

UN CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN: TALIBAN'S LOST OPPORTUNITY FOR INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

by
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In February 2024, the [United Nations](#) convened its second conference on Afghanistan in Doha. According to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the conference covered all the major areas of concern in Afghanistan. He further added that it was also discussed that Afghanistan should not become a safe haven for terrorist activities and in order to become an inclusive state in its true essence, it must have inclusive institutions with representation from all diverse groups within the country. The conference was attended by [25 special envoys](#) from different countries and regions. Representatives from civil society and Afghan women's groups along with representatives of the European Union, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation also attended. However, the de facto government of Afghanistan, the Taliban, refused to be a party to the conference after its demands were not met. The [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Taliban](#) had demanded a meeting with Mr. Guterres as the sole official representative of Afghanistan, saying that only then will participation be beneficial.

Moreover, the Taliban also pointed out that their government in Afghanistan would not be coerced by anyone, pointing towards the previous administrations in Kabul whom they considered puppets of the foreign forces. These pre-conditions were not acceptable to the UN as they would have had to deny other representatives of Afghan society and would also have been tantamount to extending recognition to the regime in Afghanistan which took over Kabul forcefully in 2021. Ever since the Taliban regime has been controlling Kabul, it has been struggling to seek recognition as the sole representative of Afghanistan, but without meeting the demands of the international community. The UN Conference would have been an opportunity that

the regime could have used to negotiate its case for international recognition.

Taliban 2.0

The Taliban regime [took over Kabul](#) in August 2021 after the U.S. and NATO forces started their departure from Afghanistan where they launched their Global War on Terror in 2001 after the deadly terrorist attacks of 9/11 and toppled the then Taliban government in Afghanistan. Initially, it was hoped that this [Taliban regime would be different](#) than their previous regime between 1996 and 2001. Before taking control of Kabul, the new regime had pledged that it would allow girls to go to school and sever its ties with Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. The regime also said that it would [honor](#) human rights, including those of women. However, they have since returned to their previous hardline policies and backtracked from their promises to guarantee certain rights to women and girls. They have [banned schooling for girls](#) beyond sixth grade as girls having education beyond that level does not comply with the regime's interpretation of Islamic law. Furthermore, they have also set a [dress code](#) for women and girls, non-compliance of which would result in arrest and detention. Additionally, they have clearly not been able to cut their ties with Al-Qaeda as its leader [Ayman al-Zawahiri was killed](#) in a U.S. drone attack in Kabul in 2022. The presence of the Al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan is also a violation of the [Doha agreement](#) between the U.S. and the Taliban, which was signed on February 29, 2020.

Taliban's Struggle for Recognition

The Taliban have [expressed their expectation](#) that their authority in Kabul as the new government of Afghanistan should be recognized by the international community. The regime has also expressed that it has taken several steps vis-à-vis international recognition. But at the same time, it has done little to none to depict its willingness to adhere to the conditions set by some regional as well as western states. The international community has urged the regime to form an inclusive government that represents every group, including women, in Afghanistan along with respecting human rights.



The Taliban had also [failed to gain diplomatic recognition](#) except from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates during their previous rule. Given that the Taliban controlled 90 percent of Afghanistan, they had also applied for a seat at the UN in October 1999. This time, the [regime controls](#) all 407 districts across the 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Despite such control, the regime still cannot have claim over the Afghan seat at the UN and get diplomatic recognition. However, China has recently become the [first state](#) to send its ambassador to Afghanistan and to formally accept the Taliban-ruled Afghan ambassador to China without giving formal recognition to the regime in Kabul. Even though Beijing's exchange of ambassadors provided the regime with some political boost, it still has a long way to go to receive its first formal recognition which comes with conditions that the regime is not ready to fulfill. As a result, the people of Afghanistan have to face hardships.

Humanitarian Crisis

Due to targeted sanctions including frozen reserves, Afghanistan under Taliban rule faces a dire [humanitarian crisis](#). It is estimated that two-thirds of Afghanistan's approximately 40 million people need humanitarian assistance to survive. There is also a looming crisis in which 20 million people are experiencing crisis level food insecurity. Besides this, [60 percent](#) of households face hindrance accessing safe water, which gives rise to the threat of cholera and other diseases. At the same time, 8.7 million children need support for their education and 22.1 million people require assistance for their protection. Despite these acute crises, the Taliban are not ready to amend their draconian policies.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding their non-conciliatory behavior, the Taliban still long for diplomatic recognition. Due to their foolhardiness, they missed an opportunity to put their stance on the table at the UN Conference in Doha. However, the regime's non-participation provided other groups, especially Afghan women and activists, a chance to discuss their issues at a multilateral forum. Despite this, the conference failed to achieve its [primary objectives](#) which were

to facilitate dialogue between the global community and the Taliban and to draw a plan for Afghanistan's international engagement. Mr. Guterres, nonetheless, stressed the significance of discussing the outcomes of the conference with the Taliban and stated that there would be a solution to allow for the Taliban's participation in the near future. For that to happen, the Taliban need to show their willingness by fulfilling their promises made before seizing Kabul two and a half years ago.

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