



# *Onward for Afghan Women Initiative*

## 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

In 2021, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) worked with partners to evacuate 1,200 Afghan women leaders and their families from Afghanistan because their high-profile work as activists, journalists, human rights defenders, and government officials made them prime targets of the Taliban. We created our signature [Onward for Afghan Women initiative](#) to equip the now-exiled leaders with opportunities to continue their advocacy on behalf of Afghan women and girls. As the humanitarian, economic, and security situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate, the voices of our Afghan women partners remain critical.

### Shaping Policy

A key component of our work is shaping US and UN policy on Afghanistan based on insights from expert Afghan women in our network. This fall, we teamed up with Nobel Prize Winner Malala Yousafzai to host a private event on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on strategies to get Afghan girls back in school and access alternative education in the meantime. Under the auspices of the UAE Mission to the UN, we also co-sponsored a timely event on the sidelines of the Commission on the Status of Women on education in Afghanistan, following the announcement that the Taliban barred women from higher education. We were joined by Afghan women and policymakers for both discussions. Another impactful convening brought together UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan Richard Bennett with our Afghan partners. We were pleased that his subsequent report on Afghanistan reflected their recommendations.



*Above: Malala Yousafzai and Georgetown student Nasim Azizi at a GIWPS event in New York*

### Engaging the Georgetown Community

We have been very fortunate to have two Afghan women leaders engage in research and policy advocacy with GIWPS as Distinguished Fellows: Palwasha Hassan, co-founder of the pivotal Afghan Women Network, and Ambassador Roya Rahmani, Afghanistan's former representative to the United States and the first woman in the position. Ambassador Rahmani recently traveled with us to San Francisco where she addressed Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi and a standing-room-only crowd of Georgetown alumni about the crisis in Afghanistan. Both fellows have been available to meet with students and both will shortly publish important studies on the future of women in Afghanistan and the response of the international community.

We have also grown our engagement with Georgetown students. Salma Alokzai and Nasim Azizi received generous scholarships to pursue graduate studies at Georgetown this year in the Global Human Development program. Students from across campus benefited from intimate roundtable conversations hosted by GIWPS with Dr. Habiba Sarabi, the first female governor in Afghanistan, and Fawzia Koofi, the first woman Second Deputy Speaker of Parliament.

*Right: Ambassador Roya Rahmani, Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, Ambassador Melanne Verveer and Ambassador Oksana Markarova at a GIWPS panel in San Francisco*



*"The Afghan women are continuing their fight for peace, equality and democracy and their efforts are nothing short of extraordinary. We will continue to work with our Afghan network to inform policymakers and stay connected and engaged with women within Afghanistan and outside its borders."*

*-Ambassador Melanne Verveer, GIWPS Executive Director*



*Our Afghan partners gathered for the second annual retreat hosted by GIWPS*

## Keeping the Spotlight on Afghanistan

As Afghanistan fades from the headlines—and the Taliban works to further erase women from public life—we continue to work with partners to ensure Afghan women are not forgotten. We joined the Italian Ambassador to the United States Mariangela Zappia to co-host a high-level conference at the Italian Embassy in Washington D.C. featuring top US, UN, and Italian officials along with innovative Afghan education women. The session was attended by US government officials, diplomats, and members of the media including the Washington Post, ABC, and AFP. This summer we traveled to Geneva for the 53rd Human Rights Council session where we convened two policy-oriented discussions on Afghanistan in collaboration with governmental partners. We have also created opportunities for Afghan women leaders to meet with key US government officials, including testifying before Congress.

## Building the Evidence Base

This year we published [original research and policy papers](#) which aim to center the expertise of Afghan women in global policy debates on Afghanistan. Our white papers have addressed pathways to education for Afghan women and girls, sources of leverage to hold the Taliban accountable, and inclusive humanitarian assistance. In addition, we published an action guide to help non-Muslim negotiators and mediators better understand the central Islamic values that play a role in negotiation and mediation processes. The guide, published in English and Dari, demonstrates how Islamic tradition supports girls' education, women's employment, and women's independence from a 'mahram' or guardian.

## Supporting our Afghan Partners

Our partners experienced severe trauma as they fled Afghanistan, and continue to grapple with adjusting to their new lives in the US while supporting family members and friends who remain in Afghanistan. We hosted a [three-day retreat](#) for exiled Afghan women in our network focused on leadership and professional development, advocacy and action, and community care. We have also supported the dignified resettlement of our partners by referring them to employment opportunities and legal resources.

"I was broken when I left my country," said Roshan Mashal. She is grateful to resilience workshops offered by GIWPS over the past two years. "It reminds us that we are alive...If you make yourself healthy and happy, you can work and help others."

*Below: Shabba Shabrukbi participates in a reflective exercise*



## Gratitude

*"GIWPS keeps the spotlight on Afghanistan by uplifting and elevating the stories, efforts, and impact of Afghan women. At a time when hopelessness is widely felt, GIWPS will continue to play the critical role of keeping Afghanistan and Afghan women on the map, honoring their leadership and movement for a safer and more inclusive Afghanistan."*

—Lina Tori Jan, GIWPS Afghanistan Policy Associate