

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 50th SESSION

Urgent debate on human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan

1 July 2022

Background

The Council decided to hold an urgent debate on the human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, on the request of the EU and France. The urgent debate took place on 1 July 2022. A draft resolution A/HRC/50/L.62 was tabled on 5 July and will be considered on 7 July.

Opening Statements

Ms. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights:

The recent earthquake in Afghanistan aggravates the desperate situation of the population, especially for women and girls. **Over 90%** of women-headed households **face hunger and food insecurity, domestic violence and attacks** on women human rights defenders, journalists, judges, lawyers and prosecutors are growing. Women face **mass unemployment, restrictions on movement and dress**, and **1.2 million girls are denied secondary school**. Since the Taliban take-over in August 2021, women and girls are experiencing **the worst decline** in the enjoyment of their rights in decades. Despite the promises of Taliban to honour their human rights obligations, as far as they are consistent with **Islamic sharia law, systemic oppression and exclusion** of women and girls is taking place. Afghan women want **direct dialogue** with the de facto authorities, which **UNAMA** is striving to facilitate. The de facto authorities must give them a seat in the table, engage in meaningful dialogue, set a firm date for opening secondary schools for girls, and ensure quality education **without discrimination**. Restrictions on women's freedom of movement **must be lifted** and their right to access to employment secured. **Independent mechanisms** to receive complaints and protect victims of **GBV** must be re-established, and the de facto authorities should **engage with predominantly Muslim countries** with experience in promoting women's and girls' rights. In this regard, the recent country visit by an **OIC** delegation is a significant step. The **international community** must make more concrete efforts to **insist** for the protection of the rights of Afghan women and girls. Governors in some regions are applying policies that provide options for women and girls, which **creates openings** that should be built on. Ongoing **initiatives of Afghan women** leaders, thinkers and civil society groups should be supported to design a strategy to promote the rights of women and girls with **clear benchmarks**. Member States who have imposed **sanctions** should facilitate support to people in need.

Mr. Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and on behalf of the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures:

There is a need for **intensified humanitarian aid** and support and ensuring the aid reaches Afghan women and girls, and other marginalized groups. There is a **backslide and regression** on women's and girls' rights in Afghanistan. Degradation of women's rights has been **central to Taliban's ideology** for decades. **Despite public promises** the Taliban is reinstating the discrimination against women and girls **unparalleled in its misogyny and oppression**. The de facto authorities have stated they will respect the international human rights treaties ratified by Afghanistan only to the extent that they are not in conflict with **Sharia law**. No indication of when schools would reopen and under what conditions were given. **Gains made by women and girls** over the past 20 years have been **wiped out**, including restrictions on **employment, travel and attire**. In addition to imposing an absolute **gendered discrimination**, Taliban's intentions are to make **women invisible** and **entirely excluded** from the society. The measures taken **massively diminish women's lives**, deliberately attack women and girls' autonomy, freedom and dignity, and create a culture of **impunity** for domestic violence, child marriage and sale and trafficking of girls, along with other **consequences**. The Taliban must create a **meaningful**

dialogue with Afghan women and ensure their free participation in civil, political, and economic life; they must open secondary schools for all children; remove restrictions on movement and ensure access to health care; and refrain from all violence and respect the right to protest peacefully. The **international community** must ensure a concerted effort to **demand women's participation** at all levels, support Afghan **female-led civil society organizations** inside and outside the country and ensure maximum available **resources**. **The Council** must provide meaningful support.

Ms. Fawzia Koffi, First Woman Vice President of the Afghan Parliament, Former member of the peace negotiation team with Taliban and Human Rights activist:

The urgent debate is a **light at the end of a long dark tunnel** that Afghan women are living, in a time that attention is diverted to another war. Afghanistan is suffering from **multidimensional problems** expanding from humanitarian to human rights and political crises, and women and girls are facing a unique and dire situation. The participation of women in parliament has diminished from **28% to 0%**, in civil service from **30% to 0%**, and for girl children in school from **4 million to 1,5 million**. Women are committing suicide, and girls as young as 9 years old are being sold. Afghanistan is the only place in the world where **women are invisible**, and it is heart-breaking to have to advocate for the right to be visible in the 21st century. Taliban has not kept their promises and act **in contradiction to Islam**. If **55%** of the population is **oppressed** and not allowed to exercise their fundamental rights, the country is a **safe haven for other military extremists**. For our own **security and stability**, we must move from beautiful resolutions and statements to practice. **Leverage** over Taliban must be used in making them **accountable to deliver** to their citizens. The **Muslim countries** should not let Taliban **misrepresent Islam**, which is the religion of peace, coexistence, and acceptance. The **international community** must be in the forefront of the struggle in solidarity with Afghan people. **UNAMA** should be more accountable on what they do to **HRC**. All humanitarian interventions should make **mandatory the 50% participation women** not only as recipients but as decision-makers for the de facto authorities and showcase this in their own organizations. **Woman-led organizations** must be supported. **Political dialogue** must be pursued, or Afghan women will continue to suffer.

Country Concerned:

Afghanistan: statement delivered by H.E. Mr. Nasir Ahmad Andisha, Ambassador, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative to the UNOG:

This urgent debate is about women's rights activists and defenders, each schoolgirl and woman in general, bravely asking for their rights to be respected. Reports indicate that the situation of human rights for women and girls in Afghanistan is **worse than anywhere on the planet**. The job of this **Council** and measure of its credibility is **standing in solidarity** with these women. This very moment in Kabul the Taleban has gathered 3000 members and assigned 12,000 armed men to guard this gathering, in which there is **no independent media present, no voice of dissent, and no women**. They will ask for **recognition**, for more humanitarian and economic **assistance** and the release of central bank **funds**. Under the view or illusion that the international community has forgotten the people of Afghanistan. For the majority of Afghans, the situation is not normal. Afghanistan is a country **with rich culture and diversity**, and a meeting point of regional civilizations. The current temporary situation is not in line with their **tradition, culture or teachings of Islam**. Women and girls refuse to allow fear to indicate their action and have kept going in the face of oppression. Until now, their voice has gone unheard. The situation of women and girls in Afghanistan demand **a robust monitoring mechanism** to collect, consolidate and analyse evidence of violation, to document and verify information, to identify those responsible and promote accountability and remedies for victims, and make recommendations for effective prevention for future violations. As long as girls and women are valued less and separated from public life, the potential to create a peaceful Afghanistan where human rights are respected will not be realized.

List of Speakers:

Members of the Human Rights Council:

Joint statements: Iceland (on behalf of Nordic and Baltic countries), Czech Republic (on behalf of the European Union), Kazakhstan (on behalf of Central Asian countries), Pakistan (on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)). **African Group:** Namibia. **GRULAC:** Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Paraguay, Argentina. **Asia and Pacific Group:** Qatar, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Pakistan, India, China, Nepal, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, Marshall Islands. **WEOG:** Luxembourg, Germany, France, Finland, Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States. **Eastern European Group:** Lithuania, Czech Republic, Montenegro, Ukraine, Poland.

Observers:

Portugal, Ecuador, Canada, Uruguay, Australia, Spain, Costa Rica, Norway, Croatia, Ireland, Peru, Austria, Estonia, Romania, Slovenia, New Zealand, Switzerland, Belgium, Chile, Viet Nam, Albania, Greece, Türkiye, Malta, Egypt, Timor-Leste, Italy, Sweden, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Maldives, Russian Federation, Israel, Iran. **Other observers:** UN Women, UNICEF, International Development Law Organization (IDLO), UNFPA.

NHRIs and NGOs:

Afghanistan: Independent Human Rights Commission, International Federation for Human Rights Leagues, Meezaan Center for Human Rights, International Humanist and Ethical Union, International Service for Human Rights, International Planned Parenthood Federation, The Next Century Foundation, Maat for Peace - Development and Human Rights Association, Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, International Commission of Jurists, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, World Organisation Against Torture, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, Save the Children International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom Now, Minority Rights Group, International Bar Association, Amnesty International, Sisterhood Is Global Institute, CIVICUS - World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Association pour la défense des droits de l'homme et des revendications démocratiques/culturelles du peuple Azerbaidjanais-Iran (ARC), Interfaith International, Center for Global Nonkilling.

Summary of the Debate:

The vast majority of speakers **offered their condolences over the recent devastating earthquake** in Afghanistan, expressing **solidarity** with the victims. They were deeply concerned over the situation of women's and girls' rights in the country, sharing their **disillusionment** with the **broken promises** of the de facto authorities for women and girls. In particular, the right to education and **lack of access to secondary schools for girls** was denounced strongly, as the severe restrictions on movement, dress, association, expression and employment are making women invisible across the society. Women human rights defenders and journalists being at a high risk of harassment, intimidation, and targeted attacks. A number of countries underlined that **sustainable peace, development, and economic recovery** will depend on the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women and girls in society. Of particular concern was the worsening **humanitarian and socio-economic crises**. Many speakers called for the international community to **act urgently**, urging them to assure the necessary recovery, reconstruction, development, financial, educational, technical and material **assistance**. Some speakers mentioned their disappointment about the **dissolution of Independent Human Rights Commission** and called for its reestablishment, and others shared concerns about reports of **former security force members with amnesty being tortured or killed**. Speakers highlighted the importance of **sustained international engagement** with the country and **continuation of dialogue**. Many called for united action from States and for **a clear message** to be brought to the de facto authorities. Several countries commended the work of **UNAMA** and the **SR** on Afghanistan. The **situation of minorities** was also of concern, with many Afghans, including religious and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ persons, and civil society activists, continuing to face discrimination, harassment, and death threats.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of **Iceland**, H.E. Ms. Thordis Kolbrun Reykfjord Gylfadottir, in a statement on behalf of Nordic-Baltic countries, regretted that the Taliban has shown no willingness to listen to appeals from the Council and urged for continuing support from the international community. The **European Union** underlined, that among other human rights, the right to education and justice for victims of SGBV are basic needs for women and girls, and access to justice must be guaranteed for all

victims and survivors. **Kazakhstan (on behalf of Central Asian countries)**, advocated for restoring trade, economic, transport, logistics and energy ties with Afghanistan to solve acute humanitarian problems and called for establishment of an inclusive and representative government which ensured the meaningful participation by all ethnic and political stakeholders, including women and minorities. **Pakistan (on behalf of the OIC)** recognized the central role Islamic scholars can play in continuing dialogue on women and girls' rights and encouraged the international community to support all such engagement efforts. **France** stated that in organizing the urgent debate the Council assumes its responsibility and sends a firm message of unity to the Taliban, that no political solution can emerge without the respect for the rights of the people of Afghanistan.

Several countries, including **Japan, China** and **India**, announced having delivered immediate emergency relief assistance to Afghanistan in response to the damages caused by the recent earthquake. Many countries further stated their support for Afghanistan in terms of humanitarian and development aid particularly aimed for supporting women and girls. **Germany** said they continue to provide humanitarian assistance and support the civil society especially for basic health services, for victims of sexual violence, and educational projects. **Indonesia** is working with partners to offer scholarships and capacity-building for Afghan women and men and continues to foster dialogue to further promote women's rights. The **United Kingdom** said it will continue to deliver £250million of aid to Afghanistan similarly to last year, allocating at least 50% to women and girls. **Malaysia**, in addition to humanitarian assistance, human capital development, and financial assistance, will continue to support Afghanistan through the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme, particularly focusing on women's empowerment, education, and capacity building. **Qatar** stressed the need to continue providing relief and development humanitarian assistance, in addition to working to restore banking and financial systems for the benefit of the Afghan people.

India, referring to the strong historical and civilizational linkages with the Afghan people, stated that the expectations of the international community are clearly outlined in the Security Council's Resolution 2593. **Venezuela** condemned the UCMs imposed on Afghanistan and saw the critical humanitarian situation in the country as a reflection of failed warmongering policy of the U.S., who have left the country in chaos. The **U.S.** shared concerns over attacks on ethnic and religious minorities and called for measures for their protection, while **Argentina**, in addition to attacks against LGBTIQ+ persons, women's rights activists, journalists and humanitarian personnel, expressed concerns over allegations of arbitrary detention, extrajudicial executions, torture, and enforced disappearances calling on all political actors in Afghanistan to fully respect human rights and IHL. **Namibia** regretted the wiped-out gains for women and girls and called on States to refrain from diverting or transferring weapons and other military equipment to the various groups in Afghanistan. **Ukraine** urged those holding power to reverse the steps taken. Several countries, including **Montenegro**, called for the re-establishment of the Independent Human Rights Commission. **Marshall Islands** urged all concerned on the ground to collaborate with humanitarian relief actors to address malnutrition and hunger.

Coming to Observers, the speakers were alarmed by the growing deterioration of the situation of human rights of women and girls in the country, and several States regretted Taliban not keeping to their promises. Many speakers called for the de facto authorities to immediately cease human rights abuses against all people, including women and girls, to guarantee their active and meaningful participation in all aspects of civic, political, economic, social, and cultural life, and make legal and political reforms that in practice guarantee full compliance with IHRL. **Portugal** stated that the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan is now the worst in the world, calling on the de facto authorities to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all women and girls. The MFA in Portugal has set up a dedicated email address to help Afghans in need and the country will continue to ensure that the more than 400 women and girl refugees now feel safe and protected. **Ecuador**, condemning all violence against women and girls and the systematic oppression across the society, said it is essential to guarantee civic space and hold meaningful dialogue with women and girls, including those belonging to ethnic and religious minorities. **Canada** said that the barriers in place to restrict women's and girls' human rights will only serve to impede the development of a stable and inclusive

Afghanistan, as well as negatively impact the Taliban's relations with the international community. **Australia** stated its commitment to provide emergency relief of AUD1 million following the 22 June earthquake, in addition to AUD140 million in humanitarian commitment. **Spain** highlighted the opportunity of ensuring that Afghan women manage and receive a greater volume of humanitarian aid. Many countries, including **Canada** and **Uruguay**, welcomed recent visits to Afghanistan made by the High Commissioner and the SR.

Norway echoed the SR's concerns on the disappearances of those, including women activists, who speak up against a society ruled by fear, not law. **Romania** said that ensuring gender equality, in law and in practice, is crucial for achieving stability, justice and sustainable and positive transformations in Afghanistan. Several speakers expressed concern over the worsening humanitarian, economic and food crisis, and encouraged the international community to support the work of the UN and humanitarian actors on the ground. **New Zealand** welcomed the resolution and deplored the recent directives from the Taliban that have further limited women's and girls' freedoms to fully participate in society and seek an education. **Timor-Leste** said that peace and security cannot last without the engagement and meaningful participation of all members of the society, stating that "*women and girls are vehicles of change, and their voices must be heard*". **Iran** reiterated its solidarity and sympathy with their "*brothers and sisters*" in Afghanistan, now suffering another catastrophe due to the earthquake, and continue to stand with Afghanistan in their quest for peace, stability, human rights, and dignity.

UN Women, having launched an innovative funding mechanism to reach women-led grassroots organizations across the country, said that reversals in rights have been rapid and show how fragile gains in gender equality are. **UNICEF**, reaffirming its commitment to work alongside the de facto authorities and protection actors to support the realization of the rights of all women and girls in Afghanistan, said that the fact that almost 1,1 million girls are currently excluded from education beyond grade 6 is a blatant denial of their rights and places them at increased risk of domestic violence and exploitation, including child labour and child marriage, with a devastating impact on their mental health. Sexual violence is pervasive, and victims are denied the opportunity to seek support and claim their rights. **IDLO** said that placing people at the centre of justice is critical to achieving sustained development gains and that women's participation in society and governance is crucial for development and lasting peace. **UNFPA** highlighted that the systematic discrimination of women and girls exacerbates long-standing inequalities, GBV, early marriage and other harmful practices, particularly for women and girls with disabilities and those living in remote areas.

The Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan called on the UN to support their work on expanding monitoring mechanisms in the country. **The NGOs** stood in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan and asked for collective commitment to ensure women's rights are first in every discussion and decision. Representing one of the most severe human rights crises of today. They condemned in the strongest terms the systematic segregation and oppression of women and girls in Afghanistan with all its consequences, including forms of structural violence, child trafficking, forced marriage, and sexual exploitation. Mahram (male guardian) and imposition of a strict dress code were also strongly condemned. The HRC was called to ensure scrutiny over the ongoing violations. Special Procedures mandate holders were recommended to conduct a joint official the country to promote accountability. The Council should continue to closely monitor and ensure regular reporting on the situation of women and girls, commit to ensuring sufficient resources to the SR on Afghanistan, and to address the need for additional accountability mechanisms. The international community must hold the de facto authorities accountable for its actions and immediately halt all forms of violence against women and girls. Some speakers urged for issuing travel bans for all Taleban leaders.

International Service for Human Rights called for the Council to endorse a strong resolution requesting regular monitoring and reporting by relevant SRs and mechanisms and for UNAMA to strengthen its monitoring and public reporting on human rights. **The Next Century Foundation** expressed appreciation for the UN Security Council for taking steps in adding international pressure on the concerned government, simultaneously asking to consider the ongoing food insecurity and economic crisis when planning strict sanctions and travel bans. **Maat Foundation** referred to the

Taliban as creators of a stone age, asking for the HRC to urge countries not to recognize them and to continue sanctioning their leaders. **Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration** regretted that survivor centres have been forced to decrease their operating capacities and urged the Government to enforce the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the 2018 Security Council resolution 2405.

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom regretted the passivity of the international community in the face of the worsening situation, highlighting that support for civil society should not be limited to humanitarian aid and funding and programming on women's and girls' rights must urgently resume. **International Commission of Jurists** described the discriminatory edicts and practices, enforced by brutal displays of public violence, as widespread and systematic and akin to a sort of 'gender apartheid.' **Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development** called on the HRC to create necessary mechanisms to ensure credible investigations and accountability for grave violations and abuses in Afghanistan including against women and girls. **World Organisation Against Torture**, speaking out for all the Afghan women who have lost their voices, urged the international community not to abandon them and to send a clear message to the Taliban: "*the international community stands with Afghan women and girls*". **Save the Children International** called on Member States to exhaust all possible avenues to influence the authorities to restore girls access to education and uphold the full rights of Afghan women and children, take steps to alleviate the economic hardship, including increasing liquidity through the release of frozen assets and continued confidence building with financial sector partners, and to ensure funding, political support, and flexibility to enable the resumption of child protection activities in a safe, principled manner.

Human Rights Watch called for a concrete plan and steps, including intense monitoring of the situation by the UN, accountability, and practical responses such as travel bans on Taliban leaders implicated in the worst abuses. **Amnesty International** called on the Member States to urge the Taliban to commit to a time-bound plan to urgently facilitate women's return to their jobs, the re-opening of secondary girls' schools and the lifting of all other restrictions. Ms. Habiba Sarabi, speaking on behalf of the **Women's Forum on Afghanistan** and having served as Afghan Government Minister for Women's Affairs and the first woman appointed to serve as Governor of Bamyan Province, described the dire situation of women and girls who had made tremendous progress in the past 20 years. She urged the Council to condemn the ongoing violations in the strongest possible manner, to ensure that the human rights mandate of UNAMA is fully implemented and to ensure that all who violate human rights are held accountable. **CIVICUS** called on States to provide Afghan human rights defenders with financial, diplomatic and political support, including by issuing humanitarian visas and funding resettlement programmes.

For the full recordings of this session please refer to **UN WebTV: [31st meeting](#)** (1 July 2022, 02h 48min 54sec),
and **[32nd meeting](#)** (41min 08sec).