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## Introduction

Marking three years since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, the issue of “Addressing the suppression of human rights in Afghanistan under Taliban rule” remains extremely prevalent and significant. Taliban’s return to power in 2021 has since led to widespread concerns over the suppression of human rights, particularly for women, minorities, and dissenting voices. Under their rule, fundamental freedoms such as education, employment, and freedom of expression have been severely restricted, reversing decades of progress.

The Taliban’s strict interpretation of Sharia law has resulted in the suppression of fundamental freedoms, including the rights to education, work, freedom of movement, and expression. Women and girls have been severely impacted the Taliban regime, with bans on secondary and higher education, restrictions on employment, and severe limitations on their participation in public life. Ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Hazara community, have faced targeted violence and discrimination, while journalists and activists critical of the regime have been silenced through intimidation, arbitrary arrests, and even extrajudicial killings.

This research report examines the current human rights situation in Afghanistan, focusing on the societal oppression enforced by the Taliban regime. By analysing the impact of this issue, the response of the international community, key players and attempts to solve the issue, this report aims to shed light on the urgent need to address the human rights violations and advocate for the protection of these rights in Afghanistan.

# Key Terms

## Human Rights

Human rights are rights that are inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. They are the basic freedoms that determine the quality of life of each and every individual.

## Taliban

The Taliban are a predominantly Pashtun, Islamic fundamentalist group that returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021 after waging a twenty-year insurgency. The Taliban also refers to itself by its state name, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

## Sunni Islam

The great majority -- upwards of 85 to 90 percent -- of the world's more than 1.6 billion Muslims are Sunnis. It is characterized by its adherence to the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad as recorded in the Quran and Hadith, and it emphasizes the consensus of the community (ijma) and the use of analogical reasoning (qiyas) in interpreting Islamic law. The Taliban is a militant Sunni Islamist group.

## Theocracy

A form of government in which religious leaders rule in the name of God or a deity, as seen in the Taliban's governance. Under the leadership of the Taliban, the government is a theocracy and an emirate with political power concentrated in the hands of a supreme leader and his clerical advisors, collectively referred to as the Leadership.

## Oppression

The prolonged and unjust exercise of power over a group, often through restrictions, discrimination, or violence. Since the Taliban took power in August 2021, women and children in Afghanistan have experienced unprecedented oppression.

## Repressive Policies

Strict laws that limit personal freedoms, such as banning girls from school or controlling the media. According to the Human Rights Watch, Afghanistan's human rights situation worsened in 2024 as the Taliban intensified their crackdown on women and girls and minority groups.

## General Overview

The suppression of human rights in Afghanistan under Taliban rule has had profound consequences for various sectors of society. Following the Taliban's resurgence in 2021, the country has witnessed severe restrictions on civil liberties, particularly affecting women, children, and ethnic minorities. The international community remains divided on how to address these violations while balancing diplomatic engagement, humanitarian aid, and political pressure. This section explores different aspects of the issue, including the role of the United States, the plight of women and children, the policies of the previous Taliban government, and the broader international response.

### United States involvement

The United States played a pivotal role in Afghanistan for two decades, initially intervening in 2001 to dismantle terrorist networks and later engaging in nation-building efforts. After the withdrawal of U.S. troops in August 2021, Afghanistan fell back under Taliban control, reversing many of the democratic and human rights advancements achieved during the previous 20 years. Despite its military departure, the U.S. continues to be involved through humanitarian aid and diplomatic efforts, working with international organizations to support Afghan civilians. However, sanctions and the freezing of Afghan government assets have exacerbated the country's economic crisis, making it more difficult to ensure essential services and human rights protections.

### Women and children's rights

One of the most pressing concerns under Taliban rule is the erosion of women's and children's rights. The Taliban's policies have systematically barred women from secondary and higher education, restricted their employment opportunities, and confined them to domestic roles. Girls are often denied schooling beyond primary education, and women have been removed from public service positions. Additionally, children, particularly girls, face increased risks of forced marriage and exploitation. The suppression of these rights not only violates international human rights norms but also diminishes Afghanistan's long-term social and economic development prospects.

## **Policies of the previous Taliban government**

The Taliban previously ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, implementing a strict interpretation of Islamic law that severely restricted freedoms, especially for women and minorities. The regime imposed public executions, banned entertainment such as music and television, and curtailed press freedoms. After retaking power in 2021, the Taliban initially claimed they would govern more moderately. However, their policies have largely mirrored those of their previous rule, demonstrating an unwillingness to align with international human rights standards. The return to such policies has led to widespread repression and fuelled mass displacement, as many Afghans seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

## **International response and diplomatic challenges**

The international community has largely condemned the Taliban's human rights abuses, but responses have varied. While organizations such as the United Nations and non-governmental groups provide humanitarian aid, many countries have refrained from officially recognizing the Taliban government. Economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation have been employed as tools to pressure the regime, yet these measures also contribute to Afghanistan's worsening humanitarian crisis. Countries such as China, Russia, and Pakistan have engaged in diplomatic talks with the Taliban, advocating for economic relief and security cooperation, highlighting the complexities of international involvement.

## Major Parties Involved

### Afghanistan

Afghanistan, officially The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, formerly the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, is a landlocked country located in the heart of south-central Asia. As of June 2024, no other country has formally recognized the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan as the de jure government of Afghanistan. The type of government in Afghanistan is referred to as a theocracy. According to the V-Dem Democracy indices, Afghanistan in 2023 was the third least electoral democratic country in Asia.

### Taliban

The Taliban previously ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 and received limited diplomatic recognition, with the United Nations and most countries continuing to recognize only the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. On 15 August, President Ashraf Ghani fled the country, and the Taliban captured the Afghan capital, Kabul, after regaining control over a vast majority of Afghanistan. Several countries, including Canada and Tajikistan have designated the Taliban as a terrorist organization. Despite no countries recognizing the Islamic Emirate as the legitimate successor of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, there have been official diplomatic talks between the Taliban and other countries since September 2021. The word “Taliban” is Pashto for “students”—was composed of peasant farmers and men studying Islam in Afghan and Pakistani madrasas, or religious schools.

### United States of America (USA)

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the United States has stopped aiding for the purpose of the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Instead, the US began to focus on humanitarian aid and targeted assistance to help meet basic human needs to avoid economic collapse. As part of these efforts, the United States has led the international response to deliver humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people working through UN agencies and NGOs, providing \$775 million in such assistance as of July 2022. The United States has advanced efforts to provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance and help fulfil the basic needs of Afghans in the priority areas of food security/agriculture, health, and education. Beyond basic needs, the United States has also supported programs designed to improve human rights in Afghanistan, particularly those of women, girls, and minority communities. The United States remains the single largest donor of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan.



## **UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)**

UNICEF, originally the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, officially United Nations Children's Fund since 1953, is an agency of the United Nations responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide. Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell in 2022, says "Restricting female humanitarians from working and female students from access to education in Afghanistan is a 'blatant violation of fundamental human rights'". While UNICEF has openly strongly condemned the egregious roll-back of basic rights by the Taliban, the organization continues to work to ensure that basic humanitarian aid is provided to children and women living all across the country.

## **United Kingdom (UK)**

The United Kingdom, second to the United States, has continued to be a major source for humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, under the Taliban Regime. The UK Government has also openly condemned The Taliban's disregard for the human rights of women and girls. A Statement for Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan mentions, "The United Kingdom continues to stand with the people of Afghanistan, particularly the women and girls and their families who are suffering because of the devastating situation of human rights and dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan." Since August 2021, the UK government and other donors have worked together to make more than \$2 billion available from the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank's Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund (ARTF) for health, education, livelihoods and food security. British troops were first sent to Afghanistan in 2001 as part of the response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the USA. On 8 July 2021, the British Prime Minister confirmed that nearly all UK forces had left the country.

## **Saudia Arabia**

Saudi Arabia was the second of only three countries to recognize the first Taliban government, extending official recognition on 26 May 1997, one day after Pakistan and shortly before the United Arab Emirates. Against the backdrop of the Taliban takeover in mid-August 2021, Saudi Arabia has played a pivotal role in pressuring the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) members to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghans. In August 2021, Saudi Arabia evacuated all of its diplomats from its embassy in Kabul after the Taliban captured the country in a swift sweep. Although Saudi Arabia does not

recognize the re-established Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan like the rest of the world, the Saudi embassy re-opened in November 2021 to provide consular services to Afghan citizens.

### **China, Pakistan, Russia and Iran**

While the Ministers of these countries emphasized the importance of the rights and needs of the entire population of the country including all ethnic and religious groups, they also pointed out that NATO members should bear the primary responsibility for the current plight in Afghanistan. In the perspective of China, Pakistan, Russia and Iran, NATO should create opportunities for Afghanistan's economic recovery and future development and prosperity, immediately lift unilateral sanctions against Afghanistan, and return Afghanistan's overseas assets for the benefit of the Afghan people. Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi noted that Iran hosts more than six million Afghans and spends over 10 billion dollars annually to meet their needs. Araghchi strongly criticized the destructive role of the US and NATO in Afghanistan and stressed that Washington and other NATO members must be held accountable for the current disastrous situation in Afghanistan.



## Timeline of Key Events

**November 19, 1946**

Seventy-eight years ago, on November 19, 1946, Afghanistan joined the United Nations as an independent country, with Abdul Hussain Azizi signing the U.N. Charter as the nation's representative.

**14 April 1988**

The U.S., Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Soviet Union sign peace accords in Geneva guaranteeing Afghan independence and the withdrawal of 100,000 Soviet troops.

**September 1994**

Newly formed Islamic militia, the Taliban, rises to power on promises of peace. Most Afghans, exhausted by years of drought, famine and war, approve of the Taliban for upholding traditional Islamic values. The United States refuses to recognize the authority of the Taliban.

**September 1996**

By September 1996, the Taliban had captured Kabul, killed the country's president, and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

**2000**

Osama bin Laden, considered an international terrorist, is said to be cultivating thousands of followers in terrorist training camps. The United Nations punishes Afghanistan with sanctions restricting trade and economic development.

**11 September 2001**

Hijackers commandeer four commercial airplanes and crash them into the World Trade Centre Towers in New York, the Pentagon outside Washington, D.C., and a Pennsylvania field, killing thousands.

**7 October 2001**

Following unanswered demands that the Taliban turn over bin Laden, U.S. and British forces launch airstrikes against targets in Afghanistan. This marked the first phase of what would become the 20-year-long War in Afghanistan.

**2001**

According to The Guardian, possibly as many as 20,000 Afghans died in 2001 as an indirect result of the initial U.S. airstrikes and ground invasion.

**2 May 2011**

U.S. forces overtake a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, and kill al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden on May 2.

**September 2014**

Ashraf Ghani becomes president of Afghanistan in September after two rounds of voting, claims of election fraud and a power-sharing agreement with main rival Abdullah Abdullah.

**February 2019**

U.S. and Taliban sign agreement on a peace deal that would serve as the preliminary terms for the U.S. withdrawal from the country by May 2021.

**15 August 2021**

The Afghanistan government collapses as the Taliban takes over Kabul.

**September 2021**

The Taliban banned secondary education for girls in Afghanistan.

**24 December 2022**

The Taliban enforce a ban on women working with local and international NGOs

**23 August 2023**

UN reported that since August 2021 there had been at least 800 instances of extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrests, and detentions, over 144 cases of torture and brutal treatment, 218 extrajudicial deaths, and 14 enforced disappearances of former government employees and security personnel by Taliban forces.

## **UN Involvement and Other Treaties**

- United Nations Security Council, 16 March 2023 (S/RES/2679)
- United Nations Security Council, 30 August 2021 (S/RES/2593)
- United Nations Security Council, 15 March 2024 (S/RES/2727)
- United Nations Security Council, 16 March 2023, (S/RES/2679)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217 A)
- Doha Agreement (2020)

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The suppression of human rights in Afghanistan under Taliban rule has been met with various attempts to address the issue. Below are some key efforts, along with their successes and limitations:

### United Nations Sanctions and Resolutions

The UN imposed sanctions, travel bans, and asset freezes on Taliban leaders. Resolutions, such as UNSC Resolution 2593 (2021), demanded human rights protections, especially for women and minorities. It isolated Taliban leadership diplomatically and limited their financial resources. However, the Taliban found alternative funding sources, such as illegal mining, drug trade, and foreign donors. Additionally, the lack of enforcement mechanisms weakened the impact.

### Humanitarian Aid

International organizations and governments provided humanitarian aid while attempting to pressure the Taliban into respecting human rights, particularly women's rights. While aid helped alleviate suffering and provided some protection to vulnerable groups, the Taliban often manipulated aid distribution, favouring loyalists and restricting women-led aid organizations. Aid dependency also limited international leverage.

### Diplomatic Engagement and Negotiations

Countries like Qatar and organizations like the UN facilitated talks with the Taliban, aiming to push for more inclusive governance and human rights commitments. It opened channels for dialogue and allowed for limited concessions, such as reopening some girls' schools for a short period. However, the Taliban remained unwilling to make meaningful reforms, viewing international pressure as external interference. They often reversed any minor concessions.

### Afghan Women's Advocacy and Protests

Afghan women and activists organized protests and online campaigns demanding rights to education and work. It brought international attention to the Taliban's restrictions and pressured global leaders to act. The Taliban cracked down violently on protests, arresting activists and suppressing media coverage. Many activists were forced into exile.

## Possible Solutions

Addressing the suppression of human rights in Afghanistan requires a multifaceted approach that balances diplomatic engagement, government policies, and advocacy. Below are some proposed solutions:

### Strengthening international pressure

International bodies (NGO's, the UN, and other relevant committees) must continue to impose targeted sanctions on Taliban leaders while simultaneously offering incentives for policy changes, such as the restoration of women's education and employment rights. Diplomatic engagement should include leveraging regional players, such as Pakistan and China, to exert influence over the Taliban and encourage compliance with international human rights norms.

### Expanding humanitarian aid and monitoring

Delegates of Developed Countries (or MEDCs) should focus on ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches those in need without being manipulated by the Taliban. This may include advocating for direct partnerships between UN agencies and local organizations, as well as increasing financial support for refugee programs assisting displaced Afghans. The placement of an international mediating body could monitor the aid being provided and its use.

### Advocating for Women's and Children's Rights

Member States should draft and pass resolutions urging the Taliban to reverse restrictions on education and employment for women. Countries with diplomatic leverage over the Taliban could be encouraged to use their influence to push for policy changes. Additionally, member states could explore establishing scholarship programs and asylum pathways for Afghan women and girls seeking education and professional opportunities abroad.

### Diplomatic Engagement and Dialogue

While all Member States do not recognize the current Taliban government, strategic diplomatic engagement remains essential. Delegates should discuss ways to maintain dialogue with Afghan civil society groups, religious leaders, and moderate factions within the Taliban to advocate for human rights improvements.

Implementing these solutions requires international cooperation and a long-term commitment to human rights in Afghanistan. While the challenges remain extremely prevalent, continued advocacy and strategic interventions can alleviate the humanitarian crisis and lay the foundation for future reforms.

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