

PROGRAMME
**HUMANITARIAN
& DEVELOPMENT**

WORLDS' FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICIES AND THE FATE OF AFGHAN WOMEN

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In recent years, feminist foreign policies have emerged as a powerful force in shaping the global agenda. These policies prioritize gender equality, women's rights, and the empowerment of women in all aspects of foreign policy decision-making. Against the backdrop of recent events in Afghanistan, the fate of Afghan women has become a critical concern for countries that have adopted feminist foreign policies. This article explores the impact of feminist foreign policies on the lives of Afghan women and the ongoing challenges they face.

FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICIES: A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Today, some countries are well-known for their feminist foreign policies. In 2014 Sweden initiated to adopt the “world’s feminist policy”. According to the UN Women by July 2022, the following countries embraced the feminist foreign policy: Sweden (2014), Canada (2017), France (2019), Mexico (2020), Spain (2021), Luxembourg (2021), Germany (2021), Chile (2022)¹. The process of developing feminist foreign policies has been placed in the agendas of the most of the countries and political parties and it turned to a worldwide trend and to some extent it became a famous brand. The internal approach of implementing these policies varies country to country, but “most of these policies cover similar themes. They vow to mainstream a gender perspective in all foreign policy actions and agencies, advocate for progress in gender equality as part of their development and humanitarian aid.”² These policies aim to challenge patriarchal structures, promote gender equality, and address gender-based discrimination. They seek to advance women's rights, ensure their meaningful participation in decision-making processes, and empower them to achieve their full potential.

WORLDS’ FEMINIST POLICIES AND THE PLIGHT OF AFGHAN WOMEN

Although the United Nations and its member states have a long history of addressing women's human rights, gender equality, and elimination of all forms of discrimination between men and women with some successes across the globe, and the feminist policies have fundamentally shifted the traditional paradigms of foreign policy by incorporating a gender perspective, this practice had more of a minimalist approach by instrumentalizing Afghan women's rights during the different course of history and political tensions.

¹ https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Brief-Feminist-foreign-policies-en_0.pdf

² https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Brief-Feminist-foreign-policies-en_0.pdf

When the United States and the Taliban signed the Doha Agreement entitled “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan” on February 29, 2020³, it alarmed the women of Afghanistan to be ready for another tragedy episode ahead of them that will soon shape their fate from being known as women to unknown figures with no identity. Despite the strong voices from the international community in the framework of their gender and women backed policies, right after the United States and its allies’ military withdrawal and illegal takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, the women and girls as the first victims of the Taliban’s extremist ideologies started experiencing their systematic removal from society.

Concerns regarding the destiny of Afghan women and the accomplishments they have battled so hard for over the past 20 years have increased significantly as a result of the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan. Afghan women underwent harsh gender-based violence, severe freedom limitations, and limited access to healthcare and education during the previous Taliban regime and now. By leaving Afghanistan quickly, the United States and its allies failed to use whatever power they had to protect the interests and rights of Afghan women.

The 2001 United States’ “Operation Enduring Freedom” intervention in Afghanistan and the subsequent NATO-ISAF operation in Afghanistan was notably gendered. One of the supportive arguments to have the public support beside the eliminating of the danger of Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan was to rescue and liberate the women of Afghanistan from the Taliban. In this regard one of the key remarks of that time by the United States’ First Lady Laura Bush as she made a radio address in November 2001 stated: “Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror – not only because our hearts break for the women and children in Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us... Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it's the acceptance of our common humanity, a commitment shared by people of good will on every continent.”⁴ This remark at that time clearly highlighted the importance of plight of Afghan women and as an opening door to have it in the world’s agenda.

Supporting Afghan women as they begin to enjoy their rights and freedoms and establish themselves legally in society has now risen to the top of the global agenda for international policies. Afghanistan changed throughout the 20 years of the republic from being a place where women were outright forbidden to speaking for themselves on a national and international level.

³ <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf>

⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/laurabushtext_111701.html

After the Taliban returned in 2021 and resumed their old policies toward Afghan women, the world witnessed the bravery and tenacity of Afghan women who fought for their rights and made significant advancements in a number of different fields. Foreign policies that prioritize feminism have been at the forefront of the fight for Afghan women's rights and their safety. They have utilized their diplomatic influence, international aid, and partnerships with local organizations to provide support and protection to Afghan women. Countries with feminist foreign policies have leveraged diplomatic channels to exert pressure on the Taliban regime and demand the protection of Afghan women's rights. They have utilized multilateral platforms, such as the United Nations, to raise awareness, mobilize resources, and rally global support for Afghan women. However, all these efforts aiming to hold the Taliban accountable for their commitments to respect human rights and gender equality, could not bring any fundamental changes in the lives of Afghan women.

THE WAY FORWARD AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While feminist foreign policies have undoubtedly elevated the concerns of Afghan women and amplified their voices, the fate of Afghan women ultimately rests on complex factors. Followings are some key recommendations:

As the lack of a legitimate administration in Afghanistan makes it difficult for the world to take joint measures, including diplomatic negotiations and persistent advocacy, Afghanistan needs serious attention. The international community must maintain Afghanistan as a top priority in its policy. It is time for the world to stop attentively monitoring the situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban's control of the country poses a severe threat to both the region and the entire planet.

Countries with feminist foreign policies should continue to reaffirm their commitment to international human rights instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). They should hold the Taliban regime accountable for upholding these commitments and demand respect for women's rights.

Aids for Afghanistan's development and humanitarian needs should be prioritized by nations. This entails making sure that funds are set aside to address the particular requirements of women and girls, such as access to healthcare, economic opportunities, education, and defense against gender-based violence.

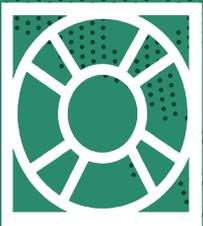
Countries should establish refugee and resettlement policies that put Afghan women and girls' safety and support at the top of the priority list due to the increased hazards that Afghan

women suffer under the Taliban's leadership. This can involve giving Afghan women safe routes to apply for asylum and resettlement, assuring their access to necessary resources, and easing their assimilation into host communities, among other things.

The journey towards gender equality and women's empowerment in Afghanistan will require sustained commitment and support. Countries with feminist foreign policies should demonstrate a long-term commitment to women's rights in Afghanistan, even in the face of evolving political dynamics. Continued engagement is vital for ensuring lasting change.

The future of Afghan women is under jeopardy, and the international community must work together to guarantee that their rights are maintained and that their voices are heard. It is time for the international community to reexamine and research the shortcomings and difficulties in their feminist policies in order to develop a fundamentally sound remedy for the predicament of Afghan women.

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