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Enforcement of the *hijab* requirement in Herat city

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Introduction

Since May 2025, women's *hijab*[1] has been an issue of particular focus for inspectors of the *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Herat city. Over the past year, there have been several periods of increased enforcement of the *chador*[2] – and at times the *burqa*[3] – as the required form of Islamic *hijab* for women in Herat city.

Hijab requirement

The *de facto* authorities have set out the *hijab* requirement in writing:

- On 7 May 2022, the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice disseminated the *hijab* instruction, requiring women to fully cover their faces and bodies outside the home.[4] The instruction also outlines punishments for male relatives of women deemed non-compliant.
- The *hijab* instruction was codified in the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice made public on 21 August 2024 and states that women must cover their entire bodies, including their faces, from non-*mahram* men and non-Muslim and "corrupt" women.[5]

Enforcement of the *hijab* requirement in Herat city prior to June 2026

Since May 2025, there have been several periods of heightened monitoring and enforcement of women's *hijab* by inspectors of the *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Herat city:

- On 12-26 May 2025, *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors established checkpoints and patrolled Herat city to monitor women's *hijab.* Inspectors of the *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice detained dozens of women, and some girls, because they were not wearing *chadors*. In most instances, the women and girls were detained at checkpoints until a relative brought them a *chador*. Jibriel area of Herat city, a majority Shi'a Hazara community, was the focus of the enforcement efforts. UNAMA Human Rights Service is not aware of prior announcement by the *de facto* authorities on the *chador* requirement.
- On 15-19 September 2025, inspectors of the *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice again established checkpoints throughout Herat city – particularly focused on Jibreil area – and ordered women to wear *chadors*. Some women and girls were detained until their relatives brought them a *chador*.
- From 4 November 2025, *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice officials in Herat issued verbal instructions to healthcare clinics, mall and shop owners, wedding halls and *de facto* institutions to refuse entry to women without *burqas.* Medecins sans Frontieres reported a 28 per cent drop in patient admissions to Herat Provincial Hospital in the two days after the requirement was introduced.[6] On 9 November, the spokesperson for the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice publicly rejected

[1] *Hijab* is a general term meaning 'to cover' or 'to veil', which is also commonly used to refer to a headscarf that covers the head and hair, but not the face. Historically it has taken various forms shaped by local laws and customs.
[2] A loose full-body cloak that covers the head and body down to the ankles, leaving the face exposed.
[3] A loose full-body cloak that covers the head and body, including the face, with a mesh screen over the eyes to allow the wearer to see.
[4] Website of the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (https://mopvpe.gov.af/ps/%DA%A9%DA%93%D9%86%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87); X account of the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (https://x.com/MOPVPE/status/1522882293718818816?s=20&t=sshqCD9cwGCRkJbt8HL3LQ; https://x.com/MOPVPE/status/1524037222399369217?t=oMIxjpN_O-O-WOvYA0pBxA&s=19).
[5] Decree of the Amir all Momineen regarding the enforcement of law on promotion of virtue and prevention of vice (Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice), Consecutive No. 1452, Ratified: 1446/1/3 Hijri, 1403/04/19 Solar year (09 July 2024), Article 13.
[6] X account of MSF Afghanistan (https://x.com/MSF_Afghanistan/status/1987410138454470901?s=20).

reports that women in Herat had been ordered to wear *burqas* stating: "restricting women to one particular type of dress code is completely incorrect."[7] The requirement for women in Herat to wear a *burqa* was subsequently relaxed, with *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice officials continuing to require women to wear *chadors* in public.

Outside these periods of heightened enforcement, *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice officials in Herat city continued to monitor women's *hijab* and instructed them to wear *chadors* outside the home. Incidents of women without *chadors* being prevented from using public transport and attending clinics, hospitals, *de facto* government offices and bazaars were documented.

June 2026 *hijab* enforcement campaign

On 4 June 2026, the *de facto* Provincial Governor of Herat, Mawlawi Noor Ahmad Islam Jar, and *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice officials met with local representatives to instruct them to ensure that women in Herat[8] were complying with the *hijab* instruction by wearing *chadors* outside the home.

On 5 June 2026, the message regarding the requirement for women to wear *chadors* was disseminated in mosques throughout Herat city during Friday prayers, and the *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice also disseminated a written instruction stating that *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors would arrest women who did not observe Islamic *hijab* and transfer them to prison.

Between 6 and 8 June 2026, teams of inspectors from the *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, reportedly accompanied by female *de facto* police officers, arrested at least 30 women and girls who were not wearing *chadors* and transferred them to the provincial prison.[9] They were released from detention on 8 June, after guaranteeing they would wear *chadors* in future.

Eyewitnesses[10] told UNAMA Human Rights Service they had witnessed arrests in Herat city between 6 and 8 June:

- A person witnessed Inspectors of the *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice arresting a woman. Her male relatives, who were with her, argued with the inspectors, leading to a physical confrontation, after which a group of *de facto* Ministry of Interior officials arrived, intervened and arrested the male relatives with the woman.
- A woman observed inspectors of the *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, accompanied by women, who she believed were female police officers, patrolling the streets. They arrested around 10 women who did not have *chadors* and placed them in one of their vehicles. The woman said: "I was also not wearing a *chador*, but fortunately I hid on a small street and was not visible to the inspectors, otherwise I would have been arrested".
- A woman witnessed the arrest of a woman and her daughter by *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice officials. The mother had a *chador*, while her daughter did not, however the mother refused to leave her daughter and both were arrested.

[7] Interview with the spokesperson for the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice on Radio and Television Afghanistan (RTA) Pashto: https://x.com/rtapashto/status/1987601584432242874.
[8] Understood to refer predominantly to Herat city, which has been the focus of enforcement efforts to date, as opposed to the province more generally.
[9] X account of UNAMA (https://x.com/UNAMAnews/status/2063591460583125080?s=20).
[10] Locations and identifying details have been withheld for protection reasons.

Protests against *hijab* enforcement

On the morning of 9 June 2026, in Herat city, Jibreil area, dozens of women and men gathered to stage a peaceful demonstration against the arrests and detentions of women in connection with the *hijab* instruction.

The protest became violent when *de facto* security forces dressed in plain clothes began beating protestors and shooting at them. *De facto* security forces shot and killed a boy, shot and beat protestors, injuring at least four,[11] and arrested at least 17 protestors.

A woman who participated in the protest and avoided arrest said: "Security forces started firing and hitting individuals with sticks. As a result of the aggression, one child was killed with gunfire. The security forces arrested a woman for recording the protest…Until the evening hours, the security forces were standing next to our houses and didn't allow anyone to go out".

A man who lives in the area where the protests took place told UNAMA Human Rights Service he heard the shooting and saw a group of *de facto* security forces use sticks to beat a man who was on his way home.

Aftermath of the *hijab* arrests and protest

In the days following the protests, *de facto* General Directorate of Intelligence officials stopped people at random to check their mobile phones for messages and/or footage related to the 9 June protests. They detained and questioned individuals found with protest-related material on their phones. A noticeable decrease in the number of women in the streets of Herat city was observed, reportedly because women were fearful that they would be arrested if they left their houses.

On 11 June 2026, in an interview with TOLOnews, the *de facto* Provincial Governor of Herat made comments regarding the *hijab* in Herat.[12] He stated: "The level of adherence to the *hijab*" in Herat "under the influence of some issues has been declining day by day" and that they had to guide some women who have "mental and Sharia illnesses". He rejected "rumours" that men had carried out the arrests and said that a team of "experienced sisters who have experience in the military sector and in arrests" were deployed to monitor the observation of Sharia *hijab* in Herat, accompanied by a guard or driver who was the *mahram* of one of the women.

On 15 June 2026, TOLO news reported that, at a gathering with local residents and religious scholars, the *de facto* Provincial Governor of Herat said: "The doors of the Herat provincial administration are open to any citizen who has complaints about the conduct of the Ministry of Vice and Virtue, the municipality or other security institutions. They can come and share their concerns with us."[13]

Since mid-June, documented incidents of women and girls in Herat city being cautioned and/or detained by inspectors of in connection with the *hijab* requirement have decreased, possibly because of increased compliance with the *de facto* authorities' regulations.

Women in Herat city have reportedly received different instructions on the *hijab* requirement, leading to ongoing confusion on the dress code. For example, a woman who visited the *de facto* Department of Education in Herat city was told that women are not permitted to enter the premises unless they are wearing a *burqa.* Another woman who visited the *de facto* Directorate for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Herat city was told that wearing a *chador* and face mask – but not a *burqa* – was a requirement of entry.

[11] UNAMA, *UNAMA alarmed by arrests of women in Herat Afghanistan and excessive use of force against protestors*, 10 June 2026, at: https://unama.unmissions.org/en/press-releases/unama-alarmed-by-arrests-of-women-in-herat-afghanistan-and-excessive-use-of.
[12] X account of TOLO News (https://x.com/TOLOnews/status/2065133622722773158).
[13] TOLO News, *Herat Religious Scholars Urge Public Restraint After Protests*, 15 June 2026, at: https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-199640

Annex: Comments provided by the *de facto* Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan

In Herat Province, any form of hijab that conforms to the requirements of Islamic Sharia is considered acceptable. This principle is also applied in other provinces of the country within the framework of the applicable regulations.

With regard to allegations that some women have allegedly been denied access to public transportation or deprived of public services because of the type of hijab they wear, it should be stated that no official directive or policy has been issued in this regard, and such claims do not reflect official policy.

[With regards to the written instruction disseminated by the de facto Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Herat on 5 June 2026]: it has been determined that the document in question was not issued as an official directive by the Directorate for the Promotion of Virtue, Prevention of Vice, and Hearing of Complaints of Herat Province. Rather, it is an educational and advisory text concerning the issue of hijab and does not hold the status of an official administrative document.

The Directorate for the Promotion of Virtue, Prevention of Vice, and Hearing of Complaints of Herat Province rejects allegations regarding the detention or imprisonment of women and states that no individual has been detained by this Directorate.