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**EN**

## **Statement by European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW) on the Situation in Afghanistan and the Rights of Afghan Women and Girls**

### **Afghanistan: Why is the World Silent ?**

As the US-NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan is brought to a conclusion, the Taliban and their associates have completed their rapid takeover of most administrative centres, provincial capitals, and the capital of Afghanistan. With this, the Taliban forces are eliminating the progress, however frail, made in the last twenty years and turning the country into a Da'esh controlled twin, where the very thought of human rights is a punishable offence. The scale and the timing of this attack has been unprecedented and cannot be described as anything but an invasion. Twenty groups — including Al-Qaida and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ Da'esh) — are fighting alongside the Taliban against the Afghan people.

Those who will pay the highest price for the brutal attack will be - and already are - women and girls.

Afghan women - both within and outside of Afghanistan - know this price too well. The entire world knew it, when in May 2020, a maternity hospital was attacked in Afghanistan leaving 16 mothers dead. The entire world knew it, when in May 2021, a school was bombed resulting in the deaths of 90 girls, and the injury of many more. So, why did the world watch in silence as the Taliban troops entered Kabul - the capital of Afghanistan and the last refuge to where thousands of its citizens had already fled searching for salvation from the brutal regime they have no part in, nor wish to be enslaved to.



The strategy of the Taliban and its accomplices should leave no one in doubt: they are here to enslave women and girls and to kill those who dare to resist this enslavement. Since their take over the capital Kabul the Taliban have issued media statements claiming that everyone is safe and will not be harmed , but for the people of Afghanistan who have had experience with them in years 1996-2001, this is just a statement intended to calm the situation and appease the international community for now. The people of Afghanistan know better: The intention is to kill ethnic and religious minorities, journalists, human rights defenders, teachers. And while they kill and enslave, they will terrorise, instil fear and eliminate hope. And the most dangerous hope of all is the hope of Afghan women: to live in a country of peace, free from male violence, conservative religious dictatorship, and patriarchal corruption - a country Afghan women and girls need not flee and become refugees.

Now this hope is being destroyed in front of their eyes.

## The Taliban Regime is Incompatible with Women's Human Rights.

"I want to come back to school even more strongly than before and continue my studies", said Fatima Noori, a teenage student in Sayed Ul-Shuhada High School which was bombed on 8 May 2021, leaving over 90 girls dead.<sup>1</sup>

The killing of mothers in 2020 and of school-girls in 2021 were not random attacks but carefully planned acts of targeted violence against women and, in particular, against those of them who aspire to an education, a future, and continuing life. While the US President Joe Biden has called the withdrawal of US troops as "the end of America's longest war", the real war has not ended - not for the women and girls in Afghanistan, nor for their children, nor for any peaceful community in the country.

In its global "Call to Action for Human Rights" United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres clearly states that "**Misogyny is a common feature of violent extremism**".<sup>2</sup> As feminists, we have always known this : numerous studies and feminist research confirms what violent male ideologies have in common, no matter the ethnicity or religion - hatred towards women and girls as sex-class, and a desire to control women and our sexual-reproductive rights and freedoms, as well as our access to any sphere of decision making - be it political, economic or cultural - where women can exert power and gain control of over our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/afghan-schoolgirl-determined-return-school-after-deadly-blast-2021-06-07/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The\\_Highest\\_Aspiration\\_A\\_Call\\_To\\_Action\\_For\\_Human\\_Right\\_English.pdf](https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf)

Without acknowledging misogyny as a core component of extremist ideologies and movements, it will never be possible to stop them. Without acknowledging that women's rights organisations must play a central role in the strategic decisions over ending or preventing man-made conflicts and sustaining peace, be it in Afghanistan or any other part of the world, we will never achieve the peaceful societies to which so many nations world-wide committed through the Sustainable Development Goals.

According to a 2019 nation-wide survey<sup>3</sup> 87 percent of Afghan people supported women's rights to education, and over 65% were *not* willing to sacrifice women's education or employment in exchange for the "peace deal". This is in the context where more than 3.5 million girls are now enrolled in school in Afghanistan, compared to none during the Taliban's rule from 1996 to 2001.

Why then, once again, were virtually no Afghan women present at the "peace talks" which, predictably, ended in disaster and the further bloodshed of innocent people instead of the promised peace and security in Afghanistan?

It is not news to anyone what the Taliban "government" has in store for Afghan women. None of their agenda is hidden: women will become men's property - the property of Talib fighters first of all - girls will be destined to be 'breeding stock' for the new generation of soldiers, their right to education, employment, health, civic participation denied, their freedoms, of movement and of thought, will be severely restricted and abolished entirely.

## **It is Unacceptable to Recognise a Violent Misogynist Regime.**

Even prior to the Taliban gaining full control over Afghanistan, a number of states already had tacitly recognised it as a ruling power over the Afghan people. The Russian officials called for the inclusion of the Taliban in the new administration of Afghanistan<sup>4</sup>, while the EU has not taken any clear position as to whether to denounce or to recognise the Taliban's rule. In its meeting on 6 August 2021, the United Nations Security Council, called for an immediate ceasefire and acknowledged the "catastrophic trajectory of violence and humanitarian suffering in Afghanistan"<sup>5</sup>, however, the UN SRSG Deborah Lyons also stated that "It is up to the Taliban" to stop the bloodshed in Afghanistan<sup>6</sup> thus recognising the de-facto status of Taliban as legitimate.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2019\\_Afghan\\_Survey\\_Infographics.pdf](https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2019_Afghan_Survey_Infographics.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/12/include-taliban-in-interim-afghan-administration-says-russia>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14596.doc.htm>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP-3Jcf\\_YAM&t=57s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP-3Jcf_YAM&t=57s)

The members of the UN Security Council called on both the Islamic Republic and the Taliban “to engage meaningfully in an inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process in order to make urgent progress towards a political settlement and a ceasefire.”<sup>7</sup>

Mullah Baradar, the political head of the Taliban, gave a talk to international representatives in which he said: “We are committed to resolving disputes through dialogue.” Yet simultaneously, the Taliban was carrying out a brutal military offensive across Afghanistan, murdering civilians, enslaving women and evicting them from universities, hospitals and offices. In the last several months alone, 50.000 civilians have been war-wounded , half of them women and children<sup>8</sup>. Teenage girls have been captured as sex slaves, aka “brides”, for Talib soldiers. In the captured cities, women have been banned from attending work. Female journalists have been murdered.

Do any of the world leaders sincerely believe that the Taliban wants dialogue? And now, when the Troika and other powerful actors asked the Taliban to be a part of a “peaceful solution”, will they take responsibility for the onslaught and bloodshed that resulted from this invitation ?

## Women of Afghanistan: What is their Future in their Homeland?

Even without Taliban control of the country, the situation for women and girls in Afghanistan has been extremely difficult. For many years now, Afghanistan has been on the list of the deadliest countries in the world. For decades, Afghan women were denied education, leading to a shortage of female medical staff to provide essential care to women in labour, while many families will only seek care from female medical personnel. In rural areas, most women do not have adequate access to obstetric care or cannot afford it. Consequently, up to two-thirds of births take place at home without any medical assistance, nearly 4,500 women die yearly due to complications during pregnancy or childbirth, and one in 13 babies die in their first year.<sup>9</sup>

The “2021 Women’s National Business Agenda: A Roadmap for Afghan Women Economic Empowerment”<sup>10</sup> elaborates a series of measures to support the economic independence of women in Afghanistan. Among its recommendations , it proposes introducing a 10 percent quota for women-owned businesses for government contracts, increasing online sale of women-made products, providing grants to women entrepreneurs, encouraging unlicensed women-owned

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14592.doc.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/afghanistan-among-deadliest-places-in-world-for-civilians-says-red-cross/2310984>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.msf.org/conflict-rages-afghanistan-remains-one-most-dangerous-places-world-give-birth>

<sup>10</sup> <https://awcci.af/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AWCCI-WNBA-Report-.pdf>



businesses to enter the formal economy, and establishing women-only markets in the areas where they do not presently exist.

How can any of these measures be implemented under the regime that forbids women from leaving home without a male guardian, murders girls who attend school and eliminates any prospects of a professional life for women ?

The Taliban's history is a history of male violence against women and girls, of brutality and of terror. What is happening to Afghanistan now will take the country back hundreds of years - it will roll back the rights of women and girls.

*“To those world leaders and to the whole world I want to say ‘Shame on you’, for what you did to Afghanistan. Why did you have to do what you did ? And why are you doing it to this part of the world, I don’t get it,”* said the founder of Afghan Women Network, Mahbooba Seraj.

Organisations such as NEGAR<sup>11</sup> and Women Living under Muslim Laws<sup>12</sup>, that has spent decades fighting for Afghan women's freedoms, warned about the detrimental impact on women's rights of the advancing Taliban and their taking over the power in the country.

As the shameful deals of betrayal are being struck between the Talib leaders and those who promised not to abandon the Afghan people, women and girls, and other peaceful communities are being trapped in Afghanistan. They have nowhere to flee as borders close, and embassies of neighbouring countries stop issuing visas. There are 17 million women in Afghanistan who are facing a prospect of either a swift death if they resist, or a slow death by becoming a part of history that will soon only be known through history books. Meanwhile, with a few exceptions of committed women's rights activists and sympathetic journalists, the international community is witnessing the atrocities and the shutting down of Afghan women's hopes - by averting their eyes.

Afghanistan's first female mayor Zarifa Ghafari says: *‘I’m sitting here waiting for them to come. There is no one to help me or my family. I’m just sitting with them and my husband. And they will come for people like me and kill me.’*<sup>13</sup>

No humanitarian corridor for little Afghan girls has been created by Europe, USA or Russia. And while the foreign civilians are being evacuated from Afghanistan, there is no special protection granted to Afghan women, children and elderly. At the time when Afghan women and girls pleaded to be rescued from the fast approaching Taliban, the richest and the most 'gender equal' states of Europe - Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherland - demanded the

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.negar-afghanwomen.org>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.wluml.org>

<sup>13</sup> <https://inews.co.uk/news/world/afghanistans-first-female-mayor-waiting-taliban-come-kill-her-1152127>



EU leaders to continue deportations to Afghanistan. "*Stopping returns sends the wrong signal and is likely to motivate even more Afghan citizens to leave their home for the EU*", said their statement of 5th August.<sup>14</sup> With an exception of some EU states halting the deportation to Afghanistan, we are yet to see what measures the EU leaders will create to help Afghan women, and a whole generation of Afghan girls and boys, whose exodus is inevitable, should their homeland become a stronghold of the misogynist, conservative regime that is the Taliban.

We, as feminist activists and women's rights campaigners, have no power to remedy the mistakes of incompetent political leaders who, year after year, decade after decade, have engaged in ill-considered and egregious decisions, resulting in the calamity for women and girls in Afghanistan that we are witnessing today. However, we do have the power to speak, to expose and to document. We have the power to hold political leaders to account and to demand justice for women. More than ever, we have the power to bear witness and to remember.

**We invite everyone to support the organisations working to secure the rights of Afghan women and girls:**

Women Regional Network	<a href="https://gofund.me/423dddab">https://gofund.me/423dddab</a>
Women Living under Muslim Laws	<a href="https://www.wluml.org/how-to-help/">https://www.wluml.org/how-to-help/</a>
Women for Afghan Women	<a href="https://womenforafghanwomen.networkforgood.com/projects/123748-20-years-of-afghan-women-strong">https://womenforafghanwomen.networkforgood.com/projects/123748-20-years-of-afghan-women-strong</a>
We the Afghan	<a href="https://gofund.me/91e9399b">https://gofund.me/91e9399b</a>
NEGAR	<a href="https://www.negar-afghanwomen.org/2/parrainage/">https://www.negar-afghanwomen.org/2/parrainage/</a>
Afghan's Women's Network	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/afghanwomennetwork/">https://www.facebook.com/afghanwomennetwork/</a>
Her Afghanistan	<a href="https://www.herafghanistan.com">https://www.herafghanistan.com</a>

**European Network of Migrant Women inviting all to a public international event *STAND UP FOR AFGHAN WOMEN* at 16:30 Central European Time on 28 August, the day when global protests will take place in cities across the world in solidarity with Afghan people.**

**[REGISTER FOR THE EVENT HERE](#)**

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/six-countries-urge-eu-not-stop-deportations-afghanistan-belgium-says-2021-08-10/>