

Mr António Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations
405 East, 42nd Street
New York, NY, 10017
United States of America - USA

Open Letter to Mr. Antonio Guterres the Secretary General of the United Nations

Dear Mr. Guterres

We, the undersigned coalitions and networks, and individuals advocating and defending the human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan through this letter, express our deep concern about the latest statements of Ms. Roza Otunbyeva, the Head of the United Nations Assistant Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) of expressing interest in investigating girls' education in madrassas under the Taliban rule. On 20 December 2023, she stated to the UNSC that there is "more and more anecdotal evidence that girls could study at the Islamic schools known as madrassas." Such statements are utterly irresponsible and perceived as normalising the education ban for girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban. For anyone familiar with the Afghan context, Madrassa and formal school systems cannot be compatible for many reasons.

Since the Taliban returned in August 2021, they have formed 100s of new religious madrassas across Afghanistan, not just for school-age boys and girls but adult men and women, where there is a genuine fear of mass radicalisation of youth. The formal education curriculum in Afghanistan is consistent with both religious education as well as modern subjects including science, mathematics, literature, foreign languages, history, and geography, unlike madrassas that are predominantly religious studies. Furthermore, there are multiple reports and research show that people who attend Taliban-controlled madrassas are radicalised and even learning militancy and insurgency. Modern education is key for the advancement of a country, particularly for women's active participation in social, political economic sphere. In absence of a formal education system and deprivation of girls from advancing has a serious impact on Afghanistan and is against the international convention of Child Rights, Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2030) of the United Nations.

We are expressing our most profound dissatisfaction with the UN's position, including UNAMA, since August 2021, who are showing little concern over the grave human rights situation in Afghanistan, particularly against women and girls. We are dismayed by the position and statements of the UN officials, particularly UNAMA's Chief Ms. Otenbyeva, who is trying to normalise the education ban against women and girls among other human rights violations of the Taliban. Taliban are an ideological militant group that uses religion and people's religious beliefs for their political and military purposes. Hence, normalisation of their restrictive rules including education ban against girls and replacement of formal education with religious madrassas will have consequences beyond Afghanistan and the region. Furthermore, Afghanistan cannot progress only with religious studies and there is already a serious lack of women professionals in all areas including medicine and technology.

Dear Secretary General,

The situation in Afghanistan is highly complex as a result of nearly half a century of armed conflict, meddling of other countries, including our neighbours, suffering from the worst form of environmental, humanitarian and human rights crisis and gender persecution, and being the only country in the world where girls are banned from education and women from work and governed by a group that is systematically persecuting women and girls because of their gender which amounts to Gender Apartheid, requires a strong UN presence and stronger UNSG representative with true commitment to the UN's core principles. The people of Afghanistan cannot afford to be revictimized because of the poor UN policies and weak decisions. We would like to see a UN that withholds its mandate on facilitating negotiations between Afghans, observes, monitors and reports on the human rights situation, including the situation of women and girls and pressures the Taliban to change the policies and actions against the people of Afghanistan and most notably against women and girls.

No country should be forced to abandon formal education, which is a fundamental human right of every human being as enshrined under the UDHR, UN Conventions and SDGs.

The Secretary General Must urge the UNAMA to:

1. Urge the Taliban to reverse policies responsible for the deteriorating human rights situation, particularly for women, girls and hold them to account for systematic violation of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan.
2. The UN must continue to call for the re-opening of schools and universities for young women and girls and not to consider the madrassas as an alternative to the formal education.
3. UN should urge the Taliban to stop spreading extremist ideologies including in the education system and madrasas. The implications of such policies are devastating for Afghanistan and beyond.
4. A complex human rights and humanitarian situation such as Afghanistan requires a strong UN presence, the UN Secretary-General must ensure that UNAMA is led by someone who has a solid human rights background and a successful track record of working in complex situations such as Afghanistan.
5. UNAMA Human Rights Unit, as a representative of the OHCHR must have the financial and political support to monitor, investigate and report on the human rights situation, including the rights of women and girls on access to education, violence against women, freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly to the Security Council and Human Rights Council.
6. UNAMA must hold monthly consultation meetings with the members of civil society, including the human rights community and media inside and in exile, to discuss the current human rights situation, particularly the rights of women and girls to education, employment, and political participation, and seek their advice.



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Other signatories

1. Anarkali Honaryar former member of Senate
2. Abdullah Ahmadi Civil Society activist
3. PhD. Nilofar Sakhi Academic
4. Judge Marzaia Babakarkhail
5. Amina Ahmadi, founder of Women Leadership Network
6. Horia Mosadiq, Human Rights Defender
7. Hami, Freuen Empowerment Organization
8. Digital Institute of Civil Society
9. Parwana Paikan, Afghan Woman Diplomat- Paris
10. Sisterhood Group for Education of Afghan Girls
11. Ghousodin Mir, Director of Afghan-Austria Association and Editor in Chief of Banoo magazine
12. Parasto Yari, Lawyer and Gender expert
13. Karimi Istalifi, poet and writer
14. Wali Mohammad Yousofzai, Deputy of Farhang Association
15. Saghar Wafa, Women Rights activist
16. Hadi Wafa, Youth activist
17. Marzia Abdullahi, Women Rights activist
18. Fahima Saqee, member of Banoo Magazine
19. Fariba Charkhi, Journalist and presenter
20. Palwasha Hamzad, Editor
21. Saleha Waheb, Writer
22. Eng. Fardiyana Tabibzada, Editor
23. Eng. Syed Amin, Graphist
24. Dr. Sharif Hashimi, Member of Farhang Association
25. Gulchehra Yaftali, Women Rights activist
26. Parnyan Sediqi, Writer

27. Fariba Atash Sadeq, Writer and Literature
28. Zarlisht Liberal
29. Aziza Enayat, Poet
30. Mahmooda Sekandari, Writer
31. Zahra Yagana, Women Rights activist
32. Maria Bashir, Lawyer and Women Rights activist
33. Malalai Habibi, women, peace and security expert
34. Sajia Behagam, Women Rights and peace activist
35. Dr. Ali Ahmad Safi, Peace and Democracy Researcher
36. Sahar Ehsan, Women Rights activist
37. Roshan Mashal, Women Rights activist
38. Salamat Azimi, Former Cabinet Minister
39. Tahmina Salik, Women Rights activist
40. Lida Sherzai-Afghanistan Women Leaders Movement
41. Mursal Safi-Afghanistan Women Leaders Movement
42. Najiba Sanjar, Women Rights activist
43. Fawzia Jahish, writer and social activist
44. Fawzia Meetra, Journalist
45. Anahita Adda, social activist in USA
46. Zarghouna Amiri, Women Rights activist in Germany
47. Mastoora Hashimi, Journalist and presenter
48. Meena Mir, writers board of Banoo magazine
49. Fawzia Baktash, Journalist and Women Rights activist
50. Dr. Pooya
51. Hameeda Hamzad, Human Rights Defender
52. Masooma Wafa, Human Rights Defender
53. Safiha Akbar, Social activist and board member of Oxus Association
54. Nooria Niazmand, social activist
55. Shukria Ehsan
56. Semeen Moshrif, Women Rights activist
57. Laila Akbari, social activist
58. Anahita Rahimi, Social activist
59. Reeta Kabiri, Social activist
60. Jamila Kabiri, social activist
61. Oxus Association in Austria
62. Arif Ankhoyee, Youth activist
63. Rahman Rahmani, youth activist
64. Ashraf Asghari, Youth activist
65. Latifa Azizi, pilot and member of Afghanistan Farhang Association
66. Mozghan Naderi, Women Rights activist
67. Basir Naderi
68. Fawzia Haidari member of Oxus Association
69. Abdul Razaq Karimi, member of Oxus Association
70. Abdullah Ramaki, journalist and presenter
71. Behzad Rahimi, Poet and Literature
72. Elham Tajik, Art and Literature
73. Nigara Mirdad Political counsellor Afghanistan Embassy in Poland
74. Nazifa Haqpal, Academic and Women Rights activist

75. Maria Raheen, Journalist and Academic
76. Shahla Farid, Lawyer and Academic
77. Masiha Fayez, Lawyer