



## Policy paper

# Afghan Women Deserve Solidarity, Protection, and Action, Not Abandonment

## Building a Unified Strategy for Media Freedom, Women's Rights, and Democratic Agency in Afghanistan

Based on a High-Level Dialogue Organized by Women Justice Movement, Dialogue Hub for Common Ground, and the International Network in Support of Afghanistan Women's Rights

Date of Event: 18 April 2026

### AFGHAN WOMEN DESERVE SOLIDARITY, PROTECTION, AND ACTION, NOT ABANDONMENT

SATURDAY, 18 APRIL 2026 | 17:00 PM (EUROPE TIME) | 20:00 PM (PAKISTAN TIME)  
19:30 PM (AFGHANISTAN TIME) | 11:00 AM WASHINGTON DC



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Executive Summary:

This policy synthesis is the outcome of a structured multi-stage consultation process initiated by the Dialogue Hub for Common Ground. As part of this process, the Dialogue Hub conducted focused engagements inside Afghanistan with women, minority groups, and other marginalized communities to document lived experiences under the current restrictions and to ensure that local perspectives directly inform international analysis.

Following these consultations, and in response to the urgent need for coordinated and expert-level reflection, the Dialogue Hub convened a high-level virtual webinar bringing together Afghan political analysts, diplomats, civil society leaders, media actors, and human rights experts. The purpose of this dialogue was to collectively identify strategic pathways for action and to move beyond fragmented interventions toward a coherent and coordinated framework.

The discussions emphasized that Afghanistan's crisis is not only political but structural, affecting governance, civic space, media freedom, gender equality, and minority rights simultaneously. The outcome of these deliberations is a set of converging recommendations aimed at strengthening Afghan-led agency while redefining international engagement in a more accountable and measurable way.

This document reflects a synthesis of expert consensus emerging from these consultations and does not represent the position of a single institution.

## **1. Introduction**

This policy paper is based on a high-level international dialogue that brought together Afghan political analysts, diplomats, civil society leaders, and human rights advocates to discuss pathways for advancing women's rights, media freedom, and democratic agency in Afghanistan.

Since August 2021, Afghanistan has experienced a systematic collapse of civic space, including severe restrictions on women's rights, freedom of expression, and independent media. Despite sustained international attention, current approaches have not produced meaningful structural change.

The discussion emphasized the need to move beyond fragmented interventions toward a coordinated, multi-dimensional strategy combining international engagement and Afghan-led agency.

## **2. Key Challenges Identified**

Limited effectiveness of international pressure

Sanctions and diplomatic pressure have had limited impact on Taliban policies, particularly on gender restrictions. The current governance structure remains ideologically driven, reducing responsiveness to conventional international leverage.

Fragmentation of Afghan advocacy

Afghan political, civil society, and resistance groups remain fragmented. The absence of a unified narrative weakens international advocacy and reduces policy influence.

### **Weak diplomatic engagement**

Despite the existence of trained Afghan diplomats, only a limited portion are actively engaged in human rights and women's rights advocacy. Diplomatic capacity remains underutilized and uncoordinated.

Decline of media freedom and visibility

Independent media has been severely restricted or forced into exile. Journalism has shifted from public accountability to constrained narratives under censorship conditions. Women and other marginalized groups are increasingly absent from public discourse.

### **Funding instability and dependency**

Reductions in international funding have disproportionately affected women-led media and human rights organizations, weakening documentation of abuses and accountability mechanisms.

Overreliance on external solutions

Excessive dependence on Western policy frameworks has limited strategic diversification and engagement with regional and Islamic institutions as well as internal Afghan agency.

### **3. Key Opportunities**

There is growing international recognition of the concept of gender apartheid as a framework for analysis and accountability. Engagement from Islamic institutions, including initiatives linked to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, is increasing. Afghan-led coordination platforms and policy roadmaps are emerging and demonstrate significant convergence among democratic actors. Despite repression, Afghan

journalists and civil society actors continue to show resilience and sustained engagement.

## **4. Strategic Recommendations**

### **4.1 Build a unified Afghan coalition and narrative**

A coordinated platform should be established linking political groups, women's movements, civil society organizations, resistance networks, and academic communities. Existing roadmaps should be consolidated into a single coherent national framework for democratic transition and rights protection.

### **4.2 Strengthen Afghan-led diplomacy**

Afghan diplomatic missions should be reactivated as platforms for human rights advocacy. Engagement should focus on policymakers and international institutions rather than symbolic representation alone. Coordinated diplomatic task forces should be established in key global hubs.

### **4.3 Engage the Islamic world strategically**

Partnerships with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Islamic scholarly institutions should be strengthened. Islamic arguments supporting women's education and gender equality should be amplified to counter monopoly narratives on religion and governance.

### **4.4 Reform international engagement strategies**

International engagement should shift from generalized pressure to targeted and measurable benchmarks. Accountability frameworks should be directly linked to human rights compliance and women's rights indicators.

### **4.5 Protect and strengthen media freedom**

Support should be directed toward transnational Afghan media ecosystems. This includes long-term flexible funding, protection mechanisms for journalists, and strengthened digital security infrastructure. Media should be recognized as a core pillar of accountability and societal resilience.

#### **4.6 Invest in internal agency and civic mobilization**

Grassroots networks inside Afghanistan should be strengthened, alongside improved coordination between internal and external actors. Secure channels for documentation and reporting must be expanded, with recognition of internal agency as essential for sustainable change.

#### **4.7 Institutionalize long-term coordination mechanisms**

Existing Afghan roadmap initiatives should be supported and expanded. Cross-group coordination platforms should be institutionalized to ensure sustained collaboration among democratic actors.

#### **4.8 Gender apartheid legal and accountability pathway**

International recognition of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity should be actively supported. An international legal working group should be established to coordinate documentation and legal strategies. Evidence should be systematically prepared for engagement with international judicial mechanisms including the International Criminal Court and United Nations Special Procedures.

#### **4.9 Conditional engagement framework**

Clear minimum benchmarks should guide any international engagement with de facto authorities. These benchmarks should include access to education for women and girls, freedom of movement, and restoration of independent media space. Engagement and assistance should be aligned with measurable human rights indicators.

#### **4.10 Protected funding mechanism for civil society and media**

An Afghanistan Civic Protection Fund should be established with a multi-donor structure and long-term funding horizon. The fund should provide direct support to women-led organizations and exiled media, alongside emergency rapid response capacity for at-risk journalists and activists.

#### **4.11 Afghan diaspora institutional role**

The Afghan diaspora should be recognized as a formal policy and advocacy actor. An Afghan Global Policy Network should be established to coordinate research, diplomacy, and international media engagement. Secure coordination mechanisms should strengthen collaboration between diaspora experts and actors inside Afghanistan.

### **5. Cross-Cutting Principles**

All interventions must be guided by Afghan ownership and leadership, gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches, coordination rather than fragmentation, long-term sustainability over short-term interventions, and protection of civic space and freedom of expression.

### **6. Conclusion**

The dialogue confirms that Afghanistan's crisis is structural and multidimensional, affecting governance, media, diplomacy, and civil society simultaneously. While international engagement remains essential, sustainable change requires a combined strategy of Afghan-led agency, unified coordination, and strategic international partnership.

The foundations for such cooperation already exist. The immediate priority is to transform fragmented initiatives into a coherent, unified, and actionable framework capable of delivering measurable impact.

### **Final Message**

Afghan women and civil society do not need symbolic solidarity alone. They require coordinated protection, sustained support, and actionable international commitment embedded in practical and accountable frameworks.

