



Open Letter to United Nations, USA, NATO and International Human Rights and Women's Right Organizations

18th June 2024

Excellencies,

The third Doha meeting is scheduled to be held on June 30th and July 1st, 2024, continuing discussions on the international community's approach to Afghanistan. The previous two meetings, held last year, did not yield significant outcomes. The upcoming third Doha meeting is highly crucial as the DFA has announced its willingness to participate. This meeting represents a significant opportunity to demonstrate to all Afghans especially Afghan women and girls that their human rights are not a bargaining chip, but the foundation upon which the future of their country depends. It is only possible when the international community and all relevant stakeholders have united stand around a key message: the rights of Afghan women and girls must not be used as a political bargaining tool and by implementing effective mechanisms, ensuring the central discussion of these meetings focuses on the current crisis of women's rights in Afghanistan. The credibility of the upcoming Doha process depends on convincing the Taliban to participate while adhering to a transparent, principled approach that upholds human rights, especially those of women, and ensures their meaningful participation in society.

Since the Taliban resumed power in 2021, there has been an unprecedented violation of women's and girls' rights. Almost in the past 3 years there has been nearly 98 decrees, restricting Afghan women and girls from their fundamental human rights. These policies, which severely restrict the rights and freedoms of women and girls, have sparked outrage and criticism from Afghan people, international governments, human rights organizations, and civil society groups, such actions violate fundamental human rights and hinder the progress of Afghan society. The Afghan people, Human right organization and women's right organization and international community, call for immediate action to protect and uphold the rights of Afghan women and girls, ensuring they are not marginalized or oppressed by discriminatory policies.

One of the main conditions of Taliban for participation in third Doha meeting was ensuring that civil society and women representatives are not invited. Taliban has realised that civil society and women activists are the main and strong opposition to their discriminatory policies. The international community has demonstrated its commitment to addressing the unacceptable situation faced by Afghan women. The clear message has been that for the current regime to gain recognition, it must respect fundamental human rights. However, the current rulers of Afghanistan have shown little interest in engaging in dialogue with civil society activists, especially those outside of Afghanistan, and have instead increased their restrictions on women living inside the country. A stark example of this is the recent decree setting a uniform salary of 5000 AFN per

month for women, regardless of their position. This underscores the failure of the international community's approach thus far to deter the Taliban from systematically repressing women's rights and signals that it is time for international organizations and UN member states to rethink their strategy toward Afghanistan.

The Taliban's conditions for participation, if undermine the protection of women's human rights, should not be accepted. Women constitute half of the nation, and their exclusion from all walks of life would severely damage Afghanistan's development. Every decree that bans women's rights harms the social, economic, and political fabric of society. Professional and skilled women are psychologically traumatized, and female breadwinners are denied dignified employment opportunities, pushing them towards destitution. The daily increased economic crisis, shrinking space for civil society, political activities and highly restrictive measures by the security department on individual and groups activities has made the life unbreathable.

Ahead of Doha III, we urge you to ensure the following:

-Respect for human rights and women's rights must be a core objective of the international community's engagement with DFA. Women's rights should be a central topic in all discussions, including those on the humanitarian crisis, political processes, climate change, counter-narcotics, counterterrorism, the economy, and development efforts.

- Discussions must be transparent and public; any decisions made behind closed doors are unacceptable to the Afghan people. The UN, USA, and all other stakeholders must allow civil society, women representatives, and representatives of the disability, minority, and marginalized communities to participate in these important meetings. To ensure transparency and accountability in any international cooperation with the DFA, it is crucial to establish transparency monitoring and operational mechanisms. This will allow the Afghan people and the international community to track the implementation and progress of any agreements made with the Taliban. Holding and conducting negotiations behind closed doors without such transparency will not benefit either the global community or the people of Afghanistan.

- The recent removal of the travel ban from four high-level Taliban officials by the UN is highly concerning, given the Taliban's inflexibility on reducing or removing bans on women's rights. Women's full, equal, meaningful, and safe participation in all aspects of public life and decision-making, including any political process, must be guaranteed. It is the universal obligation of the UN to make just and transparent decisions that do not undermine the life, equality, and dignity of the rest of the community. Any decision that ignores the reality on the ground will be unjust and unacceptable to the people of Afghanistan.

- Principled engagement requires centering human rights and accountability. We urge Member States to establish clear safeguards around the full spectrum of women's human rights, without exception, in accordance with Afghanistan's international obligations under The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). All restrictions violating the rights of Afghan women and girls, including education, work, movement, assembly,

expression, and dress, must be immediately and unconditionally removed in accordance with Resolution 2681 (2023).

- The notion of a comprehensive and inclusive government, as emphasized in statements from the United Nations, regional countries, and pertinent institutions/agencies, must be accurately interpreted and executed to guarantee equal and fair participation of both women and men at all vertical and horizontal levels of the political power structure. A prime example of such inclusivity and representation is the formation of a governing body that genuinely reflects the diverse voices and interests of Afghanistan's people. Failure to establish such an inclusive government not only risks leaving Afghanistan's problems unresolved but may also perpetuate conflicts in various forms within the country. It will pave the way for a major conflict and war in the near future.

-The education ban on girls and higher education is causing substantial damage to the nation-building process and the future of Afghanistan. The Taliban must be questioned on this detrimental policy that destroys the country's future and pushes the country to remain dependent on the help of neighboring countries for a balanced human resource for all genders of society.

-The USA and NATO, having played significant roles in the Taliban takeover with their hasty and disorganized evacuation, must now listen to the voices of the Afghan people, especially Afghan women and girls who are suffering the most. We urge the UN and member states not to hand over the UN seat to the Taliban as they do not represent the whole nation and are against half of the nation. If the UN hands over the UN seat to the Taliban, it will be an unjust decision. So far, the Taliban have not kept their promises and commitments to the international community. The United Nations must hold themselves responsible to ensure that any such engagement does not lead to the further marginalization or neglect of women, who constitute half of society.

-It is crucial that any changes in Afghanistan are assessed based on human values and respect for human rights. Neglecting these fundamental principles could lead to a regressive political system that not only threatens the freedom of its citizens but also undermines international efforts to uphold human rights.

-The UN should be transparent by extending invitations to representatives of civil society and women activists. The names of selected representatives should be made public so that all civil society groups can organize consultation meetings with the selected representatives and convey their messages to them to amplify their voices with full honesty and dedication to the DFA and the international community.

The Afghan Women Coordination Umbrella (AFWCU), an Afghan-led coordination mechanism, was established to facilitate an Afghan women-led agenda for better coordination among women's networks, movements, and coalitions inside and outside of Afghanistan, and to advocate for sustainable and strategic mechanisms to address the compounded and multifaceted challenges facing Afghan women and girls.

It is currently composed of 376 women leaders from Afghanistan's 34 provinces and is led by a core group of eight Afghan women leaders and activists outside Afghanistan (with a long history of peace and/or women's rights' activism in the country), representing the diverse groups from eight zones. The core group leads the work of the Umbrella and safeguards its agenda against influence or interference from donors, partners or governments. While the core group represents the interests of Afghan women and girls, the Umbrella's direction, strategy and advocacy are driven consultatively by members inside Afghanistan.

The AFWCU has three overarching priorities:

- an Afghan women-led agenda through increased solidarity and collaboration
- enhanced coordination of advocacy efforts among Afghan women
- a facilitated and strengthened process for women's meaningful contribution in Afghanistan