

Women's Absence in the Taliban-controlled Political Arena and its Consequences

By Lutf Ali Sultani



Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, UN Women Executive Director speaking at the event, Oct. 26, UNHQ, NY.

On October 26, the Afghanistan Policy Lab, in collaboration with Women in International Security (WIIS) - Italy, UN Women, and the Permanent Missions of Italy, Canada, the United Kingdom, Tunisia, Ukraine, and Greece to the United Nations, hosted a high-level side event at the UN Headquarters in New York as part of the UN Women Peace and Security Week. The event, titled **"Women, Peace & Security Agenda, and the Situation of Afghan Women: Women's Absence in the Taliban-controlled Political Arena and Its Consequences,"** brought together prominent Afghan women leaders and international experts to shed light on the critical issue of Afghan women's exclusion from society and the political space under the Taliban rule. They emphasized

the urgent need for international action and solidarity to protect their rights and ensure their meaningful participation in Afghanistan's future. The participants stressed the importance of maintaining a continuous discussion on the critical situation of Afghan women and listening to their voices and their concerns.

Speakers highlighted that the Taliban's takeover, and subsequently the erosion of women from political and socio-economic arenas, inspired extremists in the region and beyond to follow suit in their respective countries. Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, Founder and CEO of the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) and an adjunct professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), who runs a network of women-led peace-building organizations in 42 countries, raised concern over the current situation in Afghanistan and stated that **"the minute the Taliban took over, our partners in the Philippines, Indonesia, Yemen, and every place where Islamists, jihadists, and other kinds of extremists have been active, not just Islamists but other forms of extremist forces, were inspired by the violence of the Taliban and their ability to commit horrific acts."** She warned that the situation in Afghanistan would not remain contained and would have global consequences as **"what happens in Afghanistan doesn't stay in Afghanistan."**

During the peace talk negotiations in Doha, the Taliban presented a narrative that their stance on women had changed, assuring that they would uphold women's rights based on Sharia Law. However, after regaining power, the group demonstrated otherwise, imposing draconian policies on Afghan women. Habiba Sarabi, who was a member of the Afghan government's negotiation team in peace talks with the Taliban, called on people not to blindly trust the Taliban's words, as they had reneged on all the promises they made during the negotiations regarding women's rights. **"During the negotiations, the Taliban told us that women, except for becoming the president, can participate in all other fields. But now we see something different. Therefore, we should not simply believe what the Taliban say,"** she emphasized. Ms. Sarabi described the current situation in Afghanistan as a state of gender apartheid and stressed that Afghan women themselves must have a voice in any meeting or decision that concerns them.

The Taliban has issued over 50 edicts and decrees that violate women's fundamental rights. The de facto authorities have denied women and girls access to education, work, movement, assembly, and recreation. Over the last few months, they have banned women from visiting Band-e-Amir, one of the world's most stunning national parks. They have forced girls out of school by the age of 10, dismissed female nursery teachers, and shuttered all beauty salons, resulting in the loss of 60,000 women's jobs.

Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, the UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director, described the Taliban's treatment of Afghan women as an extensive attack on women's and girls' rights in the modern era. She emphasized that the international community requires creative and transformational leadership to address this "unprecedented assault on women's rights in Afghanistan." She added, **"We need an intergovernmental process to explicitly codify gender equality in international law so that the international community can respond accordingly."**

Meanwhile, Mr. Richard Bennett, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, whose mission was recently extended, stated that they are preparing a report on the institutionalized system of discrimination, segregation, disrespect for human dignity, and the exclusion of women and girls. **"This mandate does not specifically refer to gender persecution and gender apartheid, but it does build on the previous report, which does refer to that."** he explained.

The representatives of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union reiterated their commitment to ensuring that the issue of Afghan women is a top priority in their engagement with the Taliban. Stella Ronner-Grubačić, the European Union Ambassador for Gender and Diversity, emphasized, **"Women's rights must be the primary lens through which we make decisions. We must focus our efforts on supporting the involvement of Afghan women in a multi-leveled political process, even if it doesn't align with other urgent priorities. Our long-term aim should be preparing Afghan women and ourselves for the day when Afghan women can once again participate in the socio-economic and political life of their country."**

Katrina Fotovat, Senior Official in the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State, directly addressed Afghan women, assuring them that the United States has not forgotten about them and will not make decisions about them without their input.

In conclusion, the speakers emphasized that Afghan women should be present in any discussion, meeting, and decision that pertains to them. They stressed the importance of Afghan women speaking for themselves, rather than others speaking on their behalf.

To watch the full event, click on the link below:

[Afghan Women's Absence in the Taliban-controlled Political Arena and its Consequences | UN Web TV](#)