



Afghan/Canada Symposium CALLS TO ACTION

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Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, the country has been plunged into spiraling humanitarian and human rights crises, with women, girls and other vulnerable minorities bearing the brunt of the deteriorating situation. The ever increasing repression of women's basic rights and freedoms includes exclusion from public space and political participation, and a near total loss of access to jobs, education and free movement. Afghan women in Canada, and in consultation with women across the globe, have come together to develop these Calls to Action as a roadmap for the Government of Canada and its allies. They highlight the most pressing needs and priorities of Afghan women both inside and outside of Afghanistan, and identify policy responses which Canada can pursue to ensure their Afghanistan response aligns with their Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist International Assistance Policy.

Action Area I:

Humanitarian and Human Rights Crises in Afghanistan

After two decades of substantial human development gains fuelled by international investment in Afghanistan and the will of the Afghan people, the Taliban takeover has led to a swift reversal. The Afghan economy has collapsed, resulting in more than 70% of the population unable to meet basic food needs. With women barred from working in most fields, and forced child marriage of girls on the rise, the burden of poverty and food insecurity is disproportionately gendered.

We call on the Government of Canada to:

1. Amend the anti-terrorism financing provisions under the Criminal Code as a matter of urgency and take legislative action to ensure those provisions do not restrict legitimate humanitarian action for the people of Afghanistan.
2. Uphold Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy by ensuring that Canada continues to make development and humanitarian assistance investments aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, and ensuring aid equitably reaches women and girls, minorities, and marginalized groups.
3. In keeping with commitments made by Canada and other G7 countries through the Charlevoix Declaration and other policy frameworks, dedicate funding specifically for programs that address gender equitable education as a core component of humanitarian services and a point of access to other services such as child protection, healthcare and food aid.
4. Exert their influence with coalition partners, particularly the US, to take measurable steps in supporting the recovery of Afghanistan's economy and the stabilization of Afghanistan's Central Bank, the DAB.
5. Implement specific gender equitable strategies to support economic recovery, including provision of skills development support, business recovery funding for women entrepreneurs and support for the marketing and export of products produced by women.



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Action Area II: Pathways to Safety and Resettlement for at-risk Afghans

Human rights work and civic space are critical for a peaceful society in which rights are respected. Many Afghan Women Human Rights Defenders, due to increased risk of threats and violence, have fled to other countries. For most at-risk Afghans though, resettlement remains extremely challenging if not totally inaccessible. The situation has deteriorated to the point where the human rights crisis matches the country's humanitarian and financial crises.

We call on the Government of Canada to:

1. As promised in October 2021, expedite processing for those Afghans entering Canada on student visas and waive the expectation that those who gain places at Canadian higher education institutions prove their intention to return to their country of origin.
2. Allocate additional resources to IRCC to allow for a more consistent, transparent and efficient processing of Afghan applicants as part of their Special Immigration Measures and Humanitarian programs.
3. Implement the calls of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration to extend the special immigration measures afforded to Ukrainian nationals to other regions faced with a humanitarian crisis such as Afghanistan, and make available these measures to Afghans inside Afghanistan.
4. Engage in active diplomacy with the governments of countries where displaced Afghans are located and where they face barriers to being granted protected status, as well as with the UNHCR to better ensure the rights of displaced Afghans, for whom refugee registration processes are often inaccessible or marred by severe delays and corruption. Canada should also provide conditional development assistance to countries hosting Afghan refugees, that supports those countries to provide education, work, and other life opportunities to displaced Afghans, as well as paths to resettlement.

Action Area III: Mobilizing the International Community for the Future of Afghanistan

The international community must acknowledge its own role in and responsibility for the situation unfolding in Afghanistan today and pay attention to the calls from Afghans for accountability and justice, for concrete challenges to the impunity pervasive in the country and to remedying the wrongs of the past by paying attention to the future.

We call on the Government of Canada to:

1. Officially recognize and condemn the current system in place in Afghanistan as one of total gender apartheid, consistent with definitions of apartheid as a crime against humanity in international law, and work with allies to have this recognized globally.
2. Advocate for and work with others for an end to the United Nations Security Council exemption on the travel ban for Taliban leaders.
3. Develop and put in place a mechanism, coordinated through the offices of Canada's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, ensuring regular and meaningful consultation with and briefing for Canadian civil society actors engaged in delivering development aid in Afghanistan, with Afghan women leaders inside Afghanistan and those who have resettled to Canada, and with Afghan-Canadian diaspora actors.
4. Play a leadership role in facilitating international cooperation and dialogue in partnership with Afghan women leaders globally, and convening Feminist Foreign Policy allies to develop specific policies around Afghanistan, as outlined in these Calls to Action.
5. In line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, take specific and measurable steps to ensure Afghan women are equal partners in any decision-making regarding the future of Afghanistan, including their participation in the development of policies related to governance, peace agreements and nation building, as well as oversight and distribution of aid to the country.