

WFWPI: A Discussion with Madeleine Albright on the Standing of Afghan Women

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August 5, 2020



Madeleine Albright

The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security hosted a Zoom webinar entitled "Standing with Afghan Women: Ensuring Meaningful Inclusion in the Intra-Afghan Peace Talks", which focused on the importance of Afghan women in the anticipated peace talks in Afghanistan.

Viewers were able to explore the delicate nature of these peace talks through the guidance of the Hon. Madeleine K. Albright. Albright served as the 64th U.S. Secretary of State, making her the first woman ever nominated to that post. Prior to that, Albright was the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. She also headed the U.S. Delegation to the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

When asked about the current state of the region, Albright denounced the idea of self-proclaimed experts that consider women's rights to be a marginal concern to the so-called hard issues such as big power politics and the military. In her statement, she drew attention to Afghanistan in the 1990s, where the mistreatment of women under the Taliban was not a side issue, but a symptom of something much larger.

Growing concerns over the price of peace following the progress made since the Taliban have been overthrown are not exaggerated. The Taliban banned girls from school and refused to honor their basic human rights. However, Albright explains how today, over 3 and half million girls are enrolled in schools. Former Secretary of State Albright also explains how women went from being virtually erased, to becoming public officials and entrepreneurs. Given this, many fear that an agreement with the Taliban may threaten any gender progress that has already been made, once again bringing Afghanistan to a standstill.

Albright makes a profound statement in her assertion that "peace cannot be made on the backs of Afghan women." She insists that the best way to ensure this does not happen is for women to fully participate in the peace process. Women need to be involved in every step of the process while also being a party to the peace negotiations, not just an issue to be discussed after the fact. It is imperative that the perspective of women be reflective in any potential agreement.

"In order to honor the sacrifices and investments that have been made over many years, we must prioritize the future role of women in Afghanistan," Albright states. This can only be achieved through their full participation in the peace processes. It is imperative that women obtain a seat at the table.