



**Women living under muslim laws**  
**النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين**  
**Femmes sous lois musulmanes**

Transnational Solidarity Network

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**WLUML statement on Afghanistan**

*Women Living Under Muslim Laws* (WLUML) stands in solidarity with women's rights and feminist groups and networks in Afghanistan to express our deep concern about the fragile conditions of the Afghanistan peace process. The Istanbul peace conference, scheduled for April, was recently postponed indefinitely due to the Taliban's non-participation, following the announcement of an unconditional withdrawal by the United States and NATO by September 11, 2021. Prior to this announcement, there had been a period of intense pressure on the Taliban for a ceasefire and more inclusive and effective peace talks. But with the presumption of their military victory, the Taliban no longer see any need to compromise on these issues. In addition to stepping back from the Istanbul conference, the Taliban have increased attacks against Afghan civilians and troops during these last few days with impunity. Women activists, journalists, and prominent women politicians have borne the brunt of over 400 attacks and assassinations over the last year.

While the status of women in Afghanistan has greatly improved since the ouster of the Taliban in 2001, the Taliban have not changed their extremist ideology either on freedom of expression or with regard to women's or minorities' rights. WLUML is concerned that the hard-fought gains for democracy and women's rights, particularly with regard to education and participation in public life, are in jeopardy. Along with the devastating impact this will have on women in Afghanistan, we fear this may have a negative ripple effect on women's rights and on democracy in the region, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts, and may also serve to embolden diverse fundamentalist groups. In this fraught moment, we call for the protection of women's human rights defenders and civil society spaces in the face of ongoing and escalating violence. Women's human rights must be treated as a cross-cutting issue in the peace process and the substantive participation of women and minorities in the negotiations is necessary to ensure a just and meaningful peace.

Now more than ever, Afghan women's concerns must be heard to ensure that the peace process and its outcomes are informed by their lived experience. The international community must ensure that women and minorities have the support and means to effectively participate in peace and rebuilding efforts. WLUML calls on the international community to use all diplomatic, political and financial means available to secure the advances made in women's and girls' rights, and to facilitate an Afghan-led recovery to ensure the flourishing of a viable democracy.



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**As such, WLUML calls for:**

- **An immediate ceasefire** to ensure the peace process can proceed in good faith.
- **Women's human rights to be protected** in the outcomes of this peace process.
  - Women's and citizens' rights currently enshrined in the Constitution, national legislation and obligations under international law must continue to be respected and enforced.
  - The autonomy of civil society, including women's rights and feminist groups, must be ensured as part of the peace agreement.
- **Inclusive peace negotiations to continue** with meaningful and substantive participation of Afghan women representing diverse segments of society, in a process led by the citizens of Afghanistan.
  - Women should comprise **at least 40% of the negotiating team** in the Istanbul conference and subsequent negotiations if they are to meaningfully represent the interests of half of the society, particularly given the gendered aspects of violence and marginalization of the past decades.
- **The UN to establish a peacekeeping mission** to oversee the departure of international forces and monitor the situation, ensure the protection of human rights, and provide security for women human rights defenders and peacebuilders.
  - Sponsor countries and the UN must ensure that gender experts and progressive Islamic scholars accompany the (re)negotiating team.
  - The UN must hold parties to the negotiation accountable for their women's human rights commitments and monitor inclusion in the peace process.
- **The international community to provide direct financial and structural support** to women peace delegates, civil society actors and institutions, and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission so they can continue to monitor the human rights situation across the country.
  - The international community should **facilitate visa processes** for women representatives to ensure women's meaningful representation in the **Istanbul conference**.
- **The lifting of any sanctions against the Taliban to be conditional** on a commitment to upholding women's and citizens' rights currently enshrined in the Constitution, national legislation and obligations under international law.

In solidarity,

*Women Living Under Muslim Laws, April 2021*