

## Afghan Women

**Shaharzad Akbar**

**Horia Mosadiq**

**Sima Samar**

**Habiba Sarabi**

**Metra Mehran**

**Zarifa Ghafari**

**Mary Akrami**

**Anisa Shaheed**

**Palwasha Hassan**

**Sahraa Karimi**

**Freshta Karim**

After 20 years of war, the international troops left Afghanistan at the end of August. The situation in Afghanistan is dramatic. The rapid seizure of the country, including the capital, by the Taliban has raised grave fears of a return to past patterns of human rights violations. The Taliban's acquisition of power threatens, in particular, women's rights and freedom. During the first phase of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, women were not allowed to travel without a male guardian and were punished if perceived as too independent. Violence against women and girls remained chronically under-reported after 2001, with women often fearing reprisals and lacking confidence in the authorities if they come forward. Women in Afghanistan experience forced marriage, high maternity mortality, low literacy rate, forced virginity tests, etc. Women's participation in government is now excluded again.

This group of prominent Afghan women fight for their rights, education, and integration in the construction of Afghan society. They have a strong reputation for their activism in favour of women's rights, and they were part of the political and associative life in Afghanistan. Furthermore, they are an expression of the ethnic and generational diversity of Afghan society.



**Shaharzad Akbar** is the Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). She served as Deputy National Security Council on Peace and Civilian Protection and as Senior Advisor to the Afghan President on High Development Councils. Prior to this, she was Country Director for Open Society Afghanistan, a non-profit that supports Afghan civil society and media in peacebuilding, human rights and promoting tolerance.

**Sima Samar** is a human rights advocate, former Minister of Women's Affairs, and former Chair of Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.. She is a member of the High-Level Panel of UNSG on IDPs. In 2012, she was awarded the Right Livelihood Award for "her longstanding and courageous dedication to human rights, especially the rights of women, in one of the most complex and dangerous regions in the world."





**Metra Mehran** is a young social entrepreneur and co-founder of the Feminine Perspectives Movement. Metra Mehran is a human rights activist. She is a Fulbright scholar, currently working with Women Scholarship Endowment Program- provides scholarships for women to pursue their education in STEM majors. She co-founded the Feminine Perspectives Movement ahead of Intra-Afghan peace negotiations. The aim is to provide a platform for women across Afghanistan to raise their voices to protect their fundamental rights and ensure women's perspectives are reflected in peace negotiation processes. A leading voice in education and women empowerment, she writes opinion pieces for local and international outlets. She previously worked with UNDP, World Bank, and DFID.

**Mary Akrami** She is the head of the Afghan Women's Network. She took part as a young female delegate to the Bonn conference 20 years ago, and since then, she has championed women's rights politically and practically; for example, she established the first women shelters in Afghanistan.



**Palwasha Hassan** She is the director of AWEC (Afghan Women Educational Centre), a longtime activist, and a consensus-builder. She has more than 15 years of experience in women's development and empowerment projects and is the founding member of many existing networks and women and human rights groups in Afghanistan.

**Freshta Karim.** She was only 23 when she launched a mobile library on a bus that tours the countryside. She is an example of one of the Afghan women who went back to help Afghanistan after studying abroad (from a master's degree in Oxford University). It also shows the importance of both educational access and quality learning, and the connection between education and the future of Afghanistan



**Horia Mosadiq.** She had to leave the country because of her activism but she has continued to work for human rights and women's rights from the outside, with frequent missions in the country.

**Habiba Sarab** is a Member of the negotiating team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Ms Sarabi worked as a women's rights activist and education activist, training girls and immigrant women in Pakistani camps. She was Minister of Women's Affairs from 2002 to 2004, and in 2005 she was appointed as the first female governor in Bamyan province.





**Zarifa Ghafari** is the mayor of the town of Maidan Shar since 2018. As such, she was the first woman mayor of the very conservative province of Wardak. She received the International Women of Courage (IWOC) Award in 2020 for staying in office despite death threats, and has become a symbol of women's political rights, which she also actively promotes (before becoming mayor, she launched a women-focused radio station). In November 2020, her father was killed by the Taliban. She arrived in August in Germany where she continues her fight for human rights in Afghanistan and in particular the rights of women in Afghanistan.

**Anisa Shaheed** risks her life dedicated to dangerous reporting in the field, covering stories on human rights, security and the country's political situation.. She grew up in the years of the first Taliban regime, massively curtailing the professional and educational opportunities particularly for girls and women. The ousting of the Taliban brought her the opportunity to go to school and to attend Kabul University. She began her career as a political reporter and joined TOLONews in 2009, one of Afghanistan's first, and today the most popular commercial TV stations. In 2020, Anisa was awarded with a prize from Reporters Without Borders as one of 30 international "information heroes," including journalists, whistle-blowers, and media outlets. In April 2021, she was selected as the "Face of Freedom of Speech" journalist of the year by Afghanistan's Free Speech Hub network.



**Sahraa Karimi**, the first female president of the Afghan state film company. The director of the award-nominated film *Hava, Maryam, Ayesha* (2019) is the only Afghan woman to have a PhD in cinema. After fleeing Afghanistan, she continues her campaign for the protection of Afghan filmmakers and for women in general.