

The Dorothy Schneider United Nations Essay Contest 2023

The Challenges Faced by the Women of Afghanistan: Is United Nations Doing Enough?

Introduction

In 1945, after the war had ended in Europe, representatives from 50 countries came together to create United Nations. As one of the UN's earliest members, Afghanistan has contributed to the work of the world body through its diverse and unique culture. The 76-year partnership has resulted not only in rich cultural exchanges, but also efforts and achievements in the areas of human rights and women's empowerment. However, the situation for Afghan women still remains perilous. This essay explores the challenges faced by the women of Afghanistan and evaluates whether the UN is doing enough to address them.

Challenges faced by Afghan women

Although Article 7 of the Afghanistan Constitution says that the state should observe the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the country is still not considered to be a safe place to live in as a woman. According to the research conducted by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, nine out of ten Afghan women experience at least one form of domestic violence in their lifetime. It can take various forms, such as domestic abuse, forced marriage, and honor killings.

Gender discrimination doesn't end after crossing the door threshold. Decades of war have left Afghanistan with hundreds of thousands of widows. Millions of Afghan women entered the workforce in the past two decades, but that progress is being rapidly erased under the new Taliban regime. Growing restrictions on their clothing, speaking practices and travel options are making it impossible for them to continue in their jobs. Many Afghan women don't just want to work; they need to as the sole breadwinners in their families.

Other challenges are limited access to education, lack of professional healthcare and political representation. Girls are restricted to attend school or access healthcare, especially in rural areas, where maternal mortality rate is high. When it comes to the politics, while Afghan women have made strides in political representation, they remain underrepresented in decision-making positions. They face barriers to participating in governance and peace negotiations.

The UN's Role in Afghanistan

The United Nations has made significant efforts to promote equality, freedom, and justice for Afghan women. They advocate for female citizens, who mostly do not have the right to speak and do not hold important political positions, and they are the ones who know the reality best. Beside peace negotiations, the UN is in talks with the Afghan government to make legal changes, allowing not only better treatment of women, but also tougher penalties for violence against them.

One of the most important organizations brought to life by UN is UNAMA, which stands for UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. It's meant to promote gender equality, including increasing women's role in public life and Afghan society. An example of their activities is issuing reports on non-compliance with women's rights, or raising awareness about misinterpretations regarding women's role in Islam and law of Afghanistan.

An equally important initiative is UN Women, dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. According to their agenda, "UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws [...] needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide". Their goal is to raise the standard of education and make it easier for girls to get into schools.

Is the UN Doing Enough?

In my opinion, while the UN has made significant efforts to address the challenges faced by Afghan women, there is still room for improvement. In general, the UN should put more pressure on countries that do not respect women's rights. Conferences held in such places, or about such places, will raise the awareness not so much of the citizens of Afghanistan, but of the whole world. This will have an avalanche effect — some brands may withdraw from cooperation with the country, the level of tourism will drop, and thus the country will have to take action on women's rights to rebuild its economy.

Another idea is to implement more talks to religious and political leaders to present not only the importance of women's role in society, but also to present the negative effects of

their exclusion on the situation of the whole country. In the meantime, the United Nations should also take a better look at the security problem, especially in places where there is open warfare. This is not just about Afghan citizens, but also about official delegates doing their duty in crisis areas.

Conclusion

Although the United Nations has played a crucial role in advancing gender equality and women's rights in Afghanistan, the problem of domestic violence against women or problems with education or work are still not completely resolved. I think we all hope that through peaceful talks and raising awareness there will finally be security and equality in Afghan society.

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