

**Afghanistan: UN experts say 20 years of progress for women and girls’ rights erased since Taliban takeover**

*GENEVA (8 March 2023) – UN experts\* today said the situation of women and girls’ rights in Afghanistan has reverted to that of the pre-2002 era when the Taliban last controlled the country, effectively erasing progress on women’s rights in the intervening 20 years. They issue the following statement:*

“In 2002, after years of being denied their rights under the previous Taliban regime, Afghan women celebrated International Women’s Day full of hope. The day was observed in Afghanistan and at UN Headquarters with the theme ‘Afghan women today: Realities and Opportunities’ and commitments were made to support our Afghan sisters rebuild their lives and be full partners in the post-conflict reconstruction of the country. On that day the international community said that the plight of Afghan women had been “an affront to all standards of dignity, equality and humanity.” It stressed that world support for reasserting their rights should go beyond expressions of solidarity.

Despite challenges, Afghan women and girls made steady advances towards fulfilling their human rights. However, the situation has significantly regressed to the pre-2002 period, and women are denied their fundamental rights and freedoms including the rights to education, to work, to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, freedom of movement and freedom from fear and want and from discrimination.

Now, over two decades later, girls in Afghanistan have been banned from secondary school and women from tertiary education. Women and girls have been banned from entering amusement parks, public baths, gyms and sports clubs for four months. Women have been banned from working in NGO offices. Since the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021, women have been wholly excluded from public office and the judiciary. Today, Afghanistan’s women and girls are required to adhere to a strict dress code and are not permitted to travel more than 75 km without a mahram. They are compelled to stay at home.

All over the country, women report feeling invisible, isolated, suffocated, living in prison like conditions. Many are unable to have their basic needs met without access to employment or aid, including access to medical healthcare and psychological support in particular for victims of violence, including sexual violence. It’s a sobering reminder of how swiftly and aggressively women’s and girls rights can be taken away.

In two weeks, a new school year will start in Afghanistan. If the restrictions are indeed temporary, as the Taliban claim, they have an opportunity to prove it by lifting the ban on girls and women attending secondary and tertiary education institutions and allowing them to resume their studies at the start of this school year.

We call on the de facto authorities to end the harmful annihilation of women rights and lift restrictions imposed on women, including on their working with NGOs.

We further call on the de facto authorities to fulfil their obligations under the international human rights treaties, including CEDAW, to which Afghanistan is a State party.

The international community must continue to provide robust support to Afghan women and;

1. Reaffirm their commitment by taking concrete actions to support and realise the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, in particular their right to education and employment.
2. Immediately cease all acts of violence including reprisals against women and girls and institute processes for bring perpetrators of violence to justice.
3. Prioritise women and girls rights in all their engagements with the de facto authorities and demand the immediate reversal of edicts and policies that assault women’s and girls’ rights.
4. Take proactive measures to support Afghan women to engage in decision making processes in Afghanistan and about Afghanistan.
5. Increase support to Afghan women so that they can resume employment, access aid and healthcare (including reproductive healthcare), and have an adequate standard of living.

ENDS

*\*The Experts:* ***Richard Bennett****, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan****; Farida Shaheed****,* [*Special Rapporteur on the right to education*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-education)*,* ***Fionnuala Ní Aoláin****,*[*Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-terrorism), ***Dorothy Estrada Tanck****(Chair),****Ivana Radačić****(Vice-Chair)****, Elizabeth Broderick, Meskerem Geset Techane****and****Melissa Upreti,***[*Working Group on discrimination against women and girls*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-women-and-girls)*;* ***Tlaleng Mofokeng****,* [*Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-health).

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*For more information and****media requests****, please contact Naveed Ahmad (*Naved.ahmad@un.org*).*

*For* ***media inquiries*** *related to other UN independent experts, please contact Maya Derouaz (**maya.derouaz@un.org**) or Dharisha Indraguptha (**dharisha.indraguptha@un.org**)*

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