



Women living under muslim laws
النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين
Femmes sous lois musulmanes

Transnational Solidarity Network

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The fall of the Taliban ended one of the 20th century's cruellest regimes – one that deprived Afghan citizens, particularly women, of their basic human rights. Afghanistan has faced immense challenges posed by the ousted Taliban's ongoing clandestine attacks and assassinations on innocents. Despite this, the nation has developed a constitution, and step-by-step worked to build the basic structures for representative democracy. With the support of the international community, including more than 40,000 Canadians, Afghan citizens have built schools, clinics, and other basic services. It has also enabled for the restoration of war-torn and the creation of new political and civil institutions, including the Ministry of Women and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Moreover, Afghans and particularly women's rights advocates, have developed a thriving civil society, ensuring women's active presence in public life as high government officials, teachers, doctors, lawyers, intellectuals, artists, and advocates in the public sphere. Having endured life under the Taliban and other warring political factions for decades, Afghans have developed a profound appreciation of the importance of human dignity, equal citizenry, and fundamental human rights. The Taliban's response to citizens' support for such principles has resulted in the assassination of its critics, including many women's rights advocates, journalists, and female members of parliaments, as well as attacks on schoolgirls and destruction of property including setting fire to girls' schools. Their terrorist attacks have claimed tens of thousands of lives, physically handicapped and injured many more, both physically and psychologically. They have destroyed villages, impoverishing communities, deepening devastation and prolonging a sense of insecurity. Clearly, Afghan citizens are tired of 40 years of continuous war and yearning for long-lasting peace.

Achieving durable peace requires robust efforts by all parties to build trust, confidence, empathy, and a spirit of reconciliation between the diverse political forces and the general public. This absolutely requires the meaningful inclusion of all segments of Afghan society in the peace process, most notably women and ethnic and religious minorities, demographics that have suffered most under the Taliban. The early stage of negotiation between the Taliban and the US government, which excluded the elected Afghan government, women, and civil society representatives, set the process on a less than ideal start. While people of Afghanistan desire peace and an end to the violence, understandably, Afghan civil society, particularly women's and human rights advocates, are worried about the possibility that their fundamental rights will be traded away in favour of a narrow security agreement with the Taliban. However, despite claims of having revised their political and (distorted) religious ideologies, field-based research reports from organizations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UN human rights agencies and Afghan civil society groups, indicate otherwise. The Taliban's lack of commitment to human and civil rights is evident by their increased levels of para-militarized and terrorist violence, being used in a cruel and bizarrely misguided effort to gain greater leverage during the peace talks regardless of the cost to human life.

A durable peace cannot be achieved through the barrel of guns and the return of the Taliban's

ideology. We have already experienced the Taliban's extreme violence, particularly against women, and observed their misguided gender ideology during their rule in the 1990s and now in the areas that remain under their control. Long-lasting peace is only possible with the inclusion and meaningful participation of the voices of moderation, respect for human rights and guided international norms.

The Canadian government is a global champion of women's rights and gender equality. Its foreign affairs and international trade are guided by a feminist foreign policy imperative. We are proud that the Government of Canada appreciates the differential impact of armed conflict on women and understands the important role that women play in preventing conflict from escalating and in bringing about lasting peace. We the undersigned believe now is the time for the Canadian government to lead the charge, and mobilize the international community to stand with Afghan women and support the building of firm foundations for peace in Afghanistan; by using every means possible with policy, diplomacy and advocacy to create an environment that unequivocally enables representatives of all of Afghanistan, including women, human rights advocates, civil society organizations, representative of victims of violence, and ethnic and religious minorities, to be part of the peace talks. The reconciliation environment must be cultivated, and Canada and the broader international community must ensure that the gains made in the last 19 years through blood and sacrifice are not lost. These gains have come at a great economic cost to Afghanistan and to the international community, but more importantly, at the cost of the lives of many Afghans, Canadians and members of the international mission to Afghanistan.

Clearly, there is no military solution to be had; all parties must come together under the auspices of the UN, with the application of Resolution 1325 mandating meaningful inclusion of women in every aspect of the peace process, and in the spirit of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We ask the Canadian government to act in accordance with its own unequivocal gender equality guidelines and to support human rights through its international policy by supporting the rights of Afghan women, religious and ethnic minorities, and civil society. Appeasing the Taliban by bartering away the considerable gains of the last 19 years, including citizens' rights outlined in the current Constitution, will undermine the emerging Afghan democracy and can never lead to sustainable peace. We urge the government of Canada to seek appropriate channels for

reconciliation and support the internationally sanctioned framework under the auspices of the United Nations to bring about sustainable peace, to allow Afghan citizens and their elected government to bring about national reconciliation and take the steps to expand their young democracy.

In solidarity
Women Living Under Muslim Laws

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