



Desperate for an education, these Afghan Girls are writing their university entrance exams in the snow. ©arifrahmanii



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Afghan Peace Negotiations: Their Perilous Significance for the Women in Afghanistan

A Graduate Women International (GWI) Membership Marketplace NFA-to-NFA Partnership Project Organised by the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) and GWI-Netherlands (GWI-NL)

Distinguished Speakers

From these extraordinary Afghan women learn about the crucial issues facing them and how we as informed women can strengthen their voices at this critical time for them and for their country.



Dr. Samar

Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission Founder



Dr. Sarabi

1 of 4 women on 42 member negotiating team



Mary Akrami

Afghan Women's Network, Executive Director

Event Moderator: Patrick De Vries, European Institute of Peace, Senior Adviser

Saturday, 24 April 2021 (one time)



8:00-9:30AM PDT

5:00-6:30PM CEST

11:00AM-12:30PM EDT

7:30-9:00PM AFT

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Webinar Concept Note

Afghan women are asking for our help: we must listen to them and add our voices to theirs. At the 24 April Webinar, three remarkable Afghan women will tell us personally what must be done to ensure women's rights in the present Afghan Peace Talks. Please join for this important interactive event.

Peace talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban have given the people of Afghanistan optimism that the 40 years of violence and war will end. But they do not want peace at any price and are extremely concerned that the Taliban will try to return the country the dark days of 1996 when women were forced to remain in their homes, veiled from head to foot, denied education and medical care, and whipped, stoned, and killed for small or imagined crimes. They have good reason to be afraid.

THE CLOCK CANNOT BE TURNED BACK

The past 20 years have seen women and girls return to school, take their places in all levels of society and work in public service, justice, security services and a range of other occupations. Their rights are guaranteed within the current Constitution and so it remains crucial. The vast majority of Afghans do not want a peace agreement that denies women schooling. They believe women should be able to work outside the home, particularly in occupations such as teaching and in medical settings. There is strong support for women to seek leadership positions.

BUT

In many areas currently controlled by the Taliban schools have been closed. Parents fear for their children's safety and remove their children from school. Women are being forced to leave jobs. The last year has seen more attacks and greater violence than at any time in the last 20 years.

WOMEN ARE BEING KILLED

Over the past year the Taliban and other insurgents have targeted places such as maternity hospitals and girls' schools to murder and intimidate women and their families. Female leaders such as judges, media personalities, and heads of women's organizations have been assassinated. They tried to kill a woman on the Afghan government negotiating team. There is said to be a "hit list" of high-profile women to be executed. Many women have been forced to flee.

THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY

More than 60 per cent of the Afghan population are between 0 and 24 years old. Without a safe, educated, inclusive society, the country will be fertile ground for extremists to attract disaffected youth to their ranks. Girls and boys, men and women, need a chance to have peaceful, productive lives and not be forced to endure an oppressive, violent future.

THE FUTURE FOR OTHER COUNTRIES

With the legitimacy given them, and the concessions gained through negotiations with the United States, the Taliban are looking and feeling like victors already. Other fundamentalist groups such as Boko Haram, ISIS, Al-Shabab in other Muslim-majority countries are watching closely and being encouraged. Women in these countries could also see a life as second class citizens.

NO COUNTRY CAN SURVIVE WITHOUT THE PRODUCTIVITY OF HALF THEIR CITIZENS.

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Speaker Bios

Dr. Samar

Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission Founder



Dr Sima Samar has been fighting for women's rights in Afghanistan for 40 years. A graduate physician from Kabul University, Dr. Samar lost her first husband who was among 500 members of an educated elite "disappeared" following the Soviet Invasion. She fled with her young son to Pakistan where she quickly became involved in providing health care and education under the umbrella of the Shuhada Organization which she founded.

Shuhada still operates 55 schools for boys and girls in Afghanistan and three for Afghan refugees in Quetta. The organization also ran underground schools for girls in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime.

After 17 years Dr. Samar returned to Afghanistan to convene and chair the first Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. It conducted human rights programs across the country and investigated the human rights abuses.

During the interim administration, she established the first Afghanistan Ministry of Women's Affairs. The Ministry won the right for women governmental employees to return to their jobs and keep their seniority, oversaw the re-entry of girls to schools, launched a women's rights legal department, and opened a school at the Ministry for married girls teaching them saleable skills and literacy.

One of her most visionary projects is the founding of Gawharshad University in Kabul where young men and women from all regions and ethnic backgrounds study as equals in co-ed classes for further education in political science, law, engineering or economics. More than 30% of the students are girls; those from deprived backgrounds are provided with tuition and accommodation assistance.

Dr. Samar has been recognized for her courage and leadership with many awards and honours. She has been nominated for the Nobel Prize for peace on two occasions, is a member of the Order of Canada, and is often ranked by the American Forbes Magazine among the 100 most powerful women in the world.

Dr. Sarabi

1 of 4 women on 42 member negotiating team



Dr. Habiba Sarabi: "Our vision is of an Afghanistan where every woman can live in peace and recognize her rights"

Dr. Habiba Sarabi is a hematologist by profession and a reforming politician and activist for women's rights and the environment who has lived through the dark days of Taliban control.

In 1996 she took her three children to Pakistan where she taught women and girls and organized teams of mobile physicians to visit the camps. She also walked through the Punjab many times to maintain 80 underground literary classes in Afghanistan.

After various positions in the elected Afghan government, she was appointed governor of Bamyan, the first woman to hold such a role in the country. In this impoverished rural province with high illiteracy rates, against great odds she built up a functioning local government, brought in roads and infrastructure and established eco-tourism including Afghanistan's first National Park, Band E Amin.

A deputy director of the High Peace Council, she is also one of four women on the twenty-one member Afghan Government team in the Doha peace negotiations. Dr. Sarabi has received various prestigious awards for her trailblazing work including recognition as a one of the heroes of the Environment by Time Magazine in 2008, and in 2016, the N-Peace Award for her tireless work to bring peace to Afghanistan and her focus on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Mary Akrami

Afghan Women's Network, Executive Director



An extraordinary Afghan woman, Mary Akrami has established practical and creative organizations to empower women in her country and keep them safe. She has been engaged in the fight for human rights since 2001. Among many honours she received in 2007 the International Women of Courage Award, and was named in the BBC 100 2016 List of the year's most inspirational and influential women.

She is the director of Afghan Women's Network, an organization that engages in peacebuilding and conflict resolution and provides training and mechanisms on women's engagement in both political and community based peace building. To bring this engagement down to the local level, she introduced shuras (councils) throughout Afghanistan so that women could begin at home to take part in decision making. The founder and former executive director of the Afghan Women's Skills Development Centre, she opened the first shelter for abused women in 2003 and was involved in opening a restaurant which provided jobs for women who were the victims of violence. Since then some 25 safe houses helping over 2000 women have been established in Afghanistan. Although laws to protect these women have been passed, they are too often ignored and security for the shelters is always a concern.

She is also a member of Afghanistan's High Peace council and advocates for more representation of women at the current peace talks between the elected government and the Taliban.