

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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THE DENIAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS TO WOMEN AND GIRLS BY THE TALIBAN IS AN ATTEMPT TO ERASE THEM FROM AFGHAN SOCIETY

Since the return of the Taliban to Kabul in August 2021, the Taliban's systematic attacks on the rights of women and girls and the use of violence, including torture and other ill-treatment, and enforced disappearances, have created a culture of fear, and threatens to completely erase women and girls from public life in Afghan society. Despite their initial promise to respect women's rights within the Islamic framework,¹ women and girls' rights have been under attack in deeply intertwined ways while they have also borne much of the burden of an ongoing economic crisis. These attacks on the rights of women and girls to education, work, free movement and peaceful assembly, and the enforced disappearances, and torture and other ill-treatment of women protestors and other rights violations have severely restricted the ability of women and girls to act freely in political, social and economic spheres.

Since the Taliban seized power in August 2021, the policies, regulations and decrees of the de facto authorities have denied and violated the human rights of women and girls in the country, including rights related to public participation, education, free movement, peaceful assembly and expression.² Enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment by members of the de facto authorities,³ along with economic and social conditions that directly undermine the rights of women and girls,⁴ ranging from a crumbling economy to increased rates of child, early and forced marriage,⁵ contribute to the challenges that women and girls face. This has been worsened, in part, due to some decentralized discretionary decisions and directives by Taliban leadership, the uneven enforcement of regulations and the random violence of Taliban officials and soldiers, all of which have contributed to a culture of fear where women and girls are afraid to act and participate even in the most ordinary aspects of daily life.

Ten interviews by Amnesty International with Afghan women's rights activists both inside and outside the country over the past six months suggest that women are subject to an increasing number of human rights violations and that the space for political dialogue with Taliban leaders on the issue is shrinking. Many prominent women leaders have been arrested or harassed,⁶ and others have fled abroad. The ban on secondary education for girls, in particular, threatens to do generational damage to girls and women of the country. Further, fear of Taliban reprisals and the violence of the current government often mean family members also end up enforcing some of the prohibition on women and girls from participating in activities that the Taliban have deemed inappropriate, as interviewees told Amnesty International, all of this contributes to an environment of fear and control that women and girls are exposed to.

On the one-year anniversary of the Taliban's takeover of Kabul 40 women gathered to demand basic economic support and to protest the closure of schools for girls. The women protestors were dispersed as Taliban fighters fired automatic weapons into the air around them.⁷ Three journalists were also detained during this protest.⁸ The Taliban used

¹ BBC, "Afghan women to have rights within Islamic law, Taliban say," 17 August 2021. [Afghan women to have rights within Islamic law, Taliban say - BBC News](#)

² Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Taliban must immediately stop arbitrary arrests of journalists, civil society activists, former government officials and those who dissent - Amnesty International," 21 March 2022.

³ Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Taliban authorities must reveal Alia Azizi's whereabouts - Amnesty International.", 21 January 2022," Also, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, "[N RELEASES REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN SINCE THE TALIBAN TAKEOVER](#)", 20 July 2022. UN releases report on human rights in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover | UNAMA (unmissions.org)

⁴ Council on Foreign Relations, "A Look at Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis: Millions of Afghans are struggling to survive after crucial foreign aid was halted due to the Taliban's takeover. Images from Afghanistan show a catastrophe in a country already traumatized by decades of war.", 12 January 2022. [A Look at Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis | Council on Foreign Relations \(cfr.org\)](#)

⁵ Amnesty International, Afghanistan: Death in slow motion: Women and girls under Taliban rule, 27 July 2022, Chapter 7.

⁶ Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Taliban must immediately stop arbitrary arrests of journalists, civil society activists, former government officials and those who dissent - Amnesty International," 21 March 2022. Afghanistan: Taliban must immediately stop arbitrary arrests of journalists, civil society activists, former government officials and those who dissent - Amnesty International [THIS IS LINKED TWICE]

⁷ Yogita Limaye in Kabul and Merlyn Thomas, August 13, 2022, *Taliban break up rare protest by Afghan women in Kabul*, BBC

⁸ Dina Hadid, August 13, 2022, 'Women march in a rare protest in Kabul's streets — and face violence from the Taliban,' NPR. For more details on the situation

violence, including shooting in the air to disburse protestors, preventing them from protesting or threatening and intimidating them according to various reports. This was in order to prevent women from protesting against the deliberate targeting of Shia/Hazara at Kaaj Educational Center on 30 September, in the west of Kabul, where at least 43 dead 83 wounded persons were reported.⁹

At the same time, several of the activists that Amnesty International interviewed pointed out that one of the things that makes the current Taliban authorities different from the government in the 1990s is that many Taliban leaders are more concerned about how they are perceived internationally than previous Taliban leaders. The current Taliban has clamped down on efforts to draw international attention to the human rights violations taking place under their government. Activists who have been at protests where journalists described to Amnesty International of being attacked for reporting on human rights violations, and the de facto authorities have taken steps to try to undermine accounts of abuse of women and girls on social media.¹⁰ Sustained international attention and pressure to address the violation of human rights of women and girls becomes even more crucial in this context.

As such, Amnesty International calls on the Taliban to immediately stop denying the human rights of women and girls and ensure they can fully exercise their rights to education, work, peaceful assembly, free movement, and political participation, among other rights that are currently being violated. The Taliban must also protect women and girls from gender-based violence and stop enforced disappearances. At the same time, Amnesty International calls on the international community, particularly to the UN Security Council, to communicate through a clear formal resolution that the actions of the current Taliban towards women and girls are not acceptable, and never will be. The Security Council must develop a resolution and implement targeted sanctions and a travel ban, particularly on Taliban members that are implicated in violations of women and girls' rights.

This Public Statement builds on Amnesty's recent report¹¹ on the plight of women and girls under the Taliban and draws particularly on ten recent interviews with women rights activists and protestors inside the country and those who had managed to leave Afghanistan. The interviews were conducted from January to March 2022 via secure communication means. Amnesty International further reviewed existing reports from media, human rights organizations and the UN, particularly after the Taliban takeover of the country on 15 August 2021.

Public and Political Participation of Women

Following the Taliban takeover of Kabul, women have been excluded from political decision-making at almost every level. No women have been granted leadership positions in the Taliban government and none were invited to the Taliban's Grand Council, also known as the Afghanistan Ulema Grand Council, which was convened in Kabul from 30 June to 2 July 2022.¹² Before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan had four women ministers, a woman provincial governor, and more than 20 out of 34 provinces had women deputy governors of social affairs.¹³ Women made up more than 20% of the civil servants in the country¹⁴ and held ambassadorial positions.¹⁵ A small number of women were working in the police, military and security sectors¹⁶ and they also served as judges, prosecutors and defence attorneys.¹⁷

With the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban, the operations of almost every government office and agency that included women were immediately suspended. This included the parliament of Afghanistan, which by law had a minimum of

facing women protesters in Afghanistan, see Amnesty International, *Death in slow motion: Women and girls under Taliban rule*, Chapter 8.

⁹ UNAMA, https://twitter.com/UNAMAnews/status/1576766575629467648?s=20&t=3dmc-8XyVhVG7nenzU_CXA

¹⁰ The New York Times, [How the Taliban Turned Social Media Into a Tool for Control](#), August 20, 2021.

¹¹ Amnesty International remote interview, 8 February 2022. For more details, see Amnesty International, *Death in slow motion: Women and girls under Taliban rule*,

¹² Gandhara, "Taliban's Handpicked 'Grand Gathering' No Place for Diverse Opinions -- Or Women", 30 JUNE 2022. Taliban's Handpicked 'Grand Gathering' No Place For Diverse Opinions -- Or Women (rferl.org)

¹³ WhatsApp Conversation with Hussain Nussrat, Chief of Staff to the Second Vice President of Afghanistan, 16 March 2021

¹⁴ The World Bank, "Policy notice: Afghanistan's development gains: Progress and challenges", <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33209/Afghanistans-Development-Gains-Progress-and-Challenges.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

¹⁵ Zaman Sultani, "Women's rights must be protected by action, not rhetoric", Amnesty International (News story, 11 March 2019), www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/03/womens-rights-must-be-protected-by-action-not-rhetoric/

¹⁶ Lynzy Billing, "Female Afghan soldiers face a battle on all fronts", ZORA, 2 October 2019, <https://zora.medium.com/female-afghan-soldiers-face-a-battle-on-all-fronts-ac78722326a1>

¹⁷ NWORLD, "Women judges and lawyers who fled Taliban rule refuse to give up", 10 JANUARY 2022. Women judges and lawyers who fled Taliban rule refuse to give up (thenationalnews.com)

27% women representatives, as well as provincial councils, 20% of which were women.¹⁸ Under the Taliban, the Ministry of Women's Affairs is no longer operating, and the ministry's former Kabul headquarters was repurposed to house the Ministry of Vice and Virtue, which had a history of oppressing women during the Taliban government of the 1990s and now.¹⁹ The MoWA had provincial offices across all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, providing support to women, and these offices were primarily staffed by women in both Kabul and in the provinces.²⁰

In the days following the takeover, women were removed from other civil service jobs and political offices.²¹ The only exceptions to this are mostly in the public health sector.²² Women working in private sectors or media have also faced increasing challenges. Additionally, essential services for women facing gender-based violence, such as shelters, were decimated and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has been shut down.²³ These Taliban decisions have also had wider economic implications and forcing women out of work has also had devastating impacts on household livelihoods – particularly households headed by women.²⁴

Women who had been working in the government reported a variety of forms of harassment by the Taliban. One civil service member described to Amnesty International how she had been called in for questioning and intimidated after the takeover by the Taliban.²⁵ Others were simply instructed not to return to their offices.²⁶ In some cases former women government officials and members of civil society have been targeted specifically, such as that of Alia Azizi who was the head of the Women's Prison in Herat and went missing after reporting to work on 2 October 2021. Alia's last communication was with the Taliban's Head of Herat Prison.²⁷ Despite this, most recently, in areas where the Taliban government has not had the staff to respond to the ongoing humanitarian crises, the Taliban have requested that women send male relatives to replace them in their professional roles.²⁸

All of this has had a chilling effect, particularly on those women who had been involved in politics. One woman who had been working for the government said: "At first, I did not leave my house for seven days. Then, when I did go out, the city was like a stranger to me."²⁹

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY³⁰

Taliban restrictions almost immediately generated public protest by women in Afghanistan.³¹ Two days after the Taliban takeover, on 17 August 2021, a small group of women gathered in front of the presidential palace.³² The women were covered in black abayas and hijabs and demanded that the achievements of the last two decades on women's rights, including the right to education, right to work and political participation, should be preserved. In the weeks that followed several other protests called on the Taliban to uphold the human rights of women and girls to work and education.³³

¹⁸ 8AM, "Absence of law and Dismantle of Institutions", 17 MAY 2022. <https://8am.af/consequences-of-the-absence-of-law-and-elimination-of-institutions/>

¹⁹ Inews, "Afghanistan: Taliban replaces women's ministry with all-male department for 'virtue and vice'", 18 SEPTEMBER 2021.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/afghanistan-taliban-womens-ministry-department-virtue-vice-1206432>

²⁰ Index number: ASA 11/4143/2021 [info missing from footnote]

²¹ Amnesty International remote interview, 8 February 2022; Aljazeera, "A Taliban ban on women in the workforce can cost economy \$1bn | Business and Economy News | Al Jazeera", 1 December 2021. [Taliban ban on women in the workforce can cost economy \\$1bn | Business and Economy News | Al Jazeera](#)

²² REUTERS, "Taliban say Afghan women health service staff should go back to work", 27 August 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-say-afghan-women-health-service-staff-should-go-back-work-2021-08-27/>

²³ Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Survivors of gender-based violence abandoned following Taliban takeover – new research", 6 December 2021; Business Standard, "UN rights chief decries Taliban's move to dissolve Human Rights Commission", 20 MAY 2022. https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/un-rights-chief-decries-taliban-s-move-to-dissolve-human-rights-commission-122052000151_1.html

²⁴ WFP, "WFP Afghanistan: Situation Report 17 March 2022", 17 MARCH 2022. WFP Afghanistan: Situation Report 17 March 2022 - Afghanistan | ReliefWeb

²⁵ Amnesty International remote interview, 7 March 2022

²⁶ Amnesty International remote interview, 8 February 2022

²⁷ Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Taliban authorities must reveal Alia Azizi's whereabouts - Amnesty International", 21 January 2022.

²⁸ Hindustan Times, "Taliban ask women employees to send male replacements citing workload, 18 July 2022.

²⁹ Amnesty International remote interview, 16 February 2022

³⁰ For more information on the situation of women protesters in Afghanistan, see *Death in slow motion: Women and girls under Taliban rule*, Chapter 8.

³¹ BBC, "AFGHANISTAN: WOMEN PROTEST AGAINST ALL-MALE TALIBAN GOVERNMENT", 8 SEPTEMBER 2021. AFGHANISTAN: WOMEN PROTEST AGAINST ALL-MALE TALIBAN GOVERNMENT - BBC NEWS

³² The Indian Express, "Watch: Afghan women hold street protest as Taliban fighters look on", 18 August 2021. <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/watch-afghan-women-hold-protest-demanding-equal-rights-and-freedoms-following-taliban-takeover-7459142/>

³³ ToloNews, "Women Protest for Right to Education, Work", 14 September 2021. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-175453>

Taliban officials and soldiers cracked down on these protests using excessive use of force and committed other violations of human rights such as the enforced disappearance of protesters,³⁴ arbitrary arrests,³⁵ and the banning of any protest whose slogans did not meet their prior approval.³⁶ In some instances, Taliban set up roadblocks to arrest anyone on their way to these protests. Women were reported going to great lengths to try and organize them despite these restrictions.

At the protests, activists reported being beaten, often with pipes, whips or the stocks of weapons, as well as firing tear gas canisters directly at protesters.³⁷ Taliban police at protests intimidated journalists and confiscated phones and cameras of anyone suspected of filming the event.³⁸ Other journalists were detained and tortured.³⁹

By February 2022, the Taliban had arbitrarily arrested or forcibly disappeared more than 30 women protesters in the country.⁴⁰ While some protests continue, their frequency appears diminished and activists report that they fear contacting one another as they might put each other at risk.⁴¹

RIGHTS TO EDUCATION, WORK AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Women and girls have also faced severe restrictions on their ability to choose how they dress, travel, work and attend schools. In a devastating move impacting the long-term future of women and girls in Afghanistan, the Taliban have deprived them of the right to access education at multiple levels. Already, under the former government more than 2 million girls remained without access to education,⁴² primarily because of the ongoing wars and insufficient numbers of women teachers or education facilities,⁴³ but more recent policies over the past year have taken this to new extremes. Currently, girls' schools beyond grade six remain closed,⁴⁴ making Afghanistan the only country worldwide to impose a de facto ban on girls' secondary education.⁴⁵

Schools for boys were reopened countrywide by 17 September 2021, but girls were barred until they could be "provided with a safe learning environment" without further explanation of what this involved.⁴⁶ Since then, despite international outcry, girls' schools remained closed. At the beginning of 2022, Taliban officials announced that they would open girls' schools by March, but the decision was reversed within hours after girls reached schools.⁴⁷ The activists interviewed believed that these unfulfilled promises and their subsequent reversals were primarily aimed at lessening criticism from the international community. A year after taking power in Kabul, the ban on girls' schools, beyond grade six (age 12) remains in place.⁴⁸

³⁴ Index Number - ASA 11/5369/2022

³⁵ The Guardian, "Taliban launch raids on homes of Afghan women's rights activists", 20 January 2022. Taliban launch raids on homes of Afghan women's rights activists | Women's rights and gender equality | The Guardian

³⁶ The Guardian, "Taliban ban protests and slogans that don't have their approval", 8 September 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/08/taliban-ban-protests-and-slogans-that-dont-have-their-approval>

³⁷ The Sun, "Brutal Crackdown - Taliban soldiers armed with assault rifles 'tear gas and beat bloody' women's rights protesters in Kabul, 4 September 2021.

Taliban soldiers armed with assault rifles 'tear gas and beat bloody' women's rights protesters in Kabul | The Sun

³⁸ Amnesty International remote interview, 16 February 2022

³⁹ Amnesty International, Afghanistan: Taliban wasting no time in stamping out human rights says new briefing, 21 September 2022.

⁴⁰ ASA 11/5369/2022, Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Taliban must immediately stop arbitrary arrests of journalists, civil society activists, former government officials and those who dissent", 21 March 2022

⁴¹ Amnesty International remote interview, 7 March 2022

⁴² UNICEF Afghanistan, "Annual Report 2019", p. 11, www.unicef.org/afghanistan/media/5116/file/English%20.pdf

⁴³ Education Cannot Wait, "Women and girls take the lead in Afghanistan", www.educationcannotwait.org/girls-day-afghanistan/#:~:text=In%20all%20UNICEF%20estimates%20that,whole%20in%20Afghanistan%20is%20rising

⁴⁴ CNN, "Taliban postpones return to school for Afghan girls above 6th grade", 24 MARCH 2022. [Taliban postpones return to school for Afghan girls above 6th grade - CNN](https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/24/afghanistan-taliban-school/index.html)

⁴⁵ Geneva Solutions, "Afghanistan: The only country that bans girls' education", Afghanistan: The only country that bans girls' education - Geneva Solutions. For more details on the Taliban's violation of girls' right to education, see Amnesty International, *Death in slow motion: Women and girls under Taliban rule*, section 4.2.

⁴⁶ Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Taliban must allow girls to return to school immediately – new testimony", 13 OCT 2021.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/afghanistan-taliban-must-allow-girls-to-return-to-school-immediately-new-testimony/>

⁴⁷ NBCNEWS, "This isn't a wise decision": Taliban reversal on girls' education met with condemnation", 11 April 2022.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/taliban-afghanistan-girls-education-ban-reversal-condemnation-rcna21941>

⁴⁸ ToloNews, "Specific Reasons Not Given for Closed Girls' Schools: UN's Bennett", 16 June 2022. Specific Reasons Not Given for Closed Girls' Schools: UN's Bennett | TOLONews

Women are still technically permitted to attend universities, but the Taliban have instituted harsh attire restrictions⁴⁹ and gender-segregated classrooms.⁵⁰ The Taliban have also divided university attendance time for female and male students.⁵¹ Female university students also report various forms of harassment by Taliban soldiers. There are also other regulations that undermine their ability to access education, such as barring women from administrative buildings, which makes registering for classes very difficult.⁵²

The fact that the Taliban have banned women from travel without a *mahram*, or male chaperone, further impacts their ability to access education, as well as their freedom of movement and assembly.⁵³ Activists reported that the Taliban have harassed and beaten women for traveling without a mahram, and in some cases, have even punished those who were being accompanied, suggesting that women should not actually travel for any reason.⁵⁴ This has greatly limited the ability of women to travel both inside and outside the country and one activist, for instance, described being stopped at the airport and denied the ability to leave the country without a male relative.⁵⁵ Activists stated that Taliban officials had prevented them from leaving the country and thought that this was a deliberate strategy to keep activists inside the country and limit the spread of their messages.⁵⁶ Another activist said that she and other women had been attacked by Taliban soldiers, who beat her with a (plastic) pipe, at the passport office when she was applying for a passport to travel abroad to study.⁵⁷

Women have faced increasing restriction on what they must wear when they appear in public. The Taliban forced women TV anchors and presenters to cover their face when appearing on television so that their faces are not fully seen while on screen.⁵⁸

RULED BY FEAR

Many of the current Taliban policies build upon and expand on the harsh treatment of women and girls in what were Taliban-controlled areas under the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, where they had deprived women and girls of their right to education, work and freedom of movement and assembly.⁵⁹ At the same time, however, many of the same draconian rules that were applied during the Taliban era from 1996-2001, have been now expanded to create a culture of fear that further limits the ability of women and girls to participate in even the most mundane aspects of public life.⁶⁰ Since the Taliban takeover of Kabul, women and girls have been detained arbitrarily, accused of “moral corruption” and other vague offenses.⁶¹

Prominent women’s rights activists and female professionals, including Alia Azizi, Mursal Ayar, Zahra Mohammadi, Tamana Zaryab, Hanifa Nazari, Parwana Ibrahimkhel and Tamanna Zarayb Paryani have been unlawfully detained or forcibly disappeared.⁶² When there are enforced disappearances Taliban authorities refuse to investigate them. Families are reluctant to call for investigations on as they believe the Taliban authorities are often involved in these enforced disappearances,⁶³ has increased the current climate of fear in the country.

⁴⁹ Index number: ASA 11/4143/2021 [MISSING INFO]; The Strait Times, “Taliban orders university women in Afghanistan to wear face-covering niqab”, 5 September 2021. <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/taliban-order-university-women-to-wear-face-covering-niqab>

⁵⁰ SkyNews, “Afghanistan: Male and female students segregated by curtain as university studies resume”, 6 September 2021.

<https://news.sky.com/story/afghanistan-male-and-female-students-segregated-by-curtain-as-university-studies-resume-12400565>

⁵¹ The Statesman, “Taliban separates weekday classes for male, female varsity students”, 25 April 2022. Taliban separates weekday classes for male, female varsity students (thestatesman.com)

⁵² Amnesty International, Afghanistan: Death in slow motion: Women and girls under Taliban rule, 27 July 2022, section 4.2.2.

⁵³ France 24, “No trips for Afghan women unless escorted by male relative: Taliban”, 26 DECEMBER 2021. [No trips for Afghan women unless escorted by male relative: Taliban \(france24.com\)](#)

⁵⁴ Amnesty International remote interview, 8 February 2022. For more details, see Amnesty International, *Death in slow motion: Women and girls under Taliban rule*, section 4.4.

⁵⁵ Amnesty International remote interview, 15 February 2022

⁵⁶ Amnesty International remote interview, 15 February 2022

⁵⁷ Amnesty International remote interview, 7 March 2022

⁵⁸ BBC, “Afghanistan’s female TV presenters must cover their faces, say Taliban”, 19 MAY 2022. [Afghanistan’s female TV presenters must cover their faces, say Taliban - BBC News](#)

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch, “*You have no right to complain*”: Education, social restrictions, and justice in Taliban-held Afghanistan”, June 2020, pp. 49,

www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/06/afghanistan0620_web_0.pdfhttps://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/06/afghanistan0620_web_0.pdf

⁶⁰ Pajhwok, “Women shot dead in Faryab over alleged elopement”, 22 November 2019, www.pajhwok.com/en/2019/11/22/woman-shot-dead-fayab-over-alleged-elopement

⁶¹ Amnesty International, Afghanistan: Death in slow motion: Women and girls under Taliban rule, Chapter 6.

⁶² ASA 11/5369/2022; Amnesty International, “Afghanistan: Taliban authorities must reveal Alia Azizi’s whereabouts.”

⁶³ Amnesty International remote interview, 16 February 2022

This climate of fear has led to families often further imposing restrictions on women and girls, hindering their ability to access their rights. Families have prevented women from participating in protests, sometimes because they support the Taliban policies towards women and sometimes because they fear reprisals. As one woman protester told Amnesty International, “every woman’s protest must begin in her home before reaching the wider community.”⁶⁴ Another suggested that her family was concerned that if she was arrested by the Taliban, she would face sexual violence, bringing shame to the family, and that this was why they did not let her participate.⁶⁵

Current restrictions state that the Taliban will keep male members of the family accountable should women or girls disobey their hijab rules, women and girls covering themselves from head to toe.⁶⁶ The impact of such policies could lead to increased levels of domestic violence against women in the country. Before the takeover by the Taliban, the former MoWA registered 7,191 cases of violence against women in the country in 2020 (1399). Activists believe these numbers have increased since.⁶⁷

Activists point to the fact that the lack of protection from violence has extremely limited their ability to exercise their right to freedom of expression and thought. As one activist described: “We were about to come on the main street and Taliban soldiers came and tore down our banner. A journalist was beaten, several were forced into their pick-up vehicle, and one was taken to police station. They take journalists to police station, torture them, delete all the photos and videos and set them free.”⁶⁸ Others report that they fear their groups have been infiltrated by Taliban spies who are reporting their activities.⁶⁹ Activists also pointed out that the Taliban often violated their own regulations, for instance, by detaining women protesters without any female Taliban member being present.⁷⁰

The increased violations of the rights of women and girls also contravene the existing commitments of Afghanistan to United Nation’s Security Council’s Resolution 1325. The UN Security Council has not yet made any moves to hold the Taliban accountable to the commitments of the previous government. In particular, Afghanistan’s National Action Plan from 2015 aimed “to increase the political participation of women at all levels of decision making related to peace, security and civil service.”⁷¹

In particular, the plan aimed to:

- 1) Increase effective participation of women in the decision-making and executive levels of the Civil Service;
- 2) Increase women’s active and effective participation in leadership positions of security agencies;
- 3) Ensure women’s effective participation in the peace process;
- 4) Encourage women’s meaningful participation in the drafting of strategies and policies on peace and security;
- 5) Strengthen women’s active participation in elections.

In each of these areas Afghanistan has seen significant reversals since the return of the Taliban that the UN Security Council has not yet responded to.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The policies and actions of the Taliban authorities towards women and girls has had a devastating impact on their lives. There are also significant secondary effects. The Taliban decision to forcing women out of work has devastating

⁶⁴ Amnesty International remote interview, 16 March 2022.

⁶⁵ Amnesty International remote interview, 7 March 2022

⁶⁶ BBCPERSIAN, “Taliban’s compulsory hijab command: ‘It looks like it’s a crime to be a woman in Afghanistan’”, 16 May 2022.

<https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-61437468>

⁶⁷ VOA, “7,200 cases of violence against Afghan women recorded in fiscal year 2020”, 31 January 2021. حدود ثبت ۷۲۰۰ قضیه خشونت علیه زنان در افغان زنان علیه خشونت قضیه ۷۲۰۰ حدود ثبت. ۱۳۹۹ مالی سال در افغان زنان علیه خشونت قضیه ۷۲۰۰ حدود ثبت. (darivoo.com)

⁶⁸ Amnesty International remote interview, 25 January, 2022

⁶⁹ Amnesty International remote interview, 16 March 2022; Amnesty International remote interview, 7 March 2022.

⁷⁰ Amnesty International remote interview, 8 February 2022.

⁷¹ Afghanistan’s National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 2015. Available at: https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/wps-afghanistan_national_action_plan_1325_0.pdf

impacts on household livelihoods, and there are reports of surging rates of child, early and forced marriage due to economic pressure and the refusal of the Taliban to protect the rights of women and girls.⁷²

As a result of the ongoing violations of women and girls' rights in a continually worsening context, Amnesty International makes the following recommendations to the Taliban and the international community:

1. THE TALIBAN DE FACTO AUTHORITIES

- The Taliban must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights of women and girls to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly
- The Taliban must take immediate steps to guarantee the right to work, the right to movement, the right to political participation and other human rights that are currently being violated by members of the Taliban, including, but not limited to:
 - Allow peaceful demonstrations and protest.
 - Cease the violence against activists and journalists.
 - Remove restrictions on travel for women and girls.
 - Allow women working for the government and elsewhere to return to work.
- The Taliban must respect the right to the education of women and girls, including, in particular:
 - The revoking of the ban on girls attending secondary schools.
 - Working to ensure that the education opportunities provided to women and girls is equal to that of men and boys.
- Remove restrictions on female students and teachers at all levels, including restrictions on clothing, conduct, and gender segregation of students and teachers.
- The Taliban must stop and also work to protect women from enforced disappearances, targeted violence and torture by members of the Taliban.

2. INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

- The international community must send a clear message to the Taliban that their current policies towards women and girls are not, and never will be, acceptable. The international community should take steps to impose clear consequences, particularly on Taliban leaders, for their actions.
- Donor organizations and the UN must work to address the ongoing economic crisis in the country, which has a deep impact on the lives of women and girls. They must also send a strong message to the Taliban that their current policies on women and girls' rights are unacceptable.
- The UN Security Council must adopt a resolution including a set of concrete steps the Security Council plans to take in response to the situation of systemic violations of women and girls' rights in Afghanistan – including targeted sanctions and travel bans against Taliban members implicated in these human rights violations.

⁷² Amnesty International, *Death in slow motion: Women and girls under Taliban rule*, Chapter 7, UNICEF, *Addressing Child Marriage in Afghanistan: UNICEF's Response Strategy*, March 2022.