

Side Event Report

ERASED BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

**VOICES FOR JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY
IN AFGHANISTAN**

New York, USA, September 2025



“Erased but Not Forgotten: Voices for Justice and Accountability in Afghanistan¹”

Date: September 29, 2025

Time: 10:00 AM (New York Time)

Location: United Nations Headquarters, New York – Room CR 11

Event Overview

Over the past four years, Afghanistan has endured one of the darkest periods in its modern history under Taliban rule. Afghan society, particularly women and girls, has been stripped of fundamental rights, denied education, employment, freedom of movement, and participation in public life. What has unfolded amounts to gender apartheid and, in many cases, crimes against humanity under international law. Ethnic and religious minorities, human rights defenders, journalists, and former security personnel have faced arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings.

Against this backdrop, the event *“Erased but Not Forgotten: Voices for Justice and Accountability in Afghanistan”*, a joint effort led by the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the UN and the Human Rights Defenders Plus (HRD+) and its secretariat Civil Society and Human Rights Network - CSHRN brought together HRDs, women’s rights activists, legal experts, representatives of UN Member States, and civil society leaders at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The gathering became a vital platform to amplify survivor-centered perspectives and to press for stronger international accountability mechanisms.

Throughout the session, speakers and panelists underscored the urgent need for all-tools accountability approaches—from independent investigations into human rights abuses, to survivor-centered justice, to greater international solidarity with Afghan civil society. Advocacy missions and high-level discussions highlighted not only the human cost of ongoing persecution but also the responsibility of the international community to act.

By uniting survivors, defenders, activists, and global partners, the event transformed concern into action-oriented dialogue. It reaffirmed that justice, accountability, and dignity for the Afghan people cannot be delayed and that the international community must remain committed to supporting Afghanistan’s path toward peace and human rights.

¹ [Erased But Not Forgotten: Voices for Justice and Accountability in Afghanistan | UN Web TV](#)

Erased But Not Forgotten

Voices for Justice and Accountability in Afghanistan

Date: September 29, 2025 - Time 10:00 AM (NY Time)

Location: UN Headquarters, New York, Room CR-11

Opening Remarks

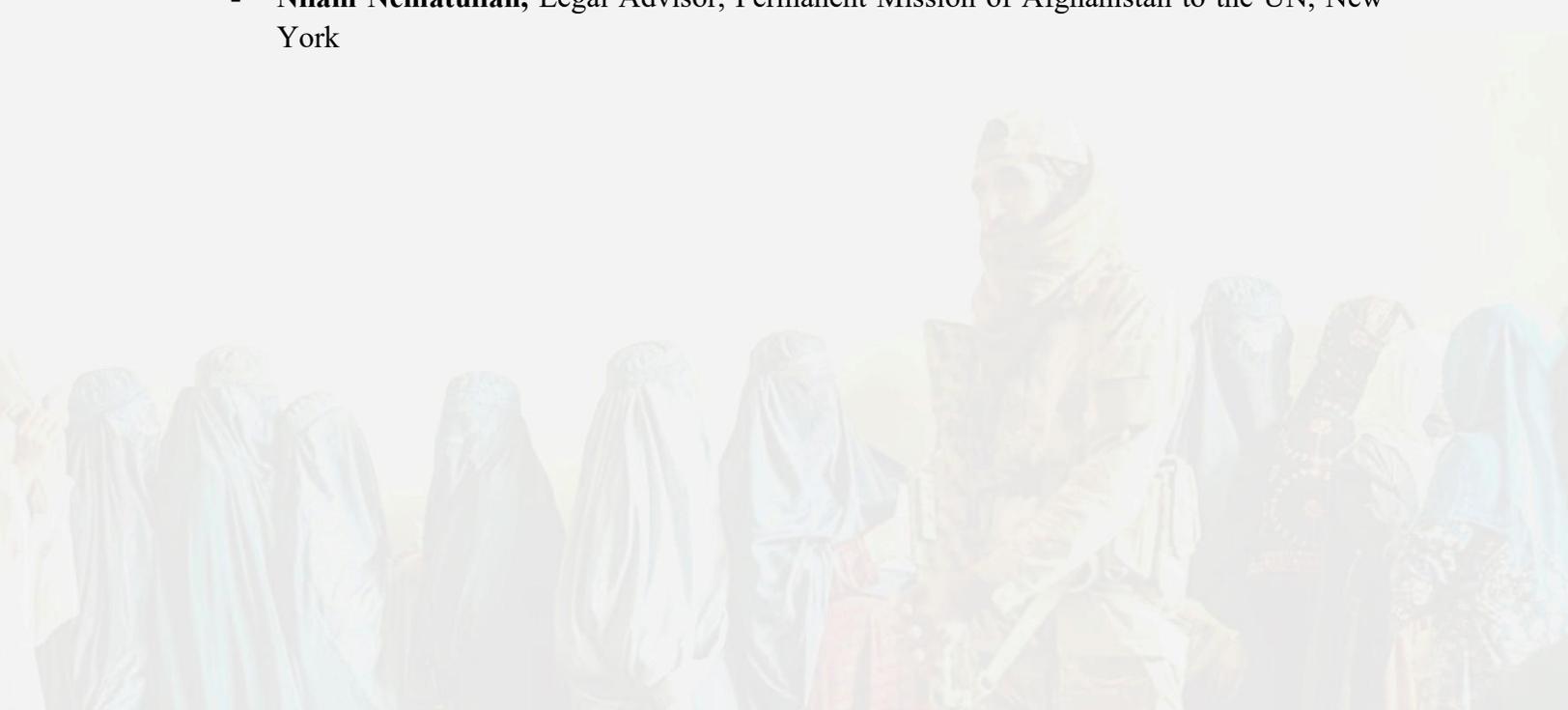
- **Naseer Ahmad Faiq**, Chargé d'Affaires, Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the UN, New York
- **Mr. Richard Bennett**, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan
- **Dr Malek Sitez**, Chairperson of HRD+ Steering Committee

Panelists and Speakers

- **Maryam Faiq Gardiwal**, Co-founder and CEO of Alefbc.app, Women's Rights Activist, Advocate, MPA Candidate
- **Fatema D. Ahmadi**, Research Fellow at RWI
- **Atal Ahmadzai**, Research Fellow at RWI
- **Joyce Bukuru**, Senior Advocate and Representative Amnesty International to the UN
- **Negina Yari**, Executive Director of Window for Hope and member of the SC of HRD+

Moderators

- **Sarah Taylor**, Independent Consultant on Gender, Peace, and Security
- **Nilam Nematullah**, Legal Advisor, Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the UN, New York



Opening Remarks

Naseer Ahmad Faiq, Chargé d'Affaires, Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the UN, New York

- Highlighted the multiple crises in Afghanistan, including human rights violations, humanitarian emergencies, and threats to regional security.
- Noted the issuance of the **International Criminal Court arrest warrant** for Taliban leadership as a critical step toward accountability.
- Stressed the importance of robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms, survivor-centered policies, and the inclusion of women and marginalized groups in decision-making processes.

Dr. Malek Sitez, Chairperson of HRD+ Steering Committee:

- Thanked UN member states, including Albania, Australia, and Canada, for ongoing support.
- Highlighted the **lack of national-level monitoring mechanisms** in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover.
- Noted the complexity of reporting violations from exile networks in Geneva, supported by OMCT (Organization Against Torture).
- Emphasized the Taliban's rejection of international human rights norms and the danger of rhetoric that undermines human rights globally.
- Called for **technical support and functional accountability mechanisms** to ensure Afghan human rights defenders can continue their work safely.

Ambassadorial Remarks

Permanent Representative of Albania to the UN

- Reiterated that Afghan women have suffered greatly over the past four years.
- Urged the international community to move beyond attention to **action**, particularly in protecting women from gender apartheid and persecution.
- Emphasized the need for survivor- and victim-centered approaches, ensuring Afghan women and marginalized groups have a seat at the table in all justice, accountability, and peace processes.
- Highlighted the importance of global solidarity in preventing impunity and safeguarding human rights.

Permanent Representative of Greece to the UN

- Paid tribute to the courage of Afghan women who continue to struggle for survival under Taliban repression.

- Thanked the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan, co-sponsoring missions, and Afghan civil society participants for their tireless efforts to awaken the conscience of the international community.
- Strongly reaffirmed Greece's support for the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and urged the Taliban to grant full access to the country.
- Recalled the anniversaries of the Beijing Declaration and Resolution 1325, underscoring that these milestones painfully contrast with the current reality in Afghanistan.
- Condemned more than 80 Taliban decrees restricting women's rights, including bans on education, work, movement, and freedom of expression, warning that such measures may amount to gender persecution.
- Called for principled engagement with the Taliban, grounded in clear timelines and benchmarks, while insisting on the inclusive participation of women in Afghanistan's political and social future.
- Delivered a powerful message to Afghan women and girls: "You are not forgotten. We will continue to stand by you, to fight for your freedom, and to defend your right to live in dignity."

Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN

- Expressed deep gratitude to colleagues who have worked tirelessly to keep attention on Afghanistan.
- Paid tribute to the former Prime Minister for helping Canada open its doors to Afghans, noting that over 60,000 Afghan men, women, and children now form a strong community in Canada, many in his home city of Toronto. Reaffirmed his commitment to continue working with them on shared priorities.
- Honored the courage of Afghan women, both those present and those still in Afghanistan, who continue their struggle for rights and justice: "*Their resilience is a reminder that the fight is far from over.*"
- Reaffirmed Canada's position: "*while no official representatives will be sent to Afghanistan under the current regime, Canada will continue to support humanitarian efforts through its ambassador in Doha.*" He acknowledged the ongoing challenge of finding the best way to engage while upholding principles and maintaining solidarity with the Afghan people.

Deputy Permanent Representative of Luxembourg to the UN

- Condemned the continued violence and impunity dominating the lives of Afghan women and girls since the Taliban's takeover.

- Stressed that Afghan women and girls have been stripped of access to education, employment, and public life, warning that the repercussions of such systemic gender persecution will impact generations to come.
- Praised the event as a civil society–driven initiative, providing a platform for grassroots voices to shed light on cycles of repression.
- Reiterated Luxembourg’s unequivocal condemnation of widespread human rights violations, affirming that the systemic persecution of Afghan women constitutes **gender apartheid** and amounts to **crimes against humanity** under international law.
- Highlighted Luxembourg’s strong support for the international criminal justice system, noting its cooperation with five other states in Geneva to advance accountability efforts.
- Expressed backing for the establishment of an independent investigative mechanism to collect evidence on serious international crimes, ensuring accountability, enabling impartial proceedings, and keeping victims at the center.
- Emphasized: *“Everything we do, we do for the victims—so they are not forgotten.”*

Permanent Representative of Australia to the UN

- Expressed grave concern over the worsening human rights situation in Afghanistan, noting that the Taliban have “erased women from Afghanistan’s self-portrait, effectively imprisoning half the population.”
- Reaffirmed Australia’s solidarity with Afghan women, girls, and civil society, both inside the country and across the diaspora.
- Highlighted Australia’s leadership, alongside Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands, in initiating proceedings against the Taliban under the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**—a critical step to hold Afghanistan accountable for systemic violations.
- Emphasized the broad international consensus across regions on the need for strong and coordinated action in response to the Taliban’s gross and systemic human rights abuses.
- Condemned the Taliban’s ongoing attempts to silence Afghan women and deny them fundamental freedoms.
- Reiterated Australia’s commitment to multilateral action to ensure Afghanistan meets its **international human rights obligations** and to safeguard the rights and dignity of women and girls.

Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the UN

- Reaffirmed the Netherlands’ **deep commitment to the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan**, underscoring that the international community must never forget Afghan women.

- Highlighted the Netherlands' ongoing **financial and programmatic support** for human rights initiatives, with a specific focus on projects that support women and girls and address the needs of the most vulnerable populations.
- Noted the **ample evidence of gross and systematic violations** of Afghan women's rights, and recalled that the Netherlands, together with Germany and Canada, has taken steps under **CEDAW proceedings** to hold the Taliban accountable.
- Emphasized the importance of **women's full and meaningful participation** in all accountability, justice, and peace processes. Through the **CEDAW Initiative** and in partnership with Afghan civil society, the Netherlands has organized consultations to ensure survivor- and victim-centered justice approaches.
- Stressed that accountability must remain at the core of international engagement with Afghanistan, warning of the persistent **"accountability gap."**
- Confirmed that the Netherlands, working with EU partners, will continue to press for the establishment of a **robust international accountability mechanism** during upcoming Human Rights Council discussions.

Permanent Representative of Chile to the UN

- Stressed that the Afghan people, especially women and girls, "have never been distant" to Chile, recalling Chile's own history of systematic human rights violations during the 1970s and the importance of international solidarity in times of repression.
- Affirmed that **violations of human rights in one country affect the protection of rights everywhere**, as humanity is bound together as a single human family.
- Expressed full support for international efforts to **document and denounce crimes committed under Taliban rule**, including gender persecution, persecution of minorities, enforced disappearances, and other grave violations.
- Recalled that in November, Chile joined Costa Rica, Spain, and France in referring the situation in Afghanistan to the **International Criminal Court (ICC)**, underlining the conviction that such crimes must be **investigated and prosecuted**.
- Stated that this step reflects Chile's **shared commitment to accountability** and to the protection of women's rights.
- Highlighted Chile's support for a **future convention on crimes against humanity**, stressing that such an instrument would help close existing gaps in international law and strengthen the global response to atrocity crimes.
- Reiterated Chile's consistent work in the **Third Committee** of the UN General Assembly, where issues of repression and denial of fundamental freedoms are addressed.
- Called for continued support to the **mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur** on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the establishment of an **independent investigative mechanism**, while ensuring Afghan voices remain central in multilateral forums.

- Reemphasized by stressing that **justice for Afghanistan is a responsibility for all humanity**, and urged the international community never to grow indifferent or accept silence in the face of atrocity.

Keynote Address by Mr. Richard Bennett, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan

Mr. Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, delivered a compelling keynote speech in which he expressed gratitude to the organizers and co-sponsors of the event before turning to the urgent need for justice and accountability in Afghanistan. He began by stressing that decades of impunity have entrenched cycles of violence and repression, cycles that must be broken if the country is to have a stable future.

Bennett emphasized that since the Taliban's return to power, Afghanistan has witnessed an alarming deterioration in the human rights situation, with women and girls suffering the most severe restrictions. He described how the Taliban have issued a litany of decrees and edicts that deprive women and girls of fundamental rights—freedom of movement, education, work, healthcare, expression, and access to justice. These violations, he affirmed, are so severe that they amount to crimes against humanity, specifically gender persecution, and can be characterized as *gender apartheid*. Beyond women and girls, other groups—LGBTQ individuals, ethnic and religious minorities, journalists, human rights defenders, former government officials, and members of the security forces—also face persecution under the Taliban's repressive rule.

Rejecting the perception that Afghanistan is a “lost cause,” Bennett framed the situation as a test for the international community. He posed a critical question: will the world uphold universal human rights principles, even when politically inconvenient, and will it listen to the voices of Afghans—especially women—who continue to resist despite extraordinary risks? He insisted that now is not the time for normalization with the Taliban, but rather for a principled and determined response.

Central to Bennett's vision is an “all-tools” approach, with justice and accountability at its core. He welcomed recent developments, such as the International Criminal Court's announcement that it is seeking arrest warrants for senior Taliban leaders, and initiatives by states pursuing accountability for violations of international conventions. He called for Afghan women, girls, and marginalized groups to be meaningfully included in these processes, warning that justice without their participation would be incomplete. Bennett also underscored the importance of codifying “gender apartheid” as an international crime, a concept long used by Afghan women to describe their lived reality.

He highlighted progress toward establishing an **independent investigative mechanism** through the UN Human Rights Council, which would have the mandate to investigate

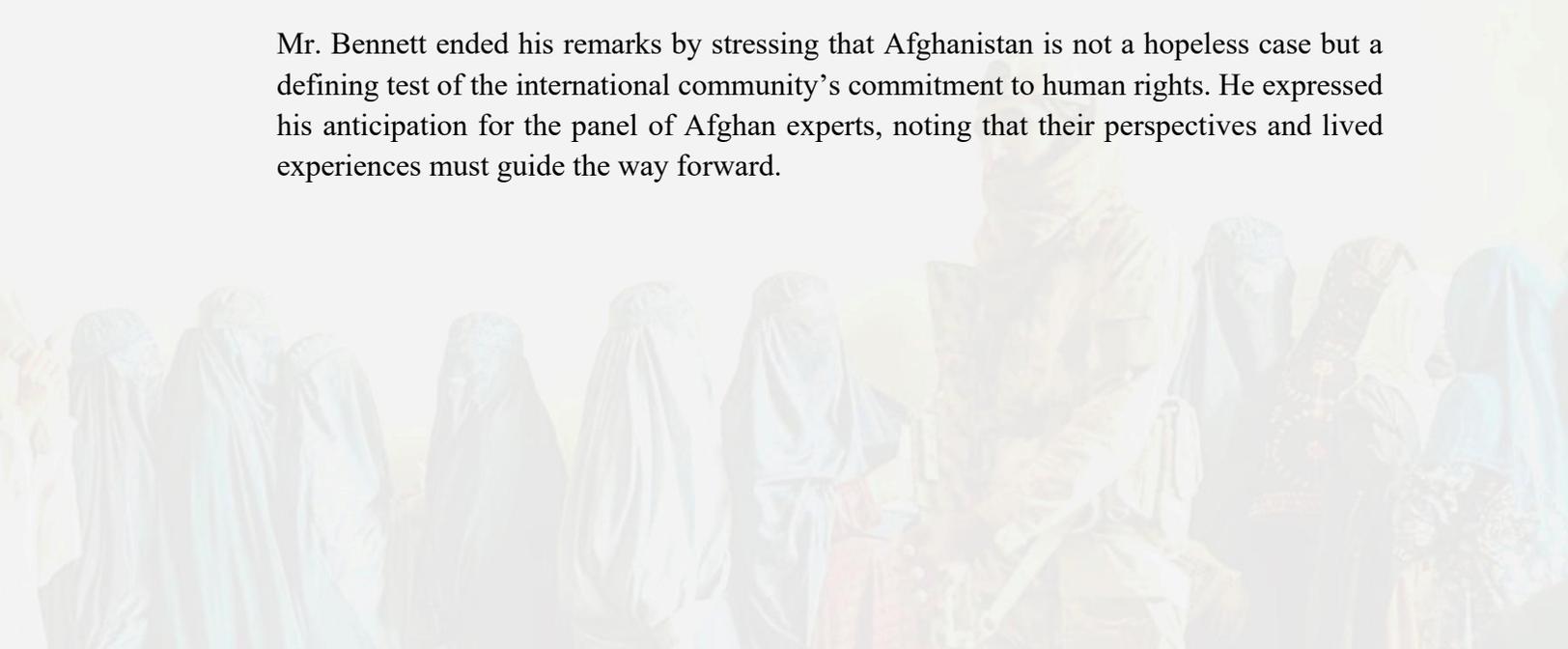
violations, preserve evidence, and prepare case files for future prosecutions. Such a mechanism, he explained, would complement the work of his mandate, the International Criminal Court, and national jurisdictions exercising universal jurisdiction. Bennett encouraged national prosecution units to pursue gender-sensitive investigations into crimes committed by all parties to the conflict, both historically and under Taliban rule.

At the same time, he reminded the audience that accountability must extend beyond legal processes. For Afghan women and girls, it also means restoring rights, ensuring access to education and essential services, and creating conditions in which they can live with dignity. He called for increased political support, including for a truly inclusive national dialogue reflecting the voices of all Afghans. He emphasized that women's rights and agency must be at the center of all political and accountability processes. Afghan women-led civil society organizations—both inside the country and in exile—play a crucial role in this effort, and he stressed their urgent need for sustained financial assistance, particularly those providing legal aid, protection, education, safe houses, and economic empowerment initiatives.

He also turned to the plight of Afghan refugees, voicing deep concern over forced deportations and mass returns. He urged all states, including Afghanistan's neighbors and those further afield, to uphold the principle of non-refoulement and halt returns that place Afghans in danger. Instead, he called on the international community to expand resettlement opportunities, provide humanitarian visas and educational scholarships, support family reunification, and strengthen assistance to host countries.

In closing, Bennett underscored the importance of maintaining a principled, rights-based approach to Afghanistan—one rooted in dignity, equality, and non-discrimination. He warned against premature normalization or engagement with the Taliban in the absence of demonstrable human rights improvements, particularly regarding women and girls. Such steps, he cautioned, would undermine the international community's stated objectives of achieving a stable, inclusive, and rights-respecting Afghanistan.

Mr. Bennett ended his remarks by stressing that Afghanistan is not a hopeless case but a defining test of the international community's commitment to human rights. He expressed his anticipation for the panel of Afghan experts, noting that their perspectives and lived experiences must guide the way forward.



Summary of Panel Discussion:



Moderated by **Dr. Sarah Taylor**, an independent consultant on gender, peace, and security with over two decades of experience in the UN system and global advocacy, the panel featured five distinguished speakers: Negina Yari, Fatema D. Ahmadi, Maryam Faiq Gardiwal, Dr. Atal Ahmadzai, and Joyce Bukuru from Amnesty International. Together, they delivered a unified call for justice, accountability, and an independent international investigation into the ongoing human rights violations in Afghanistan.

Maryam Faiq Gardiwal, Women's Rights Activist, Advocate, and MPA Candidate, opened the discussion by highlighting the systematic persecution of women and girls under the current regime. Ms. Gardiwal urged the international community to move beyond statements of concern and establish tangible frameworks to hold perpetrators accountable for gender-based crimes and other human rights abuses.

Fatema D. Ahmadi, Research Fellow at RWI, emphasized the critical importance of **independent, impartial investigations** into crimes committed in Afghanistan, particularly those amounting to gender persecution and possible crimes against humanity. She called for survivor-centered approaches to ensure victims' voices and experiences remain central to international efforts.

Atal Ahmadzai, Research Fellow at RWI, underscored the link between environmental degradation, conflict, and human rights. He urged that accountability mechanisms also address violations related to environmental neglect and resource exploitation, which further endanger vulnerable communities. Mr. Ahmadzai highlighted the need for a holistic understanding of security that includes environmental and human dimensions.

Joyce Bukuru, Senior Advocate and Representative Amnesty International to the UN, emphasized the organization's ongoing advocacy for Afghan women and human rights defenders. She reiterated Amnesty's call for an independent investigation mechanism under the UN to document abuses, ensure accountability, and end impunity for crimes against humanity in Afghanistan. Bukuru also urged for a more active role of HRD+ in New York to strengthen collective advocacy and coordination among human rights defenders

Negina Yari, Executive Director of *Window for Hope*, focused on the resilience of Afghan women and the role of grassroots organizations. She stressed that civil society must be directly involved in designing and implementing accountability and investigative mechanisms. Ms. Yari called on the United Nations and member states to establish a coordinated, independent investigation into ongoing violations to make the current regime accountable in Afghanistan.

Q&A and Conclusion

During the Q&A session, several important issues were raised regarding justice, accountability, and meaningful inclusion in addressing the situation in Afghanistan.



Ines Davau, French Lawyer – Representative of Afghan NGOs and Women in Paris

Ms. Davau highlighted that while Europe has the legal framework of universal jurisdiction, its practical impact remains limited without political will and coordinated action. She noted that Afghan women in exile continue to face intimidation and surveillance. Her question to the panel was: *Although some programs exist to protect Afghan women, coordination is lacking. Should the international community strengthen and better coordinate support systems to ensure their protection?*

Alan Creed Adele – Focal Point Lead, United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth

Mr. Adele emphasized the urgency of youth participation in justice processes, particularly for young women in Afghanistan who have suffered systemic human rights violations. He noted that young people's voices are often excluded from shaping justice mechanisms. His question to the panel was: *How can the United Nations system and its partners ensure that young women activists, including those in exile, are directly involved in co-designing accountability mechanisms, pathways for justice, and reparations? What concrete steps can be taken to ensure that their lived experiences, testimonies, data, and visions not only shape responses to violations but also help prevent future abuses?*

Elisa Yamamoto – Legal Advisor, End Gender Apartheid Campaign

Ms. Yamamoto addressed the Taliban's institutionalized regime of systematic gender-based oppression, referring to it as "gender apartheid." She highlighted Ambassador Ray's remarks on the term's importance as a tool for mobilization and as a framework for a survivor-centered approach to justice. Her question to the panel was: *Given the ongoing impunity, what concrete actions can states take to recognize gender-based oppression as a crime under international law and ensure accountability in a way that reflects the full scope of harms experienced by victims and survivors?*

Panel Responses – Reflections and Answers

Dr. Fatima – Accountability Mechanisms and Youth Inclusion

Dr. Fatima stressed the value of utilizing existing accountability mechanisms in different countries, supported by local lawyers and civil society groups. She emphasized that connecting with organizations that provide information and advocacy is key to ensuring meaningful participation of youth and children. While addressing violations against young people may seem idealistic, she highlighted that actively including their voices in dialogues and decision-making processes is essential.

Dr. Fatima also underlined the importance of international legal frameworks to strengthen responses to gender-based oppression. Codifying "gender apartheid" under international law would provide stronger tools to challenge systematic violations. She encouraged states to actively engage in ongoing processes, submit comments, and support campaigns led by organizations like the End Gender Apartheid Campaign.

Maryam – Education and Women's Rights

Maryam reflected on the profound impact of the Taliban's restrictions on Afghan women and girls, including those pursuing higher education, medical school, teaching, or other professional careers. She recognized the courage of young women who continue to create content and advocate

online despite these constraints. The panel emphasized that Afghan women are systematically denied opportunities, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated international action.



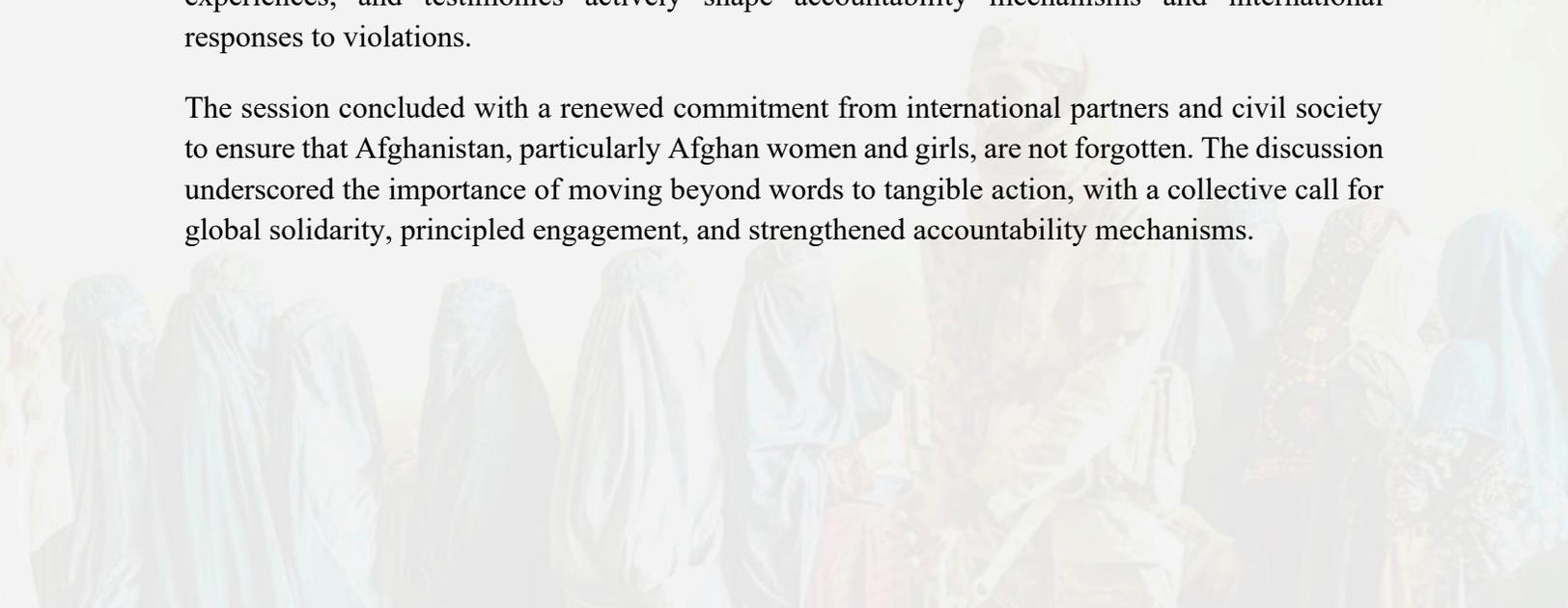
Richard – UN Support and Operational Challenges

Richard discussed the operational challenges faced by UN staff, particularly UN Women, in Afghanistan. He noted that security measures have prevented staff from entering UN compounds. He also shared updates on financial and staffing limitations, mentioning recent approvals from the UN Finance Committee while stressing that further resources are essential to continue critical work.

Call to Action

Panelists called for ongoing collaboration with civil society, member states, and youth activists. They stressed the importance of supporting initiatives that ensure survivors' voices, lived experiences, and testimonies actively shape accountability mechanisms and international responses to violations.

The session concluded with a renewed commitment from international partners and civil society to ensure that Afghanistan, particularly Afghan women and girls, are not forgotten. The discussion underscored the importance of moving beyond words to tangible action, with a collective call for global solidarity, principled engagement, and strengthened accountability mechanisms.



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Opening Remarks



Naseer Ahmad Faiq
Chargé d'Affaires, Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the UN, New York

Richard Bennett
UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan

Dr. Malek Sitez
Chairperson, Steering Committee of HRD+ Expert in International Law, Human Rights, and International Relations

Panelists and Speakers



Maryam Faiq Gardiwal
Co-founder & CEO - Alefbe.App | Women's Rights Activist & Advocate | MPA Candidate

Fatema D. Ahmadi
Research Fellow Raoul Wallenberg Institute

Atal Ahmadzai
Research Fellow Raoul Wallenberg Institute

Joyce Bukuru
Senior Advocate & Representative to the United Nations at Amnesty International

Negina Yari
Executive Director of Window for Hope

Moderators



Nilam Nematullah
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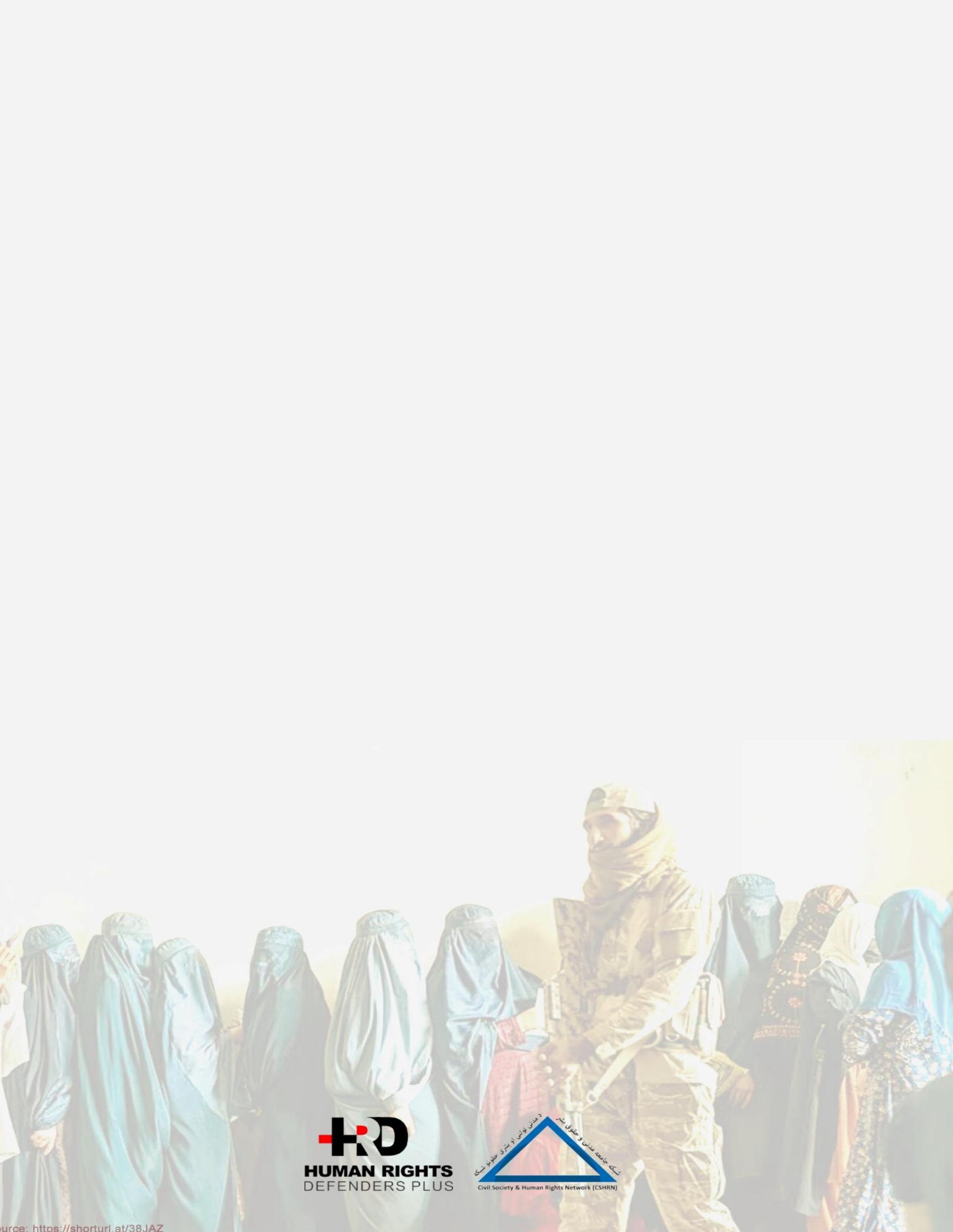
Sarah Taylor
Independent Consultant on Gender, Peace, and Security

Organizers:



Co-Sponsors:





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د عوام و ناس و بشری حقوقو نیټه
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Civil Society & Human Rights Network (CSHRN)