



General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 June 2022

English only

Human Rights Council

Fiftieth session

13 June–8 July 2022

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by The Organization for Poverty Alleviation and Development, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 May 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Human rights situation in Afghanistan

Our organization would like to draw the Council's attention to the grave human rights situation in Afghanistan, especially that confronting its girls and women. We would also like to underline Pakistan's irresponsible role in bringing such a grave situation about, as indeed in furthering it.

The Taliban regime in Afghanistan has in recent months increasingly begun to reveal its true character and abandon the more refined, but obviously insincere, talk and tone of the Doha days. The escalating frequency with which the regime has been enforcing measures that effectively strip the Afghan people, especially the girls and women that constitute half the country's population, of their basic human rights has lent a whole new meaning and urgency to the need for this Council, as also for all democracies that believe in human rights, to intervene in the most effective manner possible. The plight that Afghan girls and women now face can no longer be ignored.

Even though the repression of women that is starkly visible today had begun to find expression even in the early months of the Taliban's return to power last year, with the right of women to work and the right of girls to an education both coming under a dark cloud, the regime had nevertheless restrained itself from demonstrating the full extent of its fundamentalist worldview in the misplaced hope that the international community would be deceived into granting it legitimacy and support, something that has rightly failed to happen so far.

Over the past few months, though, girls have been banned from going to school beyond the sixth grade, women have been barred from travelling alone by road or by air unaccompanied by a male relative, and men and women have been ordered to visit public parks only on separate days of the week that have been earmarked for each. This is in addition to the slew of other restrictions imposed on women, including banning them from many government jobs that they were otherwise fully qualified to do. Several women's rights activists have been detained.

Just within the course of last week, the international media has reported that the Taliban has ordered that women anchors on Afghan television channels henceforth cover their faces while on air. In the early days after their return to power, the Taliban had demanded that women wear at least a scarf covering the head. However, much to the horror of rights activists and an already distrustful international community, the Taliban rulers reportedly ordered on 7 May that all Afghan women would require to wear head-to-toe clothing in public, which signalled a clear hard-line pivot. The decree, which allowed women to only show their eyes in public, evoked similar restrictions on women during the Taliban's previous rule between 1996 and 2001. The decree further ordered that women leave home only when necessary. It stipulated that male relatives would face punishment — starting with a summons and escalating up to court hearings and jail time — for women's dress code violations. Videos shot in Kabul and aired on prominent international television channels last week showed armed squads of the Taliban's "Ministry for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice" patrolling the streets and going from shopping mall to mall hunting for, and sternly warning, any woman they found to not be attired in strict accordance with the Taliban's instructions.

In effect, in less than a year of seizing Kabul the Taliban has totally reversed two decades of gains made by Afghanistan's women, who have today literally been reduced to rightless adjuncts.

A stark illustration of the dim view that the Taliban's leadership takes on human rights in general was exemplified when it recently decided to completely dissolve five departments that had been set up by the former government. Among them was Afghanistan's Human Rights Commission. The Taliban regime explained that this action had been taken due to of shortage of funds and because the departments, including the Human Rights Commission, were not deemed necessary by the regime.

While statements from international organizations, including arms of the UN, human rights organizations, and several Western democracies have regularly underlined the need for the Taliban regime to course-correct and ensure human rights, clearly their advice has gone

unheeded and has, therefore, proved ineffective. In a situation in which little else seems to be working, it is surprising that the international community in general, and this Council in particular, has not exerted enough pressure upon Pakistan to use its close ties to the Taliban to get the regime to reverse all its regressive steps and ensure basic human rights to all Afghan citizens, and especially to its women. After all, Pakistan's powerful military, which shepherds the country's Afghan policy, has ties to the Taliban leadership going back more than 40 years – to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. A couple of decades later, despite Islamabad's repeated denials, a Taliban victory remained the primary goal of the Pakistani military establishment during the 20-year mission of the United States of America-led coalition in Afghanistan. Pakistan's duplicitous role in Afghanistan over the past two decades has been raised several times at congressional hearings in the United States of America, and the European Parliament on 15 September 2021 adopted a Resolution that asserted that Pakistan had for many years provided safe havens for Taliban members as well as military and financial assistance to them to take on the coalition in Afghanistan.

The strength and the depth of Pakistan's ties to the Taliban can be gauged from the fact that while Taliban leaders were talking publicly about introducing barbaric punishments such as chopping the hands and heads of Afghans whom the regime classed as errant, the Pakistani Foreign Minister was advocating at the UN General Assembly that the international community develop a road map that leads to diplomatic recognition of the Taliban. Pakistan's Prime Minister was saying the same in interview after interview. He advocated the Taliban regime's cause by asking the world to give time to the Taliban on human rights and to push the regime in "the right direction towards legitimacy". China, partly because of its own covetous gaze on Afghanistan's assets, but equally on Pakistan's urging, was calling for release of frozen Afghan funds to the Taliban.

In this backdrop of Pakistan being so deeply invested in the radical ideology that the Taliban represented, it is telling that the Pakistani Prime Minister took no responsibility for nudging the Taliban, a close ally, to change its medieval ways and begin treating its citizens, especially women, as human beings. That would make legitimacy more attainable for the Taliban. He, instead, choose to put the entire onus on the rest of the world. The reality is that today, both Pakistan and the Taliban need each other. The Taliban provides Pakistan with influence in Afghanistan and a bargaining chip to use with Western interlocutors. For the Taliban, Pakistan is its primary diplomatic backer.

If the omissions of the Pakistani Prime Minister were telling, what has been really surprising is that hardly anybody in the international community, this Council included, seems to be asking why Pakistan, quite obviously the Taliban's main benefactor, cannot get the terrorist outfit to first mend its ways and only then aspire to be accepted. The Taliban had, after all, promised in Doha to adhere to respectable standards of human rights.

It is even more surprising that concerted pressure on Pakistan to prevail upon the Taliban has not been forthcoming from the international community, even after Pakistan displayed its clout over the regime on 16 April by unilaterally carrying out airstrikes deep within Afghanistan and getting away with it absolutely unscathed. The Taliban opted to ignore this serious provocation despite the airstrikes having further added to the growing Taliban anger against Pakistan for building a 2,700-kilometer-long fence along the countries' contentious colonial-era border created in 1893, known as the Durand Line, which successive Afghan governments have not recognized. The Durand Line cuts directly through traditional Pashtun lands, and for decades meant little more to families divided on either side than a line drawn across the maps by British colonial officers. The Taliban, therefore, wants an open border for Pashtun tribesmen inhabiting the region.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is today at the center of the international focus, as it rightly ought to be. As pressing as the need to address the many human rights issues that have sprung up due to the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine is, to gloss over the plight of Afghan girls and women who have over two decades been enabled and empowered to express their true productive selves would be no less of a crime.

Perhaps the most effective way to win back their rights will be to put the ball in the court of the only country that is supportive of the Taliban, that rubs shoulders with the regime, but is

content to watch from the sidelines as its close ally unleashes misery after misery upon the women and the people of Afghanistan.

European Foundation for South Asian Studies, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.