



WORDS — Women Organization for Rights, Dignity and Speech

Event Report

Afghanistan 2026: Women Under Siege

افغانستان ۲۰۲۶؛ زنان در محاصره

Based on the Report of the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) and UNAMA — March 2026

Format	X Space (Twitter Space) — Live Panel Discussion
Date	Sunday, April 20, 2026
Time	10:30 AM – 12:00 PM (Canada – Eastern Time) 4:30–6:00 PM (Germany) 7:00–8:30 PM (Afghanistan)
Language	Dari / Farsi
Platform	X (Twitter) Space @words-organization

Panellists

Panellist	Role
Freshta Abbasi	Researcher and Human Rights Defender; Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch
Sange Sediqi	Human Rights Activist and member of the Dutch D66 Part
Lina Rozbih	Senior Journalist, Award Wining Writer and Poet with experience in covering Afghanistan for international media
Foruzan Amiri	Journalist and Executive Director at Ravi Zan media

1. Background and Purpose of the Event

On April 20, 2026, the Women Organization for Rights, Dignity and Speech (WORDS) hosted an X Space panel discussion titled Afghanistan 2026: Women Under Siege. The event was anchored in the March 2026 joint report of the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) and UNAMA, which documented the continuing and deepening deterioration of Afghan women's rights under Taliban rule.

The panel brought women from diverse perspectives to examine the crisis from multiple perspectives: legal accountability, lived reality, media coverage, and the path forward. The discussion was conducted in Dari and Persian, and was attended by a diaspora audience spanning Canada, Germany, Iran, and Afghanistan.

The event was moderated by Shogofa Danish, Board Member of WORDS and herself a journalist with experience in Afghan media and women's rights advocacy.

2. Key Themes Discussed

The discussion covered four interconnected themes that emerged across the panellists' contributions:

1. The legal characterisation of the Taliban's treatment of Afghan women, including gender persecution as a crime against humanity under the ICC Statute.
2. The practical enforcement challenges facing international accountability mechanisms, including the ICC and the ICJ.
3. The lived reality of Afghan women inside the country, the physical, psychological, and social dimensions of systematic exclusion.
4. The role of media, international civil society, and the diaspora in advocacy and what meaningful support for Afghan women actually requires.

3. Panellist Contributions

3.1 Freshta Abbasi — Researcher in the Asia division at Human Rights Watch

Freshta Abbasi opened the discussion with a stark framing: in 2026, Afghan women are experiencing the worst documented situation of women anywhere in the world. She noted that UN and international reports are now arriving in rapid succession, each cataloguing deeper layers of restriction on women's public and private lives under Taliban governance.

She drew particular attention to one of the Taliban's most recent legislative acts a law that explicitly exempts family members from criminal liability for violence committed against women within the household. She described this law as a deliberate policy that will further isolate Afghan women from any recourse to justice, trapping them in domestic spaces with no institutional protection.

"Report after report confirms the deteriorating situation of women in Afghanistan, and the recent Taliban principles of criminal procedures adds another layer to these difficulties women face in the country. It removes the last mechanism that could hold perpetrators accountable, even within the home."

On international legal accountability, Abbasi provided a detailed update on the status of gender persecution proceedings at the International Criminal Court (ICC). Gender persecution, the systematic targeting and elimination of a group based on gender is recognised as a crime against humanity. She confirmed that ICC proceedings related to Afghanistan are advancing, and that Taliban leaders who have been identified in ICC processes are reportedly now closely monitoring which national borders they can safely cross without risk of arrest, a sign that the threat of international prosecution is being felt.

She also mentioned another significant multilateral development: Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and Germany have jointly initiated accountability proceedings citing Afghanistan's failure to honour its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Afghanistan acceded to CEDAW in 2003, but today every principle of the convention is being systematically violated. This inter-state action, rare in international law, signals a growing willingness among certain governments to treat the Taliban's treatment of women as a matter of state responsibility rather than purely a domestic issue.

Abbasi also welcomed an initiative launched in October 2025 by UNHCR and the European Union to build criminal case files on Taliban violations against women, describing it as a meaningful and concrete step towards eventual accountability. She called on the international community to ensure that Afghan women's voices are placed at the centre of any accountability process, describing the failure to listen to Afghan women in 2020 as one of the most consequential mistakes of the international community in this crisis.

"The biggest mistake was not listening to Afghan women in 2020. This is now the time when their voices must be heard, not as background, but as the primary source of truth about what is happening."

3.2 Sange Sediqi — Human Rights and Women's Rights Activist

Sange Sediqi built on Abbasi's legal analysis with a focused examination of the practical constraints facing the ICC in its work on Afghanistan. She noted that while the ICC has jurisdiction over gender persecution as a crime against humanity, and while two arrest warrants have been issued in the Afghanistan situation, the court faces a fundamental structural problem: it has limited access to Afghanistan.

Taliban authorities have consistently blocked any form of ICC or international monitoring presence inside the country. The court has sought to work through its existing networks and connections within Afghanistan, but these channels too have been progressively shut down or restricted. The result is that the ICC's evidence-gathering and documentation capacity inside Afghanistan is severely constrained.

"The ICC is working, but it is working in the dark. Every avenue they open, the Taliban close. The court is doing what it can through connections, but the Taliban are methodically restricting even that access."

Sediqi further explained that communications between international legal bodies and Taliban authorities are being conducted through the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but these remain entirely one-directional. Taliban representatives do not respond to the communications they receive from international legal bodies, creating a process that is technically functioning but substantively empty.

She emphasised that this is not a failure of the international legal system itself, but rather a reflection of a regime that has made a calculated decision to remain outside any framework of accountability. The challenges are real, but she stressed that the continued documentation of violations, the building of criminal case files, and the political pressure being applied by states through the CEDAW inter-state mechanism all represent meaningful progress, even if enforcement remains distant.

3.3 Lina Rozbih — Senior Journalist, Poet and Writer

Lina Rozbih brought to the panel the perspective of a journalist who has covered Afghanistan for international media over many years, combined with a writer's sensitivity to what the current moment means beyond the statistics.

She characterised 2026 as qualitatively different from previous years, not simply a continuation of bad conditions, but the consolidation of a systematic, deliberate removal of women from Afghan society in its entirety. She cited the figure that 77% of Afghan women have been removed from work, education, and public life, not through individual acts of discrimination, but through a comprehensive architectural redesign of Afghan society that treats women's participation as inherently illegitimate.

"We can't call it restrictions anymore; this is a systematic erasure. The Taliban are not limiting women, they are removing them from the concept of Afghan society altogether."

She raised a specific and alarming development: Taliban legislation that permits men to use violence against women within the family and simultaneously restricts women from accessing justice services, effectively rendering legal recourse impossible even where violations are acknowledged. The legal infrastructure for women's protection has not merely weakened; it has been inverted.

On the question of media coverage, Rozbih offered a nuanced and honest assessment. She acknowledged that international media have, by and large, done their job, documenting and reporting on the situation of Afghan women. But she identified a structural limitation that is worth understanding clearly: media has the power to cover

and bear witness, but it does not have the power to hold regimes accountable. That is the responsibility of governments, international institutions, and political leadership. The risk of repeating a crisis that has been covered extensively for years is a kind of fatigue both in audiences and in editorial decision-making that means a slow-moving but catastrophic situation struggles to maintain its urgency in global news cycles.

"Media did its job. We covered it. We are still covering it. But media cannot make regimes accountable. That is not what media is for. The question of accountability belongs to governments and international institutions, and they need to answer it."

As a poet and writer, Rozbih was also asked about the significance of the Taliban's November 2025 ban on the sound of women's voices in public including in recitation of the Quran and in song. She reflected on what it means when a woman's voice itself becomes a crime, and on the role of literature and art as forms of resistance that cannot be fully silenced.

3.4 Foruzan Amiri — Journalist and Executive Director of Ravi Zan media

Foruzan Amiri spoke from the most immediate vantage point: direct, ongoing contact with women living inside Afghanistan. Her contribution moved the discussion from legal and political analysis to the human texture of what Afghan women are actually experiencing and doing in 2026.

She described the situation without euphemism, catastrophic. Women in Afghanistan are, in her account, in a daily struggle that combines survival with the maintenance of dignity and identity. But she was equally emphatic on a point that the international discourse sometimes misses: Afghan women are not passive. They are resistant. They are continuing to find ways to be present, connected, and active even under conditions of extreme suppression.

"The situation is catastrophic. But Afghan women are not broken. They are resisting quietly, carefully, persistently. They are still there."

She raised an important and sometimes uncomfortable consideration for advocates and supporters outside Afghanistan: that for women inside the country, personal safety and the safety of family members must come before any form of public activity, even professional activity. This is not a failure of courage, it is a rational and necessary calculation in a context where visibility can have lethal consequences. Amiri urged the international community and diaspora activists to understand and respect this reality, rather than applying external pressure that does not account for the risks faced by women inside.

At the same time, she described the remarkable persistence of informal solidarity networks among Afghan women: in-person private gatherings, online connections maintained with care for anonymity, and community structures that operate under the radar of Taliban surveillance. These networks, she suggested, are not only a form of resistance, they are the infrastructure on which any meaningful future recovery of Afghan women's rights and participation will be built.

4. Key Findings and Conclusions

The following points represent the shared conclusions that emerged across the four panellists' contributions:

- **The worst documented crisis for women globally.** In 2026, Afghanistan represents the most severe and comprehensive suppression of women's rights anywhere in the world, with 77% of women excluded from work, education, and public life.
- **Legal accountability is advancing, but enforcement remains distant.** ICC proceedings on gender persecution are progressing; arrest warrants have been issued; and Taliban leaders are aware of

international legal exposure. However, the ICC has no direct access to Afghanistan, and Taliban authorities do not engage with communications from international legal bodies.

- **CEDAW inter-state proceedings mark a significant shift.** The joint initiative by Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and Germany to hold Afghanistan accountable under CEDAW is rare in international law and represents an important precedent for treating gender-based repression as a matter of state responsibility.
- **Taliban legislation is actively dismantling protection mechanisms.** The new law exempting family violence against women from criminal liability removes even the residual protections that had existed, further isolating women from any recourse.
- **Media coverage has its limits.** Journalists have documented the crisis faithfully, but accountability is the responsibility of political institutions and that responsibility has not been adequately met.
- **Afghan women are resistant, not absent.** Despite extreme suppression, women inside Afghanistan maintain networks of solidarity and connection in-person, online, and anonymously. This resistance is the foundation of any future recovery.
- **Safety must come before advocacy.** International supporters and diaspora activists must respect that women inside Afghanistan must prioritise personal and family safety above all else. External pressure that ignores this reality risks causing harm.

6. About WORDS

Women Organization for Rights, Dignity and Speech (WORDS) is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-religious organisation registered in Canada. WORDS was established to protect, equip, and connect women facing repression so they can participate safely and meaningfully in public and civic life. The organisation works across capacity building, digital safety, human rights documentation, advocacy, and international solidarity, with a particular focus on Afghan women journalists and human rights defenders.

The Afghanistan 2026: Women Under Siege event is part of WORDS' ongoing advocacy programme to ensure that the voices of Afghan women reach international decision-makers and public audiences. WORDS publishes evidence-based reports, organises public events, and engages directly with UN bodies and international partner organisations.

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