



Europe and North America CSW Caucus

Statement on Women and Girls in Afghanistan

We hear from our sisters in Afghanistan and the diaspora with relatives and friends still in Afghanistan, that women are in hiding and door to door searches continue with assassination following a successful hunt. Women who were educated or worked at any senior level are being hunted and killed. How is it possible for global leaders to accept such state actions?

The last time the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, from 1996 to 2001, it banned female education and most female employment. During negotiations and since returning to power in August the group has promised opportunities for girls' education and employment. Additionally, amnesty was promised for women's rights advocates, women politicians, and judges. None of these commitments have been, or are currently, respected to date. Women who did not have the opportunity to escape are still moving targets, major human rights violations and extra judicial killings are still conducted by the Taliban. Journalist are jailed and tortured.

As of 23 March 2022, any glimmer of hope for girls has been shattered by the Taliban. Only hours after they reopened the schools for the first time in nearly seven months, they announced that girls' high schools will be closed. One direct result of this decision: a young girl threw herself from her parents' fourth floor apartment window and committed suicide. Journalists were prevented from reporting this by the Taliban and threatened to have their children kidnaped if information was published. The event was shared via family members with those Afghans outside Afghanistan. Female students above sixth grade cannot return to school. The Taliban had committed to ensure schools for girls aged 12 to 19 were segregated and would operate according to Islamic principles. The question we ask, which Islamic principles? Those invoked and established by the Taliban? Under the true principles of Islam all women and girls have the right to education, all followers of the Islamic Faith regardless of their gender are required to be educated.

The first revealed word of the Quran commands the believers to "Read!" – with no distinction between male and female believers. "How splendid were the women of the *Ansar*; shame did not prevent them from becoming learned in the faith", is the Prophet Muhammad's praise of the women of Madinah for their pursuit of knowledge. The Prophet Muhammad enjoins his followers: "...acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims, male and female...Seek knowledge, from the cradle to the grave...Acquire knowledge, even if you have to go to China for it..."

Given the above, it is hard to understand why Islamic Scholars and Member States who uphold Islam, can stand by silent when education for girls is denied in the name of Islam. The first wife of the Prophet Muhammad, Khadeeja, was a successful, highly educated businesswoman in her own right. If those who follow the Teachings and Example of the Prophet Muhammad, recognise her station, how can they stay silent when an entire female population is denied access to work?

Throughout history, Muslim women have been involved in the founding of educational institutions. Fatima al-Fihri, established the University of Al-Karaouine in 859 CE. This university remains, according to UNESCO, the oldest continually running university in the world. How then can Islamic scholars and Islamic States stay silent when education is denied the women and girls of Afghanistan?



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The Europe and North America CSW Caucus calls on Member States to urge the Taliban to be true to their rhetoric evinced throughout the negotiations ending their war in Afghanistan and ensure all levels of quality education for girls and women in Afghanistan.

The world watches in horror at yet another example of failed global governance. States have played the game of power across the land of Afghanistan, with scant regard for its suffering people. The most recent result: - the access to power of a group promising rights for women and girls, who then at every opportunity violate the rights of women and girls enshrined in international law. Why are Member States still silent?

Without robust disaggregated data it is not possible to know exactly how many widows and female headed households exist in Afghanistan, though evidence from other conflict zones would suggest much more than half. In Afghanistan today, women are unable to leave their homes without a male chaperone. They cannot work. The Taliban allow a woman to beg in the street, but not to earn a livelihood through her own efforts. In Afghanistan today, women are selling all their household goods, then their organs in order to survive. In Afghanistan today girls are for sale in the market for less than \$300 Canadian dollars. How is it possible for any State or community leader who espouses Islam, to stand by these actions at all, leave alone when they take place in the name of Islam?

Every country has a set of laws by which the people know they are to be governed. Yet in Afghanistan there is no agreed constitution or set of laws by which its people know they must live. How is it possible for Member States to contemplate recognising a government acting with such total disregard for the rule of law? What is the value of the Right to Protect or Multilateralism in the face of such rampant injustice?

As the world moves away from its childhood behavior towards global maturity committed to the prosperity of all, is it not timely that we recognise that the welfare of the individual rests in the welfare of society at large? We are one human race living on one planet, and the well-being of those in any one place affects the well-being of us all. We feel the pain of injustice perpetrated upon our sisters across the globe in a myriad situation. In this statement we focus on the women and girls in Afghanistan.

We call on Member States to recognise that qualities such as trustworthiness and cooperation are the building block of a stable social order and not only practice these themselves but insist on them in others. We call on Member States to advocate for tolerance and understanding within their own jurisdiction and with their peers. We call on Member States, therefore, to insist one and all, that the Taliban fulfil their promises and that they too stand by their countless pledges to uphold the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan.

We call on Member States to work with civil society and UN entities to ensure robust provision for opportunity, access and support for all women and girls in Afghanistan to quality education and meaningful work. At the time of the 66th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women when we have reviewed women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work, it is vital that we recall the women and girls who have enjoyed access to education and work for the last decade in Afghanistan. The world cannot stand by and must call for both to be restored immediately.

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Organisations and individuals wishing to be specifically cited

Organisations

ADVANCE
British Federation of Women Graduates

BPWUK
Canadian Federation of Business & Professional Women (BPW Canada)
CAP
Dominican Leadership Conference
European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW)
Gender, Peace & Security
GREEK LEAGUE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS
INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN (IAW)
International Council of Women
The Judith Trust
Migrant women association Hungary
National Alliance of Women's Organisations
National Board of Catholic Women
National Council of Women of Canada
National Council of Women GB
Persons Against Non-State Torture
SAHFA
The Scottish Women's Convention
Sorooptimist International
Sorooptimist International Great Britain & Ireland
Sorooptimist International Club Genève
US Women's Caucus at the UN
Widows Rights International
Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD)
Women Graduates - USA
WUNRN-Women's UN Report Network
WWAFE - Women Worldwide Advancing Freedom & Equality
Women at the Well
Zonta London Club

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