

Call for Proposals

“The Future of Human Rights in Afghanistan: Between Rule and Agency”

organised by

***the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and International
Humanitarian Law (RWI)***

and

the South Asian Studies Network (SASNET)

Lund, Sweden

November 14-15, 2024

The Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (RWI) and the South Asian Studies Network (SASNET) are pleased to announce the upcoming international conference "Advancing Human Rights in Afghanistan: Between Rule and Agency", to be organized in Lund, Sweden, on November 14-15, 2024.

The conference aims to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and critical reflection on the current state of human rights in Afghanistan. It seeks to blend cutting-edge research with practical solutions, ensuring that diverse perspectives and experiences on human rights issues are represented. We encourage contributions from Afghan scholars, students, CSO representatives, and practitioners, and particularly welcome those willing to bridge academic disciplines and connect theoretical insights with practical applications.

Background and focus

RWI is an independent academic institute that currently is implementing a human rights programme on Afghanistan (2024-2026)¹ with the overall objective “to contribute to strengthened conditions for inclusive governance, peace, and respect for human rights and gender equality in Afghanistan”. In order to reach this objective, one particular result that the programme aims to achieve is to increase scholarship and academic discourse on the human rights situation in the country. SASNET is an organisation for cooperation between faculties, departments and individual researchers that are engaged in research on South Asia. The overarching purpose of the organisation is to promote research on South Asia. Aligned with these goals, RWI and SASNET is organizing a research conference that aims to explore key human rights issues related to the current situation in the country.

More than three years have passed since the Taliban seized power of Afghanistan on 15 August 2021. Since then, the country has faced a deepening humanitarian and human rights crisis. Human rights organizations have repeatedly pointed out that policies imposed by the Taliban clearly violate Afghanistan’s obligations under international human rights law. A recent statement made by UN experts pointed out that: “Over the past three years, the people of Afghanistan, especially women and girls, have been subjected to an appalling and intensifying attack on their rights and freedoms by a regime that lacks legitimacy and inclusivity, quashes all forms of dissent, represses civil society and the media, and has shown a flagrant disregard for the principles of justice, non-discrimination,

¹ For more information, see <https://rwi.lu.se/afghanistan-programme/>

equality, and the rule of law. The situation continues to deteriorate, and stronger and more effective international action is needed immediately”².

The ongoing humanitarian crisis has added complexity and challenges to this already difficult situation, with an estimated 29 million Afghans in need of humanitarian aid. At the same time as the humanitarian needs are growing, donors are retracting and cutting funds while there are indications that the Taliban increasingly are interfering in the operations of aid agencies.

This conference aims to address the grave human rights situation in Afghanistan by providing a platform for an evidence based dialogue on key issues of concern, combining theoretical understandings with practical approaches. The objective is to explore how the latest advances in human rights research on Afghanistan can interact with the work carried out by human rights practitioners, in order to generate new knowledge and actionable policy recommendations. By bringing together human rights academics, practitioners, and activists, the conference will explore solutions, share knowledge, and provide a space for the participants to strategize around joint efforts to protect the rights and dignity of the Afghan people.

Conference Themes/Tracks:

The conference encourages applicants to send in proposals related to the following themes:

1. Human Rights Violations under Taliban Rule

This track will explore the breadth and scope of human rights abuses under the Taliban regime. Key areas:

- Examination of specific human rights abuses, including gender-based violence, suppression of freedom of expression, arbitrary detentions, torture, and extrajudicial killings.
- Documentation and analysis of the legal frameworks and policies imposed by the Taliban that violate international human rights law.

2. Analysis of the current humanitarian situation, including food insecurity, healthcare access, and displacement.

This theme will focus on the escalating humanitarian needs in Afghanistan and the complexities of delivering aid under the Taliban. Key areas:

- Discussion on the challenges faced by international and local aid organizations, including Taliban interference and donor withdrawal.
- The role humanitarian and human rights principles in strategies and actions for ensuring effective aid delivery

3. Gender-Based Repression: Impact on Women and Girls

This track will delve into the severe restrictions placed on women and girls, analyzing their impact on education, employment, and basic freedoms. Key areas:

- Detailed examination of the impact of Taliban policies on the rights and freedoms of women and girls in Afghanistan.
- Case studies on education, employment, and social participation under the Taliban regime.
- Approaches to international advocacy and support for Afghan women’s rights.

4. Civil Society, Media, and Freedom of Expression

This theme will investigate the shrinking civil space under the Taliban, focusing on the systematic repression of civil society and the media. Key areas:

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/international-community-must-not-normalise-taliban-rule-afghanistan>

- The state of civil society and media under Taliban rule, including the risks faced by journalists and activists.
- The role of international media and civil society in highlighting and countering repression in Afghanistan.
- Digital activism and alternative forms of resistance in the face of state repression.

5. Groups in Situations of Vulnerability: Children, Persons with Disabilities, Minorities, and Other At-Risk Populations

This theme will focus on the specific challenges faced by children, persons with disabilities, and other groups in situations of heightened vulnerability. Key areas:

- The impact of the humanitarian crisis on children's education, health, and safety.
- Addressing the neglect and abuse of persons with disabilities under the Taliban's rules
- Tailoring humanitarian interventions to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

6. International Legal Responses and Accountability Mechanisms

This track will examine potential international legal avenues for holding the Taliban accountable for their actions. Key areas:

- Exploration of international legal avenues for holding the Taliban accountable for human rights violations.
- The role of international bodies, including the United Nations, in monitoring and responding to the situation in Afghanistan.
- Potential for international sanctions, criminal prosecutions, and other accountability mechanisms.

7. Future of Afghanistan: Governance, Stability, and Peacebuilding

This theme will explore the potential paths towards a stable and inclusive governance structure in Afghanistan. Key areas:

- Discussions on the future governance structure of Afghanistan and the potential paths to stability.
- Peacebuilding efforts and the role of the international community in supporting a transition to a more inclusive and legitimate government.
- Lessons learned from past international interventions and their implications for future policy.

8. Political Economy and Human Rights

This theme examines the relationship between economic policies and human rights in Afghanistan, focusing on how the Taliban's economic strategies impact the population's rights and freedoms. Key areas:

- Economic Control and Suppression: Analysis of how the Taliban's control over resources and economic policies contributes to human rights violations.
- Sanctions and Humanitarian Impact: Exploration of how international economic sanctions influence human rights and humanitarian aid distribution.
- Illicit Economies: The role of the opium trade and other illicit activities in financing the Taliban and perpetuating human rights abuses.

Call for Abstracts:

We invite scholars, researchers, practitioners, and activists to submit abstracts for paper presentations addressing one (or more) of the themes outlined above. Abstracts should critically

engage with the thematic focus area(s) and propose innovative approaches, empirical research, or theoretical insights.

Priority will be given to abstracts from **Afghan scholars and practitioners**, as we recognize the importance of centering local perspectives and expertise in discussions about Afghanistan's human rights challenges.

Financial support: The organizers will provide selected presenters with **Afghan nationality** financial support needed to participate in the conference. This support includes coverage of travel expenses, accommodation, and per diem allowances throughout the duration of the conference. Financial support for non-Afghan participants can be provided if the participant is unable to self-finance.

Submission Guidelines:

- Abstracts should be no more than 300 words in length.
- Please indicate the theme(s) your abstract addresses.
- Include a brief biographical statement (maximum 100 words) detailing your affiliation, expertise, and relevant experience.
- Include information if the applicant will attend in person or online
- Submissions should be sent to zoya.noori@rwi.lu.se by **October 6, 2024**. Deadline is **24.00 CET**.

Selected presenters will be notified by **October 11** and invited to develop a conference paper to be submitted to RWI/SASNET by **4 November**.

Online participation: The conference will prioritize in-person participation but there will be possibilities online participation in cases where invited participants cannot travel to Sweden.

Contact

Should you have any questions, please contact David Eile: david.eile@rwi.lu.se