

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:00:01](#)):

On solutions for addressing the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, I'm Melanne Vermeer, and I direct the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. We come together at a very difficult time for the people of Afghanistan. They're facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, a crisis that has been especially difficult for women, with very severe consequences for the women and girls who are also facing oppression by the Taliban with restrictions on education, their mobility, participation in the workforce, and government decision-making. Ongoing violations of human rights every day and in countless ways. The United Nations reports that nearly 12 million women and girls are in urgent need of critical assistance as the country heads towards near universal poverty. People lack food to stave off starvation. They lack fuel to keep from freezing. The economy and banking sector are on the brink of collapse. And the achievements of the last 20 years in healthcare and education are in grave jeopardy. Moreover, the pandemic and drought have exacerbated the crisis.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:01:25](#)):

The question surrounding humanitarian relief, the economy and the banking system cannot be separated from the political realities. This is a crisis within a crisis: how to relate to the Taliban, how to ease financial restrictions that are in place. Why must women be engaged in the solutions? What is the role of the international community? And so much more. To grapple with these questions, with us are both women leaders on the ground in Afghanistan and many who are now in exile, forced to leave their homeland because of grave threats to their lives. They will share their insights on the critical issues and their recommendations for urgent action. Today we at the Institute are also launching a new project Onward for Afghan women. After the fall in Kabul in August, we with so many others focused on getting Afghan women leaders to safety. Human rights activists all, their lives were in grave jeopardy.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:02:33](#)):

However, as critical as the evacuations have been, there is so much more that needs to be accomplished to support the Afghan women leaders in exile, and to ensure that they can continue their work in support of their fellow Afghans, who remain in the country. They want nothing more than to use their voices, their expertise, and their experience to chart a better future for their countrymen. We will support them by elevating and equipping them with opportunities to continue their vital work through their advocacy and through other means. And in the next few days, you will be able to follow our work in this project on Onward for Afghan Women.org. We are joined today by a thousand participants from around the world on Zoom. We've reached our cap, and hundreds more on Facebook. We want to accommodate as many of your questions as we can today.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:03:38](#)):

Many of you have already submitted questions during the registration. You can also submit questions throughout the discussion using the Q and A feature, uh, in Zoom or commenting on the Facebook live stream. Just give us your name and affiliation. And now to start our conversation, I'm pleased to turn to my colleague, Palwasha Hassan, who is the new senior fellow at the Institute. Palwasha, who has been under serious threat, arrived in the United States in August after the fall of Kabul with our first group of evacuees. She has served as the director of the Afghan Women's Educational Center, a major NGO. She's a tireless advocate for women's participation in public life and peace building, and has had extensive experience serving civil society groups during peace negotiations, including the constitutional lawyer jirga and the Afghan Reconstruction Forum. And she's also founded several influential Afghan

organizations, including of course the Afghan Women's Network. So Palwasha we're so pleased to have you at Georgetown, and we're particularly pleased to have you join us today, please.

Palwasha Hassan ([00:05:06](#)):

Thank you, Ambassador Verveer and good morning, um, to all those who are joining us. I also like to take this opportunity to welcome, um, a group of experts from Afghanistan in the United States, joining us today for, uh, this discussion. Um, coming back to the topic that we are talking about, solutions for addressing the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. I think we are, uh, unfortunately in a very difficult situation, which is today, we are facing a unique dilemma and situation between a humanitarian crisis and worsening human rights on the ground. Unfortunately, the country is experiencing a humanitarian crisis on unprecedented scale and speed. 18.8 million people are facing acute food insecurity. Sadly, the fact and the talk from inside the country points us to humanitarian crisis, uh, that will haunt us for a long time. It is late to avoid humanitarian catastrophe. What is generally needed is risk management, and saving as many lives as possible. All we need is an immediate action to minimize the impact, which threatens the lives of millions in the country.

Palwasha Hassan ([00:06:31](#)):

Unfortunately, there is no perfect solution in any ways. A fund will go through the de facto authority in Kabul, whether it is through Islamabad or elsewhere. Important is to avoid the ways through these indirect channels. Equally important is, um, finding ways to reduce hunger and further crisis. Ideally, maybe a funding to NGOs and especially women groups, and to reach out to larger communities, especially women who are head of household throughout the country. However, this might not be sufficient, looking to the scale of the crisis. We need to be more creative to find better solutions. But how the solution that don't adheres as from the principle of, uh, rights of women on the ground, how we can, uh, the only leverage that right now, women of Afghanistan and the human rights situation have is through certain sanction. We need these price of these sanctions not to be paid by the people, how this could be still imposed and only impact those who are, um, for whom this was imposing the first place, and make sure that women and men in the country are still receiving the support and the much needed humanitarian needs that they have. With that I would stop. And I would like to hear more from our speakers into this event. Thank you.

Amb. Melanne Verveer ([00:08:27](#)):

Thank you so much, Palwasha. I know you'll be working on all of these issues, and we will go now to Rina Amiri, a lifelong champion for equality and peace in Afghanistan and a champion for the rights of Afghan women and girls, especially. She has very recently been appointed the United States Special Envoy for Afghan women girls and for human rights. During the Obama administration, she served as a senior advisor to the US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and as State Department colleagues, we often teamed up in support of the interests of Afghan women and girls. On issues affecting, uh, Afghan women and girls, Rina has over two decades of experience in various conflict settings, uh, as well, both in Afghanistan and globally, with a focus on peace and security. She has served as the United Nations Special Mediation Expert, as a member of the UN country team in Afghanistan during the implementation of the Bond Agreement, and also held senior positions at a number of universities and think tanks, including NYU Center for Global Affairs, where she has led the Afghanistan Regional Policy Initiative.

Amb. Melanne Verveer ([00:09:50](#)):

She's also a founding member of Inclusive Security. 20 years ago, Rina and her family fled Afghanistan as political refugees. And now we have another group of political refugees, uh, in our midst. Rina, welcome. I have so many questions I wanna ask you, I'm gonna put them all in one, uh, and hopefully in a very abbreviated fashion, you can help us understand things as you see them. There is a widespread view held by many that it was the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the way it was done that created the current humanitarian emergency. Tell us how you see that, perhaps what the US is doing to address the crisis, and what more can be done, particularly to ease the financial restrictions, which are a big issue in addressing the crisis. Um, and then the posture as you see it toward the Taliban, and the relationship in terms of both the humanitarian crisis and the other crises that are ongoing in Afghanistan. So Rina, welcome, and good luck in this new position.

Rina Amiri ([00:11:10](#)):

Thank you very much, Melanne and thank you for convening this really important discussion. You've been with Afghan women for decades now and have been such an important champion. So, you know, it's been about, uh, it's less than two weeks since I've been in this position, but I've always, you know, I made a commitment that when I took this position that I would always be honest in my role. And yes, I would start off by saying that the US withdrawal is a factor in the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, that's undeniable in terms of what was set in motion. But I would also really stress that what is being under represented in the press is the role of the Taliban, the military takeover of the Taliban, the individuals that they've appointed to their government, their approach, which has become increasingly, um, targeting women, the human rights community, all of that makes it enormously difficult to work with them as a constructive partner to try to address this humanitarian situation.

Rina Amiri ([00:12:29](#)):

Nonetheless, you know, I have been encouraged. I was also, you know, an activist, calling on the US government and other governments to do more, to address the humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan. And what I've seen in the last 10 days has been encouraging. One, I do see that there are mechanisms to engage the Taliban directly on these issues. Yesterday I was in a meeting with over 60 senior government officials where they were all looking at this issue of how do we address the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, and a way to stave off further disaster. You are aware that general licenses have been provided to enable humanitarian aid. There's also been outreach to the private sector, to banks, which are very risk averse, to reassure them that engaging in wire transfers is not going to, uh, is not going to lead to penalties. Nonetheless, that de-risking behavior is not, and the way that it needs to happen, uh, to enable a financial liquidity to be, uh, expanded to where it needs to be to address the crisis, the banking situation is setting in motion.

Rina Amiri ([00:13:55](#)):

We're not seeing the behavior that we hoped would be enabled through these comfort letters and through these engagements. So there is a question as to what is required at this point. Is there more engagement, is there more clarity and effective communication sort of public, uh, um, I don't wanna call it a campaign, but a communication effort of sorts to reach out to the private sector, to get them to do more as they are enabled by the comfort letters. There's also a question as to what can be done to enable the public sector, particularly the education and health sector, to do more to address the devastating situation on the ground for the population, and to enable the opening of schools for boys and girls, and to push the Taliban to deliver on their commitment, to open schools for everyone, and to do, to address the issue of teacher stipends, but in a way that does not go through the government.

Rina Amiri ([00:15:03](#)):

I mean, we are trying to do something really complex. The situation is as complex as it gets. We have a regime that is consistently showing that the policy that is most robust is cracking down on the rights of women and girls. That is what they have done in the last six months beyond anything else in governance. That's what they're focusing on. Our source of leverage right now is limited. Um, it's, you know, the situation has drastically changed, but you know, where, it's the international community I've seen, whether it's the European member states, um, and the US, there's a keen level of engagement and involvement to try to stave off the humanitarian situation, but at the same time to not legitimize the Taliban, to ensure that they don't siphon off the money that's coming into the country, to ensure that there's leverage to hold them to account, to engender inclusivity and the rights of women and girls, and at the same time to prevent a further suffering of the Afghan population, I will be engaged on these issues.

Rina Amiri ([00:16:20](#)):

My portfolio is women, girls and human rights. And when I look at human rights, I do see the humanitarian situation as a critical element of that. Uh, and what I've been encouraged by is that no one is telling me to stay in my lane. They recognize that I'm going to be involved in all of this work and have, uh, they, even before I reached out, they reached out and have invited me to be a part of these discussions. So looking forward, I hope to be able to come back to you and tell you with, with more specificity out, bearing in mind that I cannot state everything that's taking place, but to give you some level of indication as to where things are going. I also wanna touch on the issue of humanitarian aid and women and girls. Now, prior to taking this position, I was also in discussions with the UN and with the range of humanitarian actors and, where we have, uh, when I, as a, as an activist now in the government, what I'm pushing for is that ensuring that women and girls are in leadership positions, and humanitarian organizations are service providers, and are the recipient of aid going into the country.

Rina Amiri ([00:17:39](#)):

And I can tell you that this is recognized as a necessity also by these humanitarian organizations. I know that the UN in particular UNOCHA has been working very hard negotiating at the provincial level throughout the country to ensure that women and girls are enabled to serve as service providers. And in some places they've been able to make that happen at a partial level, and some places at a full level. Nonetheless, there's an enormous level of work that needs to be done on all of these fronts, to, you know, there's no way of sugarcoating this situation. It is absolutely devastating on every front, on the human rights front, on the humanitarian front, in terms of addressing, uh, the, uh, preventing the collapse of institutions yet without, uh, without further enabling the Taliban, unless they adopt a more positive set of policies in regard to inclusivity and ensuring a stable government, a government that addresses the needs of all Afghans, not just a very narrow set of leaders that are aligned with their ideology.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:19:04](#)):

Thanks, Rina. I know we're gonna come back to many of the themes that you just talked about, and stand by because we'll have many questions from the audience, I'm sure on some of what you've said. But I think I speak for all of us in saying we're glad you're in this position, and we know that you'll make a difference. So we will look forward to continuing to work with you. We're going to go now to Kabul to hear from Mahbouba Seraj, a prominent Afghan women's rights activist and journalist. She's the Executive Director of the Afghan Women Skills Development Center, well known as a strong advocate

for women's rights, women's participation in the peace jirga as well as in the high peace council. She has pushed for women's participation in every way she's been able to, and been the creator and announcer of a radio program for women, and founder of the Organization of Research for Peace and Solidarity, as well as serving as a member of the board of the Afghan Women's Network. Uh, Mahbouba can you give us your, on the ground account of the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis? What do you see as the highest priorities from where you are for interventions, for particularly, uh, on behalf of women and girls, and your recommendations for what the international community should be taking into account now in the assistance that's being provided. Mahbouba?

Mahbouba Seraj ([00:20:47](#)):

This is Mahbouba Seraj, and I am talking from Kabul Afghanistan. Regarding the humanitarian crisis of women in Afghanistan on the ground, the situation here in Afghanistan is pretty dire. It's really bad. And the reason for that is the fact that there is, of course there is no work. There is no money. People don't have jobs, they don't have food to eat. They don't have a warm place to live. And some of them don't even have a roof over their head. Families and people are really desperate. So this is the humanitarian crisis on the ground and the way it is. And, and because of this, we can, we can actually, this humanitarian crisis is something that the women of Afghanistan or the people of Afghanistan, they have to, they have to have this taken care of, but this is not necessarily what is that the women of Afghanistan need.

Mahbouba Seraj ([00:22:01](#)):

This is their number one, their first priority at this point, because as we all know, nobody can think of anything else if they have an empty stomach and their children are hungry and cold, and they don't have a warm place to sleep or even a roof over their head. But at the same time and what, and actually what I really, really want the world to do, which is something that the world is really doing right now, but maybe do it better with a lot more involvement of women on the ground and people, and better planning. And that is to get, to get the help to them as an absolute priority. At the same time, this is what I really wanna ask the international community to do, at the same time on the other side, because as I said, you know, there are women that, you know, in general, what they really want for that I can say, and that's what the women of Afghanistan want.

Mahbouba Seraj ([00:23:03](#)):

And then I've been talking to them about it and any, every single one of them and any one of them. What they're saying is that we don't want the world to forget about us. So that is extremely important. The world should not forget about the women of Afghanistan, please, please. And in any way, shape or form, whether is by getting them food, by getting them sheltered, by getting them warmed, by getting them work, by getting their, their, their NGOs, the ones that they do have at some kind of a program so that they can survive, their schools that the girls can go to, women that should have jobs to go to work, money should start moving around in Afghanistan in a way that women have access to it. So all of this, this is what the women of Afghanistan really want.

Mahbouba Seraj ([00:24:00](#)):

So please, let's not disappoint the people, nor specifically the woman of this country, because if we leave them this time and forget about them this time, and don't plan for them, the way that it's supposed to be, and the way we are supposed to work and to help, they are going to go into us or this country, woman of it, of course, they are going to go into a situation that will have no return

whatsoever. And not only in Afghanistan, but to the whole of this area, and all of our neighboring countries and every single one of them are going to be affected. So this is not something that we should take it lightly. This is not something that we should forget about it. This is not something that the world should not think about it, I'm sorry. Even if it bothers people, even if it's hard, even if it's something that one really doesn't want to do. And I'm sure you all have a whole lot of other things to take care of than to think of the women of Afghanistan, but please do. We are, it's becoming extremely important on what we do for the women of this country in order to be able to do what we really want for this country and for this part of the, and for that matter for the world peace. Thank you so much.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:25:31](#)):

Thank you, Mahbouba for that really powerful message. And I think it's critical that we keep the issues affecting the women of Afghanistan visible and act in many of the ways that she just laid out, both in supporting and helping them meet their needs, but also understanding the agency they have that must be tapped going forward. We're going to turn now to Shaharзад Akbar, who served as the chair of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission. She's highly respected, she's been a long-time human rights advocate in Afghanistan and around the globe for Afghanistan, working to protect vulnerable citizens from violence and working for systemic reform. She also served as the Deputy on National Security Council for peace and civilian protection, a senior to the Afghan President on high development councils, and earlier she was the country director for Open Society Afghanistan. Akbar, uh, Shaharзад, is frequently called on to provide testimony before the UN Security Council and before so many other governmental multilateral organizations.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:26:51](#)):

Uh, I'm sure Shaharзад that you have much to tell us today. We're so grateful that you too could be with us. Let's, let's focus a little bit on how the humanitarian assistance can be delivered without benefiting the Taliban. Rina touched on this. We all understand, we have to find important and effective ways to address this crisis. What will that take in your view? Can we employ sanctions more effectively, for example, without harming the people themselves? Um, and because you have been such a strong advocate on human rights, is there a way to monitor the human rights violations that are occurring? Why is it important to do that and who can best play that role? So I know it's a lot of things wrapped into one, but, you're very capable in helping us understand this. So thank you.

Shaharзад Akbar ([00:27:52](#)):

Thank you. Thank you, Ambassador. Thank you for including me in this discussion. And I'm very honored to be part of this panel. I first want to take a minute to emphasize that I think the discourse that we often see on media around the situation of Afghanistan is sometimes one-sided, and we have to recognize that the situation is complex and there are multiple truths that can coexist. It's true that the humanitarian situation of Afghanistan is dire and it's causing harm to women and children. We have to collectively do all we can to address it, and beyond just addressing it this winter, we have to take steps to ensure that we'll not be in a similar situation of mass dependence on aid for survival a year from now. And 2023, we should not be, we should not be in a situation where majority of Afghans are queuing up everyday to get food.

Shaharзад Akbar ([00:28:47](#)):

Um, and that requires, of course, easing some of the financial restrictions. It's also true that Taliban are an oppressive regime, and they tend to make false promises and outright lie. We have to look at their

actions, not their words, and we shouldn't let them take Afghan people in the humanitarian crisis hostage. It's also true that the current situation is, as it was referenced before, it is a product of US and international communities' mistakes and failures. It's also due to the failure and corruption of the former Afghan government, but also, and importantly, we should not omit the Taliban's agency in responsibility for the current crisis. They're not taking any major steps to ease that suffering. They're just focused on stifling dissent, on making life difficult for women, and on (?) the civic space. We also have to recognize that engagement needs to happen with the Taliban.

Shaharзад Akbar ([00:29:42](#)):

Um, this discussion of either to engage or not to engage is not helpful. The conversation should be about how to engage. Engagement is not recognition. The international community can engage with Taliban without recognizing them. And it's not necessary to recognize the Taliban without concrete steps from their side to elevate the financial pressure. Now, in terms of recommendations, I think we have to move the discussion from engagement or not engagement more to how to engage, how to engage, to get the money to Afghanistan, to ease the financial, um, situation without giving money to, or getting the money to Afghanistan through Taliban. And there have been a series of recommendations out there. We already see some progress as, uh, Ms. Amiri also spoke about with, uh, the move that UN treasury and UN Security council made on December 22nd, uh, offering some sanctions relief, but it's insufficient. More needs to be done, and doing more does not require recognizing the Taliban.

Shaharзад Akbar ([00:30:48](#)):

So it's not an either or discussion. It's also very important to monitor the distribution of humanitarian aid. It's important that we make sure that it arrives to that it's distributed equitably, that women are benefiting, minorities are benefiting, and that's where the role of women's groups on the ground is very important. And that's linked to the last point I want to make. We have to at all costs try to protect the civic space in Afghanistan. The most recent trend that we are seeing is that Taliban are moving from targeting former security forces to targeting and stifling anyone who criticizes them. Just last night, they arrested three female protestors in the middle of the night; night raids were organized. If this trend continues, we will not be able to monitor the situation on the ground, and we will not be able to know what's happening to women, to men, to minorities on the ground in Afghanistan.

Shaharзад Akbar ([00:31:45](#)):

So all discussions about engagement with Taliban at the heart of it, then the national community should be telling the Taliban "You should tell us how you're listening to your own people. You should tell us how we are making the process inclusive. You should tell us how you are protecting the space for Afghan media to operate independently for Afghans to tell you what they think of you and your governance. That's a mass, and that's not against Islam. That's not against Afghan culture. If you are so scared of the dissent, it's very difficult for us to continue to engage with you. If you're failing to protect your own citizens." I stop there and I look forward to hearing from everyone.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:32:25](#)):

Thank you so much. And, and it's, you know, what you said is so wise in terms of the multiple ways that this needs to be addressed and you cannot divorce the humanitarian crisis from, uh, from the engagement with the Taliban and their obligations, as you laid out. Uh, so I think we will certainly be coming back to some of your comments with the audience questions. So thank you for those. Um, we're going to go now to Muqaddesa Yourish, who's a long time advocate for women's empowerment. She

previously served as the Deputy Minister for Commerce in Afghanistan, holding various positions in the government and the private sector, such as Commissioner for the Independent Administrative Reforms and Civil Service Commission of Afghanistan and Director of Human Resources for Kabul Municipality, uh, as well as others. She was recently appointed as a visiting scholar at George Washington University's Elliot school, here in Washington. Uh, so Muqaddesa, we're happy to have you close by to us, but today I wanna ask you, what is the relationship in your view between the humanitarian crisis and the economic crisis? What should be done to avert a collapse of the banking system? Uh, and how can we ensure that economic solutions take women into account, um, building on what you've already heard from your sisters here on the panel.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:34:06](#)):

Muqaddesa, please.

Muqaddesa Yourish ([00:34:13](#)):

Hello, everyone, good morning. Thank you, Ambassador Vermeer, for this very important opportunity to engage. Let me start by saying that humanitarian aid in the current crisis, while essential, it cannot alone bear the burden of alleviating Afghanistan's current economic and humanitarian crisis. Um, you ask me about the relationship between the humanitarian crisis and the economic. I think the current humanitarian crisis is as much a political crisis, as much as a human and economic crisis. The best service that we all, whether knowingly or unknowingly have done to the Taliban is reducing the case of Afghanistan to a humanitarian cause since the collapse of Kabul. We have almost made it convenient for the Taliban to not really see their disastrous role in both taking over the country the way they did, and also their lack of governance since their take over.

Muqaddesa Yourish ([00:35:20](#)):

I think I very much echo my friend Shaharзад's points about the fact that it's a very complex situation over there. And you can't really, um, you know, reduce it to a humanitarian cause by itself. Something that, um, a pattern that I have observed in the past, at least three or five years, the way international community has engaged with Afghanistan is that we get really fixated on one issue and then we lose the sight of the broader picture on what's happening. And I think that is certainly part of it does, um, feed into why things went the way they went for the country and in the past six months. So currently, as much as I understand, you know, that the current humanitarian crisis is a priority, it's a dire need, but I believe that it's very politically and economically shortsighted, and it's actually feeding into the Taliban, narrative of asking the international community to engage in Afghanistan because people are dying and starving. I would like to ask the Taliban that, what responsibility do you bear towards this as the current de facto government?

Muqaddesa Yourish ([00:36:39](#)):

Uh, that's uh, one thing. And then the second thing that I was hoping that I'll be able to talk about today is that it pains me as somebody who has been actively involved in creating the progress and the social transformation in Afghanistan in the past 20 years to see that my country, that nothing has unfortunately changed, that the suffering and the pain is still the same. And it also pains me to see that the international community does not want to invest in the agency of the Afghan people. I understand that as a donor country, or as somebody who wants to put in their money, it makes you feel good when you invest in people's suffering. It's almost a selfish way of looking at things, but I think for one moment, is there a chance for us to zoom out a little and see that instead of putting in this money in

the misery and suffering of Afghan people, which is the surface of what it is, can we also make sure that we, that we invest in the agency of the Afghans, that we channel it towards Afghanistan?

Muqaddesa Yourish ([00:37:50](#)):

Not because people are dying there, but also because people don't deserve what's happening there. And I think by doing so, I am hoping that we empower the voices of the Afghan people in a way that also makes the Taliban accountable for their governments, because currently the Taliban don't really see the people of Afghan as the objects that they should be. They're only seeing Afghans as a mere subject. And I think what the international community is doing is feeding into that. So nobody is empowering a cluster of the Afghan people who took every single opportunity in the past 20 years, you know, to create the progress that we all took so much pride in. It, it, the, the progress didn't come by itself. It was the ordinary Afghan, you know, waking up every morning and then doing what they could in the middle of the war to make sure that they are creating the change in the country, that we all took pride in it and are hoping to keep it intact, and try to save whatever of it that is left.

Muqaddesa Yourish ([00:38:58](#)):

So I think these are, you know, these are really important things. And now that really brings me to the private sector of Afghanistan. Um, I think the sanctions that everybody talked about, they are really focused on the humanitarian relief side of things. And this is again where I'm also saying that if you want to invest in the agency of Afghans, you need to invest in the private sector of Afghanistan. So, and then the private sector is where the agency is and expand the sanction relief to encompass private businesses and commercial transactions. Because I think what's happening right now is that most of the sanction reliefs are just focused on the humanitarian sectors. So you are ignoring a sector of the economy that can do so much, you know, that can be a partner that can help you alleviate things, because how long are we gonna continue pouring aid into the country?

Muqaddesa Yourish ([00:39:55](#)):

I very much agree with Shaharзад, what is, how, how does 2023 look for Afghanistan? So from what I know with my conversations with the private sector of Afghanistan, the private sector, nobody is in touch with them. There are no active conversations about their role and how they could partner, you know, with the international community to make sure that we, um, uh, that we do something more sustainable, um, for Afghanistan. So I guess I will leave it there, but I am open to questions. And I'm really looking forward to listen to other panelists here. Thank you, Ambassador..

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:40:35](#)):

Well, no, Muqaddesa thank you for those really cogent comments, and, you know, you've raised the private sector for the first time. I think that's an interesting element, the agency of the people of Afghanistan not being tapped enough, and certainly what everybody's been touching on. You cannot divorce the political from the humanitarian and the humanitarian from the political. So we will continue to hear from our remaining speakers and then go into the audience questions very shortly. I'm gonna turn now to Maryam Rahmani. She is temporarily in Albania where she's been a recent evacuee, and where she continues to advocate to improve the status of women to enable them to fully participate, in Afghan society. She served as the Country Representative of the Afghan Women's Resource Center, where she worked at the district and village levels to promote women's livelihoods capacity, building economic empowerment. Women at that level are also a critical element to discuss in this conversation. Uh, she's earlier served on the board of directors for the Afghan Women's Network, and was a member

of the delegation of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders that advocated before the UN on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Afghanistan.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:42:11](#)):

So, Maryam, I know that you continue to be in touch with many Afghans on the ground. Perhaps you too can tell us what you're hearing about the challenges that they're confronting, and how better those can be addressed. Um, and because you've done so much work on the, uh, in the district and local levels, how should women be engaged both in designing and distributing humanitarian assistance, but also more broadly in the ways that we've also been talking in playing a critical role under the circumstances there today. Maryam?

Maryam Rahmani ([00:43:00](#)):

Thank you, Ambassador. And thank you for giving me a chance to be on this panel. Uh, the question is actually broad and there are lots of experiences and there are lots of facts on the ground. I would be very specific, uh, try to be specific on what, uh, actually we have, um, experiencing on the ground as, uh, we all know women rights organizations have stayed active and always have found alternative ways to coordinate, collaborate, and reach their communities all the time. However, mostly these organizations are not much formally recognized for their essential work and existence, and they are mostly reached on ad hoc basis. And they are mostly less and less attention was given to the fundamental work they have done to support, both by the international organizations as well as by the governments of Afghanistan in the past. Taking into account the current humanitarian crisis and the support that is being delivered or promised again, the women's rights organizations are nowhere.

Maryam Rahmani ([00:44:24](#)):

Uh, firstly, the aid that are announced currently with big amount by international community have no way to know, uh, where they're meant to be utilized. So visibility is a big question right now. In practice, what we have observed and what I was a practical involved until end of October that the aid goes through three ways right now to the communities. One, it's the organizations or aid agencies selecting their own partners. How, it's not clear, because they are not announcing this course. And of course there are no woman organizations involved, maybe one or two, just for like maybe some visibility or something else. The second is aid is distributed via Ministry of Social Affairs and Refugees, which are under Taliban control. And the third one is the aid organizations are doing their own hiring recruitment and our, during the distributions, through their local staff. When going to the second stage, like going to the community level, the district offices and the community councils are involved in preparing the vulnerable people list.

Maryam Rahmani ([00:45:56](#)):

And until to date, this was never transparent because anyone who is much nearer to the community head is always on the list. Currently, as I hear there is another plan going on, that the mosque councils will be involved in distributing aid, and we know that they have no experience of doing such big work. Uh, the whole aid distribution process have created lots of challenges. One, the aid is not reaching the rural areas well and most, and mostly not to the vulnerable people. The second is Taliban have direct, influential influence on the aid distribution, especially when it's done by ministries. And most of the aid goes to their people. Otherwise they stop the process and it's a fact, they do stop the process. And in different cases, I have heard that even they demand 50% of the aid to be distributed to their people.

Maryam Rahmani ([00:47:11](#)):

And when it comes to the ministry levels, like the Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Refugees who are now directly involved in aid distribution, the people inside the ministries are asking for percentages, like if some local organizations want to go and want to be in the process of implementation, they ask for the percentage to get to, for you to be able to get access to the project and implement the project. Another challenge is they need assessment, which is done generally I think in community mosque or in the community leader house and this and this way, so there is no woman opinion added on the assessment there. Uh, I'm referring to, example, years before when there were assessments for the water need of the communities, the well were digged in different, uh, community places. When we were asking, uh, when later on we did the assessment, how happy the people are with this well digged in their community,

Maryam Rahmani ([00:48:26](#)):

the woman said, "no one asked us, the well is digged near the mosque. And we are the people who are, we are actually doing in the families to fetch water. And it's very difficult for us to go and near the mosque and fetch water, because there are always men around the mosque and it's, it's not enough safe place for us." So even in small things, when the woman opinion is not taken into account, people say, okay, the well is dig in the community and the people have access to water, but what woman opinion is never asked that "okay, is it okay that we dig the well near the mosque?" And it's not proper for them. Another challenge is the proper reporting mechanism because the aid providers have less resources in context to the people on the ground. And therefore, the transparency and accountability is another question.

Maryam Rahmani ([00:49:27](#)):

And so finally again, in the whole process, women and women right organizations are not visible at all. And I would like to go to the recommendations and practice actually considering the fact that women organizations always lead transformational changes and are best placed to know and understand their actual needs. They're closest to the communities and are therefore better able to adopt the challenges they face. Thus, in current context of Afghanistan, my specific recommendations are to involve women organizations in designing projects, especially by UN organizations and aid providers. It is not, it's not like maybe, it can be done in different ways, maybe through small focused groups because women organizations, women rights activists are still in Afghanistan. We cannot ignore them like the whole world, like, sad to say that they have, everything has changed 360 degrees. So at least they can be asked to come to their premises.

Maryam Rahmani ([00:50:44](#)):

Their premises are open. So why not women, uh, are not invited? Uh, so the projects could be designed based on their own, based on women ideas too, because women are the same women, and they are still in Afghanistan, so why they are not asked to come? This will help to have a more tailored response. The second is that the UN and aid organizations should publicly endorse women inclusion and also their role as key decision making in aid delivery. And the third is international aid organization should consult and involve women organization directly in aid delivery. This is not, this will not, uh, affect better aid distribution, and accountability, but will also pressurize the Taliban to recognize work of women organizations. Currently, you know, that women organizations are not formally have the permission to work in Afghanistan, but I have like, last month through DRC support, Danish Refugee Council, we were able to distribute 4,000 sanitary pads to women and girls at village level. Why we were able to do,

because DRC already had talked with Taliban that they allow us to go to the village and do the distribution, even without mahram with our women distributors.

Maryam Rahmani ([00:52:15](#)):

So it means that the donor community, the aid providers can influence the Taliban to involve women organizations in the context. So this is a, a good pressure point for, at least for now that women organizations are like right now kept behind, but for aid distributions, if they're involved, it'll give, uh, women organizations the chance to start back. And finally, I recommend, I request that, uh, in all the processes, that gender as, uh, should be focus as gender focus as mainstreamed as well, through all international funds and support by having dedicated financing committed to all, to meeting the actual needs of, um, Afghan women and girls. Thank you.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:53:06](#)):

Well, thank you, Miriam, and thank you for that level of specificity and for those examples of what is working when the effort is made to actually tap the agency of women. Which is, you know, we talk about it and sometimes for many, it seems like just a talking point, but it matters so much for the effectiveness of the outcomes. And I thought you did a wonderful job in giving us some strong recommendations and examples of how to do that. So I'm sure there'll be questions about what you've said, which we're gonna get to momentarily. And before we do that, we are going to turn to Dr. Suraya Dalil, who many of us know from her previous service as Afghanistan's Minister of Public Health. She was an especially effective advocate for the efforts to reduce child and maternal mortality, just very, very severe challenges in Afghanistan.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([00:54:08](#)):

She earlier worked in the International Organization for Migration and at UNICEF Afghanistan's office, where she led projects focused on humanitarian leadership, health diplomacy, and she's the first woman to be appointed as the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the UN in Geneva. Currently, she serves as the Director of the World Health Organization's Special Program on Primary Health at its headquarters in Geneva. Um, Dr. Dalil, Suraya, thank you so much for also joining us. Maybe you could complete this picture today, from all of your fellow panelists, by focusing on the healthcare challenges in Afghanistan right now, the kind of interventions that are needed at all levels, including with the Taliban, and how to engage. But, let's focus on the health crisis as well.

Dr. Suraya Dalil ([00:55:20](#)):

Thank you very much. Greetings colleagues, it's a pleasure to be with you. Thank you very much Ambassador Melanne Vermeer. I would like to touch on a few points. First, what health outcomes have been achieved in the last 20 years, and Afghanistan is remarkable. And let me give you some statistics on that. The life expectancy raise has been, the life expectancy rate has been raised in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2020. In 2004, the life expectancy, which is the average period that one person is expected to live, was 44.5 years, whereas this rate in 2020 was 63 years. Maternal mortality has been reduced, maternal health has been improved. Less women are dying now, and so for child health and less children are dying now. In Afghanistan, as of five months ago, there was 2,331 public health facilities across the 34 provinces, and in particular in rural areas. And there are 24,000 health workforce, 8,000 of which are female. They are midwives, they're nurses, they're vaccinators, they're physicians, they're pharmacists, many of them in the front line. Ambassador Vermeer, you were part of an effort to

train thousands of midwives from 2010 to 2014. And many of them are now at the rural frontline helping women and families through pregnancy and childbirth.

Dr. Suraya Dalil ([00:57:29](#)):

So these 8,000 women, part of the 24,000 health workforce, are a big civic space as we speak now. And many of them are still in the country. Access to services has also increased in the last 20 years. From 12% to about 90% for basic healthcare. That includes immunization, antenatal care, natal care, postnatal care, nutrition, mental health, and so on. So this is one. The second point I would like to raise is that here's a basic power structure, far complex from the time the Taliban were in power the first time that has been laid out in Afghanistan. That infrastructure includes course, includes health information system, that includes management and delivery system, and a supply chain. Supply chain means medicine, medical removals, fuel, and food.

Dr. Suraya Dalil ([00:58:36](#)):

So what are the asks? The asks are the following. First, keep the backbone function. Make sure that the health workforce are paid. We're talking about 24,000 workforce, make sure that they're paid. And our vision shouldn't be for six months, for nine months or for 12 months, it should be multiyear, um, support. And that medicine, vaccines, fuel are supplied, because the entire system, the mechanism is there. It's just to make sure the continuity and the stabilization and sustainability of that. Focus on areas that are critically important for us. They are nutrition, maternal childhood mental health, as well as, last but not least, is the pandemic. The COVID 19 pandemic, the measures, the personal and social measures in terms of wearing masks, avoiding gatherings, to become distanced and indoor ventilations and vaccinations are all critically important. And some of them are even very, very costly to accomplish.

Dr. Suraya Dalil ([01:00:04](#)):

And it's important those factors be taken into account, because as you said, there's a crisis in the crisis. We are in the crisis of not only the humanitarian situation, the situation is compounded with COVID 19, with drought, with economic downturn, et cetera. So, and within the ask, I would like also to put this physical safety and security of health workforce. Physicians, hospital directors, um, well known experts, um, doctors, and they have been disappeared, they have been killed, they have been tortured, and so on. This is going on, and those who are in Afghanistan, they need to be taken care of, and their safety and security should be on the table in our dialogue with the Taliban. So what happens if those services are stopped? These around 2,300 facilities, what happens if they are stopped?

Dr. Suraya Dalil ([01:01:23](#)):

I just gave you two examples of what happens if their centers are closed. More than 4,000 children will be deprived from routine immunization to be immunized against childhood preventable diseases. These are measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, tetanus, that kill children, and that more than 19,000 children will die from malnutrition. So, with regards to what the fellow speakers said before me, and I would like to reiterate the fact that one of the speakers said that "do not forget Afghanistan, do not forget the people of Afghanistan". And I would like to say that we need champions. We need champions at the international level to speak on behalf of Afghanistan, to keep that in the discussion, not necessarily Afghans themselves, but heads of states, elected representatives, celebrities, diplomats, people who are in the art area, um, media, parliamentarians, and so on. And we would like to hear them speak because those statements make a difference. And we would like, uh, that to be ongoing and intensified. I would also like to echo what, um, speakers told me before, that we have to look at it from a

holistic perspective. It's not health alone. It's not COVID 19 alone. It's not the cash flow alone. It's not the sanctions alone. It's not the recognition. All of them are together. And we have to really look into them not in isolation from each other, but rather from an integrated and holistic way. Thank you very much, uh, Madam, back to you.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([01:03:33](#)):

Well, thank you so much Dr. Dalil for those important points. Uh, we're gonna turn now to our audience questions. I'm gonna ask my colleague Allie Smith to provide the questions as they've come up from the audience. So, Allie, do you wanna begin, and then in terms of responding, just raise your hand, if you want to answer a portion or the whole question in terms of your own level of experience. So let's proceed and we'll try to take as many questions as we can. So please be respectful of giving everybody an opportunity.

Allie Smith ([01:04:19](#)):

Sure. Uh, we'll put two questions. The first is for Shaharзад, asking "You spoke about how the conversation should be on how to engage the Taliban, not whether or not we should. In your experience, are there examples of successful engagement that you can point to? What specific approaches might governments and INGOs factor into their work?" Then the second question here is on alternative financial routes. Um, he asks "The greatest challenge is financial transfers into the country. As the banking system is near collapse, is anything working to get money in? How do we find alternatives? And what other recommendations do you have to address the banking credit?" So perhaps let's start with Shaharзад, and then we'll go to the second.

Shaharзад Akbar ([01:05:10](#)):

Thank you. Thank you, Allie. I think there are examples of international community working with people and organizations without necessarily going through government or de facto authorities that are, um, problematic. There are examples from other <inaudible>. There are other examples as well. There are also solutions being put out. For instance, there was a recent USIP piece about mitigating humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan that talked about different mechanisms that can be used such as working with private banks and offering them comfort letters, you know, aid organizations, taking money from private sector Afghani, and providing them with cash, um, with US cash, so there are other ways of elevating the economic pressure without necessarily having <inaudible>. Of course, ideally we will have de facto authorities that we can work with, and that's why it's important to continue discussing with Taliban the steps that they need to take.

Shaharзад Akbar ([01:06:17](#)):

And why, from my perspective, the most important steps are, um, and where we can see action is them reopening schools, uh, girls, uh, for schools and making education possible for girls and women and making employment possible for girls and women. And don't let them get away with culture or religious excuses, because nowhere in a Islamic world do you see women deprived of secondary education. Women are working in all Islamic countries. Don't let them get away with cultural excuses, people across Afghanistan want their daughters to study. There are communities actually pushing for women's rights to education. So I think we need to have an honest conversation with them and remind them that they have to move from <inaudible>, if they want to last, they have to move. And if they want recognition aid, they have to move from an insurgency mindset to governance mindset, and they have to face difficult questions internally. They have to try to create consensus internally rather than focusing their

efforts on policing people's behavior. I think the range of solutions there exist technical solutions, as well as political solutions for easing the economic situation, we have to exhaust all those measures before sending money through Taliban. And if all of that fails, then we can take the next step. But I think for now, not all of that has been, for instance, comfort letters to banks, and more encouragement; Ms Amiri was also talking about it. Um, all of that has not been exhausted yet.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([01:07:48](#)):

And maybe on the, uh, the banking - thank you, Shaharad- on the banking and economic piece. Does anybody else wanna come in on that? Uh, Muqaddesa?

Muqaddesa Yourish ([01:08:00](#)):

Thank you Ambassador. So when I was at the Ministry of Commerce, um, I remember this particular time, when the sanctions on Iran were affecting the trade on Chabahar Port, which is a transit port that is supposed to connect Afghanistan, India, and Iran. And I remember being part of this meeting where the traders were there to basically raise their concern on how the sanctions on Iran were affecting their trade. And what I realized in that meeting, and from what I can recall right now, is that, you know, sometimes you need assurances beyond comfort letters because there is this, um, I think private businesses, which includes traders and also the banking sector, sometimes they really don't want to engage when they have a fear that even if right now they might have some sort of assurances, but in the future, their current engagement might actually create problem or that they will be subject, you know, to sanctions in the future.

Muqaddesa Yourish ([01:09:10](#)):

So I think there is a, um, there is a, you need trust building, you need to go beyond these comfort letters and you need to provide, and when I say having a conversation with private businesses, and that includes businesses in Afghanistan, and as well as international businesses, I think it does include some form of like trust building, because for example, right now, from what I know, the central bank of Afghanistan is not on under any direct sanctions, but nobody is engaging. It's difficult for you to send, you know, \$200 from the US to Afghanistan because nobody, no bank is willing to take that risk. And so I think it's important to go a little bit beyond some of these policy measures to ensure that trust is built with private businesses and private, private business communities to ensure that they are willing to take more risk.

Muqaddesa Yourish ([01:10:07](#)):

Um, and I think public demand also sometimes helps. Something that's happening in Afghanistan, I'm not sure that there is a level of awareness about the sanctions and about, you know, what policies are actually affecting the banks or not. So the bank are almost, you know, they have their own version of taking people's life hostage, because in their efforts to be, to control their risks, I think they are not being really open to, engaging in transactions that really does not have any risk for them and, it's not illegal to engage. But they're also choking, you know, the economy and people. So unless and until there's a broader level of awareness about it, I think it will be difficult to really, you know, try to start implementing some of these measures. One thing that we have, like policy statements and measures, but they need to translate into actions actually.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([01:11:06](#)):

Well, thank you. Thank you both. I think you've really elucidated more the engagement with the Taliban, the necessity, the parameters, and the banking system and what needs to continue to happen. Allie, do we have another question please?

Allie Smith ([01:11:20](#)):

Yeah. This question says "To what extent have NGOs and service providers been allowed to operate at a minimum by the Taliban, specifically in Afghanistan's major cities, and in light of recent Taliban crackdowns on protestors and civil society actors, can you speak to ensuring safety and security for local aid workers?"

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([01:11:44](#)):

Who'd like to tackle that? Maryam, did you hear the question?

Allie Smith ([01:11:54](#)):

Yeah. We'll go to Palwasha and then Maryam. Okay.

Palwasha Hassan ([01:12:00](#)):

Thank you, Allie. I think the Taliban, um, has limitation on NGOs, like around 20, uh, 30, 20 to \$30,000 per month that they can use. And this is small in terms of if they want to reach with, sort of, uh, this repeating, um, or the working with the communities. So there are those limitations. So we have to be, uh, design maybe programs with a small granting grants approach, so that smaller organizations, especially women organizations be able to be part of disbursements of the aid or support to the local communities, um, that having in mind. And for that, I think we also need how to go out of the box, maybe using hawala system, which was stopped at some point because of the misuse, possible misuse by the terrorist group.

Palwasha Hassan ([01:13:07](#)):

I think this scenario is quite flipped in a different way. So now it should be open and there are some relaxation by the US Treasury on that, uh, point as well. However, I think that in my opinion, we have the Afghanistan solution should be divided to immediate and longer term solution. In immediate, unfortunately, we have to go through some ways which may be quick and dirty. Through the Taliban de facto government or whatever is possible because we cannot afford to lose people's life. Uh, but for a longer solution, we have to look at all alternatives, how this can work. And I think any solution should bring the confidence of women in particular, and also journal Afghan people representations into this whole engagement with Taliban. So unfortunately in past, all ways of reaching a direct negotiation on their rights and spaces by women was curtailed, either by government or international stakeholders.

Palwasha Hassan ([01:14:29](#)):

So for now I think the proposal of having Afghan women directly negotiating for a lot of things, which is happening to their communities and to themselves, which maybe a third party, uh, Islamic feminist scholars, or people who come with that sort of knowledge, because usually women's right are dismissed or human human rights are dismissed in the context of, "oh, this is not Islamic enough," and all that, as Shaharзад before said, there is no Islamic country without education, secondary education for girls. But somehow, to bring in that kind of strength into discussion, we need maybe a three party discussion between women and maybe Islamic scholars and Taliban together. And that need to be facilitated, that has been waiting for a long time. We had very limited, a very token opportunity for women that in the

past, through the negotiation team and all that. But I think the track to has never took off and this all probably will take time. Uh, we have to be remind ourselves that in Afghanistan people are dying and we have to focus on that as a short term solution, which may not be perfect. Uh, so I stop here.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([01:15:50](#)):

Okay. Does anyone else wanna weigh in otherwise? Oh, Maryam.

Maryam Rahmani ([01:15:59](#)):

Yes. Uh, first I want to mention that overall, women organizations have no permission to work. There was a letter, um, I think it was issued by the Ministry of Economics and beginning of October to all local and international NGOs asking and mentioning that you are allowed to start the work, not excluding women organizations, but later on, I think it was a third or 4th of October, the first meeting of, the representative of Taliban from the Ministry of Economics visited Afghan and international organizations and ACBAR office, you know, ACBAR, the Afghanistan coordination body, and, uh, the whole, we were three women organizations there, and all were men and also international organizations. Uh, they clearly mentioned that women organizations have to stop work until, uh, whatever decision is made for women, employees of ministries. It would be affecting the women organizations.

Maryam Rahmani ([01:17:13](#)):

Um, I raised my hand asking that, uh, "your letter," (I took the letter with me) "Uh, your letter says that all, um, national and international organizations should resume work. Uh, it's not mentioning anything to exclude women." And he said, "yes, but I'm telling you now you cannot work." So the letters, the formal communications and the written communication is very different than what else is being practiced. We have, uh, we had four times visits by Taliban when we were not in the office. Uh, they have even communicated within themselves, let take this computer or let take this printer and these things. And later on, they were mentioning, okay, we will take them later. Uh, before coming here, we shifted in very difficult situation. We shifted the main office to another place, and not mentioning, uh, and ask, uh, the requested actually the property, not to announce that this house is rented for a woman organization.

Maryam Rahmani ([01:18:20](#)):

So there are real difficulties on the ground, and in addition to this, the whole, non-government platform, like organizations platform, I really, I ask them that especially the organizations led by men, that they also should stand for women organizations. They should not, at least this should be part of their advocacy that we will not accept the projects, or we will not start work until our, like, other partners, women partner organizations are not allowed to work. Uh, but they, but they kept silent. So this, this is also a big issue for women organizations because there are currently projects implemented. I really don't know how the man-led organizations are working. I know they are working mostly on humanitarian aid projects, but how they are dealing with it, I really never see any kind of call for, interest for those projects, but they are involved in those projects.

Maryam Rahmani ([01:19:26](#)):

So overall for women organizations the situation is not suitable to work, uh, maybe formally or written documentations to gain trust among the international community. They say something in written, but in practice, it's very different. And, like, another example, maybe one of the, maybe they don't want the international organizations to name them, but I know exactly who they are. Uh, we, uh, there's a

project, named Women Empowerment. It started just recently four months before, but right now the Ministry of Economics is not giving them implementation start letter because they say change the project name. They are not accepting a project with the name of Women Empowerment. And, so this is an issue. The owner is not accepting to change the name and the ministry is not letting them start the project.

Maryam Rahmani ([01:20:32](#)):

The same thing is, like most of them when it comes to the support, it's also a challenge because it's currently, and as far as I know, only UN organizations are supporting, or maybe they are just announcing some calls for women empowerment, but only on livelihood level, not anything others like participation or decision making these things, which were very much on for the past five to seven years. But now it's only livelihood and still development. They are all announced by UN organizations. Uh, most of our formal, uh, former donors, we had projects on pipeline, but they mentioned that unfortunately their governments have stopped any kind of support to Afghanistan in any way until they are not recognized or some other international decision. So the situation is not much good for organization, particularly for women organization.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([01:21:36](#)):

Thanks so much Maryam. And again, you see the constraints that are being applied to the women in Afghanistan, from precluding them from the agency that is so critical that they engage in. So I think these are the very issues that have to be raised and given attention to with the Taliban, because the silence and the invisibility to these issues only continues to make the situation graver. Let's turn to another question. We have a little bit of time left. Yeah.

Allie Smith ([01:22:16](#)):

Two more. The first is "On a regional level, are countries coordinating their aid responses? If so, how is this accomplished and what are your recommendations for better international coordination on aid towards Afghanistan?" The second question is on equitable distribution. "Can you speak to how particularly vulnerable groups like the Hazara are accessing, if at all, available humanitarian aid, and how can we better enable this?"

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([01:22:47](#)):

Anybody wanna tackle that? Rina?

Rina Amiri ([01:22:52](#)):

Sure, thank you for that question. Uh, I'll take the first question in terms of aid coordination or coordination in terms of strategy. There are regular meetings, uh, European members and the US, as well as with other allies on a whole host of issues, including, uh, coordination on humanitarian aid. Um, and the UN is also doing this with humanitarian organizations, but I would stress that this is an area that's quite critical. More needs to be done, it has to be done consistently. The international community has to have coherence vis-a-vis the Taliban on humanitarian aid and any other engagement. There's sometimes a tendency and restricted areas for humanitarian organizations who want to get access to try to be the whisperer to the group that's in power, and therefore gain territorial access. And it'll be of vital importance that there's a coherent position on the part of the international community when it comes to negotiating on space access, and just ensuring that there's a coherence in terms of the approach on all fronts.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([01:24:21](#)):

Anyone on the minority community, any understandings of what's happening in the distribution?
Muqaddesa?

Muqaddesa Yourish ([01:24:31](#)):

Um, I, um, I don't think I am from a knowledge perspective in a position to really comment on that because unfortunately, I don't really have that sort of information. But, you know, generally, I think to speak, it's very obvious that the Hazara community, it's a vulnerable community, and I think that vulnerability certainly extends to whether it's from a security perspective or the fact that how distribution of aid affects the community. From what we have been seeing in the past months since the Taliban took over, is that the Taliban de facto government has equally failed, uh, to protect the Hazara community in terms of their security. The communities are constantly threatened, uh, by, from what is perceived to be the, now that we are done with the Taliban, uh, ISIS and the government has unfortunately taken no measures, the de facto government, to protect the Hazara community. So I guess if all in all I can say that the community is generally under a bigger threat, it's vulnerable. And I believe that should extend, you know, to all aspects of how life is being affected by just living under the Taliban regime.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([01:25:58](#)):

And you're so right about the fact that the community has been attacked in so many ways. And that is undoubtedly continuing. Unfortunately, we have reached that point where we have to end the program, because time has, uh, come out. Uh, and I just wanna say that while the program is over, and your participation has been extremely cogent and useful, our work is only beginning to address these urgent challenges. And if you've heard one solution put forward, or one statement, it's how complex these issues are, and how we cannot silo them. We can't just work on one level. We will have to work on multiple levels. We can't talk about "should we engage with the Taliban," but we must engage, how to do that, how to hold their responsibilities in front of the public eye.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([01:27:03](#)):

Uh, so I hope that no matter what position one is in, and of all of those who have tuned in today, that you will do all that you can from your positions to keep these issues front and center, to ensure that women's participation is the vital outcome that it needs to be, and that they are not invisible as the news moves on in various ways, but that we keep them front and center. We're going to be finalizing a brief on what you have discussed today, with recommendations that we will put out in the next couple days, based on your recommendations, your examples, your call to action, that can be used for policy makers, other officials, and people in the advocacy community writ large around the world.

Amb. Melanne Vermeer ([01:28:07](#)):

So we wanna make this not just the end of a program, not just a call to action, but we wanna have and keep alive what you have said to us today in ways that can continue to be used because that's the importance of all of this, and we will also put it on our website. This is the first in a series of these virtual events on challenges in Afghanistan, and we will be back in just a few days to describe the next program to you. Uh, but I can't thank you enough. I think you've raised so many important issues, and done it succinctly despite the complications. I know how much, excuse me, demand there is on all of you. Uh, and so thank you for joining us and for participating in this way and all the ways that you participate. So

for that, uh, I'm losing my voice, uh, but to Palwasha, to Rina, to Mahbouba, to Shaharзад, Muqaddesa, Maryam, and Suraya. Thank you so much for all you do. Thank you.