

United Nations General Assembly 74

Side Event on

“Advancing Women’s Meaningful Participation in Peace to Resolve Conflict and Build Sustainable Peace in Afghanistan”

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Speaker: Mariam Safi

Your Excellency Ambassador Adela Raz, Your Excellency Deputy Foreign Minister Idrees Zaman, Your Excellency’s and Distinguished Co-Panelists Minister Eriksson and Ambassador Potzel, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, Asa Regner, and, our distinguished moderator, Ms. Melanne Verwee, Ladies & Gentleman:

I am very grateful for the opportunity to be here today. My perspective is informed by decade-long work as a peace-builder and researcher in Afghanistan consulting with diverse sectors and community members on women, peace and security issues through the [Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies](#) (DROPS).

Most of us here today, from civil society to Member States and United Nations partners, understand “peacebuilding,” as measures to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people.

Creating a *liberal peace* continues to be the central aim of our work, specifically through the agendas for sustainable peace and prevention. We continue to hope that the United Nations can achieve positive peace by elevating and placing those who were previously sidelined, namely local actors and civil society, at the center of peace efforts.

In Afghanistan, however, I am afraid that despite evidence on the impact of women’s meaningful participation in peace, we have reached a point where women’s human rights and involvement are relegated to the margins.

The gains made so far in Afghanistan have largely been an outcome of the peace-building agenda, however, that being said when Afghan women asserted themselves to preserve those very gains, the Liberal Peace-building agenda lost steam as we experienced over the past year.

The views expressed by women were placed in siloes, and treated as “women’s issues” and their concerns segregated from so-called hardline issues around the cessation of hostilities, troop withdrawal, and more. The international community too often questions the legitimacy and representativeness of their perspectives, while offering *de facto* legitimacy to the Taliban.

In 2019, women’s voices were constantly side-lined in the US-Taliban talks. The Taliban, implicitly, were portrayed as the “*local*,” giving them agency to shape an agreement, despite continuing to kill scores of innocent Afghans. While, on the other hand, women and their organizations, were treated as “*spoilers*.” When women demanded preservation of their Constitutional rights, they were pacified, and told this issue was outside the prerogative of such talks, and when they cautioned against quick fixes, they were criticized for not taking ownership of their future.

These are the dynamics we know are the pitfall of liberal peacebuilding – that when it matters most, those in positions of power adopt illiberal approaches and justify them through promises of liberal outcomes.

As practitioners, policymakers, and key leaders in this process, we must recognize and change this course, because without significant change, we risk monumental loss on 18 years of gains for the rights of all Afghans, and yet another failed peace-building intervention.

I am here today, because I have hope that we can still change course.

In the past 12 months, I have witnessed remarkable mobilization among women and women's based organizations who have come together in ways I have never seen before. Their advocacy has cut across ethnic, religious and sectorial lines with the goal of preventing a regression on the gains made towards women's Constitutional rights, civil liberties, and democracy. They have held nation-wide [consultations, talked with current and former Taliban members](#), organized [roundtables](#), wrote [Op-Eds](#), provided [policy](#) recommendations, and carried out peaceful protests in Kabul and around the world.

Afghan women called upon the international community to stand behind their struggle for inclusion and sustainable peace. "No Peace Without Women; My Red Line; and Women Will Not Go Back," are only some of the messages that spread across social media to express that any process in which women are left behind, is one that is not only unacceptable, but is also doomed to fail.

The Women's National Consensus for Peace, included consultations with 15,000 women, in 34 provinces in 2018. As the largest consultation conducted in the country, it clearly showed the united demands and perspectives of women on key issues. Their demands are as follows: (1) an immediate cease-fire, (2) the preservation of the Constitution and (3) negotiations with the Taliban under the leadership of the State with the ownership of all Afghan people. These demands were reinforced at the National Consultative Peace Jirga. But, while a few partners took actions to further this call, for others it fell on deaf ears.

Ladies and gentlemen, this leads me to my final point. While opinions may differ on the type of peace that should unfold, there is a clear and common consensus among women on the broad strokes of a "*durable*" peace settlement and the necessity of enabling them to take their seat at the table.

In my speech at the UNSC in 2018, I said that Afghan's were losing hope. However, I do not think that hope has yet been lost. Afghan people continue to remain hopeful with and for their democracy. The mobilization I have witnessed over the last year is a testament to this. It is time to take what we have learned to be true from our common understanding and definition of peacebuilding – that placing local communities, particularly women and civil society at the center of efforts to resolve conflict and build peace, is the only way to achieve a peace that lasts. I am confident that the goals expressed in the agenda of this programme are achievable.

To do so, we must hold ourselves accountable to these values in the work of bringing peace to Afghanistan and collectively using our platforms to elevate women's perspectives and participation.

Thank you.

Mariam Safi

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