

acat news

For a world without torture and the death penalty



Editorial

Dear friends of ACAT,

On 8th March we celebrate International Women's Day. Last year, on International Women's Day, we organized a campaign together with the Musée National de la Résistance et des Droits Humains and the Service Egalité de Chances, Esch under the heading "Droits des Femmes = Droits Humains". For ACAT, the focus was on the screening of "Seven winters in Teheran", a film that tells the story of the young Iranian woman Reyhaneh Jabbari, who was imprisoned, tortured and sentenced to death for killing the man who wanted to rape her. She was executed after seven years in prison. Shole Pakravan, the mother of the young woman, who made the film together with the German filmmaker Steffi Niederzoll, was available for a ciné-débat after the screening. She is ready to continue working with ACAT Luxembourg in the future to abolish the death penalty.

This year, too, we are devoting the March issue of the newsletter and the appeal letter to the "gender aspect" of torture, the death penalty and inhumane prison conditions. The focus of the newsletter is the often-forgotten fate of women in Afghanistan, who have been deprived of all their rights and suffer violence, imprisonment and even torture if they dare to speak out openly against the Taliban regime; even a violation of the rigid dress code is seen as a protest and brutally persecuted.

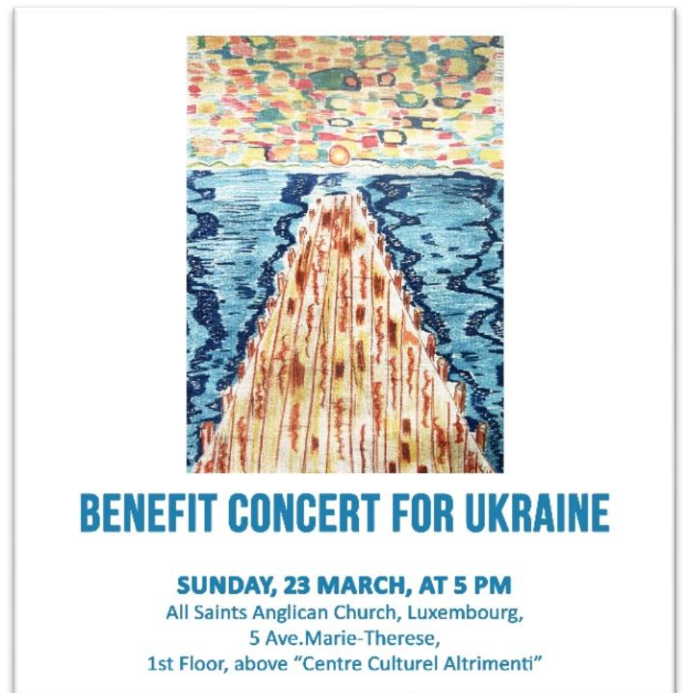
Shabnam Sabzehi and I had the privilege of speaking to Dr. Jalal Massouda, former Minister for Women in Afghanistan, and Husna Jalal, her daughter, at the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy on February 18th this year, who are now continuing their fight for women's rights in Afghanistan from exile. Their urgent appeal: Don't forget us, we depend on international solidarity. We therefore ask you to sign the "END GENDER RACISM" campaign and send a letter to the Afghan ambassador in Brussels calling on the Taliban to respect human and women's rights and to stop the acts of torture immediately. There are no details of specific cases with names given, as this would be too dangerous for the women and their families.

On February 1st, ACAT Luxembourg held its 2025 General Assembly. Christina Fabian, President until the end of 2025, Patrick Hurst, Vice President, who will take over from 2026, Stéphan Na, Treasurer, Bodo Bost, Secretary, Raphael Weickmans, member, were elected to the new board.

The new board has already started work, as there are important administrative tasks ahead: ACAT must change its statutes by September in order to continue to comply with the rules. And: ACAT Luxembourg is celebrating its fortieth

anniversary this year! We are using the anniversary as an opportunity to raise awareness of the scandal of torture and the death penalty in a diverse program. You will find the program on our homepage from April. We are also urgently looking for long-standing members for the festival committee who can contribute their experiences and stories, especially to the ceremony.

Christina Fabian, President ACAT Luxembourg



SAVE THE DATE

Friday, April 18, 10 AM, ACAT participation in the Good Friday service at the Trinity Church, rue de la Congrégation, Luxembourg City

News about Maria Kolesnikova

Maria Kolesnikova's current condition remains unknown. According to the latest available information from Radio Liberty (dated February 7), she was placed in a "cell-type room" on March 10, 2023, and later returned to her detachment. However, no further details about her situation have been reported.

Newsletter No. 17, December 2024.

Stand with the Women of Afghanistan: Break the Silence

Afghanistan is experiencing gender apartheid in its most brutal form. Afghan women are systematically excluded from society, and their fundamental rights, freedom and dignity are severely violated by the Taliban's regime. Since 2021, all the progress Afghan women had achieved over decades was nullified.

Since the Taliban took command of Kabul in 2021, the human rights situation for women and girls in Afghanistan has dramatically worsened, blatantly ignoring their initial commitment to respect these rights. The Taliban authorities have progressively imposed new restrictions, seemingly aimed at radically eliminating women's and girls' participation in public life. Moreover, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was closed, NGOs supporting women were shut down, no more access to higher education for women, exclusion from the labour market, except for a few working in the health or education sectors under extreme surveillance, female employees must wear a full burqa, International Women's Rights Day was banned. The new policies and measures adopted by the regime curtailed the rights of women and girls in nearly every aspect of their day-to-day lives: restrictions on education, work, free movement, clothing. Women resisting these policies are facing arbitrary arrest, detention, enforced disappearance and torture, ill-treatment and corporal punishment.

On 18 Feb 2025, the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy awarded the 2025 International Women's Rights to the Former Minister of Women's Affairs and the first woman to run for president and her activist daughter, Dr. Massouda Jalal and Husna Jalal, on behalf of all Afghan women's rights activists. After being forced to leave Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, they now reside in the Netherlands and have been advocating for the rights of the oppressed Afghan women. The mother and daughter team have been amplifying the voices of women of Afghanistan through their organizations Jalal Foundation and the Young Afghan Women's Movement. This year's Geneva Summit award is in recognition to all the brave women of Afghanistan who risk their lives for human dignity and equality. Dr. Massouda Jalal said, "This award belongs to the women of Afghanistan".

"Receiving this award on behalf of the women's rights activists of Afghanistan is a profound honor. This recognition amplifies their voices and our continued struggle for equality," said Dr. Massouda Jalal.

"My hope is that this international platform will inspire the global community to stand with Afghan women in their fight for freedom, dignity, and human rights."



Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy:
2025 International Women's Rights Award

Source: Shabnam Sabzehi

The women and girls of Afghanistan are enduring a humanitarian and moral crisis that demands urgent attention. Stripped of their basic rights, denied education, barred from work, and confined to their homes, they face a grim reality of oppression. This is not just a political issue — it is a profound violation of the sanctity of human dignity and justice that we, as people of faith, are called to uphold.

Torture - Breaking the Silence

The torture of women in Afghanistan has reached horrifying levels, with many subjected to physical abuse, forced confinement, and even sexual slavery under the Taliban regime. Reports from human rights organizations reveal that women and girls are being taken as "war prizes," forcibly married to Taliban fighters, and used as sex slaves. These women endure rape, beatings, and complete loss of freedom, with no means of escape or justice. The Taliban's oppressive laws further silence victims, leaving them trapped in a cycle of violence. The international community must take urgent action to expose these crimes, hold perpetrators accountable, and protect Afghan women from such inhumane treatment before it is too late.

When we remain silent, we become complicit. Silence allows injustice to thrive. It is our collective duty to raise our voices for those who are silenced and oppressed

End Gender - Apartheid Campaign

As part of the global campaign to End Gender-Apartheid, we stand united with people around the world who are calling for justice and equality for Afghan women and girls. This campaign seeks to confront systemic gender oppression and ensure accountability for those who perpetuate it.

What we can do

- Please join the global campaign to End Gender-Apartheid by signing the petition. <https://endgenderapartheid.today>
- Please sign the attached letter to **Nazifullah Salarzai, Ambassador of Afghanistan**, to Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the EU and NATO in Brussels, Belgium, included in this newsletter.

Sources:

2025 International Women's Rights Award with Massouda Jalal, Husna Jalali

<https://genevasummit.org/speech/2025-international-womens-rights-award/>

Jalal Foundation

<https://www.massoudajalal.com/jalal-foundation>

Young Afghan Women Movement

<https://www.youngafghanwomenmovement.com/>

Sign the campaign - End Gender Apartheid

<https://endgenderapartheid.today/>

Subject: Immediate Action Required to Protect the Rights and Lives of Afghan Women

Letter to His Excellency **Nazifullah Salarzai**, Ambassador of Afghanistan to Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the EU and NATO in Brussels, Belgium.

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express profound concern regarding the escalating violations of women's rights in Afghanistan. Recent reports indicate a severe intensification of restrictions and abuses that threaten the safety, dignity, and fundamental freedoms of Afghan women and girls.

Notably, the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor has recently sought arrest warrants for Taliban leaders, including Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada and Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani, citing their involvement in the systemic persecution of women and girls, actions that may constitute crimes against humanity.

Since August 2021, the Taliban has imposed numerous decrees severely restricting women's rights, including bans on work, education, and public presence.

Furthermore, reports from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International highlight that the Taliban authorities are committing the crime against humanity of gender persecution against women and girls.

The United Nations has also expressed deep concern, stating that relentless edicts issued by the Taliban have severely restricted the rights of women and girls, suffocating every dimension of their lives.

These actions not only violate international human rights standards but also erode the social and economic fabric of Afghanistan. The international community is increasingly viewing these measures as gender persecution, potentially amounting to crimes against humanity.

In light of these developments, I urge the Afghan government to:

- **Restore and protect women's rights to education, employment, and freedom of movement.**
- **Immediately cease all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls.**
- **Immediately and unconditionally end all forms of torture, ill-treatment, and exploitation of women and girls.**
- **Ensure accountability for those responsible for perpetrating abuses against women.**
- **Engage with international human rights bodies to align national policies with global human rights standards.**

The world is watching, and the continued oppression of Afghan women cannot be tolerated. It is imperative that the Afghan government takes swift and decisive action to uphold the rights and dignity of all its citizens.

Sincerely

Additional information and newsletters in French and German are available on the website www.acat.lu.

This letter is addressed to:

His Excellence Nazifullah Salarzai

Ambassador of Afghanistan to Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the EU and NATO in Brussels, Belgium.

The Embassy of Afghanistan
61, Avenue de Wolvendael
1180 Bruxelles

The letter has to be franked at 1,70 €.

ACAT Luxembourg is a politically neutral and independent human rights organisation affiliated to the International Federation of ACAT (FIACAT), which has consultative status with the United Nations, observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and participatory status with the Council of Europe.



*Ecumenical prayer for Peace:
Echternach Basilica, 9 December 2024*



*Exhibition: Icons on ammunition boxes
December 2024 - January 2025*



*New ACAT Luxembourg board:
1st February 2025*

ACAT ANNUAL THEME 2025 : HUMAN RIGHTS IN TIMES OF WAR - historical and current dimensions

On the 8th May, 2025, it will be 80 years since World War II ended. On 24th February, 2022, Putin began his war of aggression against Ukraine; an outcome that guarantees peace and justice is not in sight. In times of war, basic human rights are trampled on, especially the right to life in security and freedom (Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). We know the reports of systematic torture in the concentration camps during World War II and we have not forgotten the reports of execution and torture by Russian forces in Butcha in February/March (WHICH YEAR?). We know that Ukrainian prisoners of war suffer torture, as do political prisoners in Russian prisons.

On the 9th December, 2024, on International Human Rights Day, ACAT Luxembourg invited people to an ecumenical prayer for peace in the Basilica of Echternach, which was destroyed on 26th December, 1944 in the Battle of the Bulge. At the same time, an exhibition by Ukrainian artists entitled "Icons on Ammunition Boxes" was on display in the cathedral's visitor centre. Here is an excerpt from the prayer booklet, the complete booklet and a film document is available on www.acat.lu.

A REFLECTION ON THE PIETA IN THE BASILICA

The Pieta - Mary holding her dead son in her lap - is an archetypal image of mourning that tells of the irrevocable loss of a loved one. In the contemplation of the Pieta, other images emerge of grieving parents, of people who have lost their most beloved person, images of violent death that we are confronted with every evening on television, which we often no longer notice or actively look away from. Sometimes it happens that an image burns itself into our minds and hearts. In her text, Annemarie Brusniak recounts such an experience: an image of the war in the former Yugoslavia that she cannot let go of, an image that is a terrible surpassing of the Pieta motif - mother and dead child:

"In the background of the visual coverage, a child was seen kneeling in a bare field. In front of him laid his dead mother. The child was beating his hands on her chest. He wanted to shake her awake. Was she already dead, perhaps seriously injured, exhausted or ill? It was unrecognisable and soon disappeared from the screen. At this point, everything for the child was falling apart. It was all alone. I constantly kept thinking of this child. Had it been killed too? Could it be saved? His mother too, perhaps? Did it find a helping human hand? And, if it survived alone, how did it process this trauma, what attitude did it develop towards war, did it struggle against it or did it repress everything and remain silent? And was the soldier aware of what he was doing by 'handling weapons'? When does one become a murderer?"

THE PIETA CAN BECOME AN IMAGE OF CONSOLATION IF WE LISTEN TO AND MOURN THE VICTIMS AND COUNTER THE FORCES OF DEATH WITH OUR COMPASSION AND OUR PROTEST.

Further events on "Human Rights in Times of War":

- Benefit concert for Ukraine on March 23rd (see page 1)
- Espace de Rencontre: a meeting place for people from conflict zones
- Living Library on the topic
- ACAT participation in the Siren Prayer on the first Monday of each month at 12 noon

Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture

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L'ACAT Luxembourg est affiliée à la Fédération Internationale de l'ACAT (FIACAT) ayant statut consultatif auprès des Nations unies et du Conseil de l'Europe. Les ACAT informent, sensibilisent l'opinion publique. Elles appellent leurs quelque 30.000 adhérents dans 25 pays à l'action, à la réflexion et à la prière.