



International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) Statement on Afghanistan

Demands by Women Peacebuilders for Women Peacebuilders

We called for the international community to listen to Afghan women peacebuilders.

Our partners risked their own lives to speak at the United Nations, the European Union, the International Criminal Court, in the United States, and elsewhere. They warned of the reality in the Afghan forces, informed the world of needs on the ground, and offered recommendations and practical actions. They repeatedly asked for the chance to negotiate their own fate at the peace tables in Doha and elsewhere. They were never granted such an opportunity. Rather, they were willfully ignored and excluded.

So, we are here. The country over-run by Taliban fighters, some as young as 12, armed to the hilt, with women and girls as their primary prey.

In recent days, we have seen that Taliban commanders have already demanded some communities turn over young, unmarried women to become their wives. They have sent women and girls home from work, banks, and universities.

In their August 17, 2021 press conference, the Taliban leadership claimed that they would uphold women's rights 'within the framework of Islam'. They offered no explanation of what that means. Meanwhile our partners have reported the Taliban going door-to-door to identify people. We fear they are compiling lists that will put women peacebuilders, journalists, lawyers and judges, artists and civil servants, their colleagues and their families under grave threat of violence, particularly once the eyes of the international community are no longer on them.

As a small international NGO, we are doing all we can financially and politically to ensure the safety of our partners, their staff, and their families.

In 2020, many governments including the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and Norway endorsed the recommendations in our [Protection Framework](#). In 2017 the United States adopted the Women, Peace and Security Act that also called for the inclusion of women and their protection in contexts of conflict.

Now it is time for them to put these commitments into action, and for all states to endorse and implement these recommendations.

We urge governments to heed the following key demands, issued by women peacebuilders and for women peacebuilders.

- 1. Protect women peacebuilders, women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and activists most imminently under threat as [others](#) have also stated:**
 - Charter direct evacuation flights for them, their families, and their staff.
 - Put in place safety measures to escort them to planes;

- Expand sustainable options for their temporary relocation abroad, by expanding existing visa categories to apply to their specific circumstances, following precedent set i.e. Spain's visa program for the protection of human rights defenders at risk;
 - Grant humanitarian parole or temporary legal status and work/study visas and permits, as well as education, housing, healthcare for their families.
2. **Protect civil society activists remaining in Afghanistan, follow the recommendations from our [Protection Framework](#) to build a safety net for their physical, legal and political protection including by:**
- Seeking formal guarantees from the Taliban leadership and forthcoming government that civil society actors and government employees and will be protected;
 - Maintaining contact and relationships with women peacebuilders and WHRDs remaining in Afghanistan;
 - Strengthening coordination mechanisms to respond to threats against civil society, including through direct contact with ICAN and other networks; and
 - Facilitating emergency and ongoing support to civil society through physical accompaniment, grants, advocacy, and security arrangements.
3. **Protect the broader population of Afghanistan:**
- Urge neighboring countries to open their borders and allow for a humanitarian corridor to provide safe passage for people, food, fuel, trade, and medical supplies;
 - Support neighboring countries to receive refugees for resettlement and ensure they are protected and not exploited or abused;
 - Apply sanctions to individual Taliban and related actors, not to the entire country of Afghanistan, to prevent further civilian suffering, and until it is clear that they are not issuing reprisals against civil society or governmental personnel.
4. **Do not disappear or ignore Afghans and Afghanistan:**
- Support the provision of emergency satellite communications in the case of an internet blackout;
 - Insist on the safe presence of international organizations –from the UN and diplomatic community to INGOs and media– this is a means of keeping a light and focus on civilians and civil society.

Afghan women peacebuilders across all sectors have risked their lives for their communities. They have stood firmly in support of universal human rights. They have stood up and spoken out against terrorism, corruption, and oppression. Even now, many are searching for the light and the hope that their gains will not be lost.

At this dark and uncertain moment, the least the world can do, is stand and walk with them.