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Afghanistan

15 July 2025 | POPULATIONS AT RISK



RISK LEVEL: CURRENT CRISIS

Populations in Afghanistan are facing systematic human rights violations perpetrated by the Taliban de facto authorities.

BACKGROUND:

Since Taliban forces effectively overthrew the Afghan government in August 2021, the Taliban and various armed groups, including the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K), have committed widespread and systematic human rights violations and abuses throughout the country.

The Taliban de facto authorities have imposed policies that severely curtail the rights of women and girls, constituting extreme gender-based discrimination and violating the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In August 2024 the Taliban implemented the so-called “vice and virtue” laws, codifying over 100 sweeping repressive edicts imposed since August 2021. These laws aim to eradicate women from public life by requiring them to fully cover their faces, prohibiting them from

speaking or being heard in public and severely limiting their freedom of movement, expression, employment opportunities, political and public participation and access to education and healthcare. Edicts implemented in 2024 reinstated public stoning and flogging to death for alleged adultery, among other violations of Taliban ideology. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has documented arbitrary arrests and detentions of women and girls because of alleged non-compliance with the imposed “Islamic dress code.”

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls, the Taliban may be perpetrating gender persecution and gender apartheid as they appear to be governing through systematic discrimination with the intent to subject women and girls to total domination. UNAMA reports that women – particularly Shia Hazara women and girls – live in fear of arrest and harassment, with some forcibly taken into custody and subjected to ill-treatment. Women’s rights activists and gender equality advocates have also faced targeted killings, enforced disappearances, incommunicado detention, attacks and harassment.

UNAMA has also documented evidence of the Taliban committing extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, incommunicado detention and torture and ill-treatment against media workers, human rights defenders and former government affiliates, among others.

Ethnic and religious minority communities have been targeted by the Taliban, ISIL-K and others with members facing arbitrary arrest, torture, summary execution and forced flight. ISIL-K frequently claims attacks that target Shia Hazara, other Shia Muslims, Sufi Muslims, Sikhs and other minorities, as well as places of worship. The UN Special Rapporteur reported that these attacks appear to be systematic in nature and reflect elements of an organizational policy, likely amounting to crimes against humanity.

The people of Afghanistan are enduring a severe humanitarian crisis, compounded by the impact of sanctions and the freezing of state assets. In December 2021 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2615 to allow for humanitarian aid without violating UN sanctions against the Taliban, which have been in place since 2011.

In March 2020 the International Criminal Court (ICC) launched an investigation into alleged atrocities since July 2002, focusing on the Taliban and ISIL-K. In January 2025 the

ICC Chief Prosecutor filed applications for arrest warrants for two Taliban leaders for gender-based persecution, marking the Court's first charges of this kind. The ICC issued arrest warrants for an additional two Taliban leaders in July 2025. In September 2024 Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands initiated legal proceedings against Afghanistan before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for violations of CEDAW.

The Taliban were the de facto authorities in Afghanistan from 1996-2001 before they were overthrown by a North Atlantic Treaty Organization coalition of military forces. During their insurgency against the internationally recognized Afghan government, the Taliban perpetrated likely crimes against humanity and war crimes while Afghan security forces and members of the United States military and Central Intelligence Agency also committed likely war crimes.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS:

UNAMA has recently detailed its "Comprehensive Approach" for Afghanistan, or its so-called Mosaic Plan, put forth in accordance with the comprehensive framework outlined in the UN Secretary-General's Independent Assessment (S/2023/856). The plan proposes a flexible, phased and conditional approach to engage with the Taliban de facto authorities. The plan includes six key pillars of engagement, such as Afghanistan's international obligations and human rights, including women's rights and inclusive governance, among others.

Public floggings have surged under the Taliban's broader campaign of repression. In May 2025 alone, over 100 people, many of them women, were flogged. The Taliban defends the practice as consistent with their interpretation of Islamic law and dismisses international criticism as anti-Islamic.

Amid immigration crackdowns in the United States (US), Pakistan and Iran, Afghan nationals, including refugees, migrants and those awaiting resettlement, face mounting risks of forced repatriation and shrinking options for protection. In April alone, over 280,000 Afghans were deported or coerced to return from Pakistan and Iran, with numbers reportedly doubling in May. In the US, the Afghan resettlement program is suspended, refugee admissions paused and designations like Temporary Protected Status for over 9,000 Afghans are ending.

ANALYSIS:

The Taliban's distortion of religious principles to justify discriminatory and persecutory policies, coupled with restrictions on fundamental freedoms and impunity for past and ongoing violations and abuses, significantly heightens the risk of further human rights violations and atrocity crimes. The institutionalized marginalization of women and girls and widespread discrimination and violence against them likely amounts to gender persecution, a crime against humanity. Returnees, especially women and girls, minorities, journalists and human rights defenders, may face heightened risks of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and systematic discrimination.

The Taliban appears to be targeting journalists, civil servants, human rights defenders and former government affiliates on a widespread and systematic basis. Targeted attacks are largely unreported due to the Taliban's crackdown on independent media and a closed civic space. There are no independent national bodies to document human rights violations due to the dismantling of key institutions, including the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Attorney General, while the Special Rapporteur has been prohibited from accessing the country.

UNAMA's Mosaic Plan fails to meaningfully include Afghan civil society, particularly women human rights defenders, reduces human rights to negotiable issues and risks conferring unwarranted legitimacy on the Taliban and abandonment of Afghan women who currently have no recourse.

RISK ASSESSMENT:

- Decades of violations of international law, as well as impunity for those crimes.
- Institutionalized and systematic gender-based discrimination by Taliban de facto authorities against women and girls.
- Widespread and systematic targeted attacks by ISIL-K and the Taliban against ethnic and religious minorities.
- Lack of independent media and crackdown on civil society and human rights defenders.
- Weakness of state structures to protect vulnerable populations and an unwillingness of the de facto authorities to uphold international law

obligations.

NECESSARY ACTION:

As the de facto authorities, the Taliban are bound to Afghanistan's international human rights obligations, including CEDAW. They must uphold these obligations, including by halting violations and abuses perpetrated by their officials and guaranteeing the equal protection and promotion of the human rights of all people in Afghanistan, regardless of gender, ethnic background, religious belief or political affiliation. The Taliban must also allow international assistance and monitoring to help fulfill these obligations.

Any path toward recognizing or normalizing relations with the Taliban must be strictly contingent on their respect for international law, particularly the rights of women and girls. Afghan women human rights defenders and civil society must be included in all negotiations and future political arrangements.

The Taliban must investigate patterns of human rights violations and take steps to prevent future violations, including by holding perpetrators accountable. They must lift restrictions and allow the Special Rapporteur safe and unfettered access to Afghanistan, as well as fully cooperate with UNAMA and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The international community should continue to pursue justice for likely atrocity crimes committed in Afghanistan, regardless of the position, nationality or affiliation of the alleged perpetrator. The international community should cooperate with and lend support to the ICC and ICJ. States must uphold the principle of non-refoulement.

For more on the Global Centre's advocacy work on the situation in Afghanistan, see our [Afghanistan country advocacy page](#).