



Statement

On the 61st Session of the United Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Subject: The Deterioration of the Human Rights and Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan

Date: 25 February 2026

Accountability Watch Afghanistan expresses its deepest concerns about the continued deterioration of the human rights and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Since the last Council session in September 2025, the Taliban have intensified the enforcement of their brutal acts and policies that further consolidate a repressive system marked by oppression, institutionalised gender discrimination and ethno-religious rule. The Taliban have effectively dismantled the civic space and the protective legal and human rights mechanisms to create an environment of fear and control.

Women and girls remain subject to extensive restrictions affecting nearly every aspect of their lives, including access to education, employment, health services, sports, public space, and participation in social and political affairs. It has been held by the [International Criminal Court's arrest warrant](#) that the Taliban's gender based oppression meets the threshold of crimes against humanity of gender-based persecution. At the same time, the verdict of the [Permanent People's Tribunal](#) on Women of Afghanistan, has called for formally recognising and criminalising gender apartheid under international law.

The Taliban's ban on secondary and higher education for women and girls in Afghanistan has now entered its fourth year, with no indications for reversal. This ongoing system of exclusion not only constitutes a grave violation of international human rights law but also inflicts irreversible harm on an entire generation by entrenching poverty, increasing the risk of forced and early marriages, exacerbating psychological distress, and deepening long-term economic dependency and social marginalization.

Reports of the Taliban forcibly converting members of the Ismaili community to the Hanafi belief are alarming. Marginalised ethnic and religious groups under the Taliban, such as the Hazaras,

Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Tajiks, face continued forced eviction, land confiscation, and discriminatory administrative rulings that favour land redistribution to Pashtun settlers or the Kuchi claimants, as [reported by the Special Rapporteur](#) on Afghanistan. In particular, the Hazaras are subject to persecution on ethnic, religious and cultural grounds by the Taliban and targeted attacks by Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP), including attacks on civilians, protected sites and cultural objects, which amount to [the breach of the Genocide Convention](#). The Taliban have further restricted the use of Farsi-Dari and Uzbek languages in universities, official communications, public signage, and billboards, while systematically privileging Pashto in state institutions. These measures marginalise linguistic minorities, limit access to education and public services in their mother tongues and reinforce exclusionary ethno-linguistic hierarchies.

Beyond escalating repressions and gross violations within Afghanistan, there is a growing risk of normalisation of the Taliban's discriminatory practices outside Afghanistan. The Taliban's Minister of Foreign Affairs Amir Khan Muttaqi's exclusion of women journalists from his press conference during his October visit to India should sound the alarm bell about the normalisation of Taliban, allowing them to practice their restrictive policies against women and girls beyond Afghanistan. It also raises concerns regarding the safety and security of critics of the Taliban including women human rights defenders, journalists, civil society actors, and former government officials in exile, who may be exposed to intimidation, surveillance, and pressure by the Taliban.

The ongoing cross-border clashes and tensions with Pakistan and Tajikistan show that the notion of Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbours remains elusive, causing an unbearable human toll. This is underscored by 547 civilian casualties, including 70 deaths, recorded between October and December 2025 in incidents linked to conflict with Pakistan, according to a recent report by United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)). Since 9th October, the Taliban and Pakistan have engaged in at least eight rounds of cross-border clashes and airstrikes. Several rounds of mediation efforts by Qatar, Türkiye, and Saudi Arabia have stalled. A preliminary ceasefire that was agreed on 19th October during the talks in Doha and extended in the subsequent rounds of negotiations in Istanbul and Saudi Arabia remains fragile. These ongoing tensions require sustained monitoring and principled international engagement.

In January 2026, the Taliban created further potential for crimes against humanity by issuing [Criminal Procedural Regulations for Courts](#) in Afghanistan. The regulations codify an extreme ideological order based on a caste-style social division, religious discrimination, and coercion. Shockingly, it legitimises slavery through references to individuals as "free or enslaved," and authorises punitive measures based on social status, not the conduct. This penal code minimises punishment for domestic violence, and in some cases treats harm against animals more severely than violence against women. The code also criminalises same-sex relations under Article 60, prescribing imprisonment and, in cases deemed "habitual," discretionary death sentences,

thereby placing LGBTQI+ persons at heightened risk of arbitrary detention, torture, and execution.

Community and media reports show a sharp rise in women's deaths as well as disappearances of girls and boys across Afghanistan. Between November 2024 and November 2025, around [117 cases of women's deaths](#) by suicide or at the hands of family members were reported. Among them were women seeking employment, and women fleeing domestic violence or forced marriage. These stark realities indicate the suffocating environment of fear, stigma, and systemic abandonment normalised under the Taliban.

Journalists, civil society actors, human rights defenders, and former public officials continue to face arbitrary detention, intimidation, ill-treatment, and reprisals. Independent journalists such as Mahdi Ansari, Hamid Farhadi, Nazira Rashidi and athlete Khadija Ahmadzada have faced arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention.

LGBTIQ+ persons remain among the most at-risk populations under Taliban rule. Since 2021, credible reports document cases of arbitrary detention, torture, sexual violence, forced disappearance, and extrajudicial killing targeting individuals on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The Taliban's governance framework, including the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) law and their recent regulations, reinforce a legal environment where same-sex relations are criminalised and punishable under interpretations of Sharia law that may include corporal punishment or death. These measures institutionalise fear and eliminate any possibility of protection or legal remedy for LGBTQI+ individuals.

The human rights and humanitarian crises in Afghanistan have been compounded by the mass forced deportation of Afghanistan nationals from neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan, often in violation of the principle of non-refoulement. Many returnees face heightened risks of persecution, retaliation, or deprivation of basic services upon arrival. For LGBTQI+ returnees, the risks are particularly acute.

The collapse of protective legal frameworks, restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid, including the ban on female aid workers, have significantly exacerbated Afghanistan's human rights and humanitarian crises, disproportionately affecting women, children, and marginalised communities that also remain subject to aid diversion.

The perceived tolerance, alternative arrangements, and silence of the United Nations regarding restrictions on its female staff in Afghanistan, and the unequal support provided to those affected, particularly the vulnerable and persecuted groups, are a complicity and a violation of the UN Charter, particularly in light of the Taliban's systematic gender-based persecution of women and girls.

UNAMA's "Mosaic" plan, designed to carry forward the Doha Process based on the UN Security Council Resolution 2721 (2023), has only facilitated unilateral concessions, undermining the international leverage against the Taliban without any progress in initiating "an intra-Afghan political process" toward "an inclusive constitution-making" through a "National Dialogue" envisaged in the Independent Assessment and approved by the Security Council. When renewing the UNAMA mandate in March 2026, the UN Security Council must set a priority for UNAMA to focus on creating space for a National Dialogue. UNAMA should also ensure that human rights are not relegated to an item for internal negotiations as a capitulation to the Taliban.

We note some of the recent positive steps in efforts for accountability in Afghanistan. In particular, we welcome the establishment of the [Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan](#). We further welcome the [renewal](#) of the Sanctions Monitoring Team mandate by the United Nations Security Council, and the recent targeted sanctions and travel bans imposed by [Australia](#) on four Taliban officials. These forcible steps demonstrate the importance of coordinated, principled measures to hold perpetrators accountable and to reaffirm that grave violations of international law must carry consequences.

In this context, we call upon the UN Human Rights Council's Member and Observer States to:

- I. Advance and intensify independent monitoring and documentation, public reporting, and evidence preservation related to past and ongoing violations and abuses in Afghanistan, by supporting and funding the organisations and mechanisms involved.
- II. Recognise and address patterns that may amount to crimes under international law, including crimes against humanity such as gender persecution, gender apartheid and genocide.
- III. Strengthen victim-centered approaches that ensure protection, truth, healing, participation, non-repetition, and access to remedy.
- IV. Support and meaningfully engage with the victims and survivors, civil society, and human rights defenders in evidence collection and documentation processes.
- V. Coordinate international efforts to prevent impunity and utilise available avenues for investigating and prosecuting all alleged perpetrators, including members of the Taliban, regardless of time of alleged violations or the perpetrator's position, nationality, ethnicity, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

The United Nations should work toward fostering inclusive political change in Afghanistan, supporting the establishment of a democratic government grounded in respect for human rights and equal representation for all people of Afghanistan from across backgrounds.