

The Status of Afghan Women under Taliban Rule

Shadow
Report to

Submitted by:
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(AHRC)



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Distinguished Members of the CEDAW Committee,

The Afghanistan Human Rights Center (AHRC) submits this report to draw your attention the Taliban's systematic destruction of women's rights, which has culminated in a brutal regime of gender apartheid. Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, women and girls in Afghanistan have lost access to education beyond sixth grade, been barred from nearly all forms of employment, and faced draconian decrees that restrict their mobility, autonomy, and basic freedoms. Backed by testimonies gathered under extreme conditions and corroborated by international reports, this evidence demonstrate that the Taliban's policies contravene every provision and principle of CEDAW. Women are stripped of their legal protections, subjected to arbitrary detention and public lashings, and effectively silenced in all spheres of society.

Having ratified CEDAW without reservations in 2003, Afghanistan is now in stark violation of its treaty obligations, and it is the duty of this Committee to intervene in defense of the millions of Afghan women and girls whose rights have been systematically denied.

We respectfully urge the CEDAW Committee to exert its full authority and leadership to hold the Taliban accountable for these flagrant and deliberate violations of international law. We implore you to uphold CEDAW's mandate by recognizing the Taliban's practices as amounting to the "gender apartheid" as they so clearly represent, and by engaging all available international mechanisms to safeguard Afghan women's rights. Beyond this recognition, we call on the Committee to galvanize global support for practical interventions—such as establishing independent monitoring bodies to document and address abuses and promoting robust asylum pathways for women fleeing persecution—to ensure that Afghan women regain access to education, employment, and basic legal protections. Only by taking decisive, collective action can the Committee fulfill its mission to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and prevent the complete erasure of Afghan women from public life.

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About Afghanistan Human Rights (AHRC)

The Afghanistan Human Rights Center (AHRC), established in 2023 by exiled human rights activists with over twenty years of experience in the field of advocacy, monitoring, promotion and protection of human

rights. Drawing on expertise from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), AHRC leverages a local network to protect human rights within Afghanistan. Despite facing challenges, the organization effectively documents and advocates for human rights. With important on the ground network, AHRC aims to fill the gap in monitoring and promoting human rights in Afghanistan, focusing on documenting violations, amplifying marginalized voices, and driving global advocacy for the Afghan people under the Taliban regime.

Introduction and background:

This submission is prepared in response to the cruel, degrading and inhumane treatment of women by the Taliban in Afghanistan and aims to urge the Committee of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to take actions on stopping the Taliban from persecuting women based on their group identity. Following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Afghan women and girls have faced systematic discrimination and deprivation of their fundamental rights, and a gender apartheid regime based on systematic and institutionalized way of dominance, segregation, discrimination, exclusion and violence is in place.

The report aims to provide the CEDAW Committee with a comprehensive, evidence-based analysis, highlighting the significant gap between Afghanistan's CEDAW obligations and the current realities faced by Afghan women under Taliban rule. It seeks to inform and empower international advocacy efforts to restore and protect the rights of Afghan women and girls.

Methodology

This submission combines primary and secondary data to analyze the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. Primary data was collected using a culturally sensitive questionnaire covering education, employment, healthcare, violence, and access to justice, distributed to women and girls across various regions while ensuring their safety and anonymity. The AHRC also relied on its colleagues monitoring and observing human rights situation of women in Afghanistan. Secondary data includes reports from UN agencies, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, academic studies, media, and other credible sources. Despite challenges posed by security risks and restrictions on civil society, the report prioritizes the anonymity and safety of all participants.

The Issue

“Discrimination against women in Afghanistan is systematic, institutionalized and methodologically carried by the Taliban government and group operatives in widespread and broadest way possible” Dr. Sima Samar, the AHRC chairperson.

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Afghan women and girls have faced systematic human rights violations, including bans on girls' education beyond sixth grade, exclusion from most employment, and severe restrictions on public spaces and healthcare. These actions reflect a deliberate system of gender apartheid with global consequences, emboldening anti women forces and undermining international human rights norms. The dismantling of institutions like the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, replaced by the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, has entrenched discrimination, mocking the international

value of human rights in most egregious way possible. These violations breach Afghanistan's CEDAW obligations, demanding urgent international action.

This report documents the severe and systematic violations of Afghan women's rights under Taliban rule. It draws on AHRC's extensive reports, firsthand accounts, and secondary data to provide a detailed and factual analysis of the current situation. By shedding light on these issues, the report aims to amplify the voices of Afghan women and ensure that their struggles are recognized and addressed at the international level. It aligns with the principles of CEDAW, advocating for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the restoration of their fundamental rights.

Afghanistan ratified CEDAW in 2003 and is one of the Islamic countries in the world that signed CEDAW without reservations. Despite facing enormous domestic challenges, the country made efforts to comply with CEDAW by enacting the EVAW (Elimination of Violence Against Women) law in accordance with its provisions. Additionally, Afghanistan initiated several programs aimed at promoting women's rights. The country submitted three periodic reports to the CEDAW committee. The last one in 2020, under the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, GOIRA. Despite reporting progress, the situation of women in Afghanistan were of grave concern for the Afghanistan human rights society and international community.

In 2020, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) issued a series of concluding observations on the periodic report of Afghanistan to promote women's rights and gender equality, focusing on critical areas such as legal frameworks, access to justice, education, healthcare, employment, combating harmful practices, and participation in public and political life. The 50 recommendations reflected the obligations of Afghanistan under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). For example, under the legal framework and reference to article 1, 2, and 5 as well as General Observation of 28 and 33, CEDAW recommended strengthening the legal framework to eliminate discrimination against women. This included revising discriminatory laws and ensuring effective implementation.

In reality, following the return of the Taliban, the situation regressed to previous Taliban era. Upon taking power, the Taliban began their rule by suppressing women and systematically violating the human rights of the general population in Afghanistan. Since their return, the Taliban have enacted over 70 decrees and directives that directly target the autonomy, rights, and existence of Afghan women and girls. These measures have obliterated two decades of progress toward gender equality, replacing it with an oppressive system of governance that institutionalizes patriarchal and discriminatory norms, dominance of one gender group, men over another group women, gender apartheid. Legal protections for women such as the EVAW Law and Penal Code amendments have been dismantled, leaving women with no recourse to justice.

All decrees issued by the Taliban impose severe restrictions on women's public presence, barring them from public spaces, enforcing travel restrictions that require male guardianship, and subjecting those without male relatives to harassment, starvation, and humiliation at checkpoints. Women seeking justice often face retaliation or are accused of moral crimes, exposing them to public lashings or imprisonment. The excessive use of fear and systematic oppression has rendered Afghan women voiceless and powerless victims, with no venue for support¹.

¹ <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/explainer/2024/08/faqs-afghan-women-three-years-after-the-taliban-takeover-0>

The list of rights and freedoms violated by the Taliban and contravening CEDAW is long. According to the AHRC findings all women in Afghanistan are deprived of the following rights:

Key Findings

The list of rights and freedoms that have been violated by the Taliban and contravening CEDAW is long. According to the AHRC findings all women in Afghanistan are deprived of the following rights.

Legal protection against discrimination

Afghanistan constitution provided equality before laws for men and women. These rights were protected by laws, policies and programs. Afghan women were recognized as equal citizens and had access to education, work, and were free to move and participate in public and private life.

Afghanistan was a burgeoning society where women started to shape destiny by actively participating in public life, decision making, and eye for social and cultural progress despite ongoing conflict and entrenched harmful traditions. Women were guaranteed equal rights to participate in politics, represent the country internationally and hold important positions.

The government made significant efforts to increase women participation in public and administrative services to 30 percent and already 4 women were in the cabinet, one woman nominated as one of 9 justices, and 4 women ambassadors represented Afghanistan in the major capitals and UN headquarters including Washington DC, New York, Vienna and Norway. Additionally, women were protected from domestic violence under the EVAW (Elimination of Violence Against Women) law.

Unfortunately, with the Taliban's return to power, women rights have been systematically violated, denied and abused. The Taliban have implemented an institutionalized and systematic policy of discrimination, exclusion and violence against women². They have introduced a discriminatory, and barbaric set of laws and policies that includes the law on promotion of virtue and prevention of vice. The law which accumulates the provisions of all previous decrees, directives and instructions in the form of one unified law dictates the most severe restrictions women could possibly face in society. It provides that women should not leave home and when they do, they must cover themselves and avoid speaking to strangers. The law regards women's voice as something private belonging to home. We provide an analysis of the law as annex to this report. The remaining decrees that we have collected are all indicative of a systematic and institutionalized way of suppression and persecution of women.

Our monitoring team has found that the strict policies and laws imposed by the Taliban have severely restricted women in their daily activities. For instance, in several occasions, the Taliban have interrogated women going to health centers, or stopping and lashing women on the streets³.

Based on semi-structured interviews by our monitors, out of 39 Women that the AHRC interviewed for this report, 28 of them experienced discrimination and felt they are deprived of their rights under the law of the Taliban. Approximately 75% of these women faced some form of verbal or physical retribution by the Taliban.

² SEE Special Rapporteur Report on Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan,

³ A woman in Takhar was interrogated because of going to access health care. 129 Women have been lashed.

Furthermore, the right to property and inheritance of property for women is not respected by male family members, and women are deprived of these rights. According to the findings of this report, 31 out of 39 interviewees stated that they do not have the right to own property or inherit assets, while only 6 mentioned that they do have the right to property and inheritance.

One of the key questions asked to the interviewees was about their biggest concern for the future of women in Afghanistan. The majority (33 individuals) stated that educational barriers are the biggest concern for women in Afghanistan. Nine interviewees mentioned that the lack of individual freedoms is also a major concern. Eight others identified violence against women as one of their main worries. Four interviewees cited unemployment as their biggest issue. It is important to note that the interviewees were able to select multiple answers for this question.

Access to Justice

CEDAW Articles 2, 15, and 16 is relevant to fair and gender-sensitive access to legal remedies and support through justice mechanism. Prior to the return of the Taliban, Afghanistan made partial progress toward this objective. Family courts were established in urban areas to handle cases involving marriage, divorce, and custody. Family units were operating inside each police stations and the ministry of women affairs and ministry of justice provided legal aid to women. The prosecutor general office established several prosecutorial board and directorates by which crimes of violence and harassment against women were prosecuted. NGOs and international partners supported legal aid services for women, particularly in cases involving gender-based violence (GBV) or family disputes. Although women began to join the judiciary and legal professions, their representation remained low due to cultural resistance and security threats. Initiatives to raise awareness about women's legal rights were launched but faced significant challenges, including insecurity caused by the Taliban in rural areas.

Under Taliban rule, Afghan women have been entirely excluded from the justice system. Female judges, lawyers, and prosecutors have been dismissed, and courts now enforces extreme interpretations of Sharia law that overwhelmingly favor men. Women are unable to access courts without male guardians, leaving widows and single women particularly vulnerable. Survivors of gender-based violence face accusations of moral crimes, while perpetrators enjoy near-total impunity⁴.

Taliban courts prioritize forced reconciliations over justice, trapping women in abusive marriages and enabling practices such as child and forced marriages. The local jirgas and Shuras that allowed by the Taliban often adjudicate issues that are important to male member of society, leaving women rights vacated. Legal aid services and shelters for survivors have been dismantled, which render women with no protection against increasing violence. The Taliban's harsh punishment for charges of adultery and immorality crimes, a vague term imposes further restrictions and go beyond mere punishment as it often ends to force marriage, shame and isolation of women. In the past 3 years over 129 women have been convicted of immorality crimes and lashed in public.

The dismantling of women-led legal aid organizations has deprived victims of gender-based violence of crucial protection and support. Fear of reprisals prevents many women from reporting crimes. The absence of justice for women perpetuates cycles of violence, poverty, and inequality, undermining SDG Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG Goal 5 (Gender Equality).

⁴ <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/explainer/2024/08/faqs-afghan-women-three-years-after-the-taliban-takeover-0>

The Taliban's decree allowing judicial review of all cases adjudicated during the republic regime has forced women victims of abuses to return to their abusive families, nullifying marriages and rendering registered divorce decisions void. This has created enormous problem for women and their families. In several cases, women's families have even been forced to pay compensation for complying with the judiciary orders of the previous regime.

Decision making and representing the government

CEDAW Articles 2, 3, 7, and 8 indicate that women rights in participating in political, government and public life should be ensured and discriminations in those fields must be eliminated. Opportunities to Women to participate in decision making processes and representing the government in international level and to international organizations must be ensured. During the previous government, Afghanistan made initial steps to address this issue and eliminate discrimination against women and girls. In addition to legal protection, cabinet-level positions, parliamentary seats and ambassadorial roles, Afghanistan approved the National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security (2015–2022) aimed to enhance women's participation in peace processes and protect women in conflict settings. Women participation in peace process and membership to High Peace Council was secured by 12 women serving at the Council and 65 women at the provincial level. Women were also member of negotiating teams in Doha, Qatar. Furthermore, services such as shelters and vocational training programs, were available for displaced women and girls in urban areas. Women's turnout in parliamentary elections reached 32% and they comprised 16 % of candidates for elected positions at both the national and provincial level. Overall, according to the Directorate of Statistics and Consensus, the role of women in decision making was 11%.

Since the return of the Taliban, Afghan women have been completely erased from decision-making processes. No woman holds a leadership role at the national or provincial level, and when women are engaged, their roles are limited to policing other women and enforcing Taliban decrees. This exclusion not only violates all international human rights instruments but also perpetuates a governance structure that systematically disregards the needs and rights of half the population. As a result, Afghan women are voiceless and invisible in shaping the future of Afghanistan.

Education

CEDAW Articles 10, 14 and General Recommendation No. 36 focus on ensuring equal opportunity for education. These provisions call for removing all barriers to education, including those based on gender, age, disability, and economic status and ensuring that educational curricula promote gender equality, human rights, and the elimination of harmful stereotypes. It further requires strengthening the protection of girls from violence, including sexual violence, in and around educational settings.

During the previous government, Afghanistan made a leapfrog in provision of quality education to women. According to the AHRC report over 3,561,264 women and girls were enrolled in schools and 110,315 women were attending universities, making up 28% of the total university student population.

However, this situation has dramatically changed. In September 2021, the Taliban banned girls above grade six from attending school. In December 2022, they issued a directive that prohibited women from attending universities and private educational institutions. In August 2023, the Taliban prevented 70 female students from traveling to the UAE for scholarship opportunities, even when accompanied by male guardians. According to UNICEF, 1.5 million girls have been deprived of education the Taliban's return to power, with an additional 38,000 girls expected to lose access to schooling each year after grade six. Female education access has fallen sharply, from 39% in 2020 to just 3% in 2024. The Taliban have

also altered school curricula to align with their extremist ideology, removing subjects like civic education, arts, and science, while increasing religious content. These changes also promote anti-human rights and violent concepts and removing topics related to gender, women rights, democracy, and constitutional issues⁵. Women and girls are thought subjects in Taliban madrassas that train them about extremism and intolerance. They indoctrinate women and girls about discriminatory gender role, women obedience and submission to the will of men, reinforcing gender apartheid.

According to the findings of this report, 35 of the interviewees stated that before the arrival of the Taliban, they were actively engaged in education, but after the issuance of the Taliban leader's decree banning education for girls, they were deprived of their right to education and can no longer attend school. The other interviewees had either graduated from school or university before the Taliban came to power or had previously dropped out of school. Based on the findings, the vast majority of interviewees cited the closure of schools, universities, and educational centers to girls as the reason for not attending school or educational institutions. Additionally, 26 other interviewees mentioned fear of violence or harassment as reasons for not attending school. The interviewees were able to select multiple reasons for not attending school. For more details, please see annex 2 of the AHRC report on Women's Access to education.

Employment and Economic Rights

CEDAW Articles 11, 14, and General Recommendations No. 13 and 16 emphasize the importance of providing equal employment opportunities for women, including ensuring equal pay for equal work, protecting women against workplace harassment and strengthening access to social security.

During the previous regime, women were working in public and private sectors an estimated 220,000 women working in public sectors, police and security and defense sectors. They enjoyed equal opportunity under the labor law, including paid pregnancy leave and equal pay. The goal was to increase the number of women working in public sector to 30%.

Currently, under Taliban governance, mechanisms that supported women's participation in the workforce have been systematically dismantled. Women are now banned from most professions, including NGOs, international organizations, and previously women-dominated sectors like health, education, and beauty salons. The anti-harassment committees established under the 2017 Anti-Harassment Law, which provided women with formal processes to report workplace harassment, are no longer functional. Vocational training programs, government-led employment initiatives, and labor monitoring systems have collapsed, leaving women vulnerable to exploitation and forcing many into informal or exploitative labor.

Civic spaces have shrunk dramatically, with women-focused NGOs banned or forced to cease operations. The Taliban have replaced "women" with "men" in NGO project documents, further erasing women's presence and contributions in civil society. Additionally, NGOs are repeatedly pressured to exclude women from their staff and operations.

The economic exclusion of women has rendered them dependent on male relatives, driving poverty, financial insecurity, and an increase in child marriages. The removal of women from the workforce is projected to cost the Afghan economy \$9.6 billion by 2066, which is two-thirds of the current GDP, further exacerbating Afghanistan's economic crisis⁶.

⁵ AHRC database

⁶ AHRC and <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/explainer/2024/08/faqs-afghan-women-three-years-after-the-taliban-takeover-0>

The findings of the AHRC regarding the right to work and employment show that the majority of 39 interviewees have been deprived of this right since the Taliban came to power. Before August 2021, that is, before the Taliban's return to power, twenty-six of the interviewees stated that they were employed and working. However, after the Taliban took control, they were deprived of the right to work and have been confined to their homes. Currently, only one interviewee out of the 39 stated that she is working, while the rest are not engaged in any form of employment.

When the interviewees were asked why they are not employed, they were allowed to provide multiple reasons. Twenty of the interviewees cited the restrictions imposed by the Taliban as the primary reason for their unemployment. Seven others mentioned that, in addition to the restrictions placed on women, the lack of job opportunities is the reason they are not working. Six additional interviewees cited not only the restrictions and lack of job opportunities but also the fear of harassment as reasons for not working. Notably, 16 of the interviewees said that they were directly dismissed from their job by a Taliban decree.

All interviewees who were employed before August 2021 stated that losing their jobs has caused significant economic hardship. They struggle to meet the living expenses of themselves and their families. They mentioned that, in addition to financial problems, their mental and psychological health has deteriorated, and they are constantly worried about the economic situation of themselves and their families.

Health and Reproductive Rights

Articles 12, 14 along with General Recommendation No. 24 provides for taking all appropriate measures to ensure women's access to healthcare, including: Improving maternal health services and reducing maternal mortality rates, ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services (including modern contraceptive) without requiring spousal consent, providing age-appropriate, gender-sensitive education on sexual and reproductive health and expanding the grounds for legal abortion and ensuring access to safe abortion services.

During the previous regime, initiatives, supported by international donors, increased the availability of maternal health services, especially in urban areas. However, rural areas still faced significant challenges in accessing healthcare. Over 62% of women had access to basic health centers. Likewise, efforts were made to improve access to modern contraceptive methods, though barriers such as lack of awareness and cultural resistance persisted. Additionally, limited gender-sensitive sexual and reproductive health education programs were primarily focused on urban centers, leaving rural areas underserved.

The Taliban's policies have drastically curtailed women's health and reproductive rights, creating a public health crisis. Access to healthcare, particularly in rural areas, has plummeted due to restrictions on women's mobility and the banning of female healthcare workers. Maternal mortality rates have risen sharply, with 90% of women lacking access to basic health services, skilled birth attendants, and maternal health facilities.

Female Doctors and nurses face harassed and persecuted by the Taliban. They are not allowed to practice freely, and since they have better opportunity to emigrate and leave the country for education of their children, they mostly have left or leaving the country in large numbers. The departure of women physician and medical doctors leaving their practices have worsened the situation. For example, at one hospital in Kabul, half of the female staff had to leave their jobs, further straining the healthcare system.

Similarly, the Taliban has halted medical training for women in schools and institutes. Women are no longer allowed to study medicine in Afghanistan. This lateral means the end of women medical practice in Afghanistan.

Family planning services are increasingly inaccessible, with contraception and safe abortion services heavily restricted, even in cases of rape or incest. Gender-sensitive health education programs have been dismantled, leaving women and girls without essential knowledge. Women with disabilities face heightened barriers, including reports of forced sterilization, and mental health crises among Afghan women are escalating due to isolation, abuse, and systemic oppression.

The rollback of women's health and reproductive rights violates global health equity standards and international commitments to SDG Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality), undermining years of progress. The impact of the Taliban's policy on women has also reversed the progress Afghanistan had made in reducing child and maternal mortality rates. As a result, both child and maternal mortality rates have increased.

Based on the findings of the Afghanistan Human Rights Center, it can be concluded that the level of access for women to healthcare services has decreased compared to the years before the Taliban came to power. However, over 50% of women still have access to healthcare services, and in comparison to the right to education, women have not been completely deprived of this right. The findings indicate that nearly half of the interviewees reported having access to healthcare services, while the others stated that they do not have access to healthcare services.

Another question posed to the interviewees was about the challenges they face in accessing healthcare services. Among the 39 interviewees, 16 mentioned movement restrictions, while 8 others highlighted both movement restrictions and financial difficulties as barriers to accessing healthcare services. Additionally, 7 interviewees pointed to the lack of female doctors as another obstacle to receiving medical care. Nine interviewees mentioned that due to poverty, they cannot afford to visit a hospital or clinic because they are unable to cover the treatment costs, and thus, they have to endure their pain.

Marriage and Family Relations

According to Articles 15 and 16 and General Recommendation No. 21 of CEDAW, taking measures to ensure equality in marriage and family relations is an obligation states must ensure. This includes abolishing polygamous marriages and ensuring compliance with international human rights standards. Further, it requires preventing child and forced marriages and enforcing the minimum age of 18 for marriage for both genders.

The Convention also provides for protection of women's equal rights in matters of property, inheritance, and custody. Other provisions include ensuring legal safeguards for women in divorce and separation cases, with access to courts and legal aid.

During the previous regime, the Civil Code established the minimum age of marriage at 18 for boys and 16 for girls, with exceptions for girls as young as 15 under parental consent. Efforts were underway to harmonize laws with international standards. A National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Marriage (2017) was initiated but faced limited implementation due to cultural resistance and lack of resources.

While laws granting women inheritance rights existed, enforcement remained weak, with cultural norms often overriding legal provisions.

Family courts in urban areas provided legal recourse for women, but rural women had limited access due to geographic and societal barriers.

The Taliban's policies have severely undermined women's rights in Afghanistan, particularly in relation to marriage and family life. Child and forced marriages have become institutionalized, with nearly 28.7% of girls married under 18, including 9.6% under 15. Economic hardships drive families to marry off young daughters to reduce financial burdens or curry favor with Taliban fighters, with reports of girls as young as 12 being wed⁷. Women are unable to freely choose their spouse for marriage. The harmful tradition of "Bad"- where a woman is married to a man from a rival family as compensation for a bad or fault exacted to them in exchange for stopping violence - is still practiced. Women are married in exchange for receiving a sum of money which make women future in their husband's family vulnerable to violence.

The Taliban's approach to marriage treats women as property rather than equal partners. Legal protections against child and forced marriages have been abolished, and women's rights to property and inheritance are disregarded under Taliban-controlled legal systems. Divorce rights for women are virtually nonexistent, with Taliban courts favoring male-dominated interpretations of Sharia law. This leaves women trapped in abusive marriages with no recourse.

These practices violate fundamental human rights and undermine international efforts to achieve gender equality and eliminate child and forced marriages globally, as outlined in SDG Goal 5.

Discriminatory Stereotypes and Harmful Practices

Articles 2, and 5 General Recommendation No. 31 provides that states shall take measures to eliminate discrimination and discriminatory cultural and social views and stereotypes and harmful practices. Strengthen legal and policy measures to prevent and punish harmful practices providing education on gender equality and women's rights at all levels.

Before 2021, Afghanistan had initiated steps to address stereotypes and harmful practices. Programs were launched to educate communities about the negative impacts of harmful practices, often involving religious leaders to gain broader acceptance. The EVAW Law criminalized practices like child marriage, forced marriage, and "honor" killings. Gender equality was introduced into some school curricula, and NGOs conducted training workshops to raise awareness about women's rights.

The Taliban's decrees have fueled child marriages, and other harmful practices, with no accountability for perpetrators. Public awareness campaigns that once challenged these practices have been replaced by propaganda reinforcing women's subjugation⁸.

Women are confined to their homes, isolated from society, and subjected to physical and psychological abuse, driving some to attempt suicide. These policies are part of a deliberate strategy to erase women from public life. Since the Taliban came to power, the majority of women in Afghanistan cannot leave their homes without a male guardian. The Taliban have announced that women are not allowed to travel without a Mahram (a male chaperon). Furthermore, the atmosphere of fear and terror has prevented women from moving freely. Fear of arbitrary arrests and physical punishment by the Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has led to a restriction of women's freedoms and their

⁷ <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/explainer/2024/08/faqs-afghan-women-three-years-after-the-taliban-takeover-0>

⁸ <https://www.usip.org/tracking-talibans-mistreatment-women>
<https://media.odi.org/documents/Afghanistan-full-report-final.pdf>

ability to go about freely. According to the findings of the AHRC survey, among the 39 interviewees, 10 stated that they are sometimes able to move freely in society, while 26 mentioned that they are unable to move freely. The Taliban practice of confining women at home also has been affecting society in treating women like inferior members.

Rural Women, Refugees, and Internally Displaced women

Articles 1, 3, 9, and 14 of CEDAW provides for eliminating discrimination and General Recommendation No. 32 elaborate on this issue. Afghanistan has one of largest refugee and displaced people in the world. Most of the refugees and internally displaced people belong to rural area. In the past several years, Pakistan and Iran deported hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees back to Afghanistan. While all people in Afghanistan face discrimination and their human rights are violated, because of the Taliban policy against women, women bear the brunt of the impact of the Taliban policies. The Taliban policies and laws specially the Law on the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice have imprisoned women inside Afghanistan. As a result, thousands of women deported back to Afghanistan are deprived of access to education and are subjected to violence.

Taliban system does not protect women, nor does it take measures to protect and promote the rights of rural women, refugee and internally displaced women. Women face discrimination in having access to basic services, including shelter, healthcare, and legal aid. Women are vulnerable to gender-based violence in displacement settings.

Due to the Taliban discriminatory policies and laws, it is extremely difficult for women to easily transition to new life-settings, locally integrate, or resettle with full respect for their rights and preferences.

Access to documentation, such as ID and passports, is also difficult for rural women, displaced widowed women, and their children.

Further, displaced Afghan women face severe risks of trafficking, sexual violence, and statelessness due to the Taliban's exclusionary policies and obstruction of humanitarian aid (UNHCR, 2024). Without identity documents, many women are rendered invisible to aid systems, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and extreme poverty. The Taliban's restrictions on women's mobility further isolate rural and displaced women, deepening their helplessness and limiting access to vital resources.

Women in rural areas and displacement settings are systematically excluded from critical services such as healthcare, education, and humanitarian aid. This exclusion leaves them without basic support, increasing their vulnerability to gender-based violence. Reports indicate that sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking are on the rise, with no protection mechanisms or justice systems available to address these threats.

The lack of identity documents exacerbates the vulnerability of rural and displaced women, exposing them to statelessness and making it nearly impossible to access assistance.

Human Rights Watch (2024) and UNHCR emphasize the dire situation for displaced Afghan women. Forced evictions and a lack of legal protections perpetuate a cycle of exclusion, vulnerability, and abuse. The Taliban's oppressive policies have created a humanitarian crisis, leaving rural and displaced women and children, isolated, and at heightened risk of violence.

Women in rural areas contribute to the family and country's economy. However, they are deprived of their rights. Most women in rural areas do not have ID cards, their marriages are not registered. Rural women are subjected to early and forced marriage as well as domestic violence.

Recommendations:

We strongly ask and respectfully:

Urge international accountability mechanisms to hold the Taliban accountable for violations of women's rights under CEDAW.

Encourage states to support advocacy on negotiation of Convention on Crimes Against Humanity to criminalize and include "gender apartheid" into this international legal framework to address systematic violations and persecution of women rights in Afghanistan.

Urge international bodies to advocate for women's right to access justice in Afghanistan as a non-negotiable human rights priority.

Establish international monitoring bodies to document and prosecute legal abuses against women.

Strengthen asylum and resettlement pathways for Afghan women fleeing persecution.

Make women's participation in peacebuilding, future political settlement and international aid to Afghanistan a core condition of international negotiations with the Taliban. Create opportunities for Afghan women's involvement in global and regional decision-making forums and issues pertaining to Afghanistan.

Support programs that develop leadership and political advocacy skills for Afghan women.

Advocate for alternative education mechanisms, including online and community-based learning, provide and support scholarships programs for Afghan girls pursuing education abroad. Develop remote education programs that promote gender equality and human rights.

Strengthen global initiatives targeting SDG Goal 4 (Quality Education) with a focus on Afghan girls.

Support skill-building and remote work programs tailored for Afghan women.

Advocate for international sanctions against Taliban policies restricting women's employment.

Develop microfinance initiatives and global markets for women-led businesses in Afghanistan, including those led by rural and displaced women.

Establish mobile clinics and telemedicine platforms to deliver healthcare services to Afghan women.

Advocate for gender-sensitive health education as part of international humanitarian aid.

Advocate for expanded legal grounds for women to choose about their time and number of pregnancies, as well as access to contraceptives through international advocacy.

Advocate for global recognition of the Taliban's systematic violations of women's rights as gender apartheid.

Tie international aid to demonstrable progress in eliminating child and forced marriages.

Partner with progressive Islamic scholars to counter the Taliban's narrative and promote women's rights.

Provide resources to discreetly support local activists working against harmful practices.

Advocate for safe humanitarian corridors and gender-sensitive aid distribution for rural and displaced Afghan women.

Support programs providing identity documents for rural and displaced women and children.