

ANNUAL REPORT

2023

Web: <https://womenleaders.ca/>
Email: info@womenleaders.ca
BC Society Number: S0074574
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H. Hailey Graham is a Board member of WLOT and a family law lawyer practicing in downtown Vancouver British Columbia.

MESSAGE FROM ONE OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

“We are delighted to present to you the Annual Report for 2023, highlighting the remarkable achievements of Women Leaders of Tomorrow, a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women through education and sports. It is with great joy and gratitude that WLOT reflects upon the past year's endeavors and the positive impact we have made in the lives of Afghan women. Education is a cornerstone of empowerment and providing educational opportunities ensures our Afghan women scholars have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to overcome barriers, both at home and abroad. Similarly, sports is also a means of empowerment. WLOT firmly believes that participation in sports fosters not only physical well-being but also enhances self-esteem, leadership, and teamwork. By unleashing their athletic prowess, WLOT has empowered Afghan women athletes to break societal stereotypes, to embrace their passion for sports, and to foster an environment of equality and inclusion.

None of this would have been possible without the unwavering support and generosity of our donors, volunteers, and partners. Your commitment to our cause has made a tangible difference in the lives of countless women. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for your belief in our vision and for standing alongside us in our journey of empowerment.

As we continue to strive for greater impact, we look forward to the opportunities that lie ahead.”



1. MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I started Women Leaders of Tomorrow (WLOT) to empower women and girls from Afghanistan through education and sports. This last two years have been very difficult for me and everyone who has ties to Afghanistan or cares about women's rights. But we didn't give up. Supporting the female leaders of today and tomorrow has never been more important.

The ban on Afghan women's rights to an education, and sports remain in place since the Taliban takeover on August 15, 2021. The women athletes who previously competed in regional and national events have are still receiving death letters and warnings of the death penalty from the Taliban. Many have gone into hiding and are seeking ways to leave the country. The Judo Dojo that WLOT has been supporting for many years has had to shut down to present day. Despite initial promises that education would still be accessible, the Taliban has now outlawed education for females beyond grade six. Millions of girls and young women are now prisoners in their own home, with no opportunities to learn or develop.

WLOT continues to stand with Afghan women and girls. Since the crisis began, we have been working tirelessly to:

- advocate for athletes-at-risk to be offered refuge outside Afghanistan
- speak out about the situation in Afghanistan through the media and public events
- ask the Government of Canada to prioritize refugee status for female athletes
- facilitate scholarships and student visas at Canadian high schools and universities
- evacuate female students to schools in the US and Canada
- fundraise for Afghanistan Learns Online program

- advocate for the female athletes with the IOC to be able to compete
- continue offering direct educational programming in Afghanistan
- Continue online fitness/Judo and English language classes

I am proud of what we have accomplished this year, but the advocacy must continue because there is so much more to be done. We need the support of donors, volunteers, advocates, secondary and post-secondary institutions to continue addressing the immediate risks faced by Afghan women, while also investing in them as the leaders of today and tomorrow. Please join us!

Friba Reyazee

Executive Director and Founder



One of the biggest highlight of WLOT has been supporting the ten Afghan women geologists and mining engineers to obtain admission at the University of British Columbia. The Executive Director, Friba Rezayee says “It has been an honour for me to work with an incredible cohort of ten Afghan women students to support them to have access to higher education in Canada. Hadn’t WLOT acted on time, these ten Afghan women would have been deported back to Afghanistan under the Taliban regime”.

2. WHAT WE DO

WLOT is a group of Afghan women and supporters of women and girls' education and empowerment. Established in 2020, we seek to close the gender gap in Afghanistan by facilitating the emergence of a new generation of female leaders in sports, business, government and non-traditional occupations. Our primary focus is on helping Afghan women to obtain a world-class education. We are guided in this work by our Mission, Vision and Values.

Women Leaders of Tomorrow empowers Afghan women and girls through participation in sports and access to world-class education at home and overseas.

A world in which Afghan women are equal in all aspects of life including access to education, career opportunities (including non-traditional fields), participation in sports, and decision-making roles in government and the private sector.



We strongly believe that:

- All women and girls have the right to access to education, freedom of thought, and a life of dignity and purpose.
- Education is the single most important means to improve the status of women in Afghanistan.
- Women and girls' leadership is critical for developing the next generation of leaders for Afghanistan.

We invite you to read through our Annual Report 2022-23 to see the many ways that WLOT has been standing up for and with Afghan women and girls over the last year.

3. PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

WLOT operationalizes its mission through four program areas:

- Education in Afghanistan
- Leadership through Sports
- Education Overseas
- Advocacy

Due to the evolving crisis in Afghanistan, this year we added online educational and sports, Afghanistan Learns Online program, and activities to support for Afghan women and girls. We also ramped up our efforts to link the women and girls in our network to scholarship opportunities in North America.

Outlined below are some highlights of what we engaged in and achieved over the last year.



By the Numbers: 2023

- 20 young women participating in weekly English-language training
- 20 volunteer English-language teachers and mentors
- 2 judo coaches training the next generation of female athletes
- 13 Afghan female athletes training in judo and fitness
- 15 female students were granted scholarships in Canada
- 5 young women linked to scholarships at Canadian high schools
- 2 young women linked to scholarships at Canadian colleges



A. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING IN AFGHANISTAN

WLOT was able to continue offering English language tutoring and mentorship even after the Taliban takeover. In fact, more young women are participating in our program than ever before. It has become an important social and educational connection for the participants as they have been forced to stay at home and are no longer able to attend school. WLOT one of the few Canadian organizations still offering educational and sports programming in Afghanistan.

There are 20 participants enrolled in our English language and mentorship program *Afghanistan Learns Online* program, provided by 20 amazing volunteers. Yes! You read that correctly. We provide a 1:1 ratio between the teachers and students. The program is about much more than learning English. Our volunteers act as mentors, someone who will walk with the student on their academic, athletic, and personal journey. The goal is to make them feel that they have someone in their corner who will listen, provide support, guidance, and champion their academic and life endeavours.

Donations to WLOT for the Afghanistan Learns Online are going directly to cover the cost of internet connection for these English language students, since the program runs virtually. Our Executive Director and volunteer lead teachers support the volunteers with their lesson planning and building their capacity as mentors for our incredibly strong and resilient participants. WLOT keeps the number of the students in this program low to focus on the quality rather than quantity. However, with more funding and volunteers, we could expand this important work.



B. LEADERSHIP THROUGH SPORTS

Girls of Afghanistan Lead (GOAL) was established to help underprivileged Afghan women gain leadership in sports coaching roles and to become instructors to open their own sports clubs or to become professional athletes. GOAL has a particular focus on judo, but also supports women's cycling, volleyball, and general fitness programs. Since 2020, our support for a judo dojo in Kabul, with 3 coaches and 15 emerging athletes, was active and impactful. Unfortunately, as of August 2021, we have had to suspend this activity as the Taliban banned all female participation in sports. We have moved all the sports activities online.

WLOT partnered with a US based non-profit organization, **Free to Run**, to provide virtual fitness/Judo classes for the female athletes.

Since then, WLOT's Executive Director has been working non-stop to coordinate evacuation, full-ride scholarships, and refugee sponsorships for Afghan female athletes who are at risk of violent punishment (100 lashings for playing sports) or the death penalty (for leaders and women who competed internationally).

C. EDUCATION OVERSEAS



The ban on female education was above grade six initially, it is now above third grade in Afghanistan since August 2021 is devastating for millions of girls and women. While WLOT has always worked to link Afghan women to quality educational opportunities, the need has increased exponentially. Besides women's desire to pursue their education, there is now the added urgency to bring women at risk of violent reprisals to safety.

Since August, our Executive Director has been working tirelessly to facilitate access to scholarships overseas and student visas for Afghan women. By partnering with educational institutions and humanitarian organizations, WLOT has been able to secure:

- 5 full scholarships for young Afghan women at two private high schools in BC
- 15 female students have been linked to scholarships in British Columbia, and Ontario

The women supported by these scholarships are highly talented, with so much to offer the world. One example is a high school student who wishes to become a doctor and return to Afghanistan to establish a modern health care system.

Currently, 14 women, who made it to safety in the neighbouring countries, for instance, Pakistan Iran, and Tajikistan, are waiting to receive student visas to begin studies in engineering, fitness and health, and psychology at universities in Ontario in in Fall 2023. WLOT is in touch with many more women who need the same opportunity.

D. HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Afghanistan is in crisis internally. The Taliban takeover has had an enormously negative impact on the economy, impacting people's income and access to necessities. According to UNICEF, more than 23 million Afghans are experiencing acute hunger, and 9 million are starving. Millions of households have been left with only intermittent electricity and an inability to heat their homes through the harsh winter months.

WLOT was able to issue an urgent appeal for supplies to help families get through the winter. With the help of generous donations from individuals in the USA and Canada, WLOT volunteers purchased and delivered survival packages to five Afghan families. The packages included food staples, firewood, and basic medications.

E. ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

Our Executive Director, Friba Rezayee, has been speaking out for Afghan women and girls. Her key messages are:

To prioritize female athletes from Afghanistan as refugees

- To prioritize female athletes' accessibility to the IOC competitions immediately and independently
- To expedite student visas for Afghans accepted to study at Canadian schools
- To stand with Afghan women and girls and amplify their voices



Public Talks

Friba spoke at Crisis in Afghanistan: UN Sustainable Goals an Afghan Perspective at the University of Alberta for International Development Week, hosted by the University of Alberta in February 2023. Watch and listen to her [speech here](#).

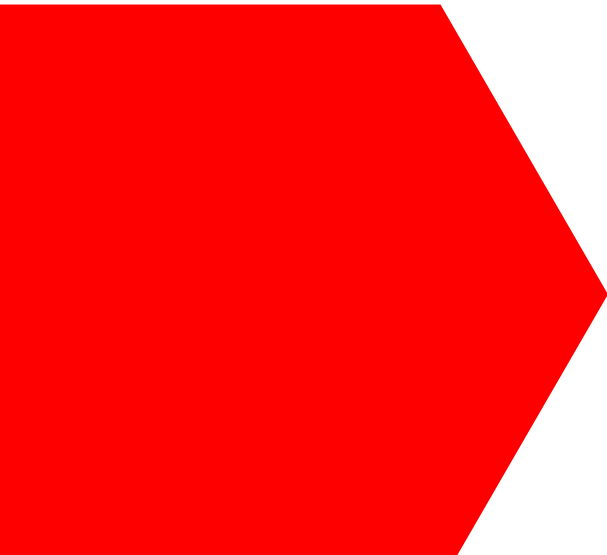
Friba participated in a panel on the International Students Over Coming War - ISOW hosted by the Wilfred Laurier University in Ontario in March 2023.

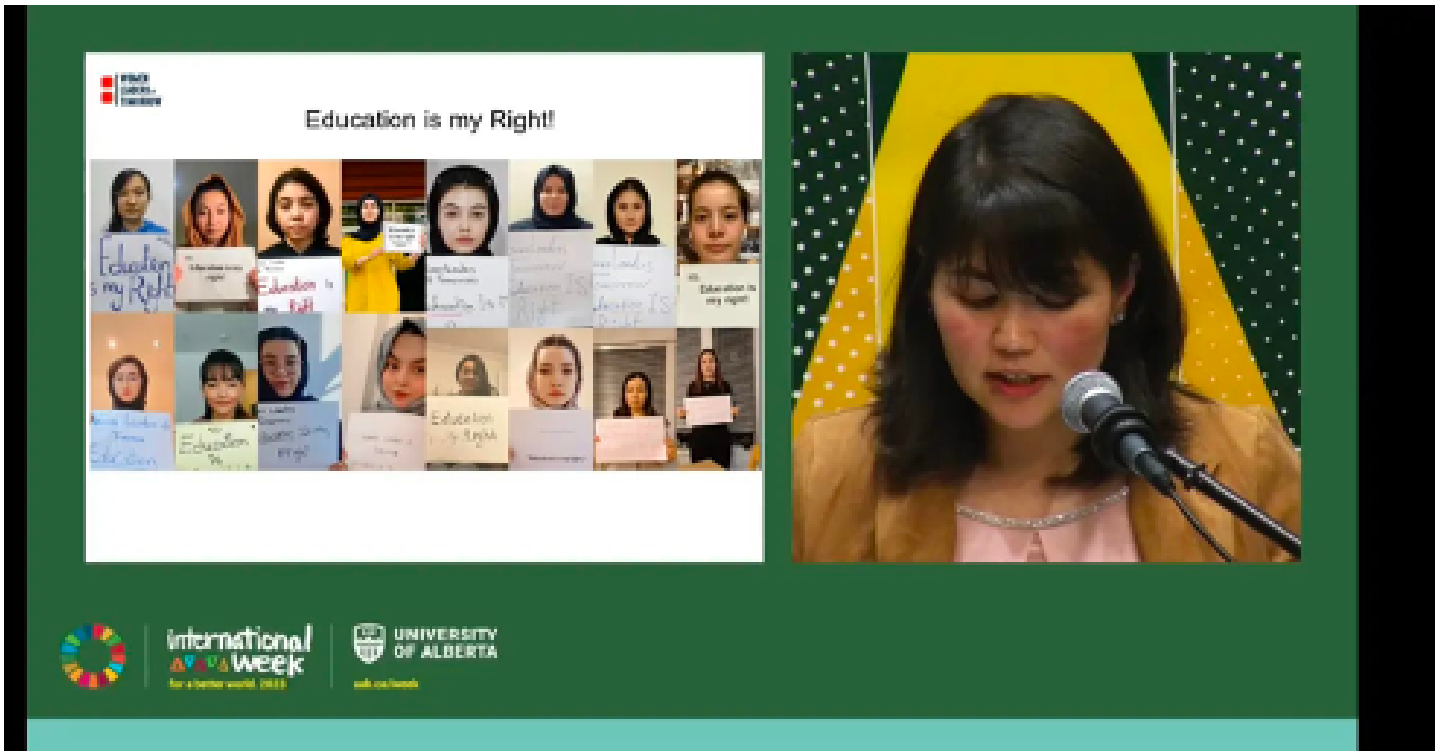
Friba was invited to speak at the Crofton House School in Vancouver. She thanked the school for providing scholarships to the two young Afghan women in January 2023.

Friba spoke at Crofton House in Vancouver. Her talk inspired the school to offer two scholarships for Afghan girls (tuition, international travel and living costs) in January 2023.

Friba was invited to speak at the Shawnigan Lake School for Scholar's lunch. She thanked the Board of Governors at the Shawnigan Lake School for considering to offer a second scholarships for another young Afghan woman in May 2023.

Friba contributed with the Deucthe Welle to make a documentary about the current situation of the Afghan female athletes in Afghanistan. [Watch the documentary here](#).





'After the Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021 I had no hope and no idea about my future. But when I received a scholarship through Women Leaders Of Tomorrow to attend Crofton House School, my dreams came alive again. The scholarship was like a light in the darkness that can change everything in my life, gave me the chance to dream again, and I am truly happy to have the opportunity to continue my education. I can say that it completely changed my live.' WLOT student at Crofton House School





Public Campaigns

WLOT launched the hashtag #EducationIsMyRight last winter calling for local schools to organize a tour with the WLOT volunteers to awareness about basic Human Rights to an education on International Day of Human Rights: December 10, 2022. The purpose of this campaign was to increase public awareness about the persecution of Afghan's female students and athletes with the return of the Taliban and to educate everyone that education is a basic Human Rights.

- Shawnigan Lake School leadership organized a tour on the school campus, and invited the WLOT ED, and volunteers to give a speech about the pressing issues of Human Rights.
- The Pearson College hosted the campaign #EducationIsMyRight with a guest speaker from WLOT in Vancouver Island.
- Crofton House School leadership invited the tour on their campus to amplify the voices of Afghan women **#EducationIsMyRight**.

On International Women's Day, members and partners of WLOT, SOCIAL IMPACT UBC, hosted a panel discussion, Reflecting Realities: Analyzing the local & global situation of Afghan Women on UBC campus. Advocating to the Canadian Government to waive the UNHCR document 'Refugee Status' or 'Asylum seeker' for the Afghan nationals.

Roya's story

"My life has become to eat and asleep at home", Roya writes "I didn't do anything wrong. The only crime I have committed is to play sports."

Before the Taliban took power in August 2021, Roya was one of the best judo and mixed martial arts fighters in the country. She couldn't take the Taliban's oppression on female athletes, and she began to a secret gym in the neighbourhood. Then the Taliban raided her gym and beat her with the AK-47 magazine on her left arm, and left a serious bruise. They wanted to hit her for going to the gym. If she couldn't manage to escape on time, she would have been tried in a Sharia court. That would have meant a penalty of 100 lashes or even public execution, just for the 'crime' of excelling in sports.

Fortunately, later, WLOT was able to organize for her evacuation to Pakistan. She currently remains in limbo – safe for the time being but with a precarious legal status.

Roya and other women like her need urgent help to settle in safe countries where they can begin to rebuild their lives.

Advocating to the IOC

On April 14, 2023, Friba wrote a letter to the president of the IOC, Thomas BC requesting him open a direct line of communication with the Afghan female athletes, also to consider establishing a direct registration system for them to register for training camps, and IOC tournaments from Afghanistan, and from outside of Afghanistan. This system will allow the Afghan female athletes to compete without the Taliban's involvement. The entire Afghan National Olympic Committee is controlled by the Taliban, and the Haqani group, and they have completely banned all forms sports actives for women and girls.

Afghan female athletes feel abandoned by the international sports community (see sidebar story). Since last fall, WLOT has been writing letters to the IOC (International Olympic Committee) asking for the immediate inclusion of female athletes who were on national teams.



Media Interviews and Articles

DW Deutsche Welle (a German media company) wrote an article in April 21, 2023 about Friba's concerns if the Taliban are allowed to participate at the upcoming Paris 2024 Olympic Games. [Read the article here.](#)

DW interviewed Friba Rezayee for a third time in April 19 2023. [Watch her interview here.](#)

CBC interviewed Friba Rezayee and a student from UBC Habiba Nazari about obtaining scholarships for a cohort of 10 Afghan women soon after the Taliban takeover in August 2021. [Listen to the interview here.](#)

CBC Radio interviewed two of WLOT' students where they described their challenging journey coming from Afghanistan to Canada in the pursuit of education. [Listen their interviews here.](#)



4. FINANCIALS

Our organization operates without paid staff or overhead. Our ED volunteers her time while also maintaining a full-time job supporting Afghan refugees. Our teachers are also volunteers. All donations received go directly to our programming except for a nominal amount for bank fees and office supplies. We also leverage scholarships through relationships with educational institutions and organizations in Canada and the USA.

Financial Statement 2022-23

Donations received	31,661.07
Program expenses	\$3,170
Admin (bank fees, supplies)	\$127
Current Balance	\$31,661.07

All Funds Raised or Leveraged

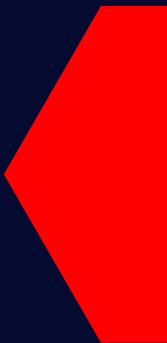
- Direct Donations Received: **\$31,661,07**
- Scholarships leveraged: **\$1,000,000+**

5. SPECIAL MENTIONS

We would like to express our deepest gratitude and appreciation to all the donors, sponsors, volunteers, and community members who supported our work over the last year.

You did it! You stood by Afghan women and girls when the Taliban took over and banned female participation in education and spots. Your support demonstrates that the international community cares about women's rights and will not give up on Afghan women and girls.

- We would especially like to acknowledge:
- All the teachers who volunteer weekly in our English-language program
- UBC for admitted ten Afghan female students
- St. Margaret School for offering two scholarships for the survival of the Kaaj centre
- Wilfred Laurier University for partnering with WLOT to support students overcoming war
- Free to Run organization for providing online fitness & Judo classes for the female athletes



6. LOOKING AHEAD

\$150,000 CAD

That's how much we want to raise in 2022-23 to support:

- English-language and mentorship programming for young women in Afghanistan
- Scholarships to access post-secondary and secondary studies overseas
- Support for Afghan female athletes to continue training and coaching

We also plan to continue developing and deepening our partnerships with educational institutions to support more opportunities for Afghan women and teens to access a quality education in safety.

We will of course be continuing our advocacy work, and efforts to sponsor female athletes and students to reach safety in Canada.



Get Involved

We rely on community members to help with fundraising, partnership development, legal advice for student visas and refugee applications, refugee sponsorship and donations to support our scholarships and programs. There are many ways to support our work.

- Donate: become a monthly donor or contribute to our Shamsia Scholarship Fund
- Advocate: organize an awareness event or write a letter to the government
- Volunteer: in our English-language program
- Advise: we need help from immigration and communications professionals
- Subscribe: sign up for our newsletter and announcements



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