



**DIALOGUE
HUB** FOR
COMMON
GROUND



Conference Paper

From Awareness to Accountability: No Dialogue Without Justice

International Women's Day Event – Oslo, Norway

March 7, 2026

Background

The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 marked a severe and unprecedented rollback of human rights, particularly affecting women, girls, and marginalized communities. Since then, Afghanistan has experienced systematic dismantling of legal, political, and social protections that were established over the past two decades.

Following their takeover, the Taliban formed an all-male de facto administration, excluding women entirely from decision-making structures. This exclusion reflects a broader pattern of institutionalized discrimination that defines the current governance system.

The Taliban subsequently suspended the 2004 Constitution and dissolved key democratic and oversight institutions, including the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), the parliament, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. These actions effectively removed accountability mechanisms and eliminated formal avenues for citizen participation.

In addition, the legal framework of the country has been significantly weakened. Critical laws related to media freedom, political participation, and civil liberties have either been suspended or rendered ineffective. Independent legal institutions, including the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association, have also been dismantled, severely restricting access to justice.

Current Human Rights Situation

Since 2021, the Taliban have issued a large number of decrees and directives that regulate daily life. Many of these measures are vague, arbitrary, and enforced without transparency. Women and girls have been disproportionately affected.

Restrictions include:

- Bans on secondary and higher education for girls
- Severe limitations on women's employment
- Restrictions on freedom of movement without a male guardian
- Exclusion from public and political life

These policies amount to systematic gender discrimination and have been widely described by experts and activists as gender persecution and, increasingly, as gender apartheid.

Women from ethnic and religious minority groups face compounded discrimination, experiencing both gender-based and identity-based exclusion.

Conference Overview

On March 7, 2026, Dialogue Hub for Common Ground and the Afghanistan Women’s Justice Movement (AWJM), organized a high-level conference in Oslo to mark International Women’s Day.

The conference brought together human rights defenders, legal experts, civil society representatives, and members of the Afghan diaspora. The central theme, “From Awareness to Accountability,” focused on advancing the global response from documenting violations toward ensuring justice and accountability.



Group Photo.

Key Discussions

1. The Cost of Engagement Without Conditions

Participants raised concerns regarding the current approach of the international community in engaging with the Taliban. It was emphasized that engagement without clear and measurable human rights conditions has failed to produce meaningful improvements.

Key concerns included:

- Continued exclusion of women from international dialogues
- Lack of tangible progress on human rights
- Increasing normalization of restrictive policies

Speakers stressed that the Taliban should not be treated as legitimate representatives of the Afghan people without accountability and demonstrated commitment to human rights.



1st Panel: From Awareness to Accountability



2nd Panel: No Dialogue without Justice

2. From Documentation to Accountability

A central focus of the conference was the need to move beyond documenting human rights violations toward ensuring accountability.

Participants emphasized that documentation efforts must be strengthened and aligned with international legal standards so that collected information can be used as evidence in legal processes.

The following progression was highlighted: Documentation → Evidence → Legal Action → Accountability

3. Legal Pathways for Justice

Several legal mechanisms were identified as viable pathways for pursuing accountability:

- International Criminal Court (ICC)
- International Court of Justice (ICJ)

- United Nations investigative and evidence preservation mechanisms
- Universal jurisdiction in national courts

These mechanisms provide opportunities to hold perpetrators accountable, even in the absence of domestic judicial systems.

4. Recognition of Gender Apartheid

Participants highlighted the importance of recognizing gender apartheid as a distinct category under international law. Such recognition would strengthen global efforts to address systematic and institutionalized discrimination against women.

5. The Need for Concrete Consequences

The conference emphasized that engagement with the Taliban must be accompanied by concrete political, diplomatic, and economic consequences. Without such measures, advocacy risks remaining symbolic.

Proposed measures included:

- Conditional international assistance
- Targeted sanctions
- Diplomatic pressure linked to human rights benchmarks

6. Role of Afghan Women and Civil Society

Afghan women, both inside the country and in the diaspora, continue to play a central role in advocating for rights and accountability. Despite severe restrictions, women inside Afghanistan continue to resist and organize.

Participants emphasized that Afghan women's voices must remain central to any discussions about the future of the country.

Key Recommendations

1. Condition all international engagement with the Taliban on measurable human rights progress
2. Ensure full inclusion of women in all political and diplomatic processes
3. Strengthen support for international accountability mechanisms
4. Recognize gender apartheid under international law frameworks
5. Support Afghan civil society organizations and human rights defenders
6. Improve documentation systems to meet legal evidence standards



Statement by Bjorn Staurset Jahnsen, Special Envoy Afghanistan, Department of Regional Affairs

Conclusion

The conference highlighted a critical shift in the global approach to Afghanistan—from awareness to accountability. While documentation of violations remains essential, it is no longer sufficient.

Ensuring justice requires coordinated international action, legal accountability, and sustained pressure. Afghan women have clearly articulated their demands. The responsibility now lies with the international community to respond with concrete and meaningful action.

Without accountability, justice cannot be achieved. Without justice, sustainable peace remains out of reach.



Prepared by: Dialogue hub for Common Ground & AWJM