

The Taliban holds first meeting of religious leaders since taking Kabul.

By **Matthieu Aikins**

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The Taliban held their first meeting of religious leaders since retaking Afghanistan's capital last week, laying out guidelines about religious instructions to hundreds of the nation's imams and religious school instructors.

Taliban leaders, including their spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, took turns speaking at the Loya Jirga Hall on Monday, from a stage that was still decorated with the tricolor flag of the fallen Afghan government. The conference's title, which included the "promotion of virtue and prevention of vice," was reminiscent of language used by Taliban's religious police when they ruled the country in the late 1990s.

More than a week after the Taliban pushed the U.S.-backed government out of power, the militants are urging Afghans to return to their jobs and daily lives as they try to form a new government. Many of their leaders, including Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, have returned to Kabul and meetings are being held with politicians including former President Ahmed Karzai. The Taliban have pledged to allow women to work and girls to attend schools, and have said they offered a general amnesty to everyone loyal to the former government.

"We invited you here today to talk about your role in this system," Mawlawi Mohammad Shafiq Khatib, one of the organizers of the conference, said to the participants at the meeting. Whatever religious leaders "say that is compatible with Shariah and the principles of Islam, the people must heed. We are thankful to God that we have an Islamic system now."

Still, no women appeared to be present at the meeting on Monday.

The Taliban leaders at the conference in Kabul indicated that school curriculum would be changing to fall in line with their teaching and that there would be more information soon about the overall structure of the educational system.

The speakers praised deceased leaders of the Taliban — including Mullah Muhammad Omar and Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour — and urged the attendees to take an active role in promoting the formation of a new government. They also urged a discussion of the ongoing drug problem among Afghanistan's young people.

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