2023

To the Participants of the International Meeting in Doha on Afghanistan

Dear Excellencies,

We, the Afghan Women Coalition for Change (AWCC) undersigned this letter with over 50 organizations and 100s of individual representatives of civil society and women of Afghanistan from different backgrounds, are writing to voice our serious concerns about the upcoming meeting in Doha, Qatar on 1-2 May. The meeting has been described as a “closed-door gathering featuring special envoys on Afghanistan from various countries” who aim to “clarify expectations” on challenges in Afghanistan, including the Taliban's restrictions on women, hosted by the United Nations under the chairmanship of Secretary General António Guterres. We are particularly concerned about the prospect of the meeting opening the door to future international recognition of the Taliban regime, as highlighted in recent comments to the media by UN Deputy Secretary-General Ms. Amina J Mohammed: “We hope that we’ll find those baby steps to put us back on the pathway to recognition [of the Taliban], a principled recognition”.<sup>1</sup>

As Afghan women and members of civil society and media groups, we are outraged that the UN or any of its Member States would consider recognising the Taliban, a terrorist group whose deeply repressive regime has systematically sought to erase more than half of the population from society. Having denied women and girls almost all of their fundamental human rights, the Taliban has become the only regime in the world upholding a system of gender apartheid. Past experience shows that giving into the demands of such regimes by compromising on human rights will only strengthen their grip on power, and prolong the suffering of the people of Afghanistan.

We urge the United Nations to immediately cancel all plans, even if they are “baby steps”, towards recognising an illegitimate regime that systematically violates the human rights of all people in Afghanistan, and whose actions amount to crimes against humanity on a daily basis against Afghan women and men of all ethnicities.

Instead, the United Nations should guarantee that it fulfils its mandate to ensure that the human rights of all Afghans, in particular women and girls, are respected, protected and upheld. This should include a strong focus on justice for past and present crimes, by ensuring that the Taliban leadership is held to account for gross human rights violations, war crimes, crimes against humanity and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including the Rome Statute. This must include cooperating fully with the ongoing investigation by the International Criminal Court.

---

<sup>1</sup> Reuters, “UN chief to convene meeting to work on way forward on Afghanistan”, 19 April 2023.

The Taliban, and their regional and international supporters, have sought to justify gender apartheid policies against women and girls as reflecting “Afghan culture and customs”. This is completely false; there is nothing in Afghan cultural tradition that calls for the elimination of women from society, effectively reducing them to nothing but producing babies. Throughout the history of Afghanistan, women from different regions and ethnic groups have played significant roles as a leaders, warriors, writers, poets and politicians. Nothing can justify the current systematic attempts to strip Afghan women and girls of their rights.

Apart from their attempts to put in place a gender apartheid regime, the Taliban have been responsible for a catalogue of human rights violations since seizing power in August 2021. The regime has committed war crimes in regions where it facing armed resistance, often detaining, torturing or even killing any suspects or their family members. The Taliban have also led a brutal crackdown on any perceived dissent, silencing media and peaceful protests, using violence, torture and prolonged detention without charge. Furthermore, the regime is also involved in forced evictions and illegal land grabbings in areas inhabited by indigenous people in the northern and central parts of Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, since August 2021, Afghanistan is more than at any time in recent history a safe haven for international terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (Daesh). This is evidenced by the recent killing of Al-Qaeda leader Iman AL Zawahiri the Al-Qaeda leader in Kabul, the increased presence of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan in the country’s eastern regions, as well as recent warnings by international intelligence agencies that Daesh are planning international attacks from Afghan soil.

We, the undersigned people of Afghanistan, are calling on all the participants of the Doha meeting on Afghanistan scheduled on May 1-2 to:

- Ensure that women of Afghanistan are meaningfully represented in all debates, meetings, conferences concerning our country and our future. Our demand from world leaders is simple: “TALK TO ME, NOT ABOUT ME.”
- Ensure that women are invited and given the opportunity to speak in any relevant international fora that concerns the people of Afghanistan, particularly women. Women invited must represent a wide section of Afghan society, including protest leaders, civil society members and women in exile. These representatives must be allowed to deliver strong and uncensored messages about the brutal reality facing women and girls under the Taliban.
- Ensure that all necessary measures are taken to hold Taliban leaders to account for serious crimes against the people of Afghanistan, in particular against women and girls. This must include cooperation with the ICC to bring the Taliban leaders and officials accused of crimes under international law before the Court.
- Ensure that all participants are aware of and take into account the genuine concerns of the people of Afghanistan, including the broad range of crimes by the Taliban such as arbitrary arrests or killings of peaceful protesters, education campaigners, journalists, university professors and former members of the government and national security forces, as well as war crimes committed in areas where armed resistance against the Taliban is taking place.

- Take steps towards ensuring that “gender apartheid” is recognised by the United Nations and its member states as a crime against humanity in international law, to prevent other oppressive regimes from systematically denying their fundamental rights people based on their gender.
- Ensure that international sanctions are strengthened and / or imposed on the leaders and officials of the Taliban, such as travel bans and asset freezes, including by re-listing officials on the UN sanction list as relevant.
- Ensure that the UN and international community works with all Afghans to pave the way for an inclusive government, based on the will of the people of Afghanistan, with representation from all ethnic groups as well as of women

## **TALK TO ME, NOT ABOUT ME!**

### **To:**

1. United Nations Secretary General
2. United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA)
3. United Nations Human Rights Council
4. United Nations Security Council
5. The Secretary of State of the United States of America
6. European Union
7. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium
8. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Germany
9. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of France
10. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Great Britain
11. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Netherlands
12. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Austria
13. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Australia
14. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Pakistan
15. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada
16. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway
17. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden
18. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
19. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland
20. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran
21. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of India
22. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
23. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Qatar
24. The Minister of Foreign Affairs United Arab Emirates
25. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Republic of Turkey
26. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Republic of Tajikistan
27. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Republic of Uzbekistan
28. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Republic of Turkmenistan
29. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Republic of Kirghizstan
30. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Republic of Russia
31. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Republic of China
32. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Republic of Japan

