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Afghan Women's Rights Remain on the Periphery of Talks with Taliban

Over the past six months, the Taliban has targeted and terrorized the women and girls of Afghanistan, swiftly reimposing draconian measures that limit their freedom and undermine their safety. In the past few weeks alone, numerous reports have emerged of women human rights defenders being detained, tortured, and killed for their activism. Despite public rhetoric claiming support for Afghan women and girls, the world has largely watched as the Taliban dramatically rolled back their rights by decades.

Earlier this week, Norway convened Taliban leaders, diplomats primarily from Western countries, and other delegates for three days of talks on humanitarian aid and human rights in Afghanistan. However, Norway evidently failed to establish any preconditions for the Taliban's participation, such as ceasing the political detention of Afghan women activists or guaranteeing the free exercise of women's and girls' human rights and their access to critical humanitarian assistance.

As organizations advocating for and standing in solidarity with Afghan women's rights activists, we are deeply disappointed in the opaque, rushed manner in which the Oslo talks were convened and the lack of priority given to addressing the Taliban's treatment of women and girls. While several Afghan women attended, the talks failed to include the broad and robust participation of Afghan women civil society members and comprehensive discussion on issues related to the rights of Afghan women and girls, continuing a trend that emerged in the U.S.-Taliban dialogues and intra-Afghan process in Doha in 2020. This marginalization contravenes the obligations of [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325](#) and [subsequent resolutions](#) seeking to advance women's meaningful participation in decision-making and the broader Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.

Also, similar to previous internationally facilitated engagements with the Taliban, the lack of notice and support that the Afghan women leaders received in advance limited their ability to properly prepare and organize. Sufficient advance notice is necessary to ensure that they can substantively advocate on behalf of the countless number of women protesters, human rights activists, journalists, doctors, lawyers, former government officials, and civil servants that have been intimidated, detained, tortured, and killed over the past six months – in addition to the millions of other Afghan women and girls currently suffering in one of the worst humanitarian crises ever seen.

In solidarity with our Afghan sisters, we call upon the U.S. Government to exercise bold leadership in amplifying the voices and rights of Afghan women and girls, as is required by the [Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017](#) and the [U.S. Strategy on WPS](#). We applaud the early efforts of U.S. Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights, Rina Amiri, and her team at the U.S. Department of State, but call on the whole of the U.S. Government to support their work and prioritize the lives, safety, and fundamental freedoms of Afghan women and girls. We also encourage Congress to quickly pass the necessary legislation to authorize additional humanitarian aid and foreign assistance programming that upholds respect for women's rights and gender equality. We urge the U.S. and its international partners to ensure humanitarian aid is distributed in line with humanitarian principles and international obligations, including meeting the needs of women, girls, and others vulnerable and marginalized communities disproportionately affected by the current crisis.

We call on the U.S. Government to lead the international community in demanding that the Taliban immediately take the following steps, which must also be a precondition for any future discussions in relation to peace, humanitarian assistance, and human rights:

- Immediately release all women activists and political prisoners and cease the intimidation, detention, and abuse of Afghan women;

- End Taliban-driven harassment and attacks on women and girls for exercising their basic human rights to employment, education, speech, and control over their lives, bodies, and finances, and reverse policies and practices that limit these rights; and
- Allow for the operation of an independent and impartial monitoring mechanism that incorporates the perspectives of survivors, including women, of Taliban abuse (or abuse by their representatives), to investigate the Taliban's political imprisonment of protesters and other acts that might rise to the level of war crimes, crimes against humanity, atrocities, or grave human rights abuses.

Finally, and most critically, we urgently call upon the international community to engage a diversity of Afghan women leaders as partners and peers and demand their full, equal, and meaningful participation in any and all future talks on Afghanistan.

We will continue to support Afghan women and girls and engage in discussions with the U.S. Government and the international community to monitor and track progress.