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Afghanistan's Taliban Rulers Order NGOs To Prevent Women From Working At Their Jobs As Protests Spread

By [RFE/RL](#)

In the latest assault on women's rights, Afghanistan's Taliban rulers ordered all domestic and international NGOs to prevent female employees from working at their jobs, claiming that many were not observing dress codes in the conservative Muslim nation.

"There have been serious complaints regarding the nonobservance of the Islamic hijab and other rules and regulations pertaining to the work of females in national and international organizations," the Islamist group's economy ministry said on December 24 in a note sent to NGOs and seen by AFP and other Western news agencies.

AP reported that the note said that any organization which did not comply with the order would have its license to operate in the country revoked.

In a statement, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said it was "profoundly concerned" about the reported order by "Taliban de facto authorities" and said it would seek to meet with the Afghan rulers to gain clarity.

"Any such order would violate the most fundamental rights of women, as well as be a clear breach of humanitarian principles," it said. "This latest decision will only further hurt those most vulnerable, especially women and girls."

Full details of the order were not immediately available, and it was not clear how it would affect the various United Nations agencies operating in Afghanistan.

U.S. Secretary of State [Antony Blinken said on Twitter](#) that he was "deeply concerned" by the Taliban move and that "this decision could be devastating for the Afghan people."

The reports come as rare protests continued to erupt in parts of Afghanistan following the Taliban decision announced on December 20 to forbid women from universities, drawing condemnation from the international community and the UN.

Taliban security forces have used violence and arrested several people as they have [dispersed protests](#) by Afghan women against the ruling.

On December 24, dozens of women and girls [protested in the western city of Herat](#) before they were stopped by security forces, according to video posted on social media.

AP said it observed video showing women yelling and running for cover to avoid water cannons before returning to the main street to continue their protest.

VOA quoted a local Taliban official as saying that security forces blocked protesters from reaching buildings housing the provincial government.

On December 22, a group of some 50 women dressed in hijabs, some wearing masks, gathered in the capital, Kabul, for a protest march against the move before they were attacked and dispersed by Taliban security forces, participants and witnesses told RFE/RL.

Several hundred medical students -- both male and female -- [protested](#) against the measure at Nangarhar University's medical school in eastern Afghanistan on December 21.

Some of the female students, who did not want to be named for fear of reprisals by the Taliban, told RFE/RL's Radio Azadi that their end-of-semester exams were supposed to begin on December 22, but following the announcement, they were barred from taking the exams.

In a rare display of solidarity, some male students joined the protest and refused to take part in the exams as well.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has [urged the Taliban rulers to revoke the decision](#) to ban female students from universities.

UNAMA warned that preventing women from "contributing meaningfully to society and the economy will have a devastating impact on the whole country," and bring more international isolation and economic hardship to a country already on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres earlier said he was "deeply alarmed" by the Taliban decision, labeling it another "broken promise" by the group -- which vowed to protect women's rights when it took power.

Since the Taliban seized power in August of last year, Western officials and activists, along with some inside Afghanistan, have expressed concerns about women's rights under the extreme conservative rule of the Islamist Taliban leadership. The Taliban rulers have not been officially recognized as the country's government by the international community.

Women's rights were severely restricted during the Taliban's first stint in power until they were driven from government by a U.S.-led invasion in 2001.

With reporting by RFE/RL's Radio Azadi, AFP, and AP

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