

STOP GENDER APARTHEID IN AFGHANISTAN: WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR DIGNITY



The international feminist Network of the Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), in collaboration with the women of Afghanistan's leaders, and other global and regional figures, is launching its 3rd phase of the campaign **Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan: Women's struggle for dignity**. The disastrous, shameful, and chaotic departure of American forces in mid-2021 brought the Taliban to power for a second time. The feminists and human rights advocates had forewarned the international community, to no avail, that there was no evidence that the Taliban had moderated their extreme approach to the rights of women, girls and minorities. This more recent return to power of the Taliban has proven even worse than many expected, and given the advent of social media, the world cannot claim ignorance. Yet the international community has barely moved beyond expressing sympathy and drafting statements of condemnation. As significant as they may be, those alone are not going to change the situation of women and the people of Afghanistan. Additionally, the return of the Taliban has significant consequences for all women living in Muslim contexts, as fundamentalists elsewhere see this as a vindication of their regressive gender ideologies.

WLUML and its partners have come to the conclusion that to effectively challenge the Taliban, we need to have an international instrument and a framework to remind the international community of the depth of the disaster that has befallen on the women of Afghanistan. Ours and other research indicate that the Taliban are pursuing a gender apartheid policy by introducing systematic policies that deny women their basic human rights in the name of their particular understanding of religion. They are forcing women out of public life, and public spaces, and denying them education, employment, and public participation and all tools of empowerment in order to more easily suppress them. The Taliban's exclusion of women from the public and economic life of the country goes far further than the South African exercise of apartheid practices the Taliban's atrocities.

Acknowledgement of the Taliban's current gender apartheid approach equates to recognition of women's human rights, and justifies efforts to safeguard threats to women's and girls' human rights. It is hard to believe that in the 21st-century and after a long struggle to establish that women's rights are human rights, once again, we need to launch a campaign to remind the international community that women's rights are human rights and, like other rights need to be protected in meaningful ways.

CAMPAIGN CENTRAL DEMANDS

1 The Taliban regime must facilitate the formation of a government that is inclusive of women, ethnic, and religious minorities, through a free and fair election that is supervised by independent or UN election observers.

2 Immediate reopening of schools and universities for girls and women.

5 Stop arbitrary arrest and harassment of civil society advocates.

7 The Taliban must remove any obstacles to women's access to employment and participation in politics and civil society.

9 To remove any restriction on access to health, including reproductive health and contraception and children's health.

11 Stop the attack on safehouses and women's shelters that are protecting women from domestic abuse and other threats.

13 To remove all overt and covert obstacles to access to the arts and sports, for all but especially for women at the national and international levels.

3 Immediate restoration of all jobs and professions to women who were dismissed following the takeover because of their gender.

4 Stop using religion and Islamic Shari'a as a pretext for gender apartheid vision.

6 The Taliban must remove any obstacle to women's freedom of movement and travel, including the removal of the need for an accompanying mahram (close male kin) in public spaces and stop harassing the women and their families.

8 To dismantle the Ministry of Vice and Virtue and remove the imposed dress code and compulsory wearing of the burqa, and to re-establish the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.

10 To stop the abduction of women and girls and force them into marriages that are, in reality, sexual slavery.

12 To stop censorship of the media and respect freedom of expression.

CAMPAIGN INTERNATIONAL DEMANDS

1 The international community should not negotiate or recognize the Taliban while their policies and conduct breach the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other UN conventions that Afghanistan has signed, as well as the rights that had been guaranteed to citizens under the 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan.

2 The international community must support mass digital education for women and children at the school and university levels and not wait for the change of attitude by the Taliban.

3 International humanitarian aid should be distributed through long-established women-led organizations to ensure that aids reach those in need and not only to the Taliban supporters.

4 All legal obstacles that prevent the transfer of funds to civil society and the smooth functioning of humanitarian support must be removed.

5 The international community must facilitate and expedite the processing of visa procedures for all people waiting in Afghanistan and neighboring countries.

6 The international community must provide financial and resource support for those Afghan refugees who are in the neighboring countries, such as Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Tajikistan, Qatar, and more.

7 The international community must support the engagement of democratic forces and women's organizations that campaign for democracy and women's rights in Afghanistan. Funds should be provided to women's organizations for periodic global summits and networking opportunities with similar entities to coordinate their efforts.



JOIN US NOW



Photo Credit: AWN



Photo Credit: AWN

OBJECTIVES OF THE CAMPAIGN

- 1 In partnership with other groups, WLUML aims to help build the capacity of women's human rights organizations and activists in Afghanistan** and among women in the diaspora who are involved in the struggle to stop the breach of women's rights in Afghanistan.
- 2 Lobby key states' officials** particularly from countries like Canada, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, Tunisia, the United States, and other relevant countries to pressure the Taliban to stop using Islam as a pretext for their gender vision and to adopt international norms and observe the citizens' rights within the international human rights framework.
- 3 Lobby the International community** and funders on the need to invest in a substantive digital education system from school to university.
- 4 Increase public pressure** by mobilizing feminists and women's rights networks and organizations worldwide - particularly those based in Muslim contexts. This will be done through awareness-raising of the broader historical and transnational context of the abuse of fundamentalisms and women's human rights, along with the amplification of women's call for transnational solidarity.
- 5 Engage with key UN mechanisms** (particularly the Security Council, Human Rights Council and Special Procedures) to categorize Taliban's policies toward women as gender apartheid as it meets all conditions of apartheid and indeed surpasses those and worse. We demand that the UNHCR appointee pays particular attention to the breach of women and girls' human rights and issue periodical reports.
- 6 Engage with the EU** in support of our demand for recognition of the Taliban's gender apartheid policy and have a periodical official report on the breach of women and girls' human rights.

JOIN US NOW



Graphic Credit: John Stanley