BEFORE YOU READ

Interpreting the Source
The Taliban, an Islamic religious group, took political control of Afghanistan in 1991. The Taliban held strict beliefs that women should not work outside the home, go to school, or participate in politics. U.S. troops ousted the group from power after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon.

Dr. Sima Samar, a well-known human rights advocate from Afghanistan, works to ease the restrictions on women. Despite threats to her own life, she has opened clinics and schools and continues to work for human rights, democracy, and peace. She has received many awards for her work and her bravery. On December 10, 2001, she was awarded the John Humphrey Freedom Award.

Reader’s Dictionary
plight: a difficult situation
humanitarian: promoting human welfare
burqa: a loose garment that covers the face and body of Muslim women; worn in public
decrees: orders
marginalizing: placing in a powerless position in society or a group
interim: temporary

Guided Reading
In this excerpt from Dr. Samar’s Freedom Award acceptance speech, read how women have had to struggle in Afghanistan. Then answer the questions that follow.

From The Acceptance Speech of Dr. Sima Samar for the 2001 John Humphrey Freedom Award

As I speak today, the future of Afghanistan is at a crossroads, particularly the future of women. With the removal of the Taliban from control, women finally may be able to regain our rights and Afghanistan may at long last have a chance for a peaceful future. But none of this is a certainty.

Finally the world is becoming aware of the plight of Afghan women. The media is now paying attention to the suffering that women have endured under the Taliban’s restrictions. More people now know about the starvation and disease that have come from the drought, the fighting, and the overall lack of humanitarian assistance. The situation of women in Afghanistan has been deteriorating for the past two decades. It could not get much worse.

Under the Taliban, women in Afghanistan were banned from attending school, prohibited from working outside their home, and not allowed to leave their homes without the company of a close male relative or without wearing the full burqa. The punishment for violating these decrees has been harsh and included among other punishments public beatings, imprisonment, and even execution.

... Women have been the main victims of the continuing human rights crisis in the country. Although neither of the warring sides respects the human rights of women, the actions of the
Primary Source Reading A
continued

Taliban were the most extreme. The exclusion of women from public life under the Taliban has taken its toll not only on women whose lives were destroyed, but also on society as a whole. Before the Taliban took over, women were the majority of teachers and the majority of health care workers. With the restrictions on women, the education system collapsed and the health care system was severely damaged, and the whole population suffered.

... To conclude, there is no acceptable justification for marginalizing Afghan women and violating our rights. Today, I am pleased to see that women have been given a role in the new interim government, and that the voices of women are at last to be heard in the country’s decision-making process. The appointment of two women is a beginning, but it is not enough. I hope that I will be able to heal some of the wounds of Afghan women.


☑️ Document-Based Questions

Directions: Use information from the primary source to answer the questions below.

1. Identifying What group does Dr. Samar believe has taken away the rights of Afghan women?

2. Listing What are three examples of ways that Afghan women have been marginalized?

3. Describing How were women who violated the Taliban’s laws punished?

4. Specifying Name two ways that the Taliban restrictions on women directly affected the entire country.