

Protecting human rights essential in Afghanistan peace talks, says HRW

KABUL: Afghan government and Taliban officials meeting in Doha, Qatar for the start of intra-Afghan negotiations should publicly commit to uphold international human rights, including women's rights, says Human Rights Watch. The United States, European Union, and other countries supporting the peace process should use their political and economic leverage to ensure explicit human rights commitments and enforcement mechanisms in any final agreement.

Talks between the Taliban and an Afghan government-backed delegation, which includes opposition leaders and some independent civil society representatives, were expected to begin in 12 September 2020. The government-backed delegation has five women among its 21 members.

"Afghans who have endured decades of violence and abuses deserve to see their promises to uphold human rights," said Patricia Gosselin, senior Asia director. "All participants in any Afghan government should commit to institutions and processes to uphold women's rights and a free press, and to ensure justice for all." Taliban officials are currently conducting a significant portion of meetings in Doha, Qatar, and are unable to be parallel out of Taliban-imposed regulations that govern education, courts, and other services, and establish or enforce codes of conduct. While there has been some progress on access to education for girls and women in Taliban-ruled areas, women have little or no opportunity to participate in public life.

Freedom of expression and the media are tightly controlled. Independent Afghan journalists in Doha are largely based on local Taliban command.

"While the Taliban have scaled back some of the harsher measures they imposed in the past, it remains difficult and dangerous for people to speak openly or voice objections in the areas under their control," Gosselin said.

Afghanistan's constitution and laws enacted since 2001 include many human rights provisions, including an freedom of expression and gender equality. Yet despite many years of international support, the Afghan government has failed to develop institutions essential to protecting justice, or to hold its security forces accountable for serious crimes, including torture, rape, and extrajudicial executions. The government has often rewarded some of the gravest offenders instead of punishing them.

In government-controlled areas, Afghan media give an active role in public life and participation in public issues. Yet journalists critical of the authorities risk threats and violence from officials, security forces, and government-backed militias.

Since 2002, in cities under Afghan government control,

millions of girls have gone to school. Thousands have participated in public life, including holding political office, in greater numbers than ever before in Afghanistan's history. Yet these gains are partial and fragile, even in government-controlled areas. Officials have often failed to protect women's rights, and there is widespread impunity for violence against women and girls.

Taliban commanders and security forces have been implicated in war crimes and other abuses. Afghan officials have tried to find off an investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC). To prevent that their own national authorities can conduct credible investigations into serious crimes, by forces operating in the country, including the Taliban.

However, abuses by government forces have gone un-

punished, and some of the approximately 2,000 Taliban prisoners released as part of prisoner exchanges have been identified in serious war crimes. Human Rights Watch expects more women will be recruited into the 2016 immunity deal, which excluded any accountability, even for war crimes. International humanitarian law encourages amnesties for insurgents at the end of hostilities, but excludes those responsible for war crimes.

"The intra-Afghan negotiations offer hope for peace after more than 40 years of war," Gosselin said. "But for a settlement to be sustainable, a future Afghan government will need to protect severely violated women's rights, and prevent rights violations." — *scribes*

The Kabul Times

Germany agrees to take more than 1,500 refugees from Greek Islands after camp fire



Germany has agreed to take 1,550 additional refugees from five Greek islands after a fire destroyed an overcrowded camp. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Party, agreed on September 15 to take in 100 families in a gesture of solidarity with EU member Greece.

That's on top of up to 150 unaccompanied migrant children that Germany has agreed to accept from the camp.

"I Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the refugees will be families with children whose asylum applications have already been accepted.

Most were later released but three remain under questioning. A local police officer told AFP that the refugees from Afghanistan, Africa, and Syria, were left homeless after a fire last week destroyed the makeshift camp on the island of Lesbos.

Creek police said on September 15 that they have arrested 12 of the alleged migrants who are accused of having set fire to the Moria camp. Three said the fire was arson. Afghan nationalists whose asylum applications were rejected.

The Greek islands have been affected by waves of migrants coming from Turkey in hopes of reaching the EU.

The fire hit through renewed attention to the EU's failure to implement a common system to distribute access to land and asylum for families including elderly and newborn.

"We are not animals." This is the 21st century's Superheroes are closed, there are no heroes, we are not mutants" raged Angelo, a 25-year-old Syrian migrant camp worker.

The Moria fire left over 12,000 people homeless. Among them, 35 have avoided hospital for coronavirus.

But thousands have been staying in the tents for the past week, with limited access to food and sanitation for families including elderly and newborn.

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The EU Commission is expected to present proposals on a new European asylum policy within weeks.

But they remain in place for the camps of Samos and Lesbos until September 29, after three positive cases among residents, the official said.

Five years after the arrival in Europe of over a million Syrian refugees, many fleeing their war-torn homes, the EU's responsibility remains unclear.

European Council chief Charles Michel, King in Lebanon after talks with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Athens, urged the 27 nations to "take more responsibility."

Germany has offered to take 1,550 refugees from Greece, on top of the 150 unaccompanied minors from the camp while other EU nations are admitting a total of 100 other youngsters from Moria.

"We need Europe to help us leave this place," Angelo said. "Would you accept these conditions of your children were in our place?"

"Please, open the gates," implored 21-year-old Samira. "We are human beings. Please help the children. They are so very important for the future," she said.

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Permanent houses to be constructed for Afghan returnees, IDPS

Strengthening essential facilities and services in communities where Afghan refugees are returning to, by 20 priority areas for return and reconstruction have been identified.

jointly by the Afghan Government and UNHCR, where returnees and displaced people are being resettled in communities. "Shelter is one of the most pressing needs for return-

ees and internally displaced people, second only to food," the statement quoted the UNHCR Representative in Afghanistan, Corrado Van Boreen as saying. "The contribution of the Republic

of Korea towards building houses for Afghans will not only help improve the living conditions of the families benefiting from the project but also bring them a strong sense of hope for the future."

UNHCR piloted the Cash for Shelter project with 400 vulnerable displaced and returnee households starting last year. The project is being expanded further in 2020 with the support of the Government of the Republic of Korea.

The project falls within the Sustainable Strategy for Afghan Refugees and its support plan form, a regional initiative, which envisages a future in which displaced Afghan migrants gradually return to their homeland permanently and prosper.

Since 2002, more than 5.3 million Afghan refugees have been resettled in various host countries. Despite the ongoing insecurity in Afghanistan, compounded by the economic impact of COVID-19, around 700 Afghan refugees have returned to far in 2020. Some 2.6 million Afghans have also been displaced by conflict and natural disasters.

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