**Inaugural Meeting: Afghan Women and Girls APPG**

**17 December 2024**

Present: Wendy Chamberlain

 Leigh Ingham

 Alice Macdonald

 Baroness D’Souza

 Calum Miller

 Wera Hobhouse

 Wendy Morton

 Sir Julian Lewis

 Lord Alton of Liverpool

Martin Rhodes

Observers: Dr Ewelina Ochab, International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute

 Dr Neelam Raina, Secretariat

 Kathryn Sturgeon, Wendy Chamberlain office

1. Election of Officers

The following officers were unanimously elected:

Chair: Wendy Chamberlain

Officers: Baroness D’Souza, Sir Julian Lewis, Alice Macdonald

1. APPG Purpose

Unanimously agreed that the purpose of the APPG is to promote the interests and voices of Afghan women and girls within Parliament and to Government.

1. Secretariat

Dr Neelam Raina of Middlesex University and the LSE volunteered her time as the Secretariat to the APPG in the last Parliament. She introduced herself and her work. It was unanimously agreed that she would remain as the Secretariat.

It is confirmed that the APPG receives no funding or benefits in kind and that Dr Raina volunteers her time to the APPG on top of her academic work.

1. Backbench business applications
	1. Alice Macdonald has applied for a debate on Women, Peace and Security and will be seeing the Backbench Business Committee. Although the debate would be general it would be an opportunity to raise the issues faced by Afghan women and girls.
	2. Wendy Chamberlain would like to apply for a backbench business debate on the Tirana Declaration. She outlined her experience of attending the summit. **Her office will circulate a backbench business application to APPG members**.
2. Immediate Priorities
	1. A letter from the APPG to the FCDO requesting an update meeting with the officials we worked with in the last Parliament. **Agreed that Wendy will write on behalf of the APPG**.
	2. A letter from the APPG to the Home Office. Wendy Chamberlain asked an oral question on the problems being faced by Afghans in the UK who are now at the end of their visa terms, and the Minister indicated they would be receptive to the APPG sending through the issues people are facing. **Secretariat to feed in issues, and draft letter to be circulated**.
3. Consideration of key issues and the work plan:
	1. The House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee published a report “[The UK and Afghanistan](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4185/documents/43162/default/)” in January 2021. **APPG to write to the committee and ask them to revisit their report.**
	2. To have a briefing session to look at what we mean by Gender Apartheid and what other steps the UK can be taking. Notes the IBAHR report from March 2024 “[Shattering Women’s Rights, Shattering Lives](https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=Gender-Apartheid-Inquiry-Report-March-2024)”. Notes that Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands are planning to take legal action against the Taliban for failing to adhere to Afghanistan’s obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. The UK could be doing more to support. This could be an opportunity to link in to civil society in Afghanistan. **Secretariat to plan evidence session**.
	3. Members saw access to healthcare and the ban on women accessing medical education and training as a priority area. Discussion of the possibility to link in with the scholars who came through the Linda Norgrove foundation and to seek media attention. **Secretariat to plan evidence session**.
	4. Discussion of using what is happening in Syria to draw parallels and highlight the situation in Afghanistan. The Taliban promised to maintain women’s rights when they took power, and then incrementally reduced them. There is risk of seeing the same in Syria.
	5. Discussion of the impact of international outcry on the Taliban. Notes that there are public facing individuals such as the Government press officer who in private conversations seem moderate and who are more likely to be impacted by international condemnation, but then there are people who are seen as important but aren’t in Government, local strong men, on whom it has no impact.
	6. There is a need to discuss what approach we should be taking to AID spending, and ensuring it reaches where it needs to go.
	7. There is a new UK Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, David Smith. **Wendy to ask to meet with him**.

Notes that the UN General Assembly 80th session will take place from 9 – 23 September 2025. **Work plan to be updated to ensure submissions are provided to the Government in advance**.

1. Possible events
	1. Agreed desire to do something public facing in the media to show solidarity. This could be to time with the anniversary of the fall of Kabul. **To revisit**.
	2. Discussion of an event in Parliament to show a film by a female Afghan film maker. She made films which reflect the lives of Afghan women pre the fall of Kabul. **To revisit**.