

***Beyond Darkness* Screening at the UK Parliament Highlights the Importance of Research, Participation, and Evidence-Based Approaches to Disability Inclusion in Afghanistan**

London, 24 June 2026

The documentary *Beyond Darkness: Stories of Resilience, Dignity, and Hope of Persons with Disabilities in Afghanistan* was screened on Wednesday, 24 June 2026, in Committee Room 9 of the UK House of Commons. The event was organized by the Rahyab Initiative and brought together Members of Parliament, human rights experts, researchers, representatives of international organizations, and disability advocates to discuss the situation of persons with disabilities in Afghanistan and explore pathways toward greater social inclusion.

Dr. Moheb Mudassir, an international human rights advocate and journalist, moderated the event. The programme began with opening remarks by Dr. Benafsha Yaqoobi, Director of the Rahyab Initiative. She introduced the objectives of the initiative and highlighted the importance of amplifying the voices of persons with disabilities in Afghanistan within international forums and policy discussions.

This was followed by welcoming remarks from Gareth Thomas, Member of Parliament of the UK, and Councillor Peymana Assad, Chair of the Labour Foreign Policy Group. Both emphasized the need for sustained international attention to the human rights situation in Afghanistan, including the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.

Mr. Mehdi Salami, deputy director of the Rahyab Initiative, subsequently presented an overview of the organization's activities and shared key findings from its research on disability in Afghanistan. Drawing on field-based research and empirical evidence, he argued that understanding disability in the Afghanistan context requires a multidimensional perspective, one that considers not only the individual experiencing an impairment, but also the social, institutional, and structural factors that shape people's lives.

The documentary, which formed the centerpiece of the event, portrayed the everyday lived experiences of persons with disabilities, including women and girls with disabilities, across Afghanistan through an intersectional approach. While documenting challenges such as limited access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and social protection, it also highlighted the resilience and aspirations of individuals striving to participate actively in their communities despite significant barriers.

The screening was followed by a panel discussion featuring Mr. Richard Bennett, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan; Dr. Benafsha Yaqoobi, Director of the Rahyab Initiative; and Ms. Heba Hagrass, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Reflecting on Afghanistan's complex social and political landscape, panelists emphasized that the challenges faced by persons with disabilities cannot be attributed solely to individual health conditions or impairments. Rather, they arise from the interaction of multiple factors, including decades of conflict, poverty, displacement, fragile healthcare systems, recurrent humanitarian crises, and existing institutional constraints. Collectively, these conditions have created substantial barriers to the social, economic, and civic participation of persons with disabilities.

During the concluding segment of the event, participants highlighted three key priorities for collective action. The first was the strengthening of interdisciplinary and evidence-based research on disability in Afghanistan. Participants noted that significant gaps remain in existing data, and insufficient collaboration among universities, research institutions, international organizations, and local actors could contribute to a more robust evidence base for policy and practice.

The second priority concerned investment in locally grounded and context-sensitive disability inclusion initiatives. Participants emphasized that humanitarian and development interventions must take account not only of individual needs but also of the wider social and institutional environments in which people live. Particular attention was given to the importance of supporting local organizations and strengthening their role in the design and implementation of inclusive programmes.

The third priority focused on the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all stages of decision-making processes. Referring to the widely recognized principle of *"Nothing Without Us,"* speakers called for the active involvement of persons with disabilities in research, policymaking, program implementation, and evaluation. They emphasized that persons with disabilities should be recognized as partners and contributors to development rather than merely recipients of services.

In concluding the event, organizers invited international organizations, academic institutions, development partners, and policymakers to build upon the discussions initiated during the

screening and explore practical avenues for collaboration in research, knowledge production, and disability-inclusive development in Afghanistan.

The central message of the event was that the social inclusion of persons with disabilities is not only a fundamental human right but also a prerequisite for sustainable development, strengthened social resilience, and the creation of equitable societies.