



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
16 February 2024

English only

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-fifth session

26 February–5 April 2024

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 Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, 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.

[3 February 2024]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan**

### **Introduction:**

The current authorities in Afghanistan, the “Taliban movement”, continue to violate the human rights on a daily basis since they took control on August 15, 2021 till the writing of this statement, while women and girls remain the ones most affected by Taliban’s de facto control.

In December 2022, the de facto Ministry of Economy asked NGOs to prevent female employees from going to work and threatened to cancel the registration of these NGOs if they did not comply with this decision. This was followed by the suspension of both the Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children from their work in Afghanistan. According to the World Food Program, 92% of Afghans do not have access to adequate food, with women and people with disabilities disproportionately affected. From August 2021 to June 2023, Taliban committed more than 800 violations against former members of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, including the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National and Local Police, in all 34 provinces. Reports also documented more than 1,600 cases of human rights violations committed by Taliban during the arrest and detention of individuals, nearly 50% of them.(1)

### **First: Arbitrary Practices Against Women and Girls:**

Women and girls remain the most affected by Taliban’s de facto control of government in Afghanistan. Taliban’s arbitrary policies and practices against women and girls were reflected in the Women, Peace and Security Index 2023, as Afghanistan ranked last among the countries covered by the index(2). With more than two years of Taliban de facto control, Taliban used an approach based on discrimination against women and girls, as Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association documented the continuation of institutions affiliated with Taliban in issuing decrees, declarations, decisions and directives that restrict the rights of women and girls, including freedom of movement and their access to education and work. For example, during the period between September 2021 and May 2023, more than 50 decrees were issued pertaining to women and girls, most of them related to restricting girls’ right to education after the sixth grade and restricting the entry of women and girls to parks, as well as depriving women of work and depriving them of freedom of movement without a male relative. On December 20, 2022, women’s right to attend university was suspended, and then on December 22, 2022, all forms of education after the sixth grade for girls were banned. Then on December 24, 2022, women’s right to work with national and international NGOs was suspended(3). Taliban also annulled thousands of divorce cases decided under the previous government. A decree in December 2023 called for the closure of beauty salons, leaving about 60,000 women without income to support their families.(4)

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association also obtained various certificates stating that women were affected by the restrictions imposed by Taliban on women’s work, and the total number of women who left their jobs due to these restrictions reached 84% of working women. In a related context, the political participation of Afghan women has become a fantasy. The de facto government that was formed after Taliban took control of power did not include any women, and the appointed ministers did not choose their female assistants(5).

These practices contradict Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which allows every person to participate in assuming public office in his country. It also contradicts the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which the previous Afghan government ratified and which Taliban are supposed to abide by.

Regarding the right to freedom of movement, according to the procedures established by Taliban, women should be accompanied by a companion for long-distance domestic travel and foreign travel. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association had obtained certificates from airline companies stating that unaccompanied Afghan women were being excluded from flights. Taliban continued to arbitrarily detain and forcefully arrest women and girls, and after the recent protests that rejected Taliban's policies, Taliban militants arrested two in 2023, whom the movement claimed were leaders of the gatherings, namely (J.B.) and (N.N). The official Taliban spokesman stated that they were receiving Instructions from outside. The de facto movement's security forces also launched a campaign to arrest girls at a young age on charges related to wearing inappropriate hijab in different areas of Kabul.(6)

It is worth noting that these policies delay the implementation of the fifth goal of gender equality among the sustainable development goals, and these measures threaten to leave most women in Afghanistan behind the sustainable development goals. Therefore, it can be said that since August 2021, the situation in Afghanistan has been considered one of the largest declines in the world regarding respect for the human rights of women and girls. It deprived Afghan women and girls of secondary and higher education, political participation and employment opportunities, and stopped support services for victims of gender-based violence(7).

## **Second: Violations against the Press and Independent Media:**

Taliban continues to threaten the freedom of the press and journalists, and the unprecedented crackdown has had negative repercussions for independent media in Afghanistan. Taliban ranked 152nd out of 180 countries in the International Press Freedom Index for the year 2023, due to the continued detention of three journalists in places of deprivation of liberty in Afghanistan, while three other journalists were killed in 2023. In addition, a number of journalists who remained in Afghanistan practiced self-censorship of their journalistic activities, and some of them left the journalism profession.

In general, in 2023, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association documented about 168 violations against press freedom in Afghanistan. Among these violations were the killing of three journalists and the injury of 19 others, in addition to more than 100 cases of violence and threats against journalists. Although these statistics reflect a decrease compared to the 260 incidents recorded in In 2022, however, the nature of the violations has not changed, and in general these violations contradict the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity(8).

Not far from freedom of the press, Taliban, as the de facto authority, imposed various restrictions on the media and practiced serious violations that undermine the freedom of independent media. These violations ranged from closing to seizing the media and managing them by Taliban loyalists. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association reviewed reports indicating that more than 230 out of 543 media outlets that worked under the previous government had been closed after Taliban took control. while more than 6,400 media outlets, including reporters, stopped working, with women media professionals being particularly affected(9), in addition, six private media outlets were controlled and managed by Taliban. According to the Afghan Journalists Center, during the period from March 21 to November 17, 2023, at least 13 directives were issued regarding the media, which goes beyond the limited amendments proposed by Taliban to the country's media laws.(10) Despite promises to allow free media to operate independently, upon seizing power, Taliban issued decrees aimed at protecting its de facto government from criticism by the media. The militants issued 11 rules to journalists prohibiting the publication or broadcast of reports that conflict with Islam and prohibiting the publication of news that has not been confirmed by Taliban officials.

**Recommendations:**

- The ICC Prosecutor's Office must ensure that its investigations and prosecutions comprehensively cover cases involving alleged crimes committed by Taliban against women and girls.
- Everyone who has influence on Taliban should urge them to stop abusive practices against women and girls and provide additional guarantees that encourage relief organizations to work in Afghanistan.
- The need to lift restrictions on women's work as soon as possible and allow them freedom of movement
- Lift the ban imposed on girls and women enrolled in secondary and higher education institutions and allow them to resume their studies.
- The current de facto authorities must provide safety for journalists and media outlets so that they can carry out their journalistic activities without fear.
- The international community must adhere to its firm position on the need to achieve justice, accountability and reparation for all gross human rights violations in Afghanistan.

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- (4) How Taliban Enables Violence Against Women, The United States Institute of Peace, 7 Dec 2023, link, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/12/how-taliban-enables-violence-against-women>
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