



Solidarity with Afghan women: the Time and Place for Feminist Responsibility

*Summary written by
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This special event was held online on October 8th 2021, and was dedicated to the situation of women in Afghanistan. The debate addressed the rapidly deteriorating circumstances of their rights, and the degree of responsibility that feminists outside Afghanistan carry towards them. This topic recently gained momentum, as 11 Afghan women have been announced as finalists of the European Parliament's [Sakharov Prize](#) for Freedom of Thought.

Keynote Speakers:

- Aisha, a young Afghan woman who accepted to speak live from Afghanistan, under a pseudonym;
- [Lisa Kakar](#), Co-Founder RUIDAD (Afghan feminist movement) and Afghan women's rights activist;
- [Cynthia Enloe](#), Research Professor in the Department of International Development, Community, and Environment (IDCE), affiliation with Political Science and with Women's and Gender Studies, all at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts;
- [Iulia Motoc](#), Judge at the European Court of Human Rights and Professor at the University of Bucharest.

Moderator: [Liliana Popescu](#), Vice-Rector for International Relations, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) in Bucharest, Romania.

The webinar offered an overview of the Afghan women's current situation, and proposed a set of actions designed to support them.



What is the actual condition of women's rights in Afghanistan?

As the voices of the unprivileged women of Afghanistan, Aisha and Lisa gave a glimpse into how the Taliban takeover of the country has changed what so many women fought hard to achieve – empowerment, financial independence, equality, and education. Afghan women used to be active members of the society, who followed their dreams, built successful careers, and raised their voices towards improving better rights. More recently, the conflicts and crises inside the country have led to the rise of an extremist ideology and of a mindset which leaves little room for the rights of women and girls. They do not have access to health commodities (such as menstruation products), are not allowed to work or speak freely, and are even banned from walking outside of their homes, being considered slaves of men, sexual tools, and only offered the chance to be household caretakers. Women are discriminated against, harassed, punished, beaten, and killed without any retaliation or consequence, while the wrongdoers are praised by the Taliban adepts for their acts. The speakers said that there is no justice at all for the Afghan women.

Even though Afghanistan was once a progressive country that endorsed education, the worst fear of literate people has become reality: their hopes and dreams are once again crushed under the terror of another Taliban occupation, where innocent people are suffering now that they lost everything, from their finances to their homes, but most importantly their safety, freedom, and peace. Unfortunately, fleeing the country appears to be the only option that educated people, especially women, have for now in occupied Afghanistan. They are terrified and unsafe within their own territories, but leaving is a very difficult process, one that requires paperwork and humanitarian assistance. The Taliban administration is confining the population intentionally, controlling how much money a family can withdraw from the bank, denying the issuing of passports and pressuring the people into legitimizing them as a government.

Both Afghan women have underlined the importance of not falling for the Taliban ideology and propaganda, because they don't represent real Islam, which allows women to work, to get educated, to speak and to have rights.

“Dear Muslims of the world, don't fall into the Taliban trap! We have rights under real Islam, not under Taliban's ideology. If you do, humanity is the loser of this battle, not only the Afghan people or the Muslims.”

– “Aisha”



How can we practice solidarity with Afghan women?

In feasible terms, solidarity with Afghan women and their sensitive situation involves the legal dimension, advocacy and peer pressure.

According to Judge Iulia Motoc, the current Afghan issues do not have a strong response within the legal international system, and the international community cannot move forward without making the voices of Afghan women heard. The legal instruments and frameworks that are needed to protect and aid the Afghan women currently prove to be inefficient or slow. Therefore, tools such as the ECHR reports, the UN General Assembly or the International Criminal Court, although currently in place and continually progressing, fail in their duty to protect and to rebuild. Solutions include preventing the Taliban administration from obtaining legitimation, because they seek to be recognized by international parties. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) could make sure that both democratic and non-democratic countries refuse to recognize the Taliban regime in Kabul. UNGA may also focus on how the international community can work with the legitimate government of Afghanistan. Additionally, the UN Security Council should impose sanctions. Another solution entails to accelerate the current investigations of the International Criminal Court into crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes against women taking place in Afghanistan.

The advocacy and peer pressure that activists and feminists can do on behalf of Afghan women and their safety requires a crucial international effort to:

- expose the reality of how the Taliban occupation is deliberately acting in the country and show the effects that their imposed rules have on women's rights;
- understand the current situation of women in Afghanistan, and allow them to inform and lead willing helpers into their lives, so that they can assist in a knowledgeable manner;
- make sure that the propaganda, disinformation and myths regarding the Taliban as the embodiment of Islam and Muslim ideologies do not become widely accepted as authentic, legitimizing the current attacks on women in Afghanistan;
- use the Taliban's need for international recognition as their Achilles' heel in order to try to pressure governments and the international decision makers into not legitimizing Taliban as the rightful government of Afghanistan;



- promote the Islamic feminist discourse regarding the hopes, ideas, and dreams of Muslim women;
- continue advocating for the inclusion of women in the negotiations of the Afghan Peace Process, recalling the numerous initiatives and proposals for concrete measures, such as the ones highlighted in a series of workshops organized in April 2021 by a consortium of Afghan and international civil society organizations and their partners, which concluded with the document titled “Afghan women’s solidarity for inclusive peace: Recommendations for a just and sustainable peace in Afghanistan”;
- demand UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations to find better and faster solutions for the people trapped in Afghanistan and who are unable leave because of lack of passports;
- promote the voices of unprivileged women of Afghanistan and encourage their truth and not only the media and social media portrayals (one particular way would be to support Lisa’s [RUIDAD](#) Afghan feminist magazine, where she and her sister publish articles on feminist issues).

Professor Cynthia Enloe emphasized that, in order to practice solidarity with the Afghan women and their situation, it is paramount to identify the authorities responsible for committees for refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers, etc. within countries and the international community and suggested contacting those members of the legislature who are able to help. Raising awareness regarding the Afghan women’s current issues is essential for an informed reaction and it provides a basis for holding the decision makers accountable for their actions.

There is hope for Afghan women and the world is asked to join their fight and support them.

“Dear women, be the voices of Afghan women that can’t speak - do events like this, propagate their voices, their rights, their fight!”

– Lisa Kakar

RUIDAD Co-Founder and Afghan women’s rights activist