

GLOBAL FRIENDS *of* AFGHANISTAN



Afghan Women: “I Don’t Feel Safe.”



A Global Friends of Afghanistan survey

May 2022





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Friends,

19 May 2022

As GFA Fellow Ambassador Haidari so succinctly described the recent actions of the Haqqani-Taliban terror regime,

“[these are] sadly, [the] last nails on the coffin of democracy by Taliban.”

It has been an extremely tough winter for Afghans. The fall of Kabul to terrorists has set global peace and security back decades. Afghans are suffering and Spring has brought no relief, only more dangers to society and more blatant human rights violations.

We should all collectively feel ashamed. Afghans are being held hostage by a regime that is the antithesis to humanity, democracy, prosperity, and development. The Taliban are attacking basic rights and freedoms on a daily basis.

In response to recent white-washing efforts by visitors to Afghanistan, Afghan women from the GFA team have launched an outreach effort to help share the voices and stories of the Afghan women and girls trapped up under the daily brutality of this illegal regime.

The Taliban-Haqqani chiefs should have been feeding Afghans to slow starvation, instead, they have been planning how to stop women from participating in public life. The Taliban continue to misuse an increasingly gullible international media establishment to continue their public relations battles with the world.

Many women in Afghanistan aren't allowed to learn or teach. They are basically under house arrest. Recent decrees from the Taliban mean they aren't allowed to show their faces in public. These are the actions of the regime. They want to dehumanize women.

These basic freedoms, being able to show your face, are now normal across the Muslim world. Even the most conservative Muslim countries have opened up their societies to greater participation of women. Those nations are reaping the benefits of empowering their entire society. The Taliban-Haqqani leaders have their own daughters in Qatari schools and air-conditioned shopping malls, while they treat Afghan women as less than human.

Just this week the Taliban-Haqqani regime shut-down five key democratic institutions: The Independent Human Rights Commission, The Parliament, The National Security Council, The High Council for National Reconciliation, and The Oversight Commission for the Implementation of Constitution. These steps make clear the trajectory of the regime.

This Global Friends of Afghanistan survey shows fear and suffering of Afghan women. The world shouldn't turn its back. We need to increase awareness of these activities and act on solutions that can help liberate Afghan women.

Thanks to the Afghan women around the globe bravely discussing this crisis.

Let us act now before it is too late,

Jason Criss Howk

GFA Director

**Please contact us if you want to understand our methodology for this survey. We have used complete anonymity to protect people who are under constant threat.*

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“I don’t feel safe. Every minute I wonder what right will be taken away from me tomorrow.”



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In April 2022 a team of Afghan women from Global Friends of Afghanistan (GFA) led discussions with other women in Afghanistan to solicit their thoughts on life under the Taliban-Haqqani regime.

Women in Afghanistan are often discussed as an important subject matter on various political forums, but are seldom personally approached for their thoughts and preferences pertaining to their own lives. From peace talks in foreign countries to foreign journalists on the ground, the direct voices of women in Afghanistan are missing. During the illegal Taliban-Haqqani regime, we see much of the same. Foreign women visit and speak of what they have briefly encountered, even painting a rosy picture of life under the Taliban, as though their experience speaks of the reality faced by Afghan women.

As human rights watchers continue to report, Afghan women are not safe to speak openly from within Afghanistan. Time and time again, when they have risked doing so, they have ended up abducted, tortured, missing, or murdered. In an effort to provide a safe platform, Global Friends of Afghanistan contacted associates in Afghanistan, and asked them to discuss their lives, and the treatment of women and girls with their networks of friends and family.

We actively approached women of various walks of life, including those who have openly supported negotiations with the Taliban-Haqqani regime, women who work in

NGOs, those who are no longer able to work, and students at various levels. In this volunteer initiative, we have spoken directly to women in various provinces, as well as the capital city of Kabul. This is what they had to tell us.



Question: What is your response to the recent claims that Afghan girls are not attending school, because the girls (many or most) don't want to go to school:

"It is only the Taliban who don't want us to go to school. The people of Afghanistan work very hard for the sole purpose of providing their children an education."

"Islam asks us to be educated, it is part of our religious belief."

"The quality of life of an illiterate person is not that of someone who has gone to school. Afghans know that and want school for our children."

"We go to school even when the conditions are not good. In the insecurity (of the past Taliban attacks) of suicide bombings and explosions my family still encouraged all the daughters to go to school and university."

"There are those who don't support education for girls, but that is not everybody!"

"I travelled around the country in recent weeks. Women in Herat, Balkh and Kabul as well as rural Paktia and Khost support girls' education. I spoke with some madrasah educated and pro-Taliban women in rural Khost. They supported girls' education, and were angered by the decision of the Taliban to do a U-turn on this issue. They, however,

said that girls' education should be in accordance with sharia law. When asked what that meant, they described what is already in place in the Afghan education system such as sex segregation and female teachers for girls."

"I was the first woman in my family to be educated. I wanted to be an ambassador. I worked my entire life to educate myself and my family supported me in this. The Taliban are wrong to say Afghans don't want to educate women. It is our Islamic right, and they are not Muslim themselves if they believe oppressing us is right."

"Taliban didn't let my mother go to school in the 90s, why would I trust that they will let me? The day Taliban sat in Arg (the Presidential palace) I knew we were in prison."

"We have always been Muslim and studied accordingly. I feel they want to change the curriculum to something that would kill my belief in myself and my dreams for the future."

"Why are millions of women who have their family's approval, now being punished for those who don't want education?"

"The most important thing to take into consideration is that in the past 20 years, women have not taken this path easily, they have paid a heavy price for the small achievement they have today. Every Afghan woman who has been able to study and work has a painful story behind it. Afghan women

in a traditional and highly conservative and misogynistic society in Afghanistan, which also suffers from decades of war and devastation and political and economic insecurity, have fought with their family, parents, relatives, friends, and society in order to let them go to school and university. They have stood up to their parents and managed to get the right to go to school and university with resistance and persistence. After school, the women faced more difficult barriers to enter university and get specialized education. Usually, rural girls travel from one province to another with a man from their family (Mahram) to prepare for the entrance exam or to go to university, which doubles the cost of a woman's education compared to a man's. Sexual harassment is catastrophic in schools and universities. But despite all this, we now have thousands of educated women and girls, mothers and families who care about their daughters going to school and are willing to make sacrifices. This carries a simple message; we cannot ignore the women and girls of Afghanistan in a world where many women and girls have the opportunity of getting education. such ignorance is morally horrible as well. No woman in any part of the world is deprived of the right to education such as the women of Afghanistan. When women do not have access to education and work, they can have no other duty than raising children and housekeeping, they cannot have financial independence, and they cannot contribute to the improvement of their lives. No one wants this and we must understand that Afghan women do not want the same destiny for themselves or their daughters."



Question: When asked if they felt safer, or safe at all, under Taliban rule:

"I don't feel safe. Every minute I wonder what right will be taken away from me tomorrow. I can't sleep at night. I rarely leave the house, fearing the Taliban will do something to me or my sisters."

"There is no safety or security. Not economic, not political. There is open discrimination and no law that protects us."

"We don't even have the security to access our own inheritance. What is secure about our lives?"

"There is no safety for anyone. Not physical or psychological."

"Our current life is like we are in a dark hole and the world is pretending they don't know where we are."

"All we have is fear and we are waiting for something bad to happen."

"I do feel safer in some ways. There aren't bombings or complex attacks (since this conversation there have been a number), There is also in my and my peers' experience, less sexual harassment in Kabul. However, I feel immensely insecure as I exercise my basic rights and freedoms. I feel that the authorities can and will take my basic rights from me any minute. I feel like my right to work and freely move is at risk. I do not think that Afghan society, men in particular, would support me as I lose more rights and freedoms."

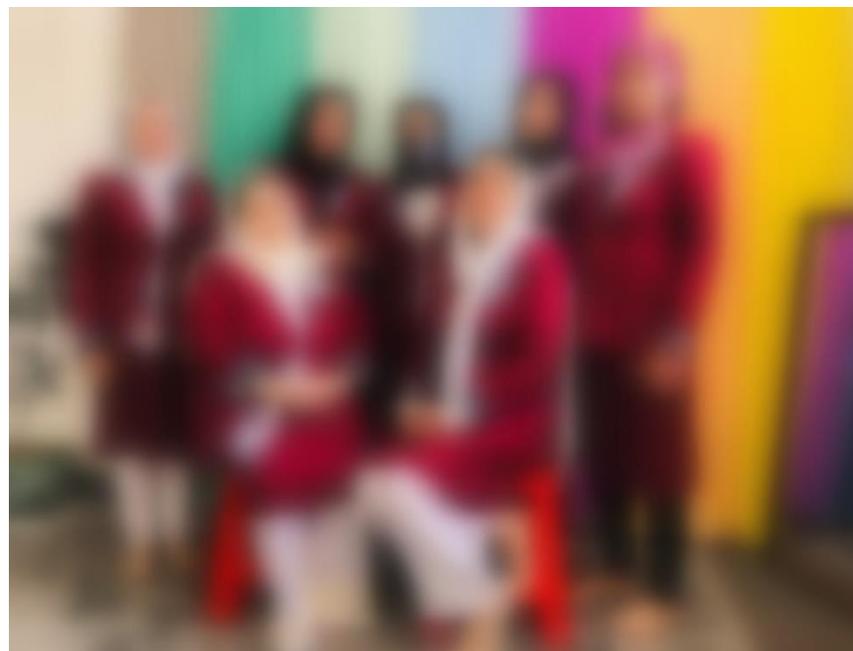
"I do not feel safe under the Taliban at all. They do not value the human dignity of women at all. Misogyny is not the Taliban's style of governing; it is their core belief."

"No, I do not have any security now. I do not have mental security, neither for education, nor to go out of the house for shopping, to go to work, to dress, to think. Our whole life has become fear and anxiety about when we will be attacked by the Taliban. We live in fear."

"I've seen the Taliban kill so many of my family members because of the tribe I belong to. We fought them as hard as we could, and we found many Pakistani members amongst them. We know where they are coming from. I have to lie about my identity, and I know that amnesty is a lie. There are thousands of soldiers imprisoned."

"I feel like a prisoner at home. I don't even want to go outside after seeing bodies of executed citizens hung on trees."

"If women respect their human rights, desire the right to freedom, equality, and life, they will never have a place to live under Taliban rule. Taliban are only tolerant of women who follow their laws and rules. But if we, like any human being, want our freedom, equality and rights and we fight for them, we will face rape, torture, intimidation, Taliban's dreadful prisons and death. This is not called security but life under the shadow of a constant threat."



Question: What is your message to the world:

"Gender equality is always on the agenda for the world, but we are fighting for basic rights, and we cannot do it alone."

"The world, the international community putting pressure on the Taliban is the only way our girls will be allowed to study. Threaten their aid and legitimacy. Put them on travel bans until they are forced to accept the rights of Afghan women."

"I ask women's rights activists to speak up. I'm a woman who worked for years to have a better life for myself and we need your support."

"Besides the pressure from us, we need the world's pressure on the Taliban. Without that, they will not agree."

"Going to school gives hope to Afghan women. If humanity is still alive, stand up with Afghan women against the injustice."

"If you have a mother or daughter you love, you should never accept the Taliban. We are hungry, we need food! We need psychological and physical peace. Please listen to us."

"We want the world to know that Afghan women feel abandoned and scared to speak because of repercussions. Please help me reach the goals I've dreamed of my whole life."

"Girls should not be deprived of school and the right to work. The world should not allow them to close our schools. Help girls left behind to complete their education."

"I invite the international community to support the diverse women's movement inside Afghanistan. Whatever means of resistance they choose - from civil disobedience to negotiations with the authorities. They should not dissociate from us, and take our fight to DC, London, and Brussels."

"We call on the world not to recognize the Taliban and to put pressure on the Taliban in any way possible for a comprehensive government, or to form a global consensus to overthrow the Taliban."

"I call on the women of the world to empathically understand the current circumstances of Afghan women and to contribute to helping them in any way possible. It is part of women's moral responsibility to work to change the situation of Afghan women. We cannot expect men to respect women's rights and demands. We as women should understand the importance of addressing violence against women, all forms of discrimination and inequality against women.

Afghan women, like every human being and every woman in the world, want to live in an equal and humane society, to be safe and to have their rights respected, and to have access to the opportunities of life the same as men. Afghan women's resistance and demands to access to education is worthy of support and admiration."

These are a few samples of the conversations we had with women in Afghanistan. They want to speak to the world candidly and share their truths with full expression, in their own voices—however, they do not have the means to do that. Not only are they detained and punished when speaking out, the women of Afghanistan are also restricted

by the deafening silence of the world. The world is again just watching what is happening, but are not asking to hear from them. Please listen to the women of Afghanistan.

These conversations were conducted throughout April 2022 by a team of Afghan women from GFA, and all participants were given complete anonymity



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All of us at Global Friends of Afghanistan (GFA) greatly acknowledge those Afghan women that dedicated their time for us to interview them for this study. They are facing extreme prejudice at home. We decided to completely withhold anything that could name subjects or point to a location or home of those interviewed.

We understand the risks of those that were brave enough to speak to our interviewers. We thank them again and we have tried to protect them as best we can. Safeguarding people is our priority.

We have also blurred photographs of Afghan women participating in public life and the democratic process. We debated if we should remove the images altogether, but unfortunately most women in Afghanistan feel like they are being erased. Hopefully the alteration of the images can be seen as symbolic for those outside the country. This was not designed to cause offense or add to Afghan women's suffering.

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This survey is designed to provide accurate and timely information on women's safety in Afghanistan. We apologise for any potential errors or edits, and we will correct them if found. We want to be as transparent as possible under difficult circumstances.

If you wish to discuss our findings and methodology, please do not hesitate to contact us at:

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