

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 54th SESSION

Interactive Dialogue on the Report of the OHCHR on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan

12 September 2023

The United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights, Volker Türk, affirmed that Human rights in Afghanistan are in a state of collapse, acutely affecting the lives of millions of women, men, girls and boys. Violations of human rights in the country are not new: decades of armed conflict mean that Afghanistan has known violence and injustice for much of its recent history. The dynamic imposed by the Taliban since they took power two years ago constitutes a systematic assault on the rights and freedoms of the population, which particularly targets women and girls and excludes them from most aspects of public and daily life. The country has also plunged into a grave humanitarian and economic crisis, with two-thirds of the population now in need of assistance.

The HC showed to the Council a report on the **stripping back of institutional protections of human rights at all levels** in Afghanistan. The **shocking level of oppression of Afghan women and girls** is immeasurably cruel. Afghanistan has set a devastating precedent as the only country in the world where women and girls are denied access to secondary and higher education. Restrictions are becoming increasingly severe, quelling women and girls' fundamental freedoms.

There has been a **systematic erosion of the laws and institutions that once provided some protection for human rights**. The Constitution has been suspended, and laws are now made by edicts rather than through consultative processes. Laws that once provided a framework for the protection of women from violence or an enabling environment for media have been suspended. **Corporal punishments and public executions have resumed** and there are ongoing reports of **extrajudicial killings, torture and ill-treatment and arbitrary arrests and detentions**. Compounding all of this is a **deeply troubling lack of accountability** for perpetrators of human rights violations.

In conclusion, the High Commissioner affirmed that the international community cannot turn its back on the people of Afghanistan. This is a human rights crisis of the first order. He encouraged States proactively to help address the challenges facing the Afghan economy. This will **involve concrete efforts to restore the financial systems to genuinely benefit the Afghan people**, including women and girls, and to ensure that sanctions do not impact humanitarian needs. He especially urged States with influence over the *de facto* authorities to help them reverse this trajectory, which is fatal not only for human rights, but for the future development and security of the country.

Afghanistan (Country concerned), recalling that progress in human rights had been made by previous authorities, deplored that the Taliban had undermined these gains. Afghanistan remains bound by international human rights obligations arising from the treaties to which the country is a party. It denounced the poverty affecting its country, the deterioration of access to health as well as the deterioration of access to education, hindered for more than 4 million children. Urgent humanitarian assistance is needed, she stressed. It deplored the "policy of gender-based apartheid" which marks the policies of the Taliban, before warning that these dangers for the future of the country also constitute an imminent threat for neighboring countries.

Interactive dialogue

31 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **The majority of the countries** expressed their grave concerns over the dire humanitarian, human rights, and socioeconomic conditions in Afghanistan. The prolonged humanitarian crises accompanied by a lack of access to funds

have left millions of Afghans at high risks of malnutrition, precarious health conditions, increased female mortality, and reduced access to basic education, among others. **New Zealand, Chile and Pakistan** remained concerned over the devastating impacts of various natural calamities on the people of Afghanistan, especially the marginalized, the vulnerable, and children and women. **The EU** called on the Taliban to end all human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law in Afghanistan. The Taliban must reverse actions that have resulted in the systematic socio-economic exclusion of women and girls and in the shrinking of civic space, including media freedom. **Ireland** focused on the importance of a full, equal, and meaningful participation of all Afghans, including women and girls and persons belonging to ethnic and religious groups and minorities, and including LGBTI persons.

The issue of impunity was also raised by several countries that recalled that perpetrators of human rights violations must be held accountable for their actions. **Russian Federation** asked for the current situation to be analyzed in its historical context, with one of them pleading for consideration of the root causes of the situation following the American occupation. **China** criticized the abuse of unilateral coercive measures that violate the rights of the country and cause suffering to the population. It called for the lifting of these measures and underscored the importance of preventing the politicization of humanitarian aid.

NGOs reported the continued Taliban's interference in humanitarian aid delivery that worsens the humanitarian and economic crisis. Increasing reports of suicide of women and forced child marriages illustrate the dire consequences of the Taliban's policies. The international community must prioritize accountability. The Council must heed the calls by many Afghan women and civil society organizations to establish an independent accountability mechanism. The international community must speak up and urge the de facto authorities to respect fundamental freedoms and to reverse their ban on women working and from education. **CIVICUS** and the **Meezaan Center for Human Rights** reported that over the last year, activists, especially women human rights defenders and journalists have continued to face arbitrary arrests, detention, and ill-treatment by the Taliban.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (31 country delegations):

EU, Netherlands (on behalf of BENELUX), Pakistan (on behalf of OIC), Liechtenstein, Ukraine, Chile, France, USA, Kuwait, Malta, Ireland, New Zealand, China, Malaysia, Cyprus, Romania, Namibia, United Kingdom and Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Czechia, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Islamic Republic of Iran, Sierra Leone, Lithuania, Albania, India, Switzerland, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Maldives, Russian Federation, Pakistan.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (10):

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, Interfaith International, International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, CIVICUS, Amnesty International, International Bar Association, Afghanistan Democracy and Development Organization, Human Rights Research League, Meezaan Centre of Human Rights, Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration.

To watch the full meeting refer to the [UN WEB TV](#).