

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **AFGHAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS ON THE VERGE OF ROLL BACK AS INTERNATIONAL FORCES WITHDRAW AND PEACE TALKS IN STALEMATE**

Amnesty International is gravely concerned that the current peace talks with the Taliban, alongside the proposed unconditional withdrawal of US forces, offer no confidence that the government of Afghanistan is committed to protect the gains seen over the last twenty years in enjoyment of the human rights of all people in Afghanistan – specifically given the ongoing wars and political instability. In particular, the current composition of the delegations of both the Taliban, with zero women representation, and the government of Afghanistan, with limited women participation, at the Doha peace talks, raise concerns about the commitment to respect, protect and fulfill women's rights.

The US forces together with the NATO troops are set to fully withdraw by 11 September of 2021 from Afghanistan. The impending withdrawal may have a serious negative impact on all human rights in the future, with a potential roll back on women's rights in particular, unless the parties to the peace talks ensure an effective guarantee for the enjoyment of all human rights and especially women's rights.

Empirical evidence confirms that inclusive peace processes are more durable, and that when women have a meaningful influence over the process, their participation has a positive impact on peace, security and the durability of peace agreements.<sup>1</sup> The UN Security Council has consistently affirmed the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in the promotion of peace and security.<sup>2</sup> The lack of women's participation in the peace negotiations will have a negative impact on the shape of the agreements that will be reached, and a detrimental impact on women's rights in a country with a history of denying human rights to women. It is also a missed opportunity to give recognition to the important role women play in public life. The peace negotiations for Afghanistan have so far failed to center women's participation and women's issues- for example the Doha peace negotiations, which began last year, mainly consisted of men.<sup>3</sup>

Amnesty International calls on the government of Afghanistan, the Taliban, the United Nations, United States, European Union and other key actors in Afghanistan's peace negotiations, to ensure that guarantees are put in place so that gains in human rights and in particular women's rights, will not be endangered by peace negotiations that do not ensure fair representation of women and by the proposed withdrawal of international forces. Each of these key actors must guarantee that all human rights, in particular women's rights will be fully respected, protected and fulfilled. The organisation also calls for the full, equal and meaningful representation of women at all stages of the peace process.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, "Women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all aspects of peace and security- 2020 Civil Society Roadmap on Women, Peace and Security", <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/roadmap-2020-participation/#:~:text=Overwhelming%20empirical%20evidence%20confirms%20that,64%25%20less%20likely%20to%20fail.&text=The%20exclusion%20of%20women%2C%20therefore%2C%20undermines%20peace>. Nilsson, "Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace", 2012.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03050629.2012.659139?scroll=top&needAccess=true&journalCode=gini20>. IPI, "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes", 2015. <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IPI-E-pub-Reimagining-Peacemaking.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> E.g. UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) [on women and peace and security]*, 31 October 2000, S/RES/1325 (2000), available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f4672e.html>, and subsequent resolutions under the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

<sup>3</sup> The Washington Post, "Shadow politicians, clerics and Soviet-era fighters: The Taliban's team negotiating peace", 1 October 2020.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/afghan-taliban-peace-talks/2020/09/30/a5333540-f859-11ea-85f7-5941188a98cd\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghan-taliban-peace-talks/2020/09/30/a5333540-f859-11ea-85f7-5941188a98cd_story.html). The New York Times, "To Get to Afghan Talks, Lots of Last-Minute Deals — and Nose Swabs", 15 September 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/15/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-peace-talks.html>

<sup>4</sup> REUTERS, "Turkey Says Afghan Peace talks in Istanbul Postponed to after Ramadan", 21 April 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-says-afghan-peace-talks-istanbul-postponed-after-ramadan-2021-04-20/>

## THE TALIBAN'S IRON GRIP ON WOMEN

The Taliban has historically enforced harsh, discriminatory policies against women with the result of women being excluded from public life.<sup>5</sup> When the Taliban were ruling the country from 1996 to 2001, women were denied their rights to education and accessing healthcare,<sup>6</sup> and their right to freedom of movement was severely restricted,<sup>7</sup> they could not appear in public without a close male relative,<sup>8</sup> and were subject to harsh, disproportionate punishments even for minor “offenses”. Any deviation from the group’s set rules could be punished through public corporal punishment,<sup>9</sup> or even death penalty or public execution.<sup>10</sup>

Amnesty International remains gravely concerned that the group has not changed their past policies on women, as witnessed in the current Taliban-controlled areas where women mostly remain deprived of their rights to education and freedom of movement,<sup>11</sup> and are subject to almost the same draconian rules that applied during the Taliban era from 1996-2001.<sup>12</sup> Where concessions to the rights of women and girls have been made; they have not been applied consistently - for example, the Taliban’s policy of allowing girls to attend school up to grade 6 (12 years old) has not been consistently applied across the areas that they control.<sup>13</sup> The Taliban’s current position on women’s access to work and education is restricted to the group’s own narrow interpretation of rights granted by Islam;<sup>14</sup> e.g. when in power during 1996-2001, the Taliban strictly implemented their own interpretation of Islamic law or Sharia and banned women from appearing in public or working outside the home. This is clearly cause for serious alarm as to the group’s position vis-à-vis guaranteeing women’s rights under international human rights laws.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to concerns on roll back on human rights – in particular women’s rights and achievements in the last two decades– in Afghanistan due to peace talks with the Taliban, Afghan rights activists have been continually warning of the possibility of such a roll back. Zarqa Yaftali, an activist while talking to the UN Security Council in 2020, stated “our hard-won gains can be snatched away without a warning. The bitter memories of Taliban rule haunt us daily. These experiences are still a reality for many women and girls living in areas controlled by the Taliban, where freedom is severely curtailed.”<sup>16</sup>

Protection of women’s rights during peace talks and after the US and NATO troop withdraw have raised concerns regionally and globally as Women Regional Network (WRN)) in 20 April 2021 in statement said, “such a [troop] withdrawal, in the absence of a secure Afghan state, able to safeguard the democratic rights of all Afghan citizens, especially women and other marginal groups, will be disastrous for their human rights and security.”<sup>17</sup> In September 2020, in an open letter, a number of world leaders called for meaningful women’s participation in peace, ensuring women’s rights during peace talks, and ensuring no rollback in achievements over two decades in Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*You have no right to complain*”: Education, social restrictions, and justice in Taliban-held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, pp. 12, 13.

[www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2020/06/afghanistan0620\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/06/afghanistan0620_web_0.pdf)[https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2020/06/afghanistan0620\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/06/afghanistan0620_web_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Stephanie Dubitsky, “The health care crisis facing women under Taliban rule in Afghanistan”, *Human Rights Brief*, American University Washington College of Law, Volume 6, Issue 2, 1999, <https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1576&context=hrbrief>

<sup>7</sup> Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organizations (AHRDO), “Afghan women after the Taliban: Will history repeat itself?” February 2012, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> “The invisible women: The Taliban’s oppression of women in Afghanistan”, *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law*, Volume 7:553, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> “The invisible women: The Taliban’s oppression of women in Afghanistan”, *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law*, Volume 7:553, p. 71.

<sup>10</sup> AP, “Public Execution in Kabul in Keeping with Taliban’s Islamic Law,” 19 December 1996.

<https://apnews.com/article/927d8bf22e2a98d7b7835687c8cbaf3a>

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*You have no right to complain*”: Education, social restrictions, and justice in Taliban-held Afghanistan”, June 2020, pp. 49,

<sup>12</sup> Pajhwok, “Women shot dead in Faryab over alleged elopement”, 22 November 2019, [www.pajhwok.com/en/2019/11/22/woman-shot-dead-fayab-over-alleged-elopement](http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2019/11/22/woman-shot-dead-fayab-over-alleged-elopement)

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*You have no right to complain*”: Education, social restrictions, and justice in Taliban-held Afghanistan”, June 2020, pp. 11-37.

<sup>14</sup> Sirajuddin Haqqani, “What we, the Taliban, want”, *The New York Times*, 20 February 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/02/20/opinion/taliban-afghanistan-war-haqqani.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/20/opinion/taliban-afghanistan-war-haqqani.html)

<sup>15</sup> Frud Bezhan, “Afghan Taliban open to women’s rights – but only on its terms”, Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty, 6 February 2019, [www.rferl.org/a/taliban-afghanistan-open-women-s-rights-only-terms/29755102.html](http://www.rferl.org/a/taliban-afghanistan-open-women-s-rights-only-terms/29755102.html)

<sup>16</sup> UN Women, “Safeguard Women’s Rights and Participation in Peacebuilding Now, Says Afghan Activist Zarqa Yaftali to the Un Security Council,” 5 November 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/11/news-afghan-activist-zarqa-yaftali-addresses-un-security-council>

<sup>17</sup> Women Regional Network, 20 April 2020. <https://twitter.com/WRNnews/status/1384402975058108416/photo/1>

<sup>18</sup> GIWPS, “An Open Letter from World Leaders Calling for Afghan Women’s Meaningful Participation in the Peace Process,” 10 September 2020.

The Taliban continues to control some geographical regions in the country,<sup>19</sup> but where government control has been established, women and girls have made major gains e.g., in accessing education,<sup>20</sup> health care,<sup>21</sup> work and engaging in public life in the last twenty years.<sup>22</sup>

## GAINS IN WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE LAST TWO DECADES

Breaking from the Taliban's repressive era, over the past two decades, women have made great strides in Afghanistan to realize their rights. Through legal reforms, equal rights for women and men were enshrined in the country's 2004 Constitution; however, an enabling environment for the full realization of these rights is not a reality yet. In the post 2001 setting, Afghan women re-started their participation in public life, working in political and government positions, and obtaining education. For example, after the Taliban overthrow in 2001, Dr. Sima Samar, a renowned human rights activist, was appointed as Deputy Chair of the Interim Administration, and a Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) was established.<sup>23</sup> The MoWA has provincial offices that are primarily staffed by women.

Additionally, the 2004 Constitution has prescribed quotas for women's political participation at the bicameral Parliament of Afghanistan. In the lower house (house of people), women's participation currently stands at 27%.<sup>24</sup>

Since 2001, participation of women in governance and public positions has increased. Today, Afghanistan has four women ministers, a female provincial governor, and 20 out of 34 provinces have a female deputy governor on social affairs.<sup>25</sup> Women make up more than 20% of the civil servants in the country,<sup>26</sup> and hold ambassadorial positions,<sup>27</sup> which is a significant change from the Taliban era when no women were permitted to work in the civil service. Though limited, women work in senior positions at the provincial and district level.<sup>28</sup> A small number of women are working in the police, military and security sectors.<sup>29</sup> Despite their increased participation, women working in government are facing multiple challenges including harassment, and the current conflict has adversely and disproportionately affecting women. Additionally, participation by women in most government agencies and in the provincial and district level remains limited.

Today about 3.5 million girls are enrolled in schools,<sup>30</sup> a tremendous improvement from the time when only a few primary private girls' schools were run during the Taliban era. Thousands of women work in the education sector as teachers, headteachers and administrative staff. Additionally, a large number of women and girls are attending

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<https://giwps.georgetown.edu/an-open-letter-from-world-leaders-calling-for-afghan-womens-meaningful-participation-in-the-peace-process/>

<sup>19</sup> Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly report to the United States Congress*, 30 January 2019, p. 69, [www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2019-01-30qr.pdf](http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2019-01-30qr.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Etillaatroz, "Statistical illustration; How women's participation on governmental sector? Special issue "Women and Taliban", 9 March 2019, [www.etillaatroz.com/73948/how-womens-participation-government-sectors/](http://www.etillaatroz.com/73948/how-womens-participation-government-sectors/)

<sup>21</sup> NCBI, "Access to health care in Afghanistan is improving, study shows", May 2007, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1865437/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1865437/)

<sup>22</sup> The World Bank, *Policy notice: Afghanistan's development gains: Progress and challenges*, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33209/Afghanistans-Development-Gains-Progress-and-Challenges.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>23</sup> Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organizations (AHRDO), "Afghan women after the Taliban: Will history repeat itself?", February 2012, p. 14. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzQO1gSxbFZbYm5sY19ER29IemM/view>

<sup>24</sup> Afghanistan Analyst Network, "Afghanistan Elections Conundrum (20): Women candidates going against the grain", 19 October 2018.

<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/political-landscape/afghanistan-elections-conundrum-19-women-candidates-going-against-the-grain/>

<sup>25</sup> WhatsApp Conversation with Hussain Nussrat, Chief of Staff to the Second Vice President of Afghanistan, 16 March 2021

<sup>26</sup> The World Bank, "Policy notice: Afghanistan's development gains: Progress and challenges", <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33209/Afghanistans-Development-Gains-Progress-and-Challenges.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>27</sup> Zaman Sultani, "Women's rights must be protected by action, not rhetoric", Amnesty International (News story, 11 March 2019), [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/03/womens-rights-must-be-protected-by-action-not-rhetoric/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/03/womens-rights-must-be-protected-by-action-not-rhetoric/)

<sup>28</sup> WhatsApp Conversation with Hussain Nussrat, Chief of Staff to the Second Vice President of Afghanistan, 16 March 2021

<sup>29</sup> Lynzy Billing, "Female Afghan soldiers face a battle on all fronts", ZORA, 2 October 2019, <https://zora.medium.com/female-afghan-soldiers-face-a-battle-on-all-fronts-ac78722326a1>

<sup>30</sup> Etillaatroz, "Statistical illustration; How women's participation on governmental sector? Special issue "Women and Taliban", 9 March 2019, [www.etillaatroz.com/73948/how-womens-participation-government-sectors/](http://www.etillaatroz.com/73948/how-womens-participation-government-sectors/)

universities across the country. However, more than 2 million girls remain without access to education,<sup>31</sup> primarily because of the ongoing wars and insufficient numbers of women teachers or education facilities.<sup>32</sup>

During the rule of the Taliban, women were banned from appearing in public without being accompanied by a close male relative;<sup>33</sup> but by 2019, above 1,000 women had established their own businesses across the country, and their overall investments in Afghanistan amounted to US\$77 million.<sup>34</sup> However, violence against women remains a perpetual problem throughout the country; the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) registered 4,639 cases of violence against women in 2019 alone.<sup>35</sup>

Though access to healthcare remains difficult in Afghanistan, in the post-Taliban era, women have also achieved some gains in accessing improved healthcare. By 2018, about 87% of the Afghan population, which included women, accessed health facilities within a two hour-distance, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>36</sup> Currently, 24% of the health ministry staff are women according to data from the Afghan Government.<sup>37</sup>

## FAILURE TO ENSURE WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN THE PEACE TALKS

Women's exclusion from peace related talks and discussion with the Taliban, Afghan human rights and women's rights activists have been raising concerns<sup>38</sup> and advocated for their inclusion,<sup>39</sup> yet women's participation in peace talks remained at zero on the side of the Taliban,<sup>40</sup> and women's participation on peace related discussions on the side of the Afghan government have been limited.

The potential for roll back on women's rights is exacerbated by the limited number of women included in the delegations for peace negotiations, e.g., in the current Doha negotiation teams, there are four women, who are renowned political and public figures,<sup>41</sup> out of 21 negotiators on the side of the government, and none on the side of the Taliban.<sup>42</sup> This negotiation was initiated as a result of the peace agreement signed by the US government and the Taliban in February 2020 in Doha.<sup>43</sup> Another high-level conference on peace in Afghanistan was tentatively scheduled to take place after the month of *Ramazan* in Turkey with the United Nations (UN), with Qatar and Turkey being its co-hosts. At the conference on peace in Afghanistan held in Moscow in March 2021, a part of the peace talks between the government and the Taliban, only one of the 10-member delegation from the government side was a woman,<sup>44</sup> and there were no women on the side of the Taliban. At the current High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) and the State Ministry for Peace (SMP), women's participation remains limited – only one of the HCNR's five deputies

<sup>31</sup> UNICEF Afghanistan, "Annual Report 2019", p. 11, [www.unicef.org/afghanistan/media/5116/file/English%20.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/media/5116/file/English%20.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Education Cannot Wait, "Women and girls take the lead in Afghanistan", [www.educationcannotwait.org/girls-day-afghanistan/#:~:text=In%20all%2C%20UNICEF%20estimates%20that,whole%20in%20Afghanistan%20is%20rising](http://www.educationcannotwait.org/girls-day-afghanistan/#:~:text=In%20all%2C%20UNICEF%20estimates%20that,whole%20in%20Afghanistan%20is%20rising)

<sup>33</sup> ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law, "The invisible women: The Taliban's oppression of women in Afghanistan", Volume 7:553, p. 70-73, <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1329&context=ilsajournal/>

<sup>34</sup> Rohullah Arman, "AWCCI releases figures on women entrepreneurs", TOLONews, 1 February 2019, <https://tolonews.com/business/awcci-releases-figures-women-entrepreneurs>

<sup>35</sup> Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, "Annual Report – On violence against women in Afghanistan", 2019, p. 5, [www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/AIHRC\\_Annual\\_Women\\_Report\\_\(2018-2019\).pdf](http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/AIHRC_Annual_Women_Report_(2018-2019).pdf)

<sup>36</sup> World Health Organization, "Afghanistan Health System", [www.emro.who.int/afg/programmes/health-system-strengthening.html](http://www.emro.who.int/afg/programmes/health-system-strengthening.html)

<sup>37</sup> Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission, "Annual Report 2019/2020", p. 21, <https://iarccsc.gov.af/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/04/IARCSC-Annual-Report-2019-20.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> IPA Global Observatory, "The Exclusion of Women's Voices from Afghan Peace Talks Remains the Norm," 31 March 2021. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/03/exclusion-womens-voices-afghan-peace-talks-remains-norm/>

<sup>39</sup> Etilaatroz, "Sima Samar: Women Should Have Meaningful Participation in the Peace Process," 20 February 2020. <https://www.etilaatroz.com/73127/sima-samar-says-women-should-have-meaningful-presence-in-peace-process/>

<sup>40</sup> Afghan Women's Network, "Afghan women call for fair and lasting peace, and lasting peace requires the full, equal and meaningful participation of women", Serial No. 75, [http://awn-af.net/index.php/cms/press\\_detail/1497/12](http://awn-af.net/index.php/cms/press_detail/1497/12)

<sup>41</sup> Aljazeera, "Who are the Afghan women negotiating peace with the Taliban?: They have risked their lives to educate girls and survived assassination attempts. Now they hope to end decades of war", 7 October 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/7/who-are-the-afghan-women-negotiating-peace-with-taliban>

<sup>42</sup> Karen DeYoung, "Global public figures say women must be included at every stage of Taliban-Afghan government peace talks", *The Washington Post*, 12 September 2020, [www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/taliban-talks-women-participation/2020/09/11/68bf39b0-f46c-11ea-bc45-e5d48ab44b9f\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/taliban-talks-women-participation/2020/09/11/68bf39b0-f46c-11ea-bc45-e5d48ab44b9f_story.html)

<sup>43</sup> BBC, "Afghan-Taliban peace talks an opportunity for peace", 12 September 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53976968>

<sup>44</sup> Al Jazeera, "In Afghan delegation for Moscow talks, 'only one woman in room'", 9 March 2021, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/19/in-afghan-delegation-for-moscow-talks-only-one-woman-in-room](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/19/in-afghan-delegation-for-moscow-talks-only-one-woman-in-room)

is a woman.<sup>45</sup> According to a 2020 research report from Oxfam, from 2005 to 2014, women attended only five out of the 23 rounds of peace talks (22%); their participation however marginally improved from 2015 onwards, where women attended 10 of the 34 rounds of peace talks (29%).<sup>46</sup> Without robust participation of women, women's voices and views will not be heard and will remain unintegrated in peace discussion and in any possible agreement.

In the 2000s while attacking the Taliban, the USA<sup>47</sup> and its international partners touted the issue of women's rights in Afghanistan as one of the justifications for military intervention. Protection and promotion of women have been a key theme of multiple international conferences organized on Afghanistan since 2001, in which the US and other western countries were the key parties to the organizations of such conferences.<sup>48</sup> On the contrary, however, the 2020 US/Taliban peace agreement had no mention of women's rights protections in Afghanistan.

## **PUBLIC COMMITMENTS TO PROTECT WOMEN'S RIGHTS MUST TRANSLATE INTO CONCRETE ACTION**

Key actors in Afghanistan such as donor countries and international organizations as well as the Afghan government, have stressed the importance of the protection of human rights, and specifically women's rights and the gains made since 2001, during peace talks. Yet, women continue to face challenges in accessing their rights. For example, domestic violence against women in Afghanistan remains pervasive,<sup>49</sup> and harmful practices such as child marriage and forced marriage are not eradicated.<sup>50</sup> Although women now participate in public life as elected representatives,<sup>51</sup> as teachers, doctors, lawyers and have excelled in many other fields, they continue to face discrimination and challenges in exercising their rights. In order to ensure that legal protections and public commitments are translated to protection and promotion of women's rights, it is critical that women's voices are included in decision-making processes at all levels.

Also, with regard to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the Afghan Government formulated a national action plan in 2019<sup>52</sup> where the government committed to 50% women's participation at the top and mid-level positions or management related to peace and conflict issues (agencies),<sup>53</sup> but when it comes to concrete action, the commitments on human rights by the Afghan Government have not been always fulfilled. It is the same situation in peace related institutions in Afghanistan: For instance, the HCNR has about 50 members, of which only eight are women and the State Ministry for Peace (SMP) has one woman deputy minister out of four deputies.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> WhatsApp Conversation with Parasto Yari, a Senior Adviser to the State Ministry for Peace, 24 March 2021

<sup>46</sup> Oxfam, Cordaid, Inclusive Peace, IMATTER, "Because she matters – Ensuring women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding in Afghanistan", September 2020, p. 12, [www.cordaid.org/en/publications/because-she-matters-ensuring-womens-meaningful-participation-in-peacebuilding-in-afghanistan/](https://www.cordaid.org/en/publications/because-she-matters-ensuring-womens-meaningful-participation-in-peacebuilding-in-afghanistan/)

<sup>47</sup> *The Washington Post*, "Text of President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address", 29 January 2002, [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/transcripts/sou012902.htm](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/transcripts/sou012902.htm); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhxw8ufncdo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhxw8ufncdo)

<sup>48</sup> European Union, "Brussels conference on Afghanistan: Realising Afghanistan's economic potential and reinforcing the role of women", 4 October 2016, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/IP\\_16\\_3285](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/IP_16_3285)

<sup>49</sup> Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, "Annual Report – On violence against women in Afghanistan", 2019, p. 5, [www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/AIHRC\\_Annual\\_Women\\_Report\\_\(2018-2019\).pdf](https://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/AIHRC_Annual_Women_Report_(2018-2019).pdf)

<sup>50</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Harmful Traditional Practices and Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan", 9 December 2010, p.6-23. [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/harmful\\_traditional\\_practices\\_english.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/harmful_traditional_practices_english.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Article 58, Election Law, 25 September 2016, Issue No: (1226).

<sup>52</sup> (Dari Version) Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Action Plan: United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (Women, Peace, and Security), 2019-2022.

<sup>53</sup> (Dari Version) Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Action Plan: United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (Women, Peace, and Security), 2019-2022, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> WhatsApp Conversation with Parasto Yari, a Senior Adviser to the State Ministry for Peace, 24 March 2021

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these grave concerns for potential rollback on women's rights in the current context in the country, Amnesty International makes the following recommendations to the Government of Afghanistan and to the international community:

### TO THE AFGHAN GOVERNMENT

- The Afghan Government must ensure that any peace agreement must include concrete modalities and mechanisms to preserve and strengthen the progress made on human rights and in particular women's rights since 2001 in Afghanistan. Any peace agreement must ensure that gains in women's participation in political and public affairs, civil service, access to education, healthcare and employment, freedom of movement and expression, and protection from gender-based violence – are preserved and strengthened.
- The Afghan government must increase the number of women included in the delegation for peace negotiations representing the government and must ensure full, equal and meaningful participation of diverse women in all peace-related talks, peace conferences and peace negotiations.
- The Afghan government must increase the level of women's participation in peace-related institutions, in particular within the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) leadership, the State Ministry for Peace (SMP) and negotiation team, and at the Istanbul Conference which was tentatively planned after the month of *Ramazan* (mid-May 2021).
- The Afghan government must prioritize the protection and promotion of women's rights across the country, and it must include approaches on appropriately and effectively working toward eradicating gender-based violence against women, improving girls' access to education, and improving women's healthcare.

### THE UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES, EUROPEAN UNION AND OTHER DONOR COUNTRIES AND AGENCIES

- The United Nations, United States, European Union and other donor countries and agencies to Afghanistan must establish a clear position and demonstrate their commitment that the peace agreement must address women's rights in Afghanistan. Any peace agreement must ensure that gains in women's rights are respected, protected and promoted, including women's participation in political and public affairs, civil service, access to education, healthcare and employment, freedom of movement and expression and protection from gender-based violence.
- The United Nations, United States, European Union and other donor countries and agencies to Afghanistan must clearly and openly support women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all peace talks, conferences, including at the Doha negotiations, the HCNR and SMP, and at the Istanbul Conference – which was tentatively planned after the month of *Razaman*.
- The United Nations, United States, European Union and other donor countries and agencies to Afghanistan must monitor the peace negotiations to ensure that the Afghanistan government continues fulfilling its international legal obligations and other commitments on human rights, specifically the international conventions and treaties that Afghanistan has signed and ratified.

### TO THE TALIBAN

- The Taliban must respect women's rights by clearly renouncing actions and policies that are detrimental to women freely exercising their rights including but not limited to access to education, work, healthcare, and freedom of movement and expression and stop gender-based discrimination approach including gender based violence in areas under its control.

- The Taliban must show that the group respects women's rights by including women in the delegations representing the Taliban in peace negotiations and ensuring their meaningful participation in the peace talks.