



Rahela Trust's Annual Lecture & AGM

How can women access education and work in Afghanistan today?

Key Speakers

Chaired by Baroness Fiona Hodgson of Abinger, CBE

Dr. Davood Moradian (Director of Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, AISS)

Forozan Rasooli (Afghan Women's Rights Activist)

Hameed Hakimi (Associate Fellow at Chatham House and Senior Fellow at Atlantic Council)

Marika Theros (Policy fellow and Peacerep's Afghanistan Research Director, London School of Economics)

Wahid Azizi (Anti-corruption & social activist)

Rahela Sidiqi, Founder and Director of Rahela Trust

Samantha Rennie, Chairperson of Rahela Trust

Welcome

Thank you for joining Rahela Trust's Annual Lecture and AGM this February 2023.

We host this event annually to draw attention to the current issues and barriers surrounding Afghan women and education. It also serves as a way to bring together members of the Afghan diaspora, facilitating their engagement with events in-country and empowering them to make a positive difference to their country's development, regardless of where they live.



"Afghan women will be instrumental to reducing the violence and poverty that give the Taliban their power. We must pressure the international community to place stronger sanctions. Education is the cornerstone for freedom and democracy. Help us fight to protect it".

Rahela Sidiqi, Founder and Director of Rahela Trust

About Rahela Trust

Rahela Trust (formerly known as Farkhunda Trust) was founded in 2015 by Rahela Sidiqi in response to the many attacks on young girls and women seeking an education across Afghanistan.

Our mission is to provide university scholarships and leadership mentoring to talented, disadvantaged young women from rural Afghanistan. Through this, we can create female leaders and agents of change for a positive and progressive society in Afghanistan.

Regardless of the abhorrent edicts issued by the Taliban, we continue to remain agile and further our mission via remote learning and partnerships.

18 Months of Taliban Rule

As with the people of Afghanistan and other Afghan-focused charities, we have had to overcome many obstacles since the occupation of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021. The first indication the Taliban were repeating history came with the edict ordering women to stay indoors on 25th August 2021, quickly followed by a ban on co-education and prohibiting men from teaching girls. It was on the 12th September 2021 that secondary education for girls was banned. The rapid unravelling of women's rights in Afghanistan has unashamedly continued (see **figure 1** on **page 3**), and just over one month ago, the Taliban banned women from working at I/NGOs and receiving a university education.

As an organisation, Rahela Trust has found ways to work around the Taliban's edicts. From providing 24-hour support to both students currently studying and those who have graduated, to giving behavioural advice to safeguard their security and providing extra funds so they could travel to and from the universities (pre-December 2022) by taxi, we have done all we can to continue their studies and maintain their mental wellbeing.

Challenges

Although we continue to manage to provide remote learning through our in-country university partners, we fear it is only a matter of time before the Taliban introduce further orders which make it impossible for this to carry on.

We have had meetings with several international organisations and universities and continue to explore partnership opportunities that would provide alternative solutions if the context evolves.

We have also focused our efforts on sourcing funding for UK-based activities that would simultaneously provide benefits to our in-country scholars. We believe the importance of Afghan diaspora engagement with issues back home is often understated, and aim to increase community activities, whilst rallying support from UK allies. In turn, we will increase pressure on international and national authorities to place stronger sanctions against the Taliban to give women their rights back, and give women in-country hope that things will change.

At present, our biggest challenges are:

- Uncertainty about the future amid increasingly repressive Taliban edicts and physical threats to women's lives.
- Securing funds for our work. More challenging due to donors de-prioritising women's education, favouring large charities only, and the mass pull-out of I/NGOs since women in-country were banned from working.
- Safeguarding students' mental wellbeing - who are scared, traumatised and exhausted.

The Taliban's Assaults on Women's Rights: A Timeline

Figure 1



June

- **1st** - ordered female students in Ghazni in grades 4-6 to cover their faces while commuting to school or face expulsion.
- **28th** - an all-male gathering of 4,500 leaders and clerics is held in Kabul claiming they can sufficiently represent the views of females.

July

- **18th** - women employees of the Ministry of Finance told to send a male relative to take their jobs if they want to be paid their salaries.

August

- **10th** - female flight attendants are removed from their jobs.
- **23rd** - established female moral police department.
- **25th** - women banned from going to parks where park authorities cannot ensure segregation between men and women.
- **29th** - female university students forced to cover faces in class.

November

- **10th** - women banned from going to parks and gyms.
- **11th** - 19 people (9 women) flogged 39 times each for adultery, theft and running away from home in Takhar.
- **14th** - Taliban supreme leader reinstated Hudud and Qisas punishments in cases such as robbery, kidnapping and sedition. Punishments for certain crimes may include public amputations and stoning.

October

- **6th** - hundreds of pre-teen students expelled in Kandahar.
- **7th** - women prohibited from choosing agriculture, mining, civil engineering, veterinary medicine and journalism as their study major due to being 'too difficult for women'.
- **28th** - removed women's seat from Commission of Media Violations
- **30th** - female university students whipped for wearing jeans under long coats.

September

- **11th** - closed secondary and high schools for girls that had briefly opened in Paktia.
- **20th** - female students at university banned from taking photos and videos on campus.

December

- **7th** - first public execution takes place in Farah province.
- **20th** - Afghan public and private universities to suspend access to female students immediately.
- **22nd** - Taliban Ministry of Education banned girls beyond grade 6 from attending private courses.
- **24th** - female staff banned from working for I/NGOs.
- **27th** - women-run bakeries banned in Kabul.

Our Panellists

Our lecture today focuses on **how can women access education and work in Afghanistan today**. Explore our expert speakers below.



Baroness Fiona Hodgson of Abinger, CBE

The Baroness Hodgson of Abinger CBE is a Conservative Peer and took her seat in the House of Lords in 2013. She has since worked extensively on international women's issues, especially in the context of developing countries and violent conflicts. She has made a number of visits to Afghanistan working on issues of women's empowerment, health and ending violence against women. In 2012, she set up the Afghan Women's Support Forum.



Rahela Sidiqi

Rahela is the Founder and Director of Rahela Trust (2016) and Omid International (2021). She has been at the forefront of the fight for women's equality and the greater progress of rural communities in Afghanistan for 35 years. Rahela frequently attends international and national conferences to advocate for Afghan women's education, recently attending the Global Convening on Women's Leadership for Sustainable Peace with UN Women.



Samantha Rennie

Samantha is an experienced charity chief executive (Rosa, the UK Fund for Women and Girls, Handicap International) and Trustee (London Funders, Landmine Action) and lifelong champion of social justice and the power of grassroots movements to effect change. She is Rahela Trust's Chairperson.



Dr. Davood Moradian

Dr Davood is 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.



Forozan Rasooli

Forozan is an Afghan women's rights activist who worked for more than a decade with the international community and NGOs in Afghanistan on good governance, human rights, and peacebuilding. She focused on women, youth and influential community figures at the grassroots level across 22 Afghan provinces. Forozan has won awards from the Women's Regional Network in 2020 and the Afghan Women's Network in 2021 for her dedication to women's empowerment. She's also a regular commentator in the media.



Hameed Hakimi

Hameed is an associate fellow at the Asia-Pacific Programme and Europe Programme at Chatham House, and a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's South Asia Center. With ten+ years experience, his research focuses on a range of topics e.g. the politics and society of Afghanistan and Pakistan, political economy of state-building, regional integration and connectivity, displacements in the Global South, and Islamist militancy and extremism.



Wahidullah Azizi

Wahidullah is a socio-political analyst based in Brussels. For over three years he's worked with leading anti-corruption organisations including Transparency International and Integrity Watch to promote government accountability in Afghanistan. He received the prestigious DAAD scholarship to study at the University of Potsdam. Currently, he works for a civil society organisation focusing on issues related to Afghanistan, and migration.



Marika Theros

Marika is a policy fellow at the Conflict and Civiness Research Group at LSE IDEAS and is completing her doctorate at LSE too. She has worked at the intersection of research, policy and civic engagement for the past 15 years, focusing on political mobilisation, global-local dynamics of violence, local peace agreements, and the politics of knowledge production. Marika is a non-resident senior fellow at the Institute for State Effectiveness and at the Atlantic Council's South Asia Center.

Agenda

Speakers	Sessions	Time
Samantha Rennie Baroness Fiona Hodgson	Welcome Three-minute film Opening remarks	4:00 – 4:15 PM
Rahela Sidiqi	Introduction to Rahela Trust and recent activity	4:15 – 4:25 PM
Dr. Davood Moradian	Taliban’s Gender Apartheid: Global Solidarity; British Responsibility	4:25 – 4:40 PM
Forozan Rasooli	The Role of Diaspora and Online Education? Why Not a Building Block Approach?	4:40 – 4:55 PM
Hameed Hakimi	Women’s Rights Through the Prism of Taliban’s Failure to Govern Effectively	4:55 – 5:10 PM
Wahidullah Azizi	Aid to Afghanistan and Ways to Support Girls’ Education	5:10 – 5:25 PM
Marika Theros	Understanding the Humanitarian-Human Rights Nexus for Afghan Girls and Women	5:25 – 5:40 PM
Baroness Fiona Hodgson Marika Theros	Questions and closing remarks	5.40 – 6:00 PM

What can you do to help?

1

Write to your Member of Parliament, Congressperson or other elected representative to join the calls for **tough sanctions on the Taliban** and **an asylum and resettlement route** to be established for Afghan women at risk.

2

Champion Afghan women's education in your community or workplace.

3

Attend marches, rallies and events organised to support of Afghan women or promote community links.

4

Follow Rahela Trust on social media (@RahelaTrust) and **subscribe to our newsletter** (the bigger our community, the louder our voice becomes).

5

Volunteer your time to support us with your area of expertise or become a mentor to a RT scholar or graduate.

6

Donate to Rahela Trust to support the continuation of our charity and activity.

Thank you

