

Women at the peace table
International Conference in Ypres, Belgium on 17 June 2023

Statement of Razia Arefi, Mothers for Peace

We all know that today's conference under the title of (women at the peace table) here in Ieper at the very moment when the factors of war and hatred spreading all over the world, is a most needed voice that we raise from here. Convergence of three occasions such as Ieper as a city of peace, teeth grinding of warmongers for more bloodshed and destruction, and deliberate suppression of women by the religious extremism in different parts of the world, requires us to do more than presenting our paper.

I mean, besides condemning the war and making our request for the role of women at the peace table, we should think about a mechanism to follow up and create a permanent voice for the cause. You know better than me that we are living in a dire situation. While we are talking here about the role of women at the peace table, thousands of women as daily routine are being ferociously victimized in different parts of the world, in Asia, Africa and somehow in Europe and America. There are millions of women with no records of birth and death. It means that neither their birth is important, nor their murder has consequences. Worse than this, a vicious war against women for being woman is going on in the yesterday's spotlight of the world. I mean Afghanistan.

Yesterday, the world was boasting about the women empowerment in Afghanistan, which Mothers for peace and many others were part of these brave and most needed initiatives; but in a sudden turning, all things dramatically changed. The fate of millions of women was left to the mercy of a criminal group and for further suppression, advanced weapons worth more than 7 billion dollars were provided to them. It happened while the crimes, massacres and misogyny of this group in 1990s were in front of our eyes.

In such a situation, why this abruptly happened? It is simply and coolly said politics has been changed. Yes, politics has been changed, but do you know how much this policy change, costed Afghan women? With this change, more than 15 million Afghan women were swept away from the society. They were cleansed of areas of educations, economy, politics, and even they were deprived of free movement and recreation places. In a summary phrasing, their humanity was completely denied. They are only allowed to give birth to the children of their husband and provide them with the sexual needs. It was the gift of the politics change for Afghan women.

I want to say here that the current world's politics that has no place for women's concerns is defective and it is suffering of the male biased structure. Even if we turn our eyes blind to the misery of women all over the world, the plight of more than 15 million Afghan women and the indifference of global politics towards it, clearly demonstrate that the main stream of politics moving against the will of women or at least in the absence of gender considerations and it plainly says how firm we need to stand for our cause. It is why we are here in Ieper to raise our voice for a gender-balanced politics. Ieper as a city which suffered a lot from the war and hence it carries the title of the city of peace, can be a city for women voice either, especially the silenced voice of Afghan women.

It is third time that I am participating in such a conference here in Ieper. Ieper has been source of inspiration for me and for many Afghan women who have worked with Mothers for Peace or have been beneficiaries of it.

My understanding of Ieper convinces me that Ieper has the capacity and moreover Ieper as a city of peace, deserves to house a permanent protection mechanism of women role in politics, especially Afghan women.

Ieper with vast cemeteries from the world-war 1 and the well-known monument of thousands of precious lost lives by the names carved in the white marble of the Menin Gate (menenpoort) provides a deep understanding of what hatred and political extremism brought to the human society. From here, you can also conceive when religious extremism merged with hatred, it will certainly constitute a formidable destructive war machine against the humanity and the precious human heritage. Religious extremism in the form of Talibanism besides massacre of thousands of men and women in Afghanistan, detonated the most valuable Buddha statue in Bamyán and smashed hundreds of other precious heritage items all over Afghanistan. Regarding this heinous background and imposing relentless containment upon women, I categorically ask the world leaders to take it seriously.

At the end I want to draw your kind attention to the dire condition of Afghan women. We are approaching to 15 August when dark cloud of Talibanism prevailed Afghanistan and consequently, thousands of Afghan women and men escaped the country, but 15 million women were left behind in misery in denial. The space of life is steadily narrowing to them day by day and they are asking you to stand with them to break down the prison of Talibanism and be the voice of voiceless Afghan women.