

Dr. Davood Moradian's Speech at Rahela Trust's AGM & Annual Lecture 2023



How Can Women Access Education and Work in Afghanistan Today Taliban's Gender Apartheid: Global Solidarity; British Responsibility

Baroness Hodgson, Madam Siddiqi, Ladies and, Gentlemen!

It is my honour to be given the opportunity to speak on the important issue of women's education in Afghanistan in a place that is universally recognised not only for its aesthetic architecture and ceremonial traditions but more importantly as the home to the World's oldest parliament and parliamentary democracy.

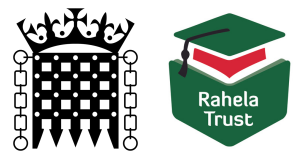
Today's program should be especially recognised by the fact that Afghanistan is sadly Receding from many governments' priorities, as they struggle with more recent international crisis such as Ukraine or the domestic ones. However, receding interest in Afghanistan does not change the tragic realities of the country, which was recently characterised as "hell" by a commentator. The women of Afghanistan bear the brunt of the ongoing and deepening humanitarian, security, political and institutional crises.

The situation of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban's reign of terror and oppression have been described from different angles and sectoral respects, such as access to education. There is a danger that focusing on specific sector may distract the attention from the whole system and hence sectoral and partial recommendation for a systemic challenge.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Different and sectoral problems of Afghanistan are integral components of a systemic political ideology, that is supported and sustained by different domestic and external enablers. Talibanism is a coherent political ideology, alongside similar totalitarian and transformative political ideologies.

Gender-apartheid is an integral pillar of the Taliban's Islamofascism ideology. We are not witnessing isolated, inexperienced, reactionary, improvised cases of gender discrimination in Afghanistan: It is widespread, multifaceted, and systemic. The physical and political elimination of Jews were central to the ideological identity and objective of Nazism. For the Taliban's Islamofascism ideology political elimination of women from public spaces and roles is their constituent pillar.



Increasingly leading political and officials have begun to refer to the Taliban as the world's first gender apartheid system in the World, including by the EU chief foreign policy official Mr Josep Borrell or the Amnesty International. I believe this characterisation will help align together academic, political and advocacy efforts in addressing our collective endeavour in addressing Afghanistan's multiple crises, including access to education for girls.

Taliban's Islamofascism ideology and their gender apartheid were not created in vacuum or in the mountains and villages of rural Afghanistan. They have religious, historical, political and geopolitical roots and enablers. A part of my presentation refers to "British responsibility", I would like to go a little beyond the prevailing public narrative by asking if the UK's choice of policies had any role in empowering the Taliban into power.

Although Afghanistan's fragmented and corrupt political class and America's maverick President Trump are the leading culprits, contextualising the Taliban's return to power in a historical context can shed light on additional and probably more consequential actors and policies.

Afghanistan's struggle for independence, constitutional government, women emancipation is almost one hundred years old. We had three attempts to establish modern constitutional and secular republic: in 1919-1929 by Afghanistan's modernising king Amanullah, 1978-1991 by Afghanistan's leftist government and 2001-2021 by Western- supported democratic efforts.

Sadly, the three attempts were toppled by almost identical forces: Islamism and their western/external allies. As time does not allow to go deeper into this controversial topic, let me focus on the specific case of the idea of peace and reconciliation with the Taliban. Based on the ethical rule of recognising "copy right" of any intellectual property, one can extend this to "policy arena". If so, the copy right of making peace with the Taliban should be given to the British government who began advocating relentlessly since 2005 onward.

In his last tweet Mr Hugo Shorter as the UK's Charge d' Affaires once again called for continuing engagement with the Taliban as the best course of action. And one must congratulate him for his consistency. The Taliban's return to power was the direct result of a policy of engagement with them as was culminated by the Doha Agreement between the Taliban and the US in February 2020. As with any earned right, such as copy right entitlements, the policy communities should also be held responsible and accountable for their policy choices, implementation and advocacy.



In addressing Afghanistan's multiple crises, the most critical issue is the framework of dealing with the Taliban. There are four leading and competing approaches: Constructive Engagement, Critical Engagement, Containment and Dismantling.

Constructive Engagement is the prevailing view of the US, the UK, Pakistan, Qatar, and Norway officials. It is premised on the hope of the so-called reformist voices within the Taliban who could eventually prevail over the hardliners.

The Critical Engagement is the EU stance and some circles within the US who believe that coercive measures may induce the Taliban to change. The advocates of containment consider Afghanistan as a lost cause which should become the Afghan and regional responsibility. The least vocal and hardly-organised perspective are those who believe in the inherent incapacity and unwillingness of the Taliban in becoming a responsible stakeholder as the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the earlier totalitarian regimes demonstrate.

Regardless of one's preference and choices among the above-mentioned options, one cannot escape the plight of women of Afghanistan under the Taliban's gender Apartheid.

The UK has a rich history of being on the right side of history in confronting early bigotries, apartheid and fascist regimes. From initiating anti-slavery legislation, women suffrage, fighting Nazism, ending South Africa's apartheid regime, and the Russian's invasion of Ukraine, the UK Parliament, civil society, academies, churches and media led the UK and global efforts. I believe the UK Parliament and the like-minded UK partners, can and should reignite their residual energy and commitment in helping Afghans to end the World's first Gendered Apartheid.



Dr Davood is the director-general of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) based at the University of Sussex following the occupation of Afghanistan by the Taliban. He was chief of programmes in the office of Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Chief Policy Advisor to Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has a doctorate from the University of St Andrews and has been published in numerous major international media outlets.



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