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**Afghan women must be meaningfully included in peace negotiations**

KABUL, The long-awaited Afghan peace process finally began on September 11, and Afghanistan's women must have a seat at the table. While crucial issues such as disarmament, power sharing, the presence of foreign troops, human rights abuses, and territorial disputes will likely take center stage, leaders from around the world have issued a call to uphold the rights of Afghan women to be included in the talks.

In his Open Letter from the World Leaders Calling for Afghanistan back to the mainstream, promoting the role of women, as long suppressed but endorsed the non-negotiable goal for women to be included in the challenging process of negotiating an inclusive peace and the end to two decades of war. Here is a brief of the open letter.

Including women is critical for national security and counterterrorism. The protection of Afghan women's rights is intertwined in the constitution and the laws they have made on hand to hand with stability, security, and peace of Afghanistan. Inclusive participation in the political, economic and social of the country is not a favor to women, it is critical to national security and countering terrorism. Women as a moderating force in preventing the conditions that give rise to terrorism. In societies where women are oppressed and their rights denied, those societies are more violent, unstable, and conflict-ridden. Ambassador Mstana Yousof, former UN ambassador and chair for global women's issues, co-chaired the Geneva Process Institute for Women, Peace, and Security, and Atlantic Council board director.

The focus must remain on creating a better future for Afghanistan, not just a foreign withdrawal. "Withdrawing forces from Afghanistan is vital, but securing a political agreement that safeguards the future of all Afghans is what really counts, and few issues will be as critical to their talks as those regarding the rights also of women."

That's why it's so important for the international community to remain focused on this critical issue." Prime Minister Carl Bildt, former prime minister and minister for foreign affairs of Sweden, member of the Atlantic Council's International Advisory Board said.

Without including women, a peace agreement would not be sustainable. "When the world took action to bring Afghanistan back to the mainstream, promoting the role of women, as long suppressed but endorsed the non-negotiable goal for women to be included in the challenging process of negotiating an inclusive peace and the end to two decades of war. Here is a brief of the open letter."

more than ever it is fundamental to stand with Afghan women. Instead of seeing us as a bystander, she said in the negotiations, Afghan women should be the centerpiece of the peace process. Her very success and sustainability depend on it," said Ana Paloma, former foreign minister of Spain.

Frank for women's rights demonstrates the gap between today's Afghanistan and the future. "The importance of the message is that Open Letter must be understood by all Afghans, and particularly of women in the Taliban. At the core of the discussion of peace and Afghanistan's future lies the wide gap between today's Afghanistan, much changed over the past sixteen years despite all its problems and contradictions, and the Afghanistan of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate. The progress made in the evolving process made in the evolving process of women in Afghan society is emblematic of the gains that must be recognized and preserved if peace is to be achieved."

The participation of Afghan women in the peace process, inside and outside the negotiations, is critical for Afghanistan to defend their rights and to making the case that their rights must be included in Afghanistan's peace process, not just by a discussion topic.

"The role and contribution of women have been one of the key components for the progress made in Afghanistan over the past sixteen years. While the inclusion of a few Afghan women is welcomed in the current peace negotiations, however, need to be more than just a symbolic gesture. As an Atlantic Council Freedom and Women's Fund support and command that include and give the Leaders of the International Community to include the idea of Afghan women being a significant contributor of the current peace negotiations and not just a topic of discussion," Ariana Nayev, Afghan singer, songwriter, and TV personality, and recipient of the 2018 Atlantic Council Freedom Award said.



**Editorial**  
**Preserving hard-fought women's rights a must**

The progress made by Afghan women within the past two decades is undeniable. They also fought for their rights and freedoms, raised their voice against injustices, participated in demonstrations for supporting their human rights, and participated in social and political decision makings.

Afghan women had their representatives in Loya Jirga for the approval of constitution, they participated in presidential and provincial councils' elections to defend their rights and gained seats in parliament, they studied hard to hold better positions in social and political arenas.

Afghan women also play active role in social, cultural, educational and economic arenas. They are teachers, doctors, engineers, lecturers, and traders, to name but a few. To put it succinctly, Afghan women made great progress in social, cultural, political, and economic areas if one compares them with Taliban era.

Recently, Afghanistan won a seat at the United Nations Commission on Status of Women for a four-year term.

Afghan Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Adib Razi, called the membership of the commission a "historic victory". This is the first time that Afghanistan becomes the member of the UN's women commission.

"We are grateful to all members of the UN's economic and social council for their votes to Afghanistan which certifies Afghan women's ability in the reconstruction of their country," Afghan embassy to the UN said Tuesday in a statement.

The United Nations' Commission on Status of Women has 45 members. It serves for gender equality and women's development.

In the post-Taliban administration, Afghan women have been playing highly essential role in collective life. Women's active role in social and political issues, despite many cultural barriers, is jaw-dropping. But the strides made by Afghan women were not possible without the support of the international community. The supports paved the way for the progress of Afghan women and empowered them in social and political arenas have to be appreciated.

Afghan government has time and again emphasized on preserving of women's rights in peace process and have appointed women in key government positions inside and outside of the country to show its will for women empowerment.

Afghan women suffered severely as a result of fundamental ideology and misogynistic approaches practiced in one way or another. Their rights and freedoms were trampled upon by many factions. Violation of their rights must stop here and they should no more be discriminated on the basis of their gender or treated as inferior.

Each member of the Afghan negotiating team has to define women's rights and liberties as red-line and show zero tolerance towards discriminatory remarks and approaches regarding women. As mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters, women have equal rights with their brothers, sons, husbands and fathers. They do not want to backtrack or have their achievements at stake.

was a priority.

The peace process now ongoing is to be welcomed but it absolutely must be accompanied by the involvement of female part of the Afghan population. Only in that way will any peace agreement be sustainable and the future prosperity of Afghanistan be guaranteed," according to UN, Lord Robertson of Fife, former secretary general of NATO and member of the Atlantic Council's International Advisory Board.

Now is the time to stand with Afghan women. "Now, and to making the case that their rights must be included in Afghanistan's peace process, not just by a discussion topic."



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