



Security Council

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Letter dated 6 January 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, as Co-Chairs of the Security Council Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, in close coordination with the United Kingdom, are writing in response to the announcement on 21 December 2022 by the Taliban, suspending access to public and private universities for Afghan women and girls, until further notice, as well as the announcement on 24 December 2022 of a ban on women working in national and international non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan.

We unequivocally condemn these decisions. Since August 2021, the Taliban have announced a series of decrees which are effectively excluding Afghan women and girls from public, economic, political, cultural and social life. These decisions are a direct attack on gender equality and deprive women and girls of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including access to all levels of education. They constitute a violation of Afghanistan's obligations under international human rights law. They also reflect the Taliban's continued refusal to honour the commitments they have made to the Afghan people and the international community, which will result in further isolation, instability and declining humanitarian aid.

The decision of 21 December, along with earlier decisions to restrict Afghan women and girls from education, is in no way compatible with the teachings of Islam. Further, the continued erasure of women and girls from public life by the Taliban erodes the foundations necessary to build a prosperous, inclusive, stable and peaceful society.

The decision of 24 December is also in breach of humanitarian principles. As stated by the Secretary-General on 24 December, "the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance requires full, safe and unhindered access for all aid workers, including women". As Afghanistan faces multifaceted crises, including an economy on the brink of collapse and over two thirds of the Afghan population in need of humanitarian assistance, the decision to ban women from working in organizations that provide life-saving relief will exacerbate the suffering of people in Afghanistan. In addition to individual women aid workers' essential expertise, women aid workers are critical to safeguarding women, children and communities. Without female staff, the population in need can only be reached selectively. We reiterate the Security Council's demand, in its resolution [2615 \(2021\)](#), that all parties allow full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for humanitarian actors "regardless of gender".



Effective and principled humanitarian aid is only possible with the participation of women and men working together to assist all Afghans.

These decisions, which stand contrary to the interest of the Afghan people, further jeopardize the prospects of international engagement with the Taliban and the opportunity for sustainable development in Afghanistan. The Taliban must immediately reverse these decisions, adhere to their commitments and respect the rights of women and girls, including their full, equal and meaningful participation across all spheres of society in Afghanistan, from the political and economic spheres, to education and public spaces. This includes the respect for, and protection of, women aid workers, women human rights defenders and civil society.

The international community has clearly rejected the Taliban's attack on Afghan women and girls. The Security Council must unite behind a meaningful and effective response.

In the light of the recent developments, in January the Co-Chairs will hold the first meeting of the Informal Expert Group in 2023 on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. Since the takeover by the Taliban in August 2021, the Informal Expert Group has met twice to discuss the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, in August 2021 and February 2022.

We should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

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to the United Nations

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