

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 55th SESSION

### Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan

29 February 2024

**Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan**, stated that the human rights situation in Afghanistan has not improved since his last report. Mr. Bennett highlighted the ongoing human rights violations, including discrimination against women and girls, arbitrary arrests, and restrictions on freedom of expression. The regular exercise of civil and political rights as well as economic, cultural and social rights remain a distant dream for the majority of the population. Dire circumstances that face children, minorities, LGBTQ+ people, and persons with disabilities create an urgent need for prioritizing the rights and well-being of Afghans. The Taliban's failure to uphold commitments and perpetration of atrocities further exacerbates the humanitarian crisis. The situation in Afghanistan called for inclusive participation and respect for human rights as crucial elements for long-term peace.

Gender-based violence in Afghanistan could constitute a crime against humanity, including the systematic oppression and exclusion of women and girls, akin to gender apartheid. There is a prevalence of child marriage, violence against journalists, and targeted attacks on minorities, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. An alarming decline in the participation of women and girls in public life accompanies widespread reports of torture and arbitrary detention, particularly by the de facto authorities. The dire circumstances faced by children, minorities, LGBTQ+ people, and persons with disabilities are also emphasized, calling for immediate action to address their plight. Condemnation against impunity for human rights violations was made, stressing the need for accountability for all perpetrators, regardless of their affiliation.

In light of these challenges, the SR stressed the importance of inclusive participation and respect for human rights as essential elements for achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Mr. Bennett commended the bravery of Afghan human rights defenders while urging concerted efforts to uphold the rights of all Afghan citizens amidst ongoing adversity.

In addition to highlighting the grave violations of human rights, the SR also emphasized the urgent need for increased funding to enable Afghans to exercise their social, economic, and cultural rights. However, it is made clear that such funding should not be perceived as legitimizing the Taliban regime. Instead, it should be viewed as essential support to alleviate the suffering of the Afghan people. Mr. Bennett called upon the Taliban to improve their human rights record -as Afghanistan remains bound by international obligations-, acknowledging the limited progress made in sectors such as private healthcare.

Ultimately, he called for international solidarity in supporting Afghanistan towards a future where human rights are upheld, discrimination is eradicated, and violence against all individuals, regardless of their identity, is unequivocally condemned and addressed.

**Afghanistan (Country concerned):** The representative of Afghanistan stated that since its establishment, reports from the SR and other independent sources paint a grim picture of the human rights situation in Afghanistan, with systematic discrimination against women and girls, torture, extrajudicial killings, suppression of media and human rights defenders, and restrictions on cultural and economic rights. Recent bans on celebrations like Nowruz further exacerbate the situation. Despite limited access and intimidation, Afghan people urge the UN to uphold human rights principles, especially as the 4th anniversary of the Doha Agreement underscores heightened obligations to

address breaches. While there is international consensus on restoring rights and establishing inclusive governance, high-level meetings have yet to yield tangible results. Economic and environmental degradation worsen, with illegal exploitation of resources and diverted humanitarian aid. Afghanistan also reiterated the UN's duty to promote human rights for all, regardless of race, gender, language, or religion, stressing the Afghan people's right to dignity, safety, freedom, and sustainable peace.

### Interactive dialogue

45 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **The majority of the countries** expressed profound apprehension regarding the humanitarian, human rights, and socioeconomic conditions prevailing in Afghanistan. Their concerns encompassed various issues such as constraints on women and girls, arbitrary detentions, infringements against minority groups, and the diminishing scope for civic engagement. Particularly, most countries considered rule of law has been replaced by rule of force where gender-based violence is a tool of systematic oppression. There exists a unanimous call for the de facto authorities in Afghanistan to honour the rights and liberties of all Afghans, with particular emphasis on the empowerment of women, protection of children, and safeguarding of minority communities.

The **EU** urged for the respect of all human rights, especially those of women and girls and of persons belonging to minorities including ethnic and religious minorities such as the Hazara and LGBTI persons. Also, the EU reiterated its support for the ongoing ICC investigation, the mandate of the special rapporteur and that of UNAMA and the appointment of a UN special envoy for Afghanistan.

As International Women's Day approaches, the **United Arab Emirates** and **South Africa** referred to the systematic suppression of women and deliberate attempts to erase their presence from all facets of public life. They called for concerted efforts to secure fair and inclusive participation of women, emphasizing the urgent need to counteract gender-based oppression and ensure equal opportunities for women's engagement and empowerment. **Romania** and **Croatia**, addressing the repercussions of intersecting discrimination against women and girls, highlighted the alarming escalation in suicide rates, particularly among young girls.

**Pakistan** and **Malaysia** emphasized that rights and freedoms of all Afghans, especially women, children and persons belonging to ethnic, religious and cultural minorities must be respected in line with the teachings of Islam and the international obligations. **Norway**, on behalf of the Nordic Baltic countries, expressed being troubled about the imprisonment of numerous human rights defenders, journalists and other media workers. The importance of investigating and holding accountable those responsible for human rights abuses and violations was emphasized by the **EU, Chile, Sierra Leone, Montenegro, New Zealand, Albania, and the U.S.**

**Russia, Iran** and **Venezuela** condemned the invasion of foreign forces, attributing it to exacerbating the devastation and poverty within the country. These countries and **China** called for an end to unilateral sanctions imposed on Afghanistan, recognizing their role in worsening the suffering of its people. **Japan** expressed its commitment to cooperate with Afghanistan and pledged a provision of 58 million US dollars towards empowering the Afghan people, including through projects for women and girls to be delivered by UN women and other agencies.

**UN Women** shared the concerns over the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan, particularly highlighting the Taliban's continued disregard for the fundamental rights of women and girls, which blatantly violates the principles of the United Nations charter. Collaborating with IOM and UNAMA, UN Women ensures ongoing consultations with diverse Afghan women to amplify their voices. The crisis surrounding women's rights in Afghanistan cannot be viewed in isolation, as it risks

normalizing attacks on women, suppression of their voices, and their exclusion from society, sending a dangerous message to oppressors worldwide.

**NGOs** referred to gross human rights violations in Afghanistan, including killings, torture, and forced disappearances, with self-censorship disproportionately affecting women and girls. They highlighted the need for accountability and stressed that any engagement with the Taliban must prioritize human rights. Impunity is a concerning trend, with civil society stifled and the rule of law absent. Efforts to address the crisis must center on the Afghan people, with genuine participation from all sectors of society. **Amnesty international** pointed out the unjust imprisonment of women human rights defenders like Ahmed Fahim Azimi and Sadikullah Afghan. They also highlighted the absence of an international mechanism to gather evidence for potential criminal proceedings in Afghanistan. **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom** called on all the states to support efforts by the ICC prosecuting gender persecution, and to exercise universal jurisdiction regarding gender-based crimes. **Society for the Threatened Peoples** highlighted ongoing militant bomb attacks targeting mosques, schools, and hospitals in the Hazara community.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (45 country delegations):

*Afghanistan, Pakistan, Norway (on behalf of the Nordic Baltic countries), EU, Liechtenstein, United Arab Emirates, Luxemburg, Qatar, Germany, Pakistan, Italy, Switzerland, Malta, Malawi, Belgium, Canada, France, Australia, U.S., Turkey, Austria, Iran, Ireland, Russia, Netherlands, Slovenia, Indonesia, South African, Romania, Croatia, Chili, Venezuela, Malaysia, Spain, New Zealand, China, Bulgaria, UK, Sierra Leona, Montenegro, Japan, Albania, India, Kuwait, Ukraine, UN Women<sup>1</sup>.*

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

Afghanistan Democracy and Development Organization, Human Rights Research League, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Patriotic Volunteer Association, Interfaith International, Amnesty International, European Union of Jewish Students, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, Society for the Threatened Peoples, International Service for Human Rights.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Malta and UNICEF were scheduled to speak but their representatives were not present in the room at the time to take the floor.