

The Humanitarian Crisis and Gender Persecution in Afghanistan Under Taliban Rule

Summary and main conclusions

- **Humanitarian Crisis and Gender Persecution:** The Taliban's return to power has led to severe humanitarian issues and significant gender-based oppression in Afghanistan.
- **Role of the International Community:** The Netherlands, EU, and international organizations must withhold recognition of the Taliban and support Afghan women through well targeted programs with gender focus strategies, including education and financial aid to make them more resilient.
- **More pressure by available instruments:** support Afghan women by pressuring the Taliban to release female human rights defenders and respect women's rights. The Netherlands and the EU must protect Afghan women and girls fleeing gender-based persecution, prioritizing their asylum applications. This includes those whose protection status is uncertain or rejected and those in countries like Iran, Pakistan, or Turkey. Additionally, the Netherlands should incorporate the investigation of Afghan perpetrators of women's rights violations into its immigration policy.
- **Afghan Women's Voices:** Afghan women are clear that international recognition of the Taliban should be conditional on the restoration of their rights. Their dignity and freedoms must be prioritized, and international aid should be tied to tangible improvements in their situation.
- **Sustainable Support Measures:** Long-term projects and discreet support mechanisms are essential for empowering Afghan women and ensuring their rights amidst the current oppressive regime.

Introduction

The Taliban, officially known as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and led by Hibatullah Akhundzada, is a military and religious movement characterized by an extremist Islamist ideology known as Talibanism. Internationally, the Taliban is notorious for its violent implementation of Islamic laws and the killing of Afghan civilians to achieve political and religious goals. The return of the Taliban to power in August 2021 has exacerbated Afghanistan's existing problems, leading to a profound humanitarian crisis. The Taliban's takeover has displaced half a million Afghans, forcing them to flee their homes.

Gender Oppression

Under Taliban rule, women and girls face severe restrictions. Girls above sixth grade are banned from attending school or university, women are prohibited from participating in social and political activities, and are not allowed to travel freely. The Taliban enforces strict dress codes, suppresses local media, and arrests journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society activists. This oppression aims to pressure the international community to recognize the Taliban government, which has historically been marked by disastrous rule from 1996 to 2001. Furthermore, the international community had specified conditions for Taliban before the fall of the Republic of Afghanistan, and the Taliban not only did **not** comply with these conditions but also committed numerous violations in Afghanistan.

Views of Afghan women

A nationwide consultation with 745 Afghan women, organized by U.N. Women, the International Organization for Migration (U.N. Migration), and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), revealed widespread "dread" and "anxiety" over potential international

recognition of the Taliban authorities. See link:

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/consultations-report-afghan.pdf> .

A majority of these women stressed that recognition should be contingent upon the removal of all Taliban-imposed restrictions against women and girls. Women reported increased harassment and fear of arrest due to the enforcement of the hijab decree, feeling unsafe leaving their homes without a male guardian (mahram), and facing public humiliation through filmed instances of harassment. Social trust is low, with 96 percent reporting distrust among neighbors, fearing Taliban informants.

The consultations highlighted the negative intergenerational impact of Taliban restrictions, with boys internalizing the subordination of women and girls losing hope for their futures. Afghan women strongly request that the international community not recognize the Taliban unless restrictions are lifted. They emphasize the importance of linking international aid to improved conditions for women and creating communication pathways for women to address the Taliban directly.

Proactive support for women and girls, also in asylum applications

The international community should support Afghan women by pressuring the Taliban to release female human rights defenders and respect women's rights. The Netherlands and the EU must protect Afghan women and girls fleeing gender-based persecution by prioritizing their asylum applications, including those with uncertain or rejected protection status, or those in countries like Iran, Pakistan, or Turkey. Additionally, the Netherlands should include the investigation and identification of Afghan violators of women's rights in its immigration policy (Schengen area).

Educational Support

Supporting Afghan women's education is crucial. Efforts should focus on providing access to higher and professional education, improving women's skills to create job opportunities, and supporting women's entrepreneurship through online education and digital platforms. Proactive use of the internet and digital tools can help disseminate information about the Taliban's failures and empower Afghan women.

Sustainable Projects

A successful project for Afghan women should focus on sustainability and self-help groups, such as "Women for Women" groups. These groups can facilitate the extension of agricultural services (food security, processing, nutrition) in rural areas. By establishing individual self-help groups, women can access online and offline vocational training. This structure will help women generate income, extend their skills and knowledge to other female community members, and ensure project sustainability. Additionally, women can receive training and work in the health sector as midwives or nurses. Increasing scholarships for Afghan women is another effective way to support their education.

Support from Humanitarian Organizations

Humanitarian and relief organizations can provide financial aid to women's rights activists and launch online training courses covering education, advocacy, digital security, and psychological support. These creative approaches can discreetly support Afghan women and human rights activists.

References:

"Afghanistan: Humanitarian Crisis," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2022.

"Taliban's Impact on Afghan Women and Girls," Human Rights Watch, 2021.

"Gender Persecution in Afghanistan," Amnesty International, 2023.

"International Response to Taliban Rule," European Union External Action Service, 2022.

"Supporting Afghan Women: Educational and Economic Initiatives," United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2023.

"Summary report of consultations UN WOMEN" <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/consultations-report-afghan.pdf>