

## **Malala pleads with world to protect Afghan girls' education**

By Daphne Psaledakis. September 24, 2021 10:45 PM CEST

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 24 (Reuters) - Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, who was shot by a Taliban gunman in Pakistan as she left school in 2012, pleaded with the world on Friday not to compromise on the protection of Afghan women's rights following the Taliban takeover.

As countries and organizations take the first steps to engage with the hardline Islamist group, the 24-year-old Yousafzai said she worried the Taliban would act as they did when they were in power 20 years ago despite a sharp increase in work and education opportunities for Afghan women since then.

"We cannot make compromises on the protection of women's rights and the protection of human dignity," Yousafzai told a panel on girls' education in Afghanistan on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.

"Now is the time that we stick to that commitment and ensure that the rights of Afghan women are protected. And one of those important rights is the right to education," said Yousafzai, who joined the panel by video.

Several world leaders promised to work for the rights of Afghan women and girls at the annual U.N. gathering this week, but it was unclear how they would do so.

Worries over women's rights in Afghanistan surged since the Taliban retook control in August, 20 years after they were driven from power by a U.S.-led campaign in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States.

The Taliban say they have changed since their 1996-2001 rule, when they also barred women from leaving home without a male relative.

The Taliban stirred skepticism about how much they would respect women's rights when they said last week they would open schools for high school-aged boys but not girls.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said the Taliban's desire for international recognition is the only global leverage to press for inclusive government and respect for rights, particularly for women, in Afghanistan. [read more](#)

Among those who spoke at the U.N. about the plight of Afghan women and girls were EU Council President Charles Michel and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

Michel called for preserving "as much as possible the gains of the last 20 years" and Sanchez said: "No society that allows only half of its population to move forward, and purposely keeps the other half behind, is sustainable."

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