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The State of the World's Human Rights; Afghanistan 2025

The Taliban intensified their systematic, widespread attacks on women's and girls' rights. The Taliban discriminated against ethno-religious groups, including forcing followers of Ismaili (Shia) to convert to Sunni Islam. The Taliban stifled independent media and all criticism of its policies, including through arbitrary arrest and detention of journalists and former government employees. Detainees and critics were subjected to extrajudicial execution and torture and other ill-treatment; protests were systematically suppressed. Access to a fair trial remained essentially impossible. The ICC issued arrest warrants for the Taliban leader and the Chief Justice. Afghanistan faced economic instability and a deepening humanitarian crisis. Lack of funding jeopardized essential healthcare services provided by WHO. Discrimination restricted access to humanitarian assistance for marginalized ethnic and religious groups. Forced evictions disproportionately impacted women and girls, particularly Hazaras.

Background

The Taliban remained the country's de facto authorities following the collapse of the former government in August 2021. UN Security Council sanctions against the Taliban continued, with many Taliban leaders facing travel bans.

Women's and girls' rights

Women and girls were deprived of almost all their fundamental rights, with women from Hazara and religious minorities facing intersectional discrimination.¹ Taliban decrees and policies targeting women and girls intensified, preventing them from: accessing education beyond the age of 12 years; working with UN agencies, NGOs and state institutions; and enjoying the rights to freedom of movement, expression and political participation. In June, according to media, the Taliban intimidated and threatened women who worked for UN agencies and their families in the capital city Kabul. In September, Taliban security forces prevented Afghan women working for UN agencies and UN contractors from entering UN compounds.

The Taliban requirement that women must be accompanied by a *mahram* (male chaperone) when travelling curtailed women's access to working in the healthcare system or seeking medical assistance. The Taliban instructed private businesses and health clinics not to serve women without a *mahram*, according to the UN. The Taliban's draconian "Law of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice" further curtailed women's already severely limited access to economic opportunities, according to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

In March, UNAMA reported that the Taliban had prevented women from attending prayers in mosques during Ramadan in Badghis and Herat provinces. In July, the Taliban arrested dozens of women in Kabul for violating its restrictive dress code. In November, the Taliban imposed a new restriction in Herat province requiring all female patients, caretakers, visitors and staff members to wear a burqa – a garment that fully covers the face and body – to access healthcare facilities.

Gender-based violence

Women and girls faced increasing levels of gender-based violence at home and in public. The UN reported a 40% increase in the risk of violence against women and girls under the Taliban and that 14.2 million women needed protection and assistance. Women and girls experiencing gender-based violence remained reliant on the Taliban's draconian policies and practices or traditional dispute resolution; the Taliban had entirely dismantled the institutional framework of support, including courts and prosecution units.

Forced, early and child marriage increased. The Taliban endorsed and engaged in forced marriage, despite introducing a decree banning it.

Freedom of religion and belief

Taliban decrees, policies and practices discriminated against ethno-religious minorities. According to UNAMA, the Taliban forced at least 50 men from the Ismaila (Shia) community to convert to Sunni Islam in Badakhshan province in January. Those who refused were subjected to physical assault, coercion and death threats. Rawadari, a local human rights organization, reported that the Taliban had forced at least 203 people to convert to Sunni Islam. The Taliban also forced Ismaila communities to send their children to Sunni religious education.

Rawadari and media reported that the Taliban in Bamiyan, Ghazni, Ghor, Herat, Kabul and Nimruz provinces had imposed restrictions on Shia-Hazaras conducting their religious rituals, specifically during the month of Muharram. In Badghis and Ghazni provinces, Shia people were forced to break their fast and pray according to the Taliban's announcement of Eid.

Freedom of expression

The Taliban continued to attack and oppress independent and critical media, persistently targeting journalists criticizing the Taliban's draconian policies. According to the National Union of Journalists, in July, the Taliban arrested seven journalists on charges including "moral corruption" and "espionage".

In July, UNAMA reported that in at least half of the country's provinces the Taliban had banned photos or any images of living beings from being taken or televised. In August, the Taliban arrested three staff members of local radio station, Radio Nasim; the station ceased

operations in Daikundi and Bamiyan provinces after 13 years of broadcasting. In late November, a local media outlet reported that the radio station in Bamiyan had been reactivated after being off the air more than three months.

The Taliban further restricted freedom of expression and the right to education by banning from universities books authored by women and the teaching of subjects incompatible with the Taliban interpretation of sharia (Islamic law). The Taliban also banned poetry critical of its policies, decisions and practices, as well as romantic poetry. People who criticized the Taliban publicly, including through social media, were subjected to arbitrary arrests and imprisonment.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

The Taliban arbitrarily arrested and detained people who criticized its draconian rules, including journalists and human rights activists. Taliban “morality inspectors” also arbitrarily arrested and detained people for non-compliance with the “vice and virtue decree”, including for hair length and style, failing to attend congregational prayer, playing music, or taking photos.

The media and UN reported cases of dissenters, including former government employees, being forcibly returned to Afghanistan and subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention. As of March, UNAMA had recorded at least 23 arbitrary arrests and detentions of former government employees. The Taliban also forcibly disappeared former government employees and those accused of collaborating with its opponents.

Extrajudicial executions

According to Rawadari, 251 people – including protesters, influential figures and employees of the former government – were extrajudicially executed, mysteriously killed, or wounded by the Taliban and unknown actors during the first half of the year. Between April and June, seven former government employees were reportedly unlawfully killed.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Detainees were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Local and international human rights organizations HRD+, Rawadari, World Organization Against Torture and others highlighted the Taliban’s use of torture, including “tooth and nail extraction”, “electric shock”, “water boarding” and “threat to kill victims’ relatives”. The Taliban reportedly sexually assaulted and abused both women and men detainees. UNAMA documented five cases of torture and ill-treatment of former government employees between January and March. The reports highlighted that detainees belonging to ethno-religious minorities, specifically Hazaras and Shia, had been subjected to additional harassment, including verbal insults and denial of religious practices.

The Taliban imposed corporal punishment, which amounted to torture and other ill-treatment, on charges such as “adultery”, “drinking alcohol”, “homosexuality” and “pederasty”. These punishments were carried out in addition to prison terms. UNAMA reported at least 231 individuals being corporally punished between April and June.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Peaceful assembly critical or independent of the Taliban remained stifled. The Taliban reportedly killed at least 10 protesters and wounded more than 40 others in Argo, Jurm and Khash districts of Badakhshan province, during protests triggered by the Taliban’s poppy eradication programme. UNAMA additionally reported the arrests of at least 48 Uzbek men and children who protested against the arrests of their community members over an altercation with local Pashtuns in Dawlat Abad district, Faryab province, in June.

Fearing arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, protests against Taliban draconian policies and practices shifted to online platforms.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

With all previously existing legislation and legal institutions having been demolished by the Taliban, access to a fair trial became nearly impossible. The Taliban’s narrow interpretation of Sharia law continued to dominate in place of former legislation, irrespective of religious diversity, the rights of women and girls, and international obligations. Oversight institutions such as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, parliament and provincial councils remained dismantled.

To tackle ongoing and past impunity, in a landmark decision in October, the UN Human Rights Council established an independent investigative mechanism for Afghanistan to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of past and ongoing crimes under international law and human rights violations and abuses.²

In July, the ICC issued arrest warrants against the Taliban leader and the Chief Justice on the charge of crime against humanity “persecution on gender grounds”.³ Afghan women and human rights activists described the ongoing attacks by the Taliban against women’s and girls’ rights as “gender apartheid”. Amnesty advocated for the recognition of gender apartheid as a crime under international law.

Economic, social and cultural rights

Afghanistan continued to face economic instability and a deepening humanitarian crisis, with 22.9 million people – nearly half the population – dependent on assistance. The humanitarian crisis was exacerbated by disasters such as earthquakes, unprecedented mass forced returns from Iran and Pakistan, and the impact of the climate crisis. In August, thousands of families

were affected by the earthquake in the east of the country, which resulted in 1,992 deaths and 3,631 wounded.

The humanitarian crisis was aggravated by the USA, Afghanistan's largest donor, cutting aid funding, and other countries scaling back assistance globally. Afghanistan remained largely disconnected from the global economy due to the Taliban's return to power and the freezing of its foreign assets.

Although the World Bank reported signs of gradual economic recovery, the Taliban exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, particularly for women. Due to restrictive Taliban policies, including bans on women working with NGOs and UN agencies, access to humanitarian assistance for women became increasingly difficult.

In August, the UN estimated that over 78% of Afghan women were out of education, employment or training. In June, UNICEF reported that 90% of children were living in food poverty, with half of them experiencing severe food poverty. Around 4 million children under the age of five and pregnant and lactating women were suffering from acute malnutrition.

Access to healthcare remained limited, particularly in rural areas, because the country's health sector remained fragile and dependent on international assistance. During earthquake rescue operations, women victims and survivors were denied immediate support because of discriminatory Taliban policies.

Discrimination

Bayat, Hazara, Ismaili (Shia) and Tajik communities were discriminated against in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including in Badakhshan, Ghazni, Ghor and Nimruz provinces, due to pressure to focus assistance on Taliban-designated areas. NGOs reported discrimination in employment against marginalized ethnic groups and religious minorities. Media reported inequality and favouritism involving Taliban judicial and non-judicial authorities.

In July, the Taliban forcibly evicted Hazara families from Rashak village in Panjab district, Bamiyan province, after a Taliban court decided a land dispute in favour of nomadic communities who were ethnically Pashtun. Initially, the Hazara residents were given 15 days to leave the village. When they resisted, the Taliban raided the village and forcibly evicted them, leaving them with no alternative accommodation or compensation.

Also in July, the Taliban forcibly evicted hundreds of households in Dawlatyar district, Ghor province, over a long-standing land dispute between two tribes. According to media, the evictions were politically motivated because many of those affected supported the former government; no alternative accommodation or compensation were offered.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

Despite ongoing, widespread human rights violations and abuses by the Taliban, and the deepening humanitarian crisis, several countries forcibly returned Afghans, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement. Germany and Austria started deporting Afghans back to danger. Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Türkiye returned Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in mass expulsions. Iran and Pakistan returned 2.8 million people up to December.⁴ On their return, the women and girls were deprived of almost all their rights, while dissenters and former government employees remained at serious risk of reprisal attacks and human rights violations by the Taliban.

Unlawful attacks and killings

Civilians were killed and wounded in suicide attacks and explosions attributed to groups opposing the Taliban, unknown actors and remnants of unexploded ordnances from previous conflicts, according to UN and Afghan human rights organizations. Cross-border attacks between the Taliban and Pakistan, and air strikes by the Pakistani army, caused many more civilian casualties.

1. [Afghanistan: Submission to the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 91st session, 16 June-July 2025, 21 May ↩](#)
2. ["Afghanistan: Open letter on Afghanistan to the permanent representatives of member and observer states of the United Nations Human Rights Council", 28 August ↩](#)
3. ["Afghanistan: ICC Prosecutor's application for arrest warrants against Taliban leaders is an important step towards justice for Afghan women, girls and LGBTQI persons", 24 January ↩](#)
4. ["Afghanistan: Forced returns to Taliban rule must end as latest figures reveal millions unlawfully deported in 2025", 16 December ↩](#)

