



Women living under muslim laws
النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين
Femmes sous lois musulmanes
Transnational Feminist Solidarity Network

Prevent a Humanitarian Crisis: Stop the Taliban's Plan to Force Women Into Sexual Slavery in the name of "marriage"

Since the withdrawal of the USA and NATO forces from Afghanistan, the Taliban have advanced to seize control of new districts while making a significant demand for peace negotiations. Yet rather than negotiating peace in good faith with Afghanistan's government, the Taliban have intensified their targeted killing, bombing, and war against the people. These conflicts have further devastated the Afghan people, who have suffered displacement, indiscriminate killings, torture and other atrocities. The country is on the brink of a humanitarian disaster, with the Covid pandemic further ravaging the people.

The Taliban leaders who have taken over Badakhshan and Takhar have issued an order to the local leaders to provide them with a list of girls over the age of 15 and widows under the age of 45 for "marriage" with Taliban fighters and inculcation in 'authentic Islam' (by sending them to the conservative region of Waziristan). Women and their families in these areas are living in fear and insecurity. Many have joined the ranks of internally displaced persons, adding to the considerable humanitarian disaster that is unfolding in Afghanistan.

Offering women and girls as sex slaves or "wives" is a war strategy to lure and retain militants. The Taliban's narrative that these sexual enslavements are "marriages" is fallacious and misleading and does not legitimise their abhorrent plan. These are not marriages, but in fact, organised mass sexual slavery. In many traditional societies, rape is perceived not only as a crime against individual women but also an attack on community honour. Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states, "Women must be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any other form of indecent assault". The Taliban's strategy is to use rape and sexual slavery to break down the spirit of the Afghan communities in order to rule them.

The latest Taliban order is a repeat of their documented horrendous accounts of atrocities during their rule (1996-2001). It also makes it clear that despite their occasional claims of having changed their perspectives, especially on women, and contrary to their improving international public relations persona, their actions, and in particular their latest declared intent to commit thousands of women to sexual slavery, indicate quite the opposite.

In 2008, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1820 affirming that "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide." This resolution reaffirms the prohibition of rape in the Geneva Conventions. Forcing women to submit to sexual slavery under the guise of marriage is no less a war crime. It is organised rape where women are rounded up and forced to enter into marriages with the advancing fighters.

The rape, sexual enslavement and murder of women who refuse or try to escape are war crimes. For example, the Boko Haram kidnapping and sexual enslavement of 200 schoolgirls in Nigeria constitute a war crime as does the kidnapping and sexual enslavement of 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Nadia Murad by Isis/Daesh in Iraq. The story of her sexual enslavement and escape was carried by all major news media.

Is the world going to watch as the story of Yazidi women and Nigerian Chibok school girls is repeated in Afghanistan? Their accounts of what they were subjected to by the fighters of

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Isis/Daesh and Boko Haram fuelled global outrage and condemnation and spurred the international community to emphasize that sexual violence in conflict is a war crime.

We cannot stand by paralyzed as the Taliban proceed to treat women as the booty of the war. This time, we must make our outrage loudly audible and clearly visible before these war crimes are perpetrated and not wait until after their mass perpetration.

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) stands in solidarity with women and feminist groups and networks in Afghanistan to express our deep concern about the condition of women and communities in the areas that the Taliban have come to control through the force of war. WLUML urges the United Nations Security Council and the international community to act quickly and decisively to prevent further atrocities against women and people of Afghanistan and prevent Afghanistan from sliding further into yet another deadly civil war.

As such, WLUML calls for:

- **The international community to emphatically denounce the Taliban's plan to force younger single, divorced and widowed women to 'marry' Taliban fighters as sexual slavery and therefore a war crime that should be immediately reversed.**
- **An immediate ceasefire** to ensure the peace process can proceed in good faith.
 - **Women's human rights to be protected** before, during and in the outcomes of this peace process.
 - Women's and citizens' rights currently enshrined in the Constitution, national legislation and obligations under international law must continue to be respected and enforced.
 - The autonomy of civil society, including women's rights and feminist groups, must be ensured as part of the peace agreement.
- **Inclusive peace negotiations to continue** with meaningful and substantive participation of Afghan women representing diverse segments of society, in a process led by the citizens of Afghanistan.
 - Women should comprise **at least 40% of the negotiating team** in all peace negotiations if they are to meaningfully represent the interests of half of the society, particularly given the gendered aspects of violence and marginalization of the past decades.
- **The UN to establish a peacekeeping mission** to oversee and monitor the situation, ensure the protection of human rights, and provide security for women human rights defenders and peacebuilders.
 - Sponsor countries and the UN must ensure that gender experts and progressive Islamic scholars accompany the (re)negotiating team.
 - The UN must hold parties to the negotiation accountable for their women's human rights commitments and monitor inclusion in the peace process.
 - All parties who commit war crimes, **including rape, and sexual enslavement of women (under whatever guise) be held accountable.**
- **The international community to provide direct financial and structural support** to women peace delegates, civil society actors and institutions, and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) so they can continue to monitor the human rights situation across the country.
- **The lifting of any sanctions against the Taliban to be conditional** on a commitment to upholding women's and citizens' rights currently enshrined in the Constitution, national legislation and obligations under international law.

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In solidarity,

Women Living Under Muslim Laws, July 2021