



## HOLDING THE TALIBAN ACCOUNTABLE

### *Utilizing international leverage to stop rights abuses*

Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security | June 13, 2022

On the sidelines of the 50th session of the UN Human Rights Council, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security hosted an expert discussion on June 13, 2022 focused on identifying the most effective sources of international leverage against the Taliban.

Since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, the regime has imposed draconian measures, restricting women's right to work, freedom of expression and movement, and forcing women to wear a head-to-toe covering. Against their promises to the international community, the Taliban has forbidden girls above sixth grade to attend school, depriving them of their universal right to education and their future. At the same time, they have accelerated targeted killings, committed a litany of abuses against activists and journalists, and dissolved critical institutions including Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission.

Afghan women experts and leading policymakers provided urgent recommendations for how the international community can use its leverage to hold the Taliban accountable and prevent the further erosion of human rights. The experts' top recommendations to the international community include:

### REINSTATING TRAVEL SANCTIONS

- **The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) should reimpose the longstanding international travel ban on Taliban leadership** by letting the current exemption lapse at the upcoming vote on June 21. UN travel sanctions imposed on Taliban leaders are among the last forms of leverage the international community has left, and the most potent source that does not implicate the Afghan people.
- **The United States and regional allies should impose and enforce individual sanctions and travel restrictions on the key Taliban leaders and their families**, including the Haqqani network leaders, who play a leading role in rights violations. The UN sanctions committee has [confirmed](#) the Taliban's cooperation with international terrorist groups, providing the ground for the continued sanctions regime.
- **The UN should monitor implementation of the travel sanctions and penalize countries that violate the ban.** Easing travel restrictions should be conditioned on the Taliban's demonstrated policies toward women and girls, especially girls' rights to secondary education.

*“Reinstating the full UN sanctions travel ban is a unique and time-bound opportunity to demonstrate some consequences of the Taliban abuses.” – Annie Pforzheimer, Former U.S. Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Afghanistan and Deputy Chief of Mission in Kabul*

## LEVERAGING FINANCIAL ASSETS AND RESERVES

- **The United States and European allies should consider the movement of suspended financial assets back to the Afghan Central Bank** as a key source of leverage. Both the suspended \$7 billion in U.S. reserves and the frozen assets across European banks are a carrot and stick measure for the Taliban who are blocked from accessing any Central Bank assets.
- **Freezing the financial assets of individual Taliban leadership, businesses, and networks** can have a measurable impact. The Taliban are directly calling for the release of individual assets, primarily held up in Pakistan. Cooperation with regional countries is key to enforcement.

## TARGETING HUMANITARIAN AID AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- **Engaging with local women-led organizations to direct funding and channel humanitarian assistance** is critical to ensuring aid reaches the Afghan people, without compromising a tough stance on the Taliban regime. Alternative mechanisms for providing funding to local women who are essential drivers of effective aid distribution should be a central counterpart to any financial sanctions effort.
- **Partner with international organizations and donors, including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, to keep humanitarian assistance flowing, while restraining members of the Taliban who are eager to engage with credible financial institutions.

## ENGAGING THE TALIBAN

- **UN Member States should refrain from official ministerial visits to Kabul** until the Taliban takes concrete steps toward improving human rights conditions. While holding back on formal recognition, Pakistan, China, Iran, Russia, and other regional powers are [leaning toward increasing](#) diplomatic engagement with the regime, and threatening the most pertinent leverage of the international community against the Taliban.
- **Diplomatic accreditation and recognition at the UN should be used as a tool of collective leverage.** The perception of legitimacy is important to the Taliban who want to be acknowledged in diplomatic settings and on the UN stage, particularly through the Taliban-appointed envoy Suhail Shaheen.

## ENGAGING REGIONAL ACTORS IN COORDINATED ACTION

- **Engaging regional and Muslim countries, including Qatar, Pakistan, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** is important to encourage them to hold the line in demonstrating to the Taliban that the regime will not enjoy solidarity from anyone. Key areas of engagement should include diplomatic recognition of the Taliban, counter-terrorism efforts, and the enforcement of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.
- **Regional powers and partners in the Gulf region should develop a collective security framework to address the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan**, including the Taliban's accommodation of terrorist cells, such as Al Qaida.
- **The United States, UN, and the international community should formulate and uphold clear red lines** in response to the Taliban's actions, sending a clear message that human rights abuses and attacks on the women and girls of Afghanistan will not be tolerated.

## CONDITIONS FOR LIFTING SANCTIONS

- **Removing sanctions on the Taliban should only occur under set global conditions**, including a demonstration that the Taliban are willing to develop constructive dialogue with all Afghan stakeholders and the international community, with a focus on upholding the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Afghan people. After years of peace talks, the bar should be *extremely high* to justify the physical presence of known international terrorists at meetings with US and UN officials.
- **Sanctions removal and the broader issue of recognition should be dependent on Taliban's disengagement from terrorist groups**, especially whether or not they continue to provide sanctuary for Al Qaeda.
- **The international community should engage in a parallel private dialogue with the Taliban and regional partners** on issues of recognition, sanctions imposition, and concrete metrics for removal. Women must meaningfully participate in every negotiation, in order to determine available levers and progress metrics with which to push the Taliban on women's and human rights.

The June 13 Onward for Afghan Women event from which these recommendations are derived featured the following leaders:

**Ambassador Adela Raz**, Former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations

**Horia Mosadiq**, Founder and Director, Safety and Risk Mitigation Organization

**Ambassador Earl Anthony Wayne**, Former U.S. Deputy Ambassador to Afghanistan

**Annie Pforzheimer**, Former U.S. Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Afghanistan and Deputy Chief of Mission in Kabul

**Ambassador Melanne Vermeer**, Executive Director, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security