

## **Exclusive interview : Solidarity Party of Afghanistan's Selay Ghaffar speaks about the struggle against the Taliban**

samedi 2 octobre 2021, par [CARTIER Marcel](#), [GHAFFAR Selay](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 30 septembre 2021).

Two days before the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, I was gearing up to interview one of the Afghanistan's most prominent women's activists. I have long admired Selay Ghaffar for her role in not only promoting gender equality and social justice policies, but also for her resolute opposition to the United States and NATO occupation of her country, which was often justified using humanitarian pretexts.



*Photo : Selay Ghaffar, spokesperson for the Solidarity Party of Afghanistan.*

As spokesperson for the leftist Solidarity Party of Afghanistan, Ghaffar was well placed to help provide some clarity on the rapid advance of the Taliban through the country, as well as how the Afghan left was orienting itself against both reaction and imperialism.

About an hour before our scheduled interview, Ghaffar sent me an apologetic message that she would need to reschedule. "The security situation is unclear," the text read. It was hard to imagine from where I was sitting that within the next two days the Taliban would be patrolling Kabul without as little as a shot having been fired.

In the following weeks, I tried to contact Ghaffar on a few occasions, but I didn't hear back. I wondered if she had decided to stay in Afghanistan, or if she had joined the huge numbers who were trying to leave the country as the Taliban prepared to firm up their rule. I worried for her safety, but held out hope that I would hear from her.

I finally received a message from Ghaffar in the past week that she was safe and willing to give me an interview. She couldn't discuss her whereabouts, due to the security situation.

The following is my full interview with Selay Ghaffar from an undisclosed location.

**Marcel Cartier - We initially planned to do this interview on August 13, just two days before the Taliban entered Kabul. Could you explain what the situation was like at that time in the city and what the following days were like for you ?**

Selay Ghaffa - To be honest, like many others, I was both shocked and not shocked at the same time. I was shocked only in the sense that everything happened so quickly, that suddenly in the last week the Taliban were taking over province after province without any fighting.

I remember I was making a joke with a friend of mine that maybe tonight I will go to sleep, and in the morning when I wake up the Taliban will take over Kabul, as well — and it happened almost exactly like that.

I had a meeting that day to coordinate food distribution for IDPs [internally displaced persons], so in the morning I sent my daughter to my mother, my son went to school, my husband went to work. We started with what seemed like a normal day.

Everybody was out and about, my comrades were on the way to our meeting, and suddenly there was a huge amount of traffic and congestion on the roads. Then I heard gunfire coming from one of the western districts of the city.

I asked my bodyguard who was with me if he could ask somebody what was going on, and people started responding that the Taliban are in the city.

Suddenly, my main concern became reaching a safe place. I got worried for my comrades, for my family that they were out, especially my little daughter who I had been breastfeeding. It took me hours to reach a safe place, but I was still separated from my daughter.

But that night I received many messages and e-mails from my friends and from supporters abroad asking : “Are you safe ? What can we do for you ?”

These kinds of solidarity messages gave me a lot of strength, but at the same time I was getting a lot of messages from people asking for help, for safety.

It was a terrible feeling, because I didn't know how to help them or support them. I was awake the whole night with the sound of helicopters circling above. We thought maybe it was fighting taking place, but later on we found out that it was evacuations. Early the next morning, I left that place to head to another safe house.

It was terrible how shamelessly United States left but then decided to send back troops to evacuate their own. Through all this, Afghan people were trying to show their hatred toward the Taliban and rushed toward the airport.

Maybe not even because they were scared, but because they have so much hatred toward the Taliban that they didn't want to live under that kind of regime.

**You mentioned that you were only really surprised by how quickly the Taliban managed to take power. Was your expectation that as soon as the US and NATO countries left Afghanistan that the government of Ashraf Ghani and the Islamic Republic would inevitably fall ?**

In a TV interview about a week before Kabul fell to the Taliban, I clearly said that what's going on right now it means that the United States is bringing the Taliban back to power. This is exactly what we had anticipated, and we knew that the deal that had been made in Doha in 2020 would lead to this.

One thing everybody's saying now is that the Taliban succeeded and the United States failed. I would say no, the United States just changed its puppet regime. Whether it was Ashraf Ghani or the Taliban, both of them are puppets of the US.

It's not that the Taliban was a popular national force that defeated the occupiers. No, it was not like Vietnam. Nobody can compare it. The United States just changed from one side to the other side,

which is why United States decided to withdraw.

Zalmay Khalizad, who was the US envoy during the Afghanistan peace talks, just made this very clear when he said that they wanted the transition to take place in a safe, peaceful manner. This means that they had this plan to give power to the Taliban, and we were right in our assessment of what would happen.

Ashraf Ghani could not stay because he was such a puppet and he didn't have the support of the people. The army was collapsing, everything was collapsing, because it was all based on the United States' budget. For this reason, the United States prepared the Taliban for this takeover.

We in Afghanistan, we were witnessed all that. We saw the deal between the United States and the Taliban in Qatar to release 5000 of their prisoners. This gave the broken backbone of the Taliban its strength once again. Incidents like releasing their suicide bombers from Guantanamo, giving them an office in Doha, were like recognising them officially as a political force, not as terrorists.

On the other side, the Afghan government was weak. The corruption, the injustice, the unemployment and all these things inside the country paved the way for the Taliban's return to power. People were not in favour of supporting the government, but they didn't want the Taliban, either.

**The Taliban have claimed that Afghanistan is now finally an independent country, contrary to what you have just said about them being a puppet of the United States. Do you see any truth to their assertion ? Does their victory at least bring forward the prospect of a lasting peace after 40 years of war ?**

We always said that we wanted all foreign forces to leave Afghanistan, because military occupation was not the solution. And of course, the United States and their NATO allies had their own strategic, economic and political purposes in Afghanistan. They didn't come here for Afghans or to bring prosperity to Afghanistan. It was very clear for the world that they had their own interests.

During these 20 years of occupation, we had the darkest days in our lives. It was our country's darkest period because during this period hundreds of thousands of people have been killed.

During this period, many dangerous terrorist groups have been empowered. Afghanistan has been turned into the most corrupt country in the world, with the highest production and trafficking of opium and heroin. Lots of our untouched minerals have been looted.

There has been a huge difference or gap between the rich and poor, because with all the money arriving in Afghanistan, it was looted by those who were in power. We had brutal oppression against women, and the United States abused our misery to justify their presence in Afghanistan.

We always said that we wanted the United States and NATO forces to leave, and also take their puppets with them, whether it's the Taliban, the technocrats, jihadist parties, or other terrorist groups that they created, supported and financed. This wasn't just happening in Afghanistan, of course, but in other parts of the world like Syria and Iraq. Take them with you ! Leave the country to Afghans, leave it to the democratic and progressive forces. We will build our country.

We wanted them to leave, but we didn't want them to hand over power to the Taliban again.

Everybody should know that Taliban was a creation of the United States. Benazir Bhutto (the former Prime Minister of Pakistan) once said that the idea of creating Taliban came from Britain, and the United States backed this idea. Saudi Arabia supported them and Pakistan trained them. When a

puppet says to their boss, “leave us alone”, it is just fake. It doesn't make them a genuine national liberation movement.

This is from one side. On the other side, if you ask me if the Taliban is also a puppet of other countries, I would say yes in the sense that Russia has its interests, China has its interests, even Iran has its interests in supporting the Taliban.

Of course, we can see Pakistan now has heavy influence in Afghanistan, and they are the decision makers, as well — but we should not forget that Pakistan was always under the command of the United States from the beginning. When the Taliban took over, the first person to come to Afghanistan to meet with them was the head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

We should also not forget that back in 2014, when the United States started their withdrawal, they destroyed significant amounts of military equipment and gave lots of them to Pakistan rather than turning them over to Afghanistan at that time. This is because they never wanted an independent country, a stable state, or let's say they never wanted to have a popular state. That's why they always have their puppets.

Whatever the Taliban has said about Afghanistan being independent, it's not independent. There is a strategic change, but they are under the control of ISI, they are under the control of the CIA, and many others.

Peace will never come through a puppet regime, especially as they are medieval minded, they are misogynist, they are inhumane, they are brutal murderers. Peace will never come because they are not here for the prosperity of Afghanistan or for people of Afghanistan.

Also, many times I have said that the white flag of the Taliban has been replaced with the black flag of the Islamic State. On the one hand, the US helped to bring the Taliban back to power, while on the other side, they prop up the Islamic State in Afghanistan. The war will continue as right now we're witnessing.

[US President Joe] Biden has said that we will collaborate with the Taliban to combat terrorism, which now means ISIS in Afghanistan. With this, they will have an excuse to be in Afghanistan, especially to counter their rivals like China and Russia in destabilising the region. They want to stop the economic growth of their rivals. Right now, China and Russia are also playing a diplomatic role with the Taliban because they are afraid of terrorism being exported to their countries and, of course, this is the plan of ISIS.

To summarise, we can only talk of peace and prosperity when there is a democratic and secular order.

**What are your thoughts when you see somebody like George W Bush, the architect of the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, say that the withdrawal of US troops is a mistake and that he fears for the women and girls of your country ?**

I think he's insulting Afghan women. He's insulting the Afghan people because he is the man who twenty years ago occupied my country and destroyed my country. Because of this occupation, again, the Taliban took over. Back then, the US and NATO overthrew the bloodthirsty Taliban regime within a week, but all the while they have been wheeling and dealing with them, especially in Doha. They brought their mercenaries back to power.

But this didn't start with Bush, or only twenty years ago. It's been over 40 years since the US thrust our country into the darkest period in our country's history by supporting the Mujahedeen during

the Cold War to counter the Soviet Union and their puppet regime.

It's really shameful when Bush, Clinton, Obama and others who have been in power and were responsible for this destruction and hundreds of thousands of deaths, and are responsible for the chaos of today, talk about human rights and women's rights. They are the biggest liars in history, and should be noted that way in the history of their country.

After September 11 [2001], you had an excuse to occupy Afghanistan, and when you did, the puppet regime you installed was one full of all these Northern Alliance murderers. You brought the butcher Gulbuddin Hekmatyar back to Kabul under this peace process. Let's say that fundamentalists are the first enemy of women. And you Bush, you Obama, you Clinton, you Trump, you supported them — and even Hillary Clinton ! You were the ones who supported this fundamentalist government. You were never on the side of Afghan women, you waged war on women's emancipation in 2001. It was just a lie to invade Afghanistan, and now you are shedding crocodile tears for women.

Fundamentalism and imperialism are the two sides of the same coin. Imperialism and the capitalist system mean that war has to be created ; for these imperialist countries to continue to thrive and to conquer the world, and especially for the United States to remain the principle superpower. Of course, the US has always used terrorism as a tool in order to accomplish this.

Today, they are threatening their rivals like China, Russia and Iran : if you move your ass, we have all these weapons in our arsenal. We saw this when they used the Mother of All Bombs (MOAB) in Afghanistan, to show these countries that these kind of weapons are right on their borders.

The Afghan people will never forgive you. From 2001 until now, hundreds of people have been killed by drone attacks in Afghanistan. These crimes have been documented and they have to be prosecuted for these crimes, even if it's just for the drone attacks that they have done. When it comes to solidarity, you have to work on these things if you want to truly support the Afghan people. Otherwise, they will get away with murder with impunity.

**Did the situation of women in Afghanistan change in any meaningful way during the US-NATO occupation ? Despite the imposition of the reactionary government that you mentioned, there did appear to the outside observer to be women taking on prominent roles in government and more broadly in society.**

We always actually said that United States and the west have deceived their people by claiming that they were liberating Afghan women. In reality, the barbarism and oppression against Afghan woman was increased, because they gave the power back to the fundamentalists, and as I have said, fundamentalism is the first and most dangerous enemy of women.

During this 20-year period, women have been stoned, women have been victims of acid attacks. We saw how women were beheaded, and the many self immolations due to the horrific oppression of women. That's why Afghanistan had been called the most dangerous country in the world for women to live in — just in 2019. Women have been harassed and have been put in prison for adultery, when actually they were raped.

There was impunity at all levels when it came to women's justice, because all those people sitting in power were the perpetrators, whether it was in rape cases or any other kind of violence against women. The ones in power were involved, their families were involved, their parties were involved.

On the other hand, there were some superficial show-pieces, such as women in the parliament or in the cabinet. We also did have women who started working outside. There were some things for

women like education, and being able to go out on their own and all that, but it was not supported with the proper infrastructure, and was often entirely dependent on the money of NGOs or the United States, who were in turn looting Afghanistan in the name of women's rights.

It is true that there were some actual gains, even if they were not in the infrastructure of the country itself, but these were then used to convince western people that their countries had to continue their military operation in Afghanistan. Most of these women in the parliament and in the cabinet were actually the loudspeakers of the imperialist countries and the occupiers. They were the real obstacles standing in the way of the real resistance of Afghan revolutionaries and the progressive movement.

There was something for women, but I can't say this was freedom, I can't really say they were rights. I always say that rights have to be achieved by struggle, and then they cannot be so easily taken away. They cannot be gifted.

That's why all these women sitting in government were saying when the United States leaves, all of our gains will be reversed. That's why we always ask the Afghan woman to struggle against these fundamentalist groups, to raise their voices to make a strong movement of resistance, so we should take our rights with our own hands.

If we look at history and the rights that women in the west have won, it's the result of decades, or even centuries, of struggle. We can look at the examples of women like Rosa Luxemburg, or if we look at Iceland and the position of women, we see a long history where they started with demands for social reform, and they were able to finally achieve many of their rights. If we look at women today in Kurdistan, the self-determination they have has been the result of a long struggle.

There have been really progressive organisations over these past 20 years that did work hard among the masses here in Afghanistan, among the women. That's why right now we can see that all these protesters in Afghanistan, all these brave women that have come into the streets, they are the generation of these 20 years. They're all young women who have gained awareness, and are even very politically aware.

**What kind of period do you think Afghanistan is entering, especially for resistance to the Taliban ? What will be the role of progressive forces or the women's movement if all opposition is effectively banned ?**

It's important to say that unfortunately ever since the puppet regime of the Soviet Union was imposed more than 40 years ago, the space for leftists, progressive forces, intellectuals and revolutionaries has always been restricted. They have been banned, attacked and there were always obstacles. They were attacked from all sides, and each period has its own history.

For instance, there were intellectuals who were killed by the Soviet puppet regime just because of their ideology. Later, during the Mujahedeen regime, intellectuals or teachers were killed simply because they could read and write. Many of them escaped the country. Under the [Hamid] Karzai and Ghani governments, in the name of democracy, it's true that many parties or organisations reopened, but they were always attacked, there were always laws and regulations to stop them from functioning. They were always receiving threats.

I'm on the side of revolutionary and progressive movement. I have always received threats for my work. Just a few months back, I got very serious threat. I have been threatened many times by the jihadist parties because I was very outspoken against them, but this time it was from the al-Qaeda group, the Haqqani Network. Now Sirajuddin Haqqani is the Minister of Interior.

The man who was supposed to assassinate me was identified by the Afghan intelligence service, and they actually released a statement saying that now this man has been released from prison. All this shows that when you raise your voice, they try to stop you, they try to shut you down.

Now we see that the Taliban, just to get recognition from the world — just to show themselves as supposedly “moderate” — said they would be more tolerant. But then when women started to go out onto the streets, when the people started to go on the street and demand their rights, they gradually started to attack them. They began to put them on the ground, they started firing so that they would scatter and no longer raise their voices.

They imprisoned three journalists and tortured them just because they were covering the news of the protests of women. We can see what kind of policy they are imposing when journalists have to take permission from the Ministry of Interior and that murderer Haqqani on who to interview.

We have always struggled with very limited space for the revolutionary forces, but regardless we did continue to struggle in different regions, and by using different tactics. This resistance in Afghanistan will continue, because there are organisations and associations of women, as well as certain parties.

Of course, they will change their tactics not to come under more attack. It means that it's not good to, you know, just simply ask the enemies to come and attack me, but they will find ways to continue and the most important job for them as of right now is to give political awareness to the people. It's also to ask for unity of all national progressive forces to come together and get organised, and also organise the masses.

Right now, all these women's protests and people protesting across the country are self-organised, but they are not under one strong, progressive leadership. This is important, because if they don't have a strong leadership, they will definitely not be able to continue this movement.

We see what happened in Egypt, what happened, you know, in the Arab Spring and all that, because of the strong democratic leadership. It's very important, the democratic leadership of such kind of movements and uprisings. If the uprisings and movements have democratic and progressive, revolutionary leadership, it will have an impact and it will succeed one day.

So, the left has to organise themselves, has to mobilise the people, has to give this awareness to the people, has to work among the masses, has to even provide humanitarian support to all these people who are in need.

Especially for women, we have to raise awareness of secularism, because without a secular government, it would be impossible to have rights for women. Secularism is guaranteeing the rights of women under government somehow, to suppress the one who uses religion as an excuse to oppress minorities and to oppress women.

**Despite everything, it sounds as if you still maintain a sense of optimism.**

As long as I have hope, I will definitely continue my struggle. I have faith that one day we will succeed. If we don't have hope, how we could continue our struggle? We have to learn from all those countries that have struggled for decades, and finally they succeeded. The struggle is not a matter of just today. Most of the young people in my country in the past 20 years, when I have been politically and socially active, demanded and expected the change to happen very quickly.

It's not easy. It's not easy to convince people to go out and organise people, because there are lots of issues in Afghanistan. For example, the trust of people when it comes to revolutionary ideas or when

you work as a revolutionary might be hard to gain because they will say, “Oh, but remember what the communists did to us ?”

Or even if you organise as a Muslim, they might say, “But what about what the Taliban have done to us ?”

Or when we talk about democracy, about women’s rights, they will point to the Hamid Karzai or Ashraf Ghani governments.

So many people are not believing in anything — they are not believing in women’s organisations, they are not believing in parties, and they’re not believing in all these ideologies because of previous experiences of how these ideologies were used.

On the other side in Afghanistan, there is an ethnicity problem and clashes of ethnic groups among themselves, and all these warlords always use these ethnic clashes to their advantage. That’s why it was difficult to unite all the people together, that’s why we have to achieve unity of all people regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender or even class.

For me and many women like me, it’s difficult to live in Afghanistan, because I can’t walk in the streets on my own, I can’t work — especially being a public figure receiving all these threats and to know that they’re searching for me. I can’t organise people or conduct my work the way I would want. When you don’t have access to the internet, when you don’t have access to mobile phones, you can easily understand why many of the women’s activists chose to leave and why many revolutionaries have left.

We have to be hopeful, but understand that all these things are difficult and that they take time. It’s not easy, and I always say that I am from a generation of war. I was born in war in 1983, and I grew up in this war. I don’t know, maybe I will die in this war, but I’m hopeful that at least my daughter will live in a peaceful country and enjoy all her rights.



---

## **P.-S.**

• GLW. Issue 1320. September 30, 2021 :

<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/exclusive-interview-solidarity-party-afghanistans-selay-ghaffar-speaks-about-struggle>