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Women for Afghan Women Announces Expo 2019 Honorary Co-Chairs and Speakers
Afghanistan's First Lady Rula Ghani and Feminist Icon Gloria Steinem to Co-Chair WAW Event

(New York, NY) April 4, 2019—[Women for Afghan Women](#) (WAW) is pleased to announce that Afghanistan's First Lady Rula Ghani and feminist trailblazer Gloria Steinem will serve as honorary co-chairs of WAW's Expo 2019 to [#CelebrateCourage](#)—the courage of our brave, resilient, staff, clients, and supporters. While neither can attend the April 30th event in New York City, they stand firmly behind WAW and support Afghan women's rights and peacebuilding.

"Few other women's values and work align more closely with those of WAW," said WAW Executive Director Najia Nasim. "We are thrilled that First Lady Rula Ghani and Gloria Steinem have agreed to co-chair Expo 2019 and that Afghanistan's first female Ambassador to the United States, Her Excellency Roya Rahmani, will speak about Afghan women's rights and their role in the country's peace process."

WAW, the largest organization in the world promoting and protecting the rights of Afghan women and children, has provided services to nearly 38,000 women, children, and families, trained over 362,000 individuals on women's rights, and facilitated protection and monitoring services for around 723,000 internally-displaced persons and refugee returnees since 2001. The organization has over 800 full-time local staff, with 32 facilities and programs in 14 Afghan provinces, as well as in its New York Community Center and Washington, DC office.

[First Lady Rula Ghani](#) has long been a strong advocate for Afghanistan's women, children, and the most vulnerable citizens—but has increased her efforts immensely since her husband was elected President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2014, and she assumed the role of First Lady. She has been instrumental in initiating country-wide discussions focused on promoting peace and responsible citizenship. Today, as overtures towards peace are underway, First Lady Ghani is championing the women and youth working to make their voices heard, and believes that peace cannot be achieved at the expense of the Afghan people, particularly women. In 2015, *TIME* magazine recognized her as one of the 100 most influential people in the world.

[Gloria Steinem](#) is a writer, lecturer, political activist, and feminist organizer who has been an outspoken champion of women's rights, peace, and justice since the 1960s. She co-founded *New York Magazine* and *Ms. Magazine*, and produced a documentary on child abuse, a feature film about the death penalty, and *WOMAN*, a series of documentaries about global violence against women. Gloria co-founded and is on the boards of the Women's Media Center, Equality Now, and Donor Direct Action, and the Advisory Board of Apne Aap. She is an advisor to TIME'S UP, part of a global movement against sexual violence and harassment. In 2013, she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor, for her activism.

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[Najia Nasim](#) will speak for the first time in her new capacity with WAW to its broad base of supporters, friends, and partners, and present her vision for the organization's future. She spent five years managing WAW's day-to-day operations in Afghanistan as Country Director, for which she received numerous accolades, including being nominated for the "10 Bravest Women of the World" award in 2014 by Amnesty International and the Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize in 2015. In 2018, she received the Mother Teresa Memorial Award for Social Justice on behalf of WAW.

Expo 2019 will present interactive exhibits about WAW's work and feature a high-level panel discussion on [women and the prospects for peace in Afghanistan](#) including Afghan Ambassador to the United States, [H.E. Roya Rahmani](#); WAW Board member and Senior Program Officer at the United States Institute of Peace, [Belquis Ahmadi](#); Senior Fellow and Director of the Center of International Cooperation at New York University, [Dr. Barnett Rubin](#); Journalist at The New York Times and author, [Kim Barker](#); and Founder of the Strategic Leadership Academy and retired Army Colonel, [Dr. Christopher Kolenda](#) as panelists, and journalist [Jenny Nordberg](#) as moderator. The evening will also include a live performance by inspiring Afghan concert pianist Elham Fanoos, and a silent auction featuring items made by WAW clients.

As the peace talks between the United States and Taliban continue, Afghanwomen have the most to lost—and yet remain largely excluded from the process and live in fear that [their rights may be bargained away](#) in service of a flawed peace deal. A reemergence of Taliban rule of a peace agreement that tolerates the Taliban's oppressive ideology threatens the impressive gains women and girls have made since 2001, as well as the vital work WAW's 800-plus staff undertake everyday throughout Afghanistan.

[Expo 2019: #CelebrateCourage](#) will honor the strides Afghan women and girls have made, while helping WAW to continue its urgent work to amplify their voices throughout the peace process, ensure they have a seat at the table, and to serve them in our daily life-saving and life-changing programs and facilities.

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Women for Afghan Women (WAW) is a grassroots, non-profit organization dedicated to securing and protecting the rights of disenfranchised Afghan women and girls in Afghanistan and New York, particularly their rights to develop their individual potential, to self-determination, and to be represented in all areas of life: political, social, cultural, and economic. WAW advocates for women's rights and challenges the norms that underpin gender-based violence wherever opportunities arise to influence attitudes and bring about change.