



Afghanistan Human Rights Center

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Press Release on

Recent Disasters and Discrimination against Women

The Afghanistan Human Rights Center commemorates December 10, Human Rights Day, and the War Victims Memorial Day. On this occasion, the Center is publishing a report on “The Response to Recent Natural Disasters and Discrimination Against Women.”

The Afghanistan Human Rights Center expresses concern about the Taliban’s handling of natural disasters and their discriminatory treatment of female victims. The Center’s findings indicate that women have suffered or lost their lives not only due to the disasters themselves but also because of the Taliban’s discriminatory policies against women. The Taliban have imposed discrimination against women in disaster relief efforts, depriving them of access to aid.

Between 2023 and 2025, Afghanistan experienced four major natural disasters: the Herat earthquake, the floods in Baghlan and Behsud, and the earthquakes in Kunar, Nangarhar, and Balkh. These events devastated communities that were already suffering from hunger, poverty, and repression. Women and children, historically excluded from social and economic life, bore the greatest impact. The Taliban’s bans on women working with aid organizations, enforcement of gender-segregation restrictions, and prohibitions on women’s education and freedom of movement prevented them from accessing effective, available, sufficient, and acceptable rescue services, healthcare, food, and shelter.

After the Taliban’s takeover in August 2021, the fragile structures and systems of the Republic collapsed. The ruling authorities replaced trained personnel with mullahs, dismissed all female employees, and dismantled provincial structures. Disaster management became militarized and turned into a patriarchal system run by untrained religious members of the Taliban who lack technical expertise. Early warning systems have stopped functioning, coordination has broken down, and the

exclusion of women from the public workforce has eliminated the ability to assist female victims and assess their needs.

In the Herat earthquake, which occurred in October 2023, more than 1,480 people lost their lives and 1,950 were injured. Women made up about 60 percent of the injured. Due to the Taliban's restrictions on women's movement, most women were confined inside their homes at the time of the earthquake. When their houses collapsed, they were buried under the rubble, but there were no female rescuers. Male rescuers, bound by decrees prohibiting contact with unrelated women, hesitated or refused to pull women from the debris. Witnesses reported hearing the screams of some women for hours, but male rescuers were unable to touch their bodies or pull them out from under the rubble.

Health facilities lacked sufficient resources, as well as female doctors and nurses, and women were not allowed to travel to medical centers without a male companion. Field clinics operated by international organizations were instructed not to admit women without a mahram (male guardian). Many survivors suffered harm as a result of these discriminatory policies.

In the Behsud floods in Maidan Wardak Province, which occurred in August 2024, farmlands and many homes were destroyed. More than 2,000 families were affected, and nearly 500 families lost their agricultural crops. As a result of the flooding, between 70 and 80 families—around 500 people—were displaced. The victims of this flood received no effective assistance from Taliban-controlled institutions or humanitarian organizations, leaving these affected communities in dire conditions.

In the Baghlan floods, which occurred in May 2024, many villages in Baghlan and Takhar were destroyed, 347 people lost their lives, and 1,651 were injured. Aid arrived late and was never sufficient. Distribution of assistance was carried out through male community elders, who reportedly excluded widows and women without male guardians. Health centers were overwhelmed with patients and, due to the ban on women working in the health sector, were unable to treat female patients. There were also reports of increased miscarriages and postpartum deaths.

In the Kunar and Nangarhar earthquakes, which occurred in August and September 2025, 2,200 people lost their lives and 3,600 were injured. Women and children constituted the majority of the victims. Reports indicate that women were left without care because the Taliban did not allow men to have contact with women. Many women were buried under the rubble because they were afraid to leave their homes without proper clothing, and some were unable to meet with health workers due to the absence of a mahram (male guardian).

The absence of female staff made it impossible to access entire villages. Health facilities operated by international organizations faced bureaucratic obstacles, as Taliban administrators required written authorization for every mission and imposed restrictions on the treatment of female patients.

In the Balkh and Samangan earthquakes, which occurred in November 2025, 27 people lost their lives and over 1,000 were injured. Although the area was accessible and close to the major cities of Mazar and Aybak, the problem of receiving health and relief support remained the same as in

previous disasters. Women victims suffered due to fear of not having proper clothing at the time of the incident. Numerous complaints were raised because people could not access humanitarian aid, and communities were denied assistance by the authorities.

The repetition of these failures over three years of natural disasters demonstrates a systematic pattern of deliberate neglect. Rescue operations were delayed due to weak management and planning; vulnerable groups, particularly women, were denied aid because of discriminatory policies; and there was no accountability due to fear. When deprivation predictably leads to death and suffering, it is no longer merely discrimination but a violation of the right to life and dignity. Afghanistan today is a clear example of vulnerability caused by state mismanagement. Earthquakes are natural, but the scale of human casualties is political.

Discrimination in the distribution of aid has been widely reported. Instead of being based on need and the rights of individuals, aid has become a privilege granted according to power, gender, and ethnicity. Taliban control over humanitarian operations allows interference at every level, from selecting aid recipients to hiring relief staff. In most affected areas, aid distribution is directed toward communities loyal to the self-appointed authorities, while others—especially Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks—face systematic deprivation.

According to international human rights covenants, most of which Afghanistan is a party to, discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, language, religion, place of birth, social status, or other affiliations is prohibited. Regardless of which group governs the country and whether their rule is recognized, Afghanistan remains obligated to uphold its international commitments. The Taliban's discriminatory conduct in responding to victims of recent disasters constitutes a clear violation of human rights, including the right to life and the right to human dignity.

The Afghanistan Human Rights Center, in order to ensure an effective and fair response to natural disasters in Afghanistan, offers the following recommendations:

- **To the Taliban:** Restrictions on women's work, education, and mobility must be lifted immediately. Crisis management should be returned to civilian leadership, and female experts should be reinstated in all institutions. Equal access to aid must be guaranteed, and independent monitoring should be permitted.
- **To the United Nations:** A rights-based and integrated approach should replace scattered negotiations. Women's participation must be considered a prerequisite for all humanitarian operations. The UNAMA mission should be expanded to include investigations into gender-based harassment and persecution, as well as accountability under international law.
- **To donor governments:** All aid should be conditional on measurable standards of women's access and independent monitoring. Donors should prioritize NGOs, diaspora organizations, and educational initiatives, and support the resettlement or creation of safe spaces for displaced and uprooted women. We also urge donor governments and NGOs to allocate more

resources for the reconstruction of destroyed villages, taking into account that with the approach of winter, the cold weather could exacerbate the suffering of survivors.

- **To neighboring countries:** Forced expulsions must be stopped, and temporary support and humanitarian pathways should be established for returning Afghans. Regional coordination should ensure that movement is safe, voluntary, and dignified.
- **To civil society and universities:** Documentation of violations must continue despite censorship. We welcome the UN's new investigative mechanism. Afghan lawyers, researchers, and students should be engaged and supported through training and collaboration to preserve evidence, build legal cases, and sustain civil society activities.

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