



## We Are Afghan Women: Voices of Hope

*George W. Bush Institute*

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Here are Afghan women in their own words. Words that are by turns inspiring, moving, courageous, and heartbreakingly. Their powerful stories create a compelling portrait of the lives, struggles, and successes of this extraordinary nation and its extraordinarily resilient women. With an introduction by Laura Bush, honorary founding co-chair of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council.

Afghanistan has been described as “the worst nation in the world to be a woman.” More than fifty percent of girls who are forced into marriage are sixteen or younger. Too many women live in fear and in many areas, education and employment for women are still condemned. The women featured in *We Are Afghan Women* are fighting to change all that. From rug weavers to domestic violence counselors to business owners, educators, and activists, these courageous women are charting a new path for themselves, their families, their communities, and their nation. Told in their own voices, their stories vividly capture a country undone by decades of war and now struggling to build a lasting peace.

Meet Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, who ran underground schools for girls until the Taliban fell, and today has established educational centers across Afghanistan to teach women and girls basic literacy. Or Freshta Hazeq, who as a female business owner, has faced death threats, sabotage, and even kidnapping threats against her children. Naheed Farid is the youngest female member of Afghanistan’s parliament. During her campaign, opponents cut Naheed’s face out of campaign posters and her family risked complete ruin, but her husband and father-in-law never wavered, encouraging her to persevere. Here, too are compassionate women such as Masooma Jafari, who started a national midwives association. Her own mother was forced into marriage at age twelve and gave birth to her first child at age thirteen.

With an introduction by former First Lady Laura Bush, *We Are Afghan Women* chronicles the lives of young and old, daughters and mothers, educated, and those who are still learning. These determined women are defying the odds to lead Afghanistan to a better future. Their stories are a stark reminder that in some corners of the world the struggle continues and that women’s progress in society, business, and politics cannot be taken for granted. Their eloquent words challenge all of us to answer: What does it truly mean to be a woman in the twenty-first century?

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