

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

7 February 2024

Dear Secretary-General Guterres,

We write to you ahead of the UN-convened meeting of Special Envoys and Special Representatives on Afghanistan on 18-19 February in Doha, Qatar, to discuss the path forward on the [independent assessment](#) on Afghanistan mandated by [Resolution 2679](#) (2023).

Since their takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban have imposed more than [80 restrictions](#) limiting women's rights in every aspect of their lives: from education, to work, to movement, to dress, to their participation in public life. International experts,<sup>1</sup> [including you](#), have deemed this widespread and systematic repression of women's rights [gender apartheid](#). Further, Afghan women have consistently [expressed concerns](#) that their rights and their meaningful participation have been sidelined in international discussions.

The upcoming meeting in Doha offers an important opportunity for the UN, the Security Council and the international community to reaffirm that the rights of Afghan women are not negotiable.

**We therefore urge you to ensure that diverse Afghan women, including women human rights defenders, peacebuilders, protestors and those representing ethnic, LGBTQI+ and other marginalized groups, are full participants in all discussions and processes in Doha and beyond, and that their recommendations are reflected in any outcomes determining the international community's approach to Afghanistan.**

This is not only essential to demonstrate the UN's commitment to upholding the rights of Afghan women, but is fundamental to fulfilling Security Council [Resolution 2721](#), which emphasized the need for the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of Afghan women throughout this process. To fail to do so would undermine faith in the international community's commitment to uphold women's rights and the credibility of the Doha meeting, and further, set a concerning precedent for any future process of international engagement on Afghanistan.

We further urge you to consider the following:

- Respect for women's rights must be a core objective of the international community's engagement on Afghanistan, and a priority agenda item for discussions in Doha. It should also be a central part of discussions addressing any other aspect of the situation in Afghanistan, such as the humanitarian crisis, the economy and development efforts, and displacement.
- Although the Security Council has reaffirmed, on multiple occasions, the indispensable role of women in Afghan society, expressed deep concern at the increasing and unprecedented erosion of their rights and fundamental freedoms, and called on the Taliban to swiftly reverse any policies and practices that restrict women's human rights or their participation in public life, the Taliban has thus far failed to heed these calls.<sup>2</sup> The meeting in Doha is a critical opportunity to establish clear safeguards, conditions and explicit guarantees to ensure the protection and promotion of the full scope of women's human rights, in accordance with Afghanistan's international obligations,<sup>3</sup> including under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and women's full, equal and meaningful participation in any decision-making regarding the future of the country. Further, it is essential that the outcomes of the Doha convening do not fall below what the Security Council,<sup>4</sup> civil society<sup>5</sup> and UN experts<sup>6</sup> have already called for with regards to protection of women's rights, inclusive governance, women's participation and human rights.

- We urge you to use the opportunity provided by the Doha meeting to publicly call for: all restrictions violating the rights of Afghan women to be immediately and unconditionally reversed; the [targeting](#) of women human rights defenders, including women [protestors](#), peacefully exercising their freedom of expression and assembly, to immediately cease, and for the [release](#) of those who have been arbitrarily detained; and perpetrators of human rights violations, including [gender persecution](#) and other abuses targeting diverse women and girls, to be [held accountable](#).
- The UN Special Envoy, due to be appointed, must have a strong track record on human rights and women's rights, and senior gender and human rights expertise on their team, regularly and meaningfully engage with diverse Afghan women civil society and human rights defenders, and ensure that their views inform all aspects of the Envoy's work.
- It is critical that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as the primary UN presence in the country, continues to monitor and report on the human rights situation, including women's rights, and advocates for the protection of all human rights defenders at risk.<sup>7</sup> UNAMA's reporting on human rights will be essential in establishing whether the Taliban are meeting the conditions laid out by the international community.
- Finally, we urge you to share how the international community plans to address the grave situation of women's rights in your briefing to the Security Council following the meeting in Doha, as mandated by Resolution 2721. We urge you to ensure that this briefing is public so that there is transparency about what was discussed, and civil society has the opportunity to understand how their perspectives, concerns and recommendations will inform the international community's approach in Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup>

As the Taliban's abuses against women and girls [continue to deepen](#), Afghan women urgently look to the UN, and your leadership, to show that the international community stands united behind the fundamental belief that all women have the right to full equality in all aspects of their lives.

We look forward to your response.

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. Outright International
7. Refugees International
8. Women Enabled International (WEI)
9. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
10. Women's Refugee Commission (WRC)

<sup>1</sup> For instance, refer to statements by the [High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) and the [Executive Director of UN Women](#), as well as the report of the [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls](#).

<sup>2</sup> See UN Security Council resolutions [S/RES/2593](#) (2021); [S/RES/2596](#) (2021); [S/RES/2626](#) (2022); [S/RES/2679](#) (2023); [S/RES/2681](#) (2023); [S/RES/2721](#) (2023). See UN Security Council press statements [SC/14604](#) (2021); [SC/14842](#) (2022); [SC/14902](#) (2022); [SC/15165](#) (2022).

<sup>3</sup> Afghanistan's international obligations include: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to footnote 2.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to statements by [Ms. Mariam Safi](#) (March 2022), [Ms. Yalda Royan](#) (June 2022), [Ms. Zahra Nader](#) (October 2022), [Ms. Zubaida Akbar](#) (March 2023), [Ms. Karima Bennoune](#) (September 2023) and [Ms. Shaharзад Akbar](#) (December 2023) to the UN Security Council.

<sup>6</sup> Refer, for instance, to statements by [UNAMA](#), the [High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), the [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan](#) and other [UN Special Procedures](#).

<sup>7</sup> In accordance with UNAMA's mandate as per [Resolution 2626](#) (2022) and renewed by [Resolution 2678](#) (2023).

<sup>8</sup> Several of the Security Council's discussions regarding the independent assessment thus far have been closed, for instance: [Private meeting on the independent assessment on Afghanistan](#) (28 November 2023); [Closed Arria-formula meeting on "women's perspectives on Afghanistan"](#) (11 December 2023).