

H.E. Mr. António Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations

26 April 2023

Dear Secretary-General Guterres,

Afghanistan is at a crossroads and the actions you take as UN Secretary-General will play a major role in shaping not only the immediate future of the country, but the lives of generations of Afghan women and girls. As advocates for gender equality, and organizations working in Afghanistan or with Afghan women and girls, we call on you to urgently and unequivocally defend their human rights, and ensure that their full, equal and meaningful participation is central to the international community's next steps in the country.

We urge you to ensure that diverse Afghan women — including women leaders, human rights defenders, peacebuilders and civil society representatives — are at the table at the meeting of Special Envoys on Afghanistan to be convened on 1-2 May in Doha, Qatar. Afghan women have been clear — failure to ensure their meaningful participation will render any discussions, outcomes or decisions made without them [illegitimate](#).

Since August 2021, Afghan women and girls have confronted unprecedented and [systematic violation](#) of their rights. The Taliban's extreme form of gender-based discrimination against Afghan women has been [recognized](#) as amounting to the crime against humanity of [gender persecution](#), and condemned by [you](#) and [international experts](#) as "[gender apartheid](#)." In this context, the most recent [statement](#) by UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, that the upcoming convening of Special Envoys on Afghanistan will provide an opportunity for international actors to "find those baby steps to put us back on the pathway to recognition" of the Taliban, was met with alarm by [Afghan women human rights defenders](#). They have been clear that there can be [no formal recognition](#) of or a seat at the UN for the Taliban, and [no unconditional engagement](#) until the Taliban respect international law and [face consequences](#) for human rights violations. If Afghan women are not meaningfully represented and politically supported in key decision-making processes at this critical moment, they will have no say in the future of their country, and their exclusion will pave the way for future conflict and violence.

Afghanistan is a critical test of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda — of more than 20 years of promises, commitments and Security Council resolutions that have pledged to center women's rights in conflicts and crises, and ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in all aspects of peace and security. The right to equal participation is not only firmly rooted in the principles of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in the UN Charter and international human rights law, but a foundational demand of women civil society and Resolution 1325 (2000). Meaningful participation — that is, equal, direct, substantive and influential inclusion of diverse women in any decisions about their future — is what Afghan women demand, and deserve, now.

Secretary-General Guterres: You [said](#) that "women's inequality should shame us all," and that you [would](#) "do everything in [your] power to make sure women are represented in all decision-making at the United Nations, including in peace processes."

Afghanistan is an opportunity for the UN to truly [lead by example](#).

We therefore urge you to use your influence to insist that diverse Afghan women leaders, human rights defenders and other civil society, including from ethnic and religious, LGBTQI+ and other marginalized groups, are able to fully

and meaningfully participate in *all* meetings to discuss the future of Afghanistan hosted, supported or attended by the UN, and that their views are reflected in the outcomes of these discussions. Women's rights must be central to *all* UN engagement, public statements, [assessments](#) and strategies to address the crisis in Afghanistan. We furthermore urge the UN and all international actors to continue to call for all restrictions violating the rights of Afghan women to be immediately and unconditionally reversed. Failure by the international community to uphold its own international obligations to protect human rights and gender equality will not only have direct and devastating consequences for Afghan women, but will set a dangerous precedent for how women's rights are addressed in other conflicts and crises across the world.

Over the last 18 years, Afghan women who have briefed the Security Council — from the [first](#), who described how exercising one's rights could be “a life or death choice,” to the most [recent](#), who demanded that Afghan women be front and center in any decisions about their future — have been clear that there can be nothing about them without them.

The rights of Afghan women are not negotiable — no woman's are. Afghan women, who courageously and tirelessly fight for their rights every day, need your support now.

Sincerely,



Kaavya Asoka
Executive Director, NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

On behalf of the following members of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security:

1. Amnesty International
2. Global Justice Center (GJC)
3. Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP)
4. Human Rights Watch (HRW)
5. MADRE
6. Nobel Women's Initiative (NWI)
7. Outright International
8. Refugees International
9. Women Enabled International (WEI)
10. Women for Women International (WfWI)
11. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
12. Women's Refugee Commission (WRC)