



The Responsibility to Protect
and Not Neglect:
At Home and Abroad, the
Afghan People Deserve More
International Support for a
Better Future

Amina Ahmed
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P.O. Box 734

Goshen, IN 46527 (USA)

(574) 205-9002

www.fourthfreedomforum.org

Cover photo credit: Valerie Plesch. Internally displaced persons from Helmand Province, photographed in Kabul in April 2014. Their story can be read here: <https://roadsandkingdoms.com/2014/the-solace-of-sound/>.

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Amina Ahmed was the 2024 Howard S. Brembeck Fellow of the Fourth Freedom Forum. She graduated from Smith College with a double major in Government and Russian, Eastern European, and Eurasian Studies. Originally from Afghanistan, Amina was the first woman from Kandahar to receive a U.S. State Department scholarship to study in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Her interests lie in conflict studies and foreign policy, and she hopes to attend law school. She can be reached at aminaahmed335@gmail.com.

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Acronyms

| | |
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| AI | artificial intelligence |
| AUCA | American University of Central Asia |
| BIS | Bank for International Settlements |
| DAB | Da Afghanistan Bank |
| DFA | Department of Foreign Affairs |
| DoD | Department of Defense |
| DoS | Department of State |
| FCDO | Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office |
| GL | General Licenses |
| IILE | Institute of International Liberal Education |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| IRC | International Rescue Committee |
| OFAC | Office of Foreign Assets Control |
| SDGT | Specially Designated Global Terrorist |
| UNAMA | United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| WFP | World Food Programme |

Introduction

This policy brief is informed by my personal lived experiences as an Afghan woman and refugee currently residing in the United States. It examines several of the urgent issues facing Afghanistan and its people, both within the country and among the diasporas. It highlights the decay of education for both girls *and* boys, the dire economic conditions that demand immediate international attention and support, and the severe suppression of human rights—particularly women’s rights—under Taliban rule.

The policy brief concludes with concrete recommendations for governments, donors, and other international stakeholders involved in providing aid to Afghanistan to consider. Additionally, it emphasizes the critical role the Afghan diaspora plays in lobbying their host nations for meaningful support for Afghans in Afghanistan, refugees, and those trapped in limbo without legal status in countries like Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. In essence, this brief serves as a call to action for the diaspora to organize and advocate effectively for their fellow Afghans.

Background

Afghanistan’s location in Asia has often made it a challenging region for those seeking power, leaving the country susceptible to many invasions. Its geographical and cultural identity is frequently debated—some consider it part of South Asia, whereas others, particularly in American discourse, associate it with the “Middle East.” However, Afghanistan is fundamentally part of Central Asia, both in terms of its geography and its diverse population, many of whom share deep-rooted connections with a vast array of Central Asian ethnic groups.¹

Afghanistan’s geography has shaped its history for millennia, attracting invaders from across the region. Afghanistan remained neutral during both World War I and World War II and experienced a brief civil war in 1929. However, the country was forcibly drawn into the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, ultimately leading to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and their withdrawal 10 years later. At the start of the 21st century, Afghanistan returned to the global spotlight after years of being largely ignored following the Soviet withdrawal. This resurgence occurred when Muslim jihadists responsible for planning the 9/11 attacks sought refuge in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, prompting the U.S. invasion in retaliation.² The resulting conflict became the United States’ longest war, spanning 20 years, overseen by four U.S. presidents,

¹ Central Asia is the most accurate classification for Afghanistan’s location and identity within the broader Asian context. As Thomas Barfield notes in his book *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), “Landlocked Afghanistan lies in the heart of Asia, and links three major cultural and geographic regions: the Indian subcontinent to the southeast, Central Asia to the north, and the Iranian plateau in the west.”

² Ibid.

two democrats and two republicans. In 2021 President Biden ordered the full withdrawal of U.S. troops, effectively returning the country to the Taliban. It was an ill-conceived and devastating capitulation to the very enemy the U.S. had spent two decades trying to defeat.

With the second Trump administration and the Taliban in Afghanistan recently marking the third anniversary of the collapse of the Afghan Republic, the Afghan people and economy in Afghanistan remain in shambles. The international community has largely turned its attention to other global issues, from the Middle East to eastern Europe, effectively losing interest in Afghanistan and its people. For Afghans, however, their misery has only deepened, as international stakeholders continue to overlook their plight.

Food insecurity remains very concerning, with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) reporting that “[Approximately] [14.8 million people \(32 percent of the population\) are projected to be food insecure \(IPC Phase 3/Crisis or above\) during the winter months and are in urgent need of humanitarian food assistance.](#)”³ Almost half of the country is on the brink of food insecurity, exacerbated by massive unemployment following the Taliban takeover. More than half of the population (i.e., women), have been excluded from the workforce, and the situation is further strained by the influx of returnees from forced deportations by neighboring countries.

Human rights in Afghanistan have worsened dramatically as well, with the Taliban imposing increasingly draconian restrictions on women and men, while stifling civil society and silencing journalists and education. Since the withdrawal of international troops in 2021, the economy and education systems have been thrown into disarray. Meanwhile, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other international nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners have [sent shipments of cash](#)⁴ as aid to address both the economic collapse and the massive humanitarian gaps left by the withdrawal. At home and abroad, Afghans are suffering under a brutal misogynistic Taliban regime, and they urgently need assistance from the United States and the rest of the international community to address the demise of education, an ailing economy, and the diversion and (paucity) of international aid.

The Demise of Education

Decades of continuous conflict have devastated Afghanistan’s educational system. Since the Taliban took power in August 2021, ongoing crackdowns and extreme restrictions on education for both

³ “WFP Afghanistan: Situation Report, October 2024,” Relief Web, 11 November 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/wfp-afghanistan-situation-report-october-2024#:~:text=Food%20insecurity%20remains%20high%20and,November%202024%20to%20March%202025>.

⁴ William Byrd, “How Afghanistan’s Economy Can Survive Shrinking Shipments of U.N. Cash Aid,” United States Institute of Peace, 14 November 2024, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/11/how-afghanistans-economy-can-survive-shrinking-shipments-un-cash-aid>.

boys and girls have deprived millions of their basic right to education. According to a recent UNESCO report, [more than seven million children are out of school in Afghanistan](#),⁵ with girls making up more than 60 percent of this total. The lack of access to education and employment has severely impacted young girls' mental health, as they are now confined to their homes and even restricted from speaking outside. With schools no longer available, [girls as young as 15 are being sold into marriages, often to help families repay debts and secure food](#)⁶ amid the worsening economic crisis. The despair stemming from the ban on education for girls is compounded by extreme restrictions on their mobility, employment, clothing, and even public expression. These so-called "morality laws" dictate nearly every aspect of their lives. UN Women emphasized that "[the world must not turn a blind eye as Afghan women and girls disappear from public life](#)."⁷ With severe restrictions on their movement and growing hopelessness from their absence in society, many women are turning to suicide or being forced into marriage. For Afghan women, there is little left but despair.

The ongoing ban on education in Afghanistan affects not only girls' education but, in the long run, boys' education is suffering as well. Schools are no longer allowed to use previous syllabi that were used under the republic. The curriculum for boys has also shifted to a more religious syllabus, lacking instruction in science and critical thinking skills and instead indoctrinating young boys with "Madrassa-style" teachings. This is dangerously indoctrinating a generation of young Afghans to the Taliban's "ideologies" and "philosophy."

In the Taliban's first two years in power, it opened [5,618 new religious schools, of which only 1,212 existed under the previous government](#).⁸ Human Rights Watch notes that young boys who were previously taught by female teachers are now taking lessons from [unqualified male teachers, or](#)

⁵ "50 million Children Out-of-School: What You Need to Know About UNESCO's Latest Education Data," UNESCO, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/250-million-children-out-school-what-you-need-know-about-unescos-latest-education-data>.

⁶ "Afghanistan: Taliban Blocking Female Aid Workers," Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/04/afghanistan-taliban-blocking-female-aid-workers>.

⁷ United Nations, "Sanctions, Travel Bans on Taliban Resulting in Afghanistan Being 'Ruptured from International Community,' Special Representative Warns Security Council," 18 September 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15824.doc.htm>.

⁸ Abdul Aziz Mohibbi and Noah Coburn, "How Taliban Rule Has Reshaped Higher Education in Afghanistan," 8 August 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/08/how-taliban-rule-has-reshaped-higher-education-in-afghanistan/>.

[sometimes no teachers at all](#).⁹ As a result, the country is regressing and losing its hard-earned progress made over decades.

Under the current Taliban regime, Afghanistan’s education system—once a symbol of progress, especially for women after 2001 when they were encouraged to return to school following the Taliban’s initial brutal rule in 1996—has suffered greatly. During that time, Afghan civil society achieved significant progress, with women becoming doctors, engineers, teachers, and journalists. Now, under the current revitalized Taliban, setbacks in education have worsened, and draconian laws and restrictions on both women and men have returned. The mass departure of educated individuals after 2021 has further weakened the education system and the economy. Combined with the economic free fall and the diversion of humanitarian aid, these issues urgently require action to support vulnerable communities in Afghanistan and its global diaspora.

An Ailing Economy in Need of Support

The Afghan economy suffered a significant shock following the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops, which took with them a substantial portion of the country’s functional workforce, including doctors, engineers, and developers. Prior to the U.S. withdrawal in 2021, Afghanistan’s economy heavily depended on external support. However, the withdrawal of troops left a considerable void, destabilizing the economy and impacting daily life for ordinary Afghan civilians. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Afghanistan’s GDP contracted by 20 to 30 percent in 2021. From 2001 to 2021, [the U.S. Department of Defense \(DoD\) and Department of State \(DoS\) disbursed a total of \\$72.7 billion in military aid to U.S. and Afghan forces](#),¹⁰ a large portion of which funded Afghan military expenditures.

However, the withdrawal of foreign troops and aid after the Taliban’s takeover created a major economic collapse. Before the fall of the Islamic Republic, [international aid accounted for about 40 percent of Afghanistan’s GDP and 75 percent of public expenditures](#).¹¹ Foreign aid accounted for [more than half of the government’s \\$6 billion annual budget and roughly 80 percent of total public expenditure](#).¹² The abrupt withdrawal of this support without any emergency funds in place caused

⁹ “Schools are Failing Boys Too”: The Taliban’s Impact on Boys’ Education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch, 6 December 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/12/06/schools-are-failing-boys-too/talibans-impact-boys-education-afghanistan>.

¹⁰ Nan Tian, “20 years of US military aid to Afghanistan,” SIPRI, 22 September 2021, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2021/20-years-us-military-aid-afghanistan>.

¹¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, “Reshaping U.S. Aid to Afghanistan: The Challenge of Lasting Progress,” 23 February 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/reshaping-us-aid-afghanistan-challenge-lasting-progress>.

¹² Daniel F. Runde, Annie Pforzheimer, Thomas Bryja, and Caroline Smutny, “The Future of Assistance for Afghanistan: A Dilemma,” 13 June 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/future-assistance-afghanistan-dilemma>.

the economy to collapse, triggering a severe humanitarian crisis. In response, the UNAMA introduced a short-term “temporary assistance” initiative, flying cash aid into the country from private donors and international organizations, including nonprofit and humanitarian agencies. The U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) quickly issued General Licenses (GLs) to authorize humanitarian activities, starting with General Licenses [14](#) and [15](#) (in 2021) and later expanding to include GLs [16](#) through [20](#) (in 2022).¹³ These measures helped revitalize humanitarian efforts through UNAMA, providing relief to some extent.

Although the aforementioned GLs and other measures taken since the U.S. withdrawal in 2021 mean that some restrictions on the Taliban have lifted, the United States continues to list the Taliban—which now controls Afghanistan—as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) entity. It is therefore not surprising that many businesses and investors remain reluctant to return. The lack of economic opportunities, coupled with the need to navigate a complex legal and compliance environment, has deterred foreign investment and business ventures from investing in the country.

UNAMA reportedly flies \$40 million in cash into Afghanistan each week to sustain the economy, address a portion of the country’s humanitarian needs, and stabilize the Afghan currency. Although this emergency relief has provided some temporary support, it presents significant challenges for both the international community and the Afghan people, who continue to suffer under the ineffective Taliban government. The Taliban, which has largely “[outsourced the country’s social safety net to UN agencies and a handful of international NGOs](#),”¹⁴ has struggled with leadership and governance.

Although cash assistance has alleviated certain aspects of the humanitarian crisis caused by the international community’s abrupt exit and the isolation of the Taliban government, it is not a viable long-term solution. This approach has also dissatisfied donors, whose contributions have declined annually. For instance, [the United Kingdom has reduced its Afghan aid budget by 76 percent, and Germany has cut its contribution by 93 percent](#),¹⁵ citing concerns over human rights abuses, corruption, and mistrust of the Taliban’s de facto authorities. According to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ (OCHA) 2023 Humanitarian Needs Response Plan, [the](#)

¹³ U.S. Department of the Treasury, “General License No. 14: Authorizing Humanitarian Activities in Afghanistan,” <https://ofac.treasury.gov/media/912996/download?inline>; “General License No. 15: Transactions Related to the Exportation or Reexportation of Agricultural Commodities, Medicine, Medical Devices, Replacement Parts and Components, or Software Updates in Afghanistan,” <https://ofac.treasury.gov/media/913001/download?inline>; “General License No. 16: Authorizing Noncommercial, Personal Remittances to Afghanistan,” <https://ofac.treasury.gov/media/915126/download?inline>; “General License No. 17: Official Business of the United States Government,” <https://ofac.treasury.gov/media/917126/download?inline>.

¹⁴ Runde, Pforzheimer, Bryja, and Smutny, “The Future of Assistance for Afghanistan: A Dilemma.”

¹⁵ Ibid.

[initial funding request for Afghanistan is only 15.9 percent funded](#),¹⁶ highlighting the growing challenge of sustaining humanitarian efforts in the country.

The Theft and Redirection of Humanitarian Aid

Reports indicate that the Taliban has obstructed aid from reaching women-headed households. According to a report cited in [Foreign Policy](#):

Sources inside and outside the country say much of the money never reaches those who need it. Instead, they say, unknown quantities are stolen by the Taliban and diverted to their own causes, keeping supporters onside with handouts of cash and food and funding the private operations of senior leaders.¹⁷

Furthermore, restrictions on women, including barring them from employment; hampering their role in the delivery of aid, and public interactions with men without a “mahram,” have made [it nearly impossible for women-led households to access essential aid from NGOs](#).¹⁸ Women have been disproportionately affected by the economic crisis and natural disasters due to their exclusion from employment and income-generating opportunities. The Taliban Ministry of Economy issued a letter stating that [“it would revoke the operating licenses of any NGOs that allowed women to work in Afghanistan.”](#)¹⁹ Following the Taliban takeover, more than 700,000 jobs have been lost in Afghan cities, with most positions eliminated due to the ongoing ban on women workers and a significant reduction in humanitarian assistance. The situation is dire. Compounding these challenges, Afghanistan has faced a series of climate-related disasters, including an [earthquake in Herat, drought in the south, and floods](#)²⁰ in northern regions.

The Taliban’s frequent policy changes, such as replacing the Ministry of Women with the Ministry of Vice and Virtue, have made it nearly impossible for women to access the support they need. According to the CIVICUS *Monitor*, Afghanistan’s civil society is now classified as “closed” due to the Taliban’s crackdown on organizations, especially those focused on women’s rights. Since December

¹⁶ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Afghanistan 2204: Country snapshot for 2024,” <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/1/summary/2024>.

¹⁷ Lynne O’Donnell, “The Taliban Are Abusing Western Aid,” *Foreign Policy*, 30 December 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/12/30/taliban-western-aid-misogyny-women-rights/?tpcc=recirc_latest062921.

¹⁸ Julia Ingram, “Humanitarian Needs in Afghanistan Deepen as Taliban Continues Ban on Women Working for NGOs, UN,” PBS *Frontline*, 25 April 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/taliban-ban-afghanistan-women-ngos-un-humanitarian-crisis/>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Earthquake in Herat, Afghanistan,” Humanitarian Coalition, October 2023, <https://www.humanitariancoalition.ca/earthquake-in-herat-afghanistan>.

2022, the Taliban has banned Afghan women from working for national and international NGOs, affecting more than 15,000 women across 183 organizations in 17 provinces. This has not only removed a significant source of income for many Afghan households, particularly those without male breadwinners, but it also hampers the ability of NGOs to reach women in remote areas. Male workers are unable to gather the same insights or establish connections with women-led households, making it difficult to accurately assess and address the needs of Afghan women. A 2023 survey by UN Women found that [25 percent of NGOs now operate with only male staff, 42 percent allow women to work from home, and 8 percent have ceased operations entirely](#).²¹ Some reports indicate that the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has even instructed organizations to replace [“women” with “men” in project documents](#),²² further marginalizing women’s needs.

These restrictions on women’s mobility, employment, education, and access to healthcare is exacerbated by the nationwide ban on girls attending school past the ninth grade. This policy is often downplayed or whitewashed by some Afghan actors in the NGO sector, who prioritize their own positions and connections with the Taliban over the needs of Afghan women. International influencers—often western influencers with some media presence hired by the Taliban Foreign Ministry—[further distort the situation, painting an inaccurate picture of Afghan women’s freedom](#)²³ under Taliban rule.

In August 2023, the Taliban imposed [new laws restricting women’s freedoms](#),²⁴ including mandatory full veils, restrictions on traveling without a male escort, and further limitations on women’s rights to participate in public life, including speaking or singing in public.²⁵ These extreme measures have resulted in a mental health crisis among Afghan women, with [nearly 70 percent reporting symptoms of depression, insomnia, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts](#).²⁶ The rate of suicide

²¹ UN Women, *Afghanistan: Gender Country Report 2024*, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/Gender-country-profile-Afghanistan-en.pdf>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Arpan Rai, “TikTok influencer faces backlash for posing with Taliban fighters in Afghanistan,” *The Independent*, 22 August 2024, <https://www.the-independent.com/asia/south-asia/tiktok-influencer-geenyada-afghanistan-vlogs-taliban-b2600169.html>.

²⁴ Annie Kelly and Zahra Joya, “‘Frightening’ Taliban Law Bans Women from Speaking in Public,” *The Guardian*, 26 August 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/article/2024/aug/26/taliban-bar-on-afghan-women-speaking-in-public-un-afghanistan>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Rahim Faiez, “Mental Health Among Women in Afghanistan Is Deteriorating, UN Report Finds,” 19 September 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/mental-health-among-women-in-afghanistan-is-deteriorating-un-report-finds>.

among women has skyrocketed since the Taliban's takeover, with [women now accounting for twice the number of deaths by suicide](#)²⁷ compared to men.

The Taliban government's inability to effectively manage or distribute aid has compounded the crisis. The government's fragmented structure and lack of coordination hinder its ability to oversee humanitarian aid efficiently. Additionally, the international community remains wary of the Taliban's ability to manage aid without benefiting their regime or contributing to the further suffering of the Afghan people.



An Afghan child who was separated from his parents at the Kabul airport during the takeover, featured in a Wall Street Journal article about unaccompanied children.

Photo/Valerie Plesch

[“Although ranked the weakest in the world, \[it\] has become the most lucrative source of income for the Taliban.”](#)²⁹ The passport that once cost only [\\$65 now suddenly costs more than \\$2,500](#),³⁰ leaving most Afghans unable to obtain one. Although some of the quoted fees go to middlemen or brokers involved in the process, most go to Taliban officials, creating another opportunity for

Although some²⁸ may argue that petty corruption has declined under the Taliban compared to the Afghan Republic, other forms of corruption have increased under its rule. The Taliban has become much more sophisticated in using technology and extending their control over the entire country. One example of this corruption and theft is the current passport system. The Afghan passport has now become one of the most expensive—if not the most expensive—passports globally. [“Although ranked the weakest in the world, \[it\] has become the most lucrative source of income](#)

²⁷ Mark A. Green, “Women and Suicide in Afghanistan,” Wilson Center, 19 September 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/women-and-suicide-afghanistan>.

²⁸ Jessica Ludwig and Albert Torres, “Corruption and Kleptocracy in Afghanistan Under the Taliban,” <https://www.bushcenter.org/publications/corruption-and-kleptocracy-in-afghanistan-under-the-taliban>.

²⁹ Kazim Ehsan, “How Taliban Officials Have Turned the World’s Weakest Passports into the Most Expensive,” 25 January 2023, <https://kabulnow.com/2023/01/passports-how-taliban-officials-have-turned-the-worlds-weakest-into-the-most-expensive/>.

³⁰ Ibid.

exploitation. The same is true for [obtaining visas to Pakistan](#)³¹ for desperate Afghans trying to flee. Reports indicate that those who manage to secure visas by paying exorbitant bribes through the black market see the money sliced between Pakistani authorities and Taliban officials. Furthermore, the Taliban's informal taxing of businesses and collection of revenue, including forced door-to-door visits in a "[ransom-style revenue system](#),"³² further contributes to this corruption.

The inability to govern and corruption of Taliban authorities extend even further, exploiting Afghans attempting to flee their rule. Many left Afghanistan after the Taliban's takeover in 2021, seeking resettlement through the United Nations and other agencies or asylum in Europe or North America. However, obtaining the necessary formal documents and visas—required to attend in-person asylum interviews or apply for resettlement through organizations like the [UN's International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#)³³—has become extremely difficult. Even for those with connections, [these documents are often unattainable due to the closure of most foreign diplomatic missions in Kabul](#).³⁴ With only a few operational embassies, such as Pakistan and Turkey, these countries remain the last hope as third countries for many Afghans to attend their interviews. This limited access has fueled a black market for visas, where desperate Afghans resort to extreme measures to escape the harsh realities of life under Taliban rule. For many, obtaining an Afghan passport is the first obstacle. The Taliban have reportedly issued more than 700,000 passports since taking power, [earning about \\$50 million in revenue, according to officials](#).³⁵ Similarly, visa costs to third countries have risen dramatically. The Pakistani embassy, for example, [now charges up to \\$1,000 for a one-year visa](#)³⁶—a significant increase from the previous \$50 or less. Reports indicate that embassy staff demand additional unofficial graft payments from vulnerable Afghans. Unofficial sources suggest that the Taliban and Pakistani embassy staff have an under-the-table agreement, exploiting the desperation of Afghans. Allegedly, the bribe money is shared between Taliban authorities in Kabul and the embassy staff, further exacerbating the plight of those attempting to flee to third countries.

³¹ Radio Free Europe, "Afghans Say Black Market for Pakistani Visas Thriving," 14 June 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-black-market-visas-pakistan/31898158.html>.

³² Jessica Ludwig and Albert Torres, "Corruption and Kleptocracy in Afghanistan Under the Taliban," <https://www.bushcenter.org/publications/corruption-and-kleptocracy-in-afghanistan-under-the-taliban>.

³³ United Nations International Organization for Migration, <https://www.iom.int>.

³⁴ Radio Free Europe, "Afghans Say Black Market for Pakistani Visas Thriving."

³⁵ Akmal Dawi, "Taliban Make Millions from Passports Issued to Fleeing Afghans," Voice of America, 24 August 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-make-millions-from-passports-issued-to-fleeing-afghans/6715133.html>.

³⁶ Radio Free Europe, "Afghans Say Black Market for Pakistani Visas Thriving."

According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), [more than 23 million people in Afghanistan are in desperate need of humanitarian aid](#),³⁷ with women and children making up most of those affected. However, given the Taliban's restrictions on women workers and the barriers to education and employment, questions arise about where the humanitarian aid is actually going. Are the funds intended for women and children being misappropriated by the Taliban and those in charge of enforcing these draconian policies?

Recommendations for International Community and Policymakers

The following recommendations are designed to address these pressing issues by targeting specific stakeholders, each of whom can play a crucial role in protecting and promoting the rights and livelihoods of innocent people suffering under Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

These recommendations aim to assist the international community in alleviating the suffering of Afghans, both within Afghanistan and as stateless refugees in neighboring Pakistan, Iran, and other countries.

Recommendation 1: The international community must prioritize its commitment to international law and prevent the Taliban from committing human rights abuses with impunity.

Speculation abounds that President Trump's second administration might reopen diplomatic channels with the Taliban, as was done with the Doha Deal during Trump's first term. The Doha Deal ultimately led to the Taliban's return to power and the withdrawal of U.S. and international troops without fulfilling the commitment they had made to the Afghan people and the world.

The international community must hold the Taliban accountable for human rights abuses. Humanitarian aid entering the country should be made contingent on tangible improvements of the rights of Afghan citizens.

Recommendation 2: Increase funding for education.

Donors and intergovernmental bodies must rethink their approach to Afghanistan's educational crisis. Now is the time for international donors to step forward and use their funding strategically to incentivize school attendance for both boys and girls. Most donors withdrew from Afghanistan and halted projects to which they were previously committed following the U.S. withdrawal, leaving education and development initiatives in limbo. However, donor funds still have the potential to

³⁷ International Rescue Committee, "Millions of Afghans Endure Crisis Three Years After Taliban Takeover," 14 August 2024, <https://www.rescue.org/article/millions-afghans-endure-crisis-three-years-after-taliban-takeover>.

influence local communities, who are currently enduring the harsh and merciless rules of the Taliban.

In light of the extreme educational, economic, and other ongoing disasters, Afghanistan remains in a constant state of emergency. Donors and international actors play a crucial role in persuading young Afghan men and women to return to schools and universities. Although civilians are in desperate need of food and basic resources to support their families, donors could agree to restore aid and donations to schools by offering small incentives, such as a monthly ration of lentils, oil, sugar, flour, or even a monthly stipend, contingent upon school attendance.

One example is [Educate Girls Now \(EGN\)](#),³⁸ a nonprofit online school founded by American educator Marilyn Mosley Gordanier in 2013, which serves more than 50 Afghan families. These families receive monetary support in the form of monthly stipends to educate their daughters in schools. The stipend is conditional upon families continuing to keep their daughters enrolled. Currently, EGN is trying to avoid repressive Taliban measures, by running underground schools and keeping its operations discreet. Several similar examples exist where this technique has successfully encouraged locals to send their daughters—and sons—to school rather than having them work in the streets or selling them off in marriages.

Similarly, the WFP has implemented a model where children in rural Afghanistan [are fed in schools as an incentive to attend](#).³⁹ This model can be replicated by other international NGOs and charities working on the ground, partnering with local communities to boost school attendance. For instance, [“school girls in grades 4 to 6 receive take-home rations, including vegetable oil or cash for their families.”](#)⁴⁰ This strategy could be expanded by other NGOs to promote enrollment in both rural and urban areas of Afghanistan.

International donors can leverage their donations as incentives to pressure the locals as well as the Taliban not only to allow girls and women back into schools but also to ensure that boys attend schools beyond just the religious madrassas.

³⁸ Joey LoMonaco, “In Afghanistan, Old Forces Threaten Girls’ Education. She Represents a New School of Thought,” *Fredericksburg Free Press*, 9 June 2024, <https://www.fredericksburgfreepress.com/2024/06/09/in-afghanistan-a-new-school-of-thought-for-girls-education>.

³⁹ World Food Programme, “WFP Expands School Feeding in Afghanistan Thanks to Contribution from the European Union,” 29 May 2024, <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-expands-school-feeding-afghanistan-thanks-contribution-european-union>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Recommendation 3: Increase rather than decrease scholarships and other educational opportunities for Afghans. The EU/North American governments must restore their programs.

Prestigious government scholarship programs, such as the [Fulbright Scholarships](#)⁴¹ for graduate and PhD levels, previously administered by the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, provided a vital pathway for both Afghan women and men to pursue advanced degrees from renowned universities in the United States. A key element of the Fulbright Program was the expectation that scholars would return to Afghanistan upon completing their degrees. However, with the departure of the U.S. Embassy, [the scholarship program has been canceled for Afghan students, both inside and outside the country](#),⁴² while it remains open to other countries participating in the U.S. Fulbright Program. Although this may not appear as a significant issue, the Fulbright Scholarship was a symbol of “[hope for a better future and a life-changing opportunity](#)”⁴³ to many. The program is now indefinitely suspended for Afghan students, as confirmed by the State Department.

This situation has stripped hundreds of thousands of men and women of the opportunity to pursue higher education, both within Afghanistan and abroad. Students like myself, who were already studying abroad and looking to transition into similar opportunities, were also affected. Now living in the United States, I applied for a graduate degree after completing my undergraduate studies. Although I was accepted to three of the nation’s top institutions, I ultimately couldn’t attend due to the high cost of tuition, the lack of programs like Fulbright to apply for, and my ineligibility for in-state or other tuition assistance. These factors led me to decide against pursuing graduate school for the time being. Although other options remain available for international students in the United States, Fulbright, which continues to operate for other countries, should not only remain available for Afghans (both living in Afghanistan and abroad) but also be expanded to accommodate their unique needs.

[The U.S. State Department](#)⁴⁴ administered other prestigious initiatives for Afghan students to pursue undergraduate degrees at partner universities, such as the American University of Central Asia (AUCA). I had the privilege of being selected as the first woman from Kandahar to attend AUCA via the State Department program in its thirteen-year history with the university. As an Afghan refugee who completed high school in Pakistan, I experienced first-hand the impossibility of accessing higher education in Pakistan because Afghan refugees in Pakistan are not permitted to

⁴¹ Fulbright Scholarships, https://af.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/268/Fulbright_Application-2020-2021-6.pdf.

⁴² Moshin Amin, “Why Cancellation of Fulbright Program in Afghanistan Matters,” Aljazeera, 4 March 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/3/4/why-cancellation-of-fulbright-program-in-afghanistan-matters#:~:text=And%20a%20few%20weeks%20ago,the%20grand%20scheme%20of%20things>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ United States Mission to Afghanistan, <https://af.usembassy.gov/>.

enroll in Pakistani universities. Upon repatriation to Afghanistan, my path changed when I discovered the State Department's scholarship program through a Facebook post, and went through a rigorous application process and interviews, which ultimately enabled me to attend AUCA's New Generation Academy and later enroll in a fully funded undergraduate program. This opportunity transformed my life. Unfortunately, these programs have now been shut down for both Afghan men and women.

Other prestigious international scholarships, such as the [Chevening Scholarship](#)⁴⁵ administered by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO), have also been closed to Afghan students since 2021. However, in November 2024, [Chevening has reopened its application portal to Afghan students](#)⁴⁶ after years of outcry from Afghans. Many other independent scholarships remain largely inaccessible due to extreme visa restrictions for Afghan passport holders, travel limitations, and the withdrawal of funding for Afghan-specific programs. Afghan students, even those who secure spots at higher educational institutions abroad, face significant barriers. They must often travel to third countries for visa interviews, where they risk rejection despite already securing admission. Given the severe poverty in Afghanistan, most families cannot afford the financial burden of this process, leaving students with little hope.

The international community should take note of initiatives like a 2024 [initiative in Scotland](#),⁴⁷ which welcomed 19 female Afghan students to continue their medical degrees after the Taliban's ban on women's education. Similarly, independent philanthropists, such as [Bard College in collaboration with the Institute of International Liberal Education \(IILE\) and the Open Society University Network](#),⁴⁸ have provided full scholarships to more than 100 Afghan students. These examples show that meaningful and much needed support for Afghan students can still be achieved. The U.S. government, the British government, and other partners have a moral obligation to provide a safe pathway for young Afghans to access their fundamental right to education.

Lobbying to create more educational opportunities for Afghans abroad would empower Afghans to take greater control over their own futures and the future of their country. This would reduce reliance on foreigners who, under the pretext of being more formally "educated," often end up making decisions on behalf of their Afghan colleagues. It is imperative for the Afghan diaspora and Afghans within the country to advocate for the reopening and expansion of educational programs

⁴⁵ Chevening in Afghanistan, <https://www.chevening.org/scholarship/afghanistan/>.

⁴⁶ Mariam Amini, "UK Reopens Key Scholarship for Afghan Students After Months of Pressure," Hyphen, 15 November 2024, <https://hyphenonline.com/2024/11/15/chevening-scholarship-afghanistan-uk-reopens-scheme/>.

⁴⁷ Scottish Government, "Afghan Medical Students Arrive Safely in Scotland," 21 August 2024, <https://www.gov.scot/news/afghan-medical-students-arrive-safely-in-scotland>.

⁴⁸ Bard Institute for International Liberal Education, "Supporting Displaced and Refugee Students on Campus," <https://iile.bard.edu/afghanistan>.

for Afghan students. These programs would provide significant benefits not only to Afghans abroad but also to those remaining in Afghanistan, fostering a more self-reliant and resilient Afghan society.

Recommendation 4: Expand online education platforms to better suit the needs of Afghan girls.

Larger platforms that provide free education worldwide, such as [Khan Academy](#),⁴⁹ Duolingo, and others should expand their outreach and accessibility to Afghan girls. Given their reliability and vast reach, platforms like Khan Academy can extend their educational resources to girls in Afghanistan. Programs focusing on subjects like English and mathematics could help these girls secure scholarships for admission to schools and colleges abroad.

From my own experience, I attended school as a refugee in Pakistan and later studied in Kandahar. I primarily learned English online, as English language courses such as TOEFL-iBT and IELTS can cost up to \$350–700 per course in Afghanistan, which is unaffordable for most families. Instead, I turned to free resources like YouTube videos and the BBC 6 Minute English Podcast, which I could access on my iPhone using a 2G internet connection. That was my first introduction to listening and speaking English when I was 11 years old.

The internet and access to technological equipment can greatly improve educational opportunities for Afghan girls. It can provide them with the tools to learn and succeed despite the challenges they face. In addition, larger platforms such as Khan Academy in collaboration with other platforms such as [OpenAI-ChatGPT](#)⁵⁰ and other similar advanced artificial intelligence (AI) platforms could harness the potential of Afghan educators and innovate ways to expand its outreach and develop programs structured for Afghan girls and boys with limited access to technology and the internet.

Recommendation 5: Harness technology to help Afghan girls in the country and in the diaspora.

Starlink, operated by SpaceX is one example of a company that provides internet access and broadband to remote and areas of conflict around the world. It could be a vital resource for Afghans to access online education amid the crisis and school closures. Starlink has already provided internet access to Ukrainians and is believed to have assisted Iranians in their resistance against the authoritarian regime, as well as in many other remote and conflict zones. If this constellation of satellites were extended to Afghanistan, [it would greatly aid girls struggling to access online education](#).⁵¹ An increase in online admissions to universities, such as University of the People, has

⁴⁹ Kahn Academy, <https://www.khanacademy.org>.

⁵⁰ ChatGPT, <https://openai.com/index/chatgpt/>.

⁵¹ Mark R. Whittington, “It’s Time for Elon Musk’s Starlink to Save the Women of Afghanistan,” *The Hill*, 29 January 2023, <https://thehill.com/opinion/technology/3833597-its-time-for-elon-musks-starlink-to-save-the-women-of-afghanistan>.

been introduced in Afghanistan. However, we must ensure that technologies like Starlink can address the gaps in stable internet access. Although the Taliban may issue new edicts and decrees to limit access to Starlink, such measures would require extensive planning and would not be implemented overnight. With Starlink technology, SpaceX can help Afghan girls access the internet and continue their education.

Recommendation 6: Unlock frozen assets of Da Afghanistan Bank (Afghan Central Bank).

The frozen assets of the Central Bank of Afghanistan (Da Afghanistan Bank, or DAB), amounting to \$7 billion, are currently held at the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) in Switzerland. This followed the Biden administration's issuance of [Executive Order 14064](#)⁵² in February 2022, which blocked these reserves and consolidated them into a single account. In September 2022, the [Fund for the Afghan People](#)⁵³ was established with the mandate to disburse half of the \$7 billion to support macroeconomic stability. However, the DAB has yet to demonstrate its independence from the Taliban, with stringent Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) measures in place to qualify for access to these frozen assets. The DAB has failed to meet the necessary standards.

The \$7 billion held in U.S. bank accounts was a significant factor in maintaining macroeconomic stability in Afghanistan. Since the Biden administration froze the assets, the country has faced an intensified banking liquidity crisis. However, these frozen funds were not the sole factor supporting the economy. The major economic shock arose from the [abrupt pull-out of nearly \\$8 billion](#)⁵⁴ in civilian and security-related international aid following the Taliban's takeover. Despite this, the funds could still play a crucial role in [stabilizing prices in a country severely affected by both inflation and deflation](#).⁵⁵

The DAB is currently led by senior Taliban officials, including individuals under U.S., EU, and UN counterterrorism sanctions. Moreover, the DAB lacks the necessary AML and CFT controls, as well as independence from political interference—conditions set by the United States and its partners for accessing the frozen funds.

⁵² Exec. Order No. 14064 of February 11, 2022 (87 FR 8391), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/02/15/2022-03346/protecting-certain-property-of-da-afghanistan-bank-for-the-benefit-of-the-people-of-afghanistan>.

⁵³ Fund for the Afghan People, <https://afghanfund.ch>.

⁵⁴ William Byrd, "U.S. to Move Afghanistan's Frozen Central Bank Reserves to New Swiss Fund," United States Institute of Peace, 28 September 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/09/us-move-afghanistans-frozen-central-bank-reserves-new-swiss-fund>.

⁵⁵ Catherine Cartier, "A Year on, Billions in Afghan Assets Linger in Switzerland," The Diplomat, 21 October, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/10/a-year-on-billions-in-afghan-assets-linger-in-switzerland>.

During a [November 2024 meeting](#)⁵⁶ with the advisory board of The Afghan Fund, Dr. Anwar Ahady, one of the advisors, shared updates about the \$3.5 billion held in the Swiss bank account. This amount has generated more than \$400 million in interest, which also remains in the “offshore account.” Dr. Ahady emphasized that the funds are intended for the Afghan people and will benefit them directly. Suggestions to allocate the money toward peacebuilding or other humanitarian causes were dismissed, as the Fund’s primary objective is to stabilize Afghanistan’s economy and help create a more “functional economic system” and help with the liquidity crisis of Afghanistan.

The Biden administration reiterated that until the necessary AML/CFT measures are implemented and the government demonstrates normal governance practices, the funds will remain frozen in Switzerland. When asked about potential changes under a Trump administration starting in January 2025, Dr. Ahady speculated that Trump’s government might pursue greater diplomatic engagement with the Taliban, possibly paving the way for their recognition; however, this remains uncertain.⁵⁷

Under the Biden administration, Afghanistan received diminished attention, partly due to the war in eastern Europe that began in 2022 and subsequent conflicts in the Middle East. Additionally, there was a general apathy from the Biden administration toward Afghanistan and its people. With a Trump 2.0 administration the focus on Afghanistan may shift, presenting both opportunities and challenges for addressing the ongoing crises.

Foreign investors currently remain hesitant to engage in Afghanistan, viewing the situation as too risky. The Taliban have shown little interest in accessing the Afghan Fund, making minimal progress toward meeting the conditions outlined by the Biden administration. Meanwhile, human rights—particularly those of women and minorities—continue to decline under Taliban rule, with no signs of improvement. This underscores the Taliban’s blatant disregard for the fundamental rights of these vital segments of Afghan society.

Recommendation 7: Assist the Afghan diaspora and enhance their role in helping Afghanistan and engaging international stakeholders.

Although the first Afghan immigrants arrived in the United States in the [early 1860s](#),⁵⁸ the major Afghan migration to the U.S. occurred after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent

⁵⁶ Fund for the Afghan People, https://www.afghanfund.ch/files/2024-11-25_press-statement-october-16-2024.pdf.

⁵⁷ Transcript of interview available on file with author.

⁵⁸ Aya H. Mohamed, “Understanding the Afghan Diaspora: Exploring the Factors Driving Migration and the Impact of Migration Policies on Recent Afghan Evacuees Resettling in the United States,” (master’s diss., City University of New York (CUNY), June 2023), https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6494&context=gc_etds.

U.S. invasion. If there is any diaspora closely resembling the Afghan diaspora overseas, it is the Kurdish diaspora. Although the Kurdish homeland is spread across four countries—Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq—Afghanistan, despite being a single recognized country, presents challenges for its diaspora similar to those faced by Kurds, especially under the current Taliban regime. The ethnic diversity among Afghans, including Tajiks, Pashtuns, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, makes the situation somewhat comparable to the Kurds who are dispersed across multiple countries and into the diaspora in Europe and the United States.

The Afghan diaspora in the United States and Europe, who have access to education and opportunities, can draw valuable lessons from the success stories of the Kurdish diaspora. They must find ways to become more organized, unify their demands, and engage more effectively to advocate for both their needs as a diaspora and the needs of their compatriots left behind in Afghanistan. Similar to the Kurdish diaspora, which has made significant progress despite still yearning for a state, the Afghan diaspora can leverage its experiences to drive meaningful change.

Recommendation 7.1: Draw on Lessons from the Kurdish Diaspora.

Kurdish diaspora engagement extends beyond interactions among themselves and with other diasporas in Europe. They have established [community centers, aid distribution centers, schools, and advocacy organizations](#)⁵⁹ in their host countries that keep the Kurdish issue at the forefront of their priorities. For example, the [Kurdish Red Crescent](#),⁶⁰ despite its ties to the diaspora, collects remittances and distributes aid to Kurds affected by disasters in their homelands. Other organizations focus on direct advocacy for acknowledging the plight of Kurds and lobbying for the creation of a homeland where all Kurds, despite linguistic, religious, and ethnic differences, could belong. Advocacy centers also document and highlight the atrocities and suppression faced by Kurds in countries such as Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

Notably, the [Kurdistan National Congress \(KNK\)](#),⁶¹ a multinational platform of Kurdish groups, emerged from the diaspora to raise awareness of Kurdish rights in their host countries. By pressuring European governments to recognize the plight of the Kurds and to alter their policies toward the Middle Eastern regimes responsible for their oppression, the KNK lobbies for a unified Kurdish cause.

The Afghan diaspora can draw valuable lessons from the Kurds and establish targeted advocacy groups to lobby for the rights of Afghans both within the diaspora and those left behind. They

⁵⁹ Veysi Dag, “The Growing Political Role of Prominent Individuals in the Kurdish Diaspora in Europe,” *The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*, January 2022, <https://jstribune.com/dag-growing-political-role-of-kurdish-diaspora>.

⁶⁰ Kurdish Red Crescent, <https://hskurd.org/en>.

⁶¹ Kurdistan National Congress, <https://www.peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/category/kurdish-national-congress/>.

should advocate for accountability for human rights violations committed by the Taliban and work to increase international pressure on countries not to recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. The diaspora must present a unified and organized voice to ensure international stakeholders listen, take action, and refrain from recognizing the Taliban, as they are extremists who are merely motivated by dangerous self-interest, twist religion, and otherwise apply draconian doctrine to suit their purposes and are unlikely to abandon their hardline policies. It is crucial for the diaspora to coordinate their approach, communicate clearly, and focus on documenting the Taliban's crimes and violations of international humanitarian law.

Additionally, the Afghan diaspora should consider developing initiatives similar to the Kurdish Red Crescent. These projects could involve sending remittances to alleviate the economic crisis in Afghanistan and advocating for the protection and welfare of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan, who are living under extreme conditions.

Recommendation 8: Find ways for the Afghan Diaspora to organize and advocate.

Recommendation 8.1: Advocate for Effective Aid Distribution.

The Afghan diaspora has a critical role in ensuring that international aid reaches its intended recipients. This includes lobbying governments and NGOs to reverse the Taliban's policies that exclude women from working or accessing aid. It is essential to advocate for the inclusion of women workers in humanitarian efforts to address the unique needs of Afghan women. Furthermore, the diaspora must push international organizations contributing aid to Afghanistan to ensure transparency and accountability. Aid must be contingent on its proper use for those in need. Given the Taliban's fragmented governance structure and lack of coordination, diaspora advocacy is essential to prevent aid from indirectly benefiting the Taliban regime and to ensure it serves its intended purpose of serving the Afghan people.

Recommendation 8.2: Ensure Proper Use of Afghan Future Fund Reserves.

The management of the Afghan Future Fund reserves is another area where the diaspora must engage. These reserves should only be deposited into Da Afghanistan Bank when it demonstrates

Establish Channels of Engagement Across Regions

One of the persistent complaints heard in Washington, particularly among U.S. government officials and other stakeholders, is that Afghan diaspora groups and political leaders are not well-organized. This lack of organization hinders their ability to effectively engage and lobby international actors, unlike what other diasporas have been able to achieve. Thus, the Afghan diaspora must focus on establishing stronger channels of engagement, not only within North America but also with counterparts in Europe and Asia, including Central Asia. Enhanced collaboration can be achieved through cultural exchange programs and platforms for dialogue. By fostering a cohesive and unified voice, diaspora communities in Europe, South Asia, and the United States can more effectively advocate for immigration reforms in host countries and raise awareness about the plight of displaced and stateless Afghans.

independence from the Taliban. The funds must be used solely to address Afghanistan’s economic crisis and comply with international AML/CFT standards. Because these standards are unlikely to be met under Taliban leadership, the diaspora must work closely with stakeholders and governments to ensure that the funds are handled responsibly and reach their intended recipients without benefiting the Taliban.

Recommendation 8.3: Advocate for Refugee Rights in Neighboring Countries.

The Afghan diaspora must also take a proactive approach to defending the rights of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran. This involves developing strategies to advocate for these refugees through international refugee organizations and the United Nations. Violations of refugee rights, such as the [killing of 300 Afghan refugees by Iranian border police](#),⁶² must be addressed to prevent further tragedies. Similarly, Pakistan’s illegal deportation of Afghan refugees must be condemned and prevented in the future. The diaspora must mobilize resources and exert pressure on international organizations to take these issues more seriously, ensuring that Afghan refugees in neighboring countries are protected and supported.



Secretary-General António Guterres (right) visits Shafi Alif (centre) and his spouse Rohina Sofizada (left) at their residence in Corona, New York, ahead of World Refugee Day (20 June).

UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Recommendation 8.4: Promote Educational Opportunities for Vulnerable Afghans.

Finally, the Afghan diaspora should promote educational opportunities for vulnerable Afghans, particularly those in Pakistan. By engaging host governments and international organizations, they can create pathways to education that improve prospects for displaced Afghans. Through these coordinated efforts, the Afghan diaspora can amplify its voice, address the urgent issues facing Afghans worldwide, and contribute meaningfully to Afghanistan’s stability and recovery.

Conclusion

Inquiries are needed (with hearings in the U.S. Congress and UN Security Council debates informed by investigations) and should seek answers to key questions surrounding the distribution of aid to Afghanistan, particularly given the immense need for humanitarian assistance following the

⁶² UN News, “World News in Brief: UNAMA Concern Over Migrant Deaths, ‘War Tactics’ in the West Bank, UN Political Chief Underscores Support for Somalia,” 18 October 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/10/1155896>.

country's economic collapse after the withdrawal of international troops. From a legal perspective, what is the responsibility of the international community to alleviate the ongoing economic and humanitarian crises while ensuring that aid reaches its intended recipients? Moreover, how can stakeholders use their leverage to pressure the Taliban into allowing women and children equal access to this aid? In December 2024, the UN Security Council [Resolution 2664](#)⁶³ was [renewed indefinitely](#),⁶⁴ marking a groundbreaking step forward in alleviating the suffering of people in need. This resolution establishes a humanitarian carve-out to the asset freeze measures imposed by the [UN sanctions regimes](#)⁶⁵ by extending its application to the 1267/1989/2253 [Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant \(ISIL/Da'esh\)](#)⁶⁶ sanctions regime (1267 regime). The adoption of Resolution 2664 also includes the addition of GLs at the national level, providing a permanent mechanism to facilitate humanitarian aid in sanctioned jurisdictions. However, without adequate oversight by individual countries to monitor aid delivery and ensure it reaches its intended recipients, the effectiveness of these measures remains uncertain. Robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms are crucial to translating the promise of this resolution into tangible benefits for those in need.

The collateral damage endured by the Afghan people—those still within the country and those forced to flee as refugees—represents a shared responsibility of international stakeholders. These individuals deserve and should have the right to protection, support, and assistance, and have their basic needs met. The 1949 Geneva Conventions make it clear that post-conflict recovery involves more than rebuilding infrastructure that was damaged during war and/or invasion. It also entails addressing the harm suffered by those who survive—as collateral damage, they are deeply affected by destruction and invasion.

The [UN Security Council Resolution 2615](#),⁶⁷ adopted unanimously in 2021 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, affirms that “humanitarian assistance and other activities supporting basic human needs in Afghanistan do not violate provisions in Resolution 2255 (2015) concerning individuals and entities associated with the Taliban.” However, the fundamental question remains: what are the legal obligations of international stakeholders—governments, officials, agencies, and

⁶³ UN Security Council, S/RES/2664, 9 December 2022.

⁶⁴ Security Council Report, “Vote on a Draft Resolution Extending the Application of Resolution 2664 to the ISIL and Al-Qaida Sanctions Regime,” 5 December 2024, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2024/12/vote-on-a-draft-resolution-extending-the-application-of-resolution-2664-to-the-isil-and-al-qaida-sanctions-regime.php>.

⁶⁵ Security Council Report, “Sanctions,” <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/sanctions/>.

⁶⁶ Security Council Report, “Counter-terrorism,” <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/counter-terrorism/>.

⁶⁷ United Nations, “Security Council Unanimously Adopts Resolution 2615 (2021), Enabling Provision of Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan as Country Faces Economic Crisis,” 22 December 2021, <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14750.doc.htm>.

organizations—toward this “collateral damage”? This collateral damage includes but is not limited to the Afghan people living in legal limbo outside their country as well as those inside Afghanistan suffering under Taliban restrictions, a collapsing economy, soaring unemployment, and the compounded effects of natural disasters.