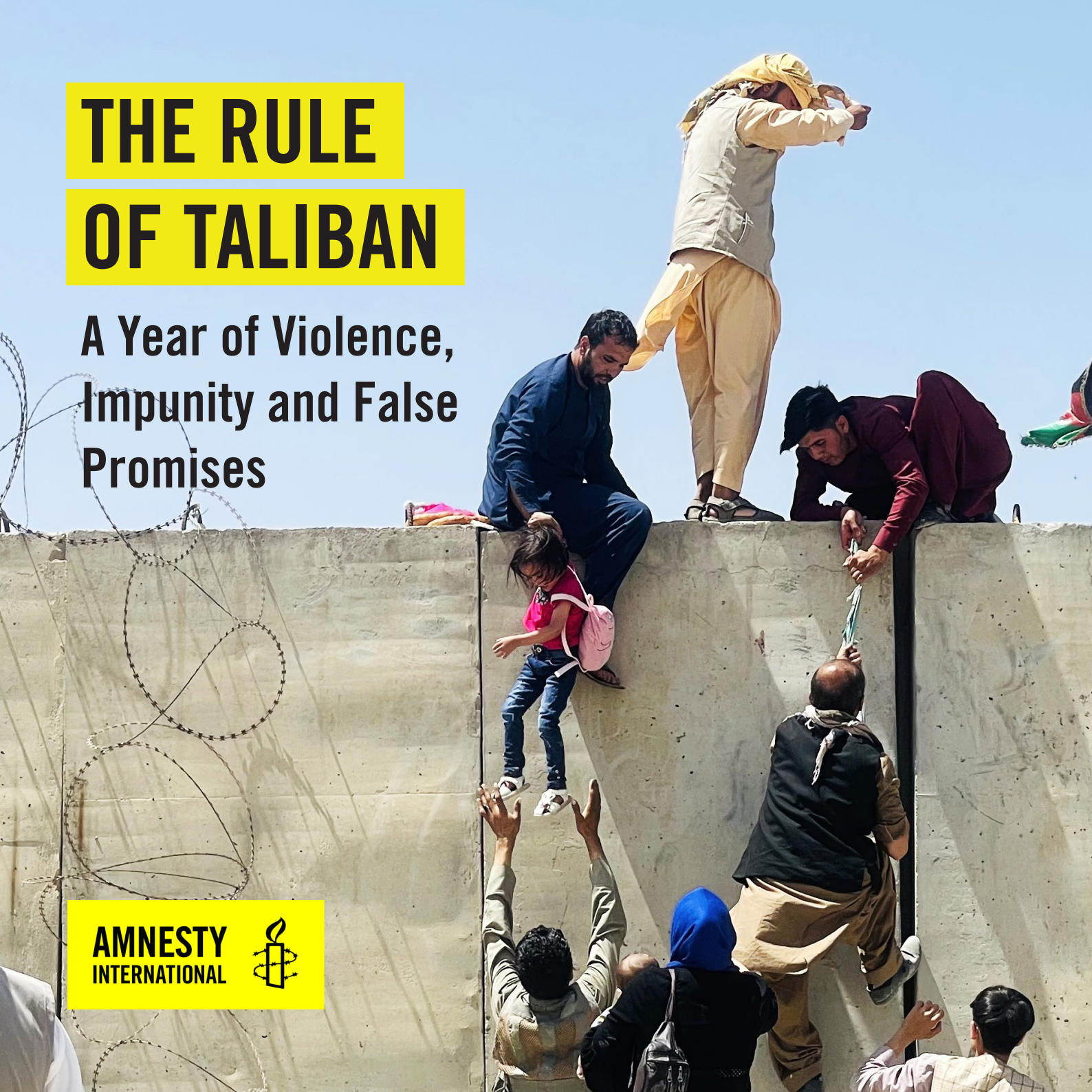
THE RULE OF TALIBAN

A Year of Violence, Impunity and False Promises



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Cover photo shows Afghans rushing to the Hamid Karzai International Airport as they try to flee the Afghan capital of Kabul, Afghanistan, on August 16, 2021. Photo credit: Getty images

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BACKGROUND

Following the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan that ousted the Taliban from power, a new constitution was adopted by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in the year 2004. It committed the state to uphold protection and promotion of key human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom from torture, freedom from forced labour, the right to education, the right to work, the right to equality before the law, the right to a fair trial and the right to non-discrimination. The new constitution also gave way to enactment of new laws or amendment of old laws, aligning them with international human rights standards. Between 2002 and 2020, Afghanistan ratified several international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Culture Rights (ICESCR) among others and enhanced human rights reporting mechanisms.

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), an independent national entity, was formed in 2003 to oversee the human rights situation in the country and the Ministry of Women's Affairs was established in 2002, specifically to advance gender equality and women's rights. Afghanistan's independent media played a major role in bravely covering various challenging issues such as administrative corruption, security crises, governance, economic, social, cultural, women issues and health problems.

From 2001 to 2021, Afghanistan improved on human rights commitments in leaps and bounds. Civil society in Afghanistan grew in great strength. Vibrant and diverse civil society organizations were playing a bridging role between the government and people, monitoring the shortcomings especially in relation to human rights violations and advocating at the national and international level to address them. The role of human rights defenders had become key in seeking accountability for human rights violations and abuses under international law.

← *Afghan people sit as they wait to leave the Kabul airport. Photo credit: Getty images*

LOST IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

It all changed overnight when on 15 August 2021, the Taliban, once again, seized power in Afghanistan. The tragic scenes from the Kabul Airport are still fresh in everyone's mind — thousands of Afghans scrambling to get out of the country, amid gunfire, a crowd pushing and shoving its way up a staircase trying to board a plane; and dozens clinging to the sides of planes attempting to take off. This was the fear of return of the Taliban rule.

Those who remained in Afghanistan, waiting to see how life would pan out in the coming days and months, have found themselves stuck in a living nightmare. What has ensued since the fateful day of 15 August 2021 is a human rights crisis of unprecedented scale that has led to almost an immediate reversal of two decades of progress, losing hard-won rights enshrined in the 2004 Constitution and other international human rights laws.

One year on, a litany of human rights abuses and violations under international law against the civilian population have been committed by the Taliban with absolute impunity and zero accountability. The Taliban has brutally clamped down on civic spaces, imposed draconian restrictions on women, contradicting their own repeated assurances during the negotiations.

Despite the announcement of a 'general amnesty' by the Taliban on 17 August 2021 for those who had worked with the US-led coalition and the previous government, hundreds of former security force personnel and government officials have been subjected to extrajudicial killings, often after public humiliation and torture. Many more have been disappeared.

The de-facto authorities have also banned peaceful protests and shown zero tolerance to any form of criticism, both online and in the traditional media. While the use of indiscriminate violence against peaceful protesters in the early days of Taliban rule tried to stifle dissenting voices through crackdown on demonstrations, women's groups have bravely continued to organize and hold small gatherings, despite some of them been violently dispersed. Over 80 journalists have been arrested and tortured for reporting such peaceful protests. The Taliban have issued diktats on media reporting, limiting the scope and access to information for journalists and media workers, and anyone not remotely towing the line is subjected to arbitrary detentions, torture, harassment, and intimidation.

← Afghans march down the street carrying banners and the flag of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, despite the presence of Taliban fighters around them, in Kabul, Afghanistan, Thursday, Aug. 19, 2021. Photo credit: Getty images

Human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society activists are facing systematic intimidation — many have been harassed, threatened, detained, and even killed for their human rights work. In May 2022, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, which performed extraordinary work in extremely difficult conditions over many years, shining a spotlight on the human rights of the Afghan population, was officially dissolved, and many of its key staff were forced to flee abroad for fear of reprisal.

The Taliban claimed that many of the restrictions that are in place are 'temporary' and would be lifted once appropriate conditions have been established. However, this argument has already been contradicted by the fact the Taliban are gradually tightening the many restrictions they have imposed on both the public and private lives of Afghans. During their first time in power in Afghanistan between 1996-2001, the Taliban had made similar promises and restrictions were never lifted during their rule.

The human rights crisis in Afghanistan is further compounded by the impact of the ongoing massive humanitarian emergency, which prompted the UN to launch in January 2022 its largest ever humanitarian assistance appeal for any single country.[1] An already difficult economic situation, linked to decades of conflict and a severe drought, spiraled into a major crisis after the Taliban takeover of the country. Sanctions imposed by members of the international community on the new de-facto authorities and freezing of state assets led to a liquidity crunch and banking crisis, which was exacerbated by the freezing of projects and withdrawal of international donor funding. Proposals by the US administration to use frozen Afghanistan central bank reserves in the US to pay compensation to the families of 9/11 victims caused an international outcry. Through such policies, the US is in effect reprimanding the Afghan people for the actions of the Taliban, a group that the US effectively brought back into power by signing a deal with them in February 2020. Within a year, the human rights situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated.

In this campaign digest, Amnesty International identifies, documents, and establishes some of the patterns of gross human rights violations that have been committed by the Taliban in Afghanistan since 15 August 2021. While it is not possible to cover the full scope of the human rights crisis in Afghanistan in this document, it is intended to highlight the types of violations that are taking place frequently since the Taliban takeover, the lack of accountability of the de-facto authorities, and the weak international response to address human rights abuses and violations in Afghanistan.

1 United Nations News, Afghanistan: UN launches largest single country aid appeal ever, https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/01/1109492

KEY FINDINGS:

ONE YEAR OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AND VIOLATIONS

People wait in line to cross Spin Boldak border gate to reach Pakistan from Kandahar, Afghanistan on September 27, 2021 as Pakistani forces and Taliban members stand guard to secure the border after Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. Photo credit: Getty images

1 GRIM STATUS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

RESTRICTIONS ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

The Taliban leadership's repeated promises that they had changed their attitude towards women's participation in public life were fully contradicted within days of their takeover of the capital city, Kabul. The evidence from the south and east of the country, which was controlled by the Taliban in recent years, confirms the ceaseless violations of women's and girls' rights.[2] On 24 August 2021 – just 10 days after their seizure of Kabul, the Taliban spokesperson issued instructions to women and girls to stay at home, claiming that Taliban foot soldiers patrolling the streets had not yet been 'trained' to respect them and might therefore pose a threat to them.[3]

Then again, in less than a month, a chilling message was sent when on 17 September 2021 the sign outside the Ministry for Women Affairs was taken down and replaced with that of the Taliban's Ministry for the Preaching and Guidance and the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. A ministry that had been tasked with protecting and promoting women and girls' rights and increasing their access to educational and economic opportunities was effectively dissolved, and was replaced with a ministry that has consistently undermined the rights of women and girls' rights and imposed severe restrictions on their mobility and presence in public life.

A stream of harsh restrictions has followed ever since that has steadily stripped away the rights and freedoms of women and girls. Many of these have come from the Ministry for the Preaching and Guidance and the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.

2 Human Rights Watch, You have No Right to Complain, https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/06/30/you-have-no-right-complain/education-social-restrictions-and-justice-taliban-held#:~:text=While%20in%20power%20in%20Afghanistan,religion%2C%20expression%2C%20and%20education.
3 New York Times, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/24/world/asia/taliban-women-afghanistan.html

DECREES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS MADE BY THE TALIBAN BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 2021-MAY 2022

SEPT **2021**

Early September: Several government ministries and agencies issue instructions asking female employees to stay at home. Except for female health workers and civil servants working in the passport office, women were not allowed to return and have since lost their jobs.

In a media interview, a Taliban official says that Afghan girls should not play cricket or any other sports.

A Taliban spokesman says a 'woman can't be a minister, it is like you put something on her neck that she can't carry. It is not necessary for women to be in the cabinet - they should give birth'.

DEC **2021**

17 September: Girls above grade 6 are not allowed to attend secondary schools upon their reopening.

26 December: The Taliban announce that women will not be allowed to travel more than 72 kilometers (45 miles) without a male chaperone or mahram. Taxi drivers are instructed not to pick up women who are not wearing 'proper' hijab.

MAR **2022**

Early March: Reports surface that women in several areas including Bamiyan and Ghazni have been disallowed to visit healthcare facilities without a mahram; women are turned away and even beaten for trying to access healthcare.

23 March: Hours after school for girls above grade six were reopened, the Taliban leadership reversed the policy at the last minute, leading to their closure.

27 March: The Taliban issued instructions to airlines stating that women are no longer allowed to fly locally or internationally without a mahram.

The Ministry for Preaching and Guidance and the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice issues a statement saying that women can only visit amusement parks on Sundays to Tuesdays, while men could go on Wednesdays to Saturdays.

MAY **2022**

7 May: The Acting Minister for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice Khaled Hanafi issues a decree stating that women must wear 'hijab' (head to toe body cover veil) outside their homes, but that the best way of observing 'hijab' is to avoid leaving the house entirely. The decree states that the forms of hijab are the burqa (a full body covering with just a fabric grill over the eyes) or niqab (an all-encompassing black robe that originated in the Gulf region that leaves only the eyes uncovered).

23 May: The Taliban issues a decree asking female television presenters to cover their faces while on air.

JUNE **2022**

29 June: The Taliban gathers 3,000 religious scholars to discuss the Afghanistan situation with zero female representation. Despite a prior announcement stating that girls' access to education and women's right to work will be on the agenda in the three-day gathering, no further discussion took place.

This is often the case, women and girls are disproportionately affected by the dire economic and humanitarian situation. There are thousands of women who were the sole breadwinners for their families. Some of these women are widows who have been providing support to their children and elderly in-laws and parents. These women are facing a dire financial situation for losing their income.[4] In september 2021, a Taliban spokesman said "a woman can't be a minister, it is like you put something on her neck that she can't carry. It is not necessary for women to be in the cabinet – they should give birth."[5]

INCREASED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The lack of implementation of existing legal framework and institutional mechanisms to protect women from domestic violence has revictimized women and girls who face violence, abuse, and discrimination. Protection mechanisms established under the previous government for those facing gender-based violence have been dismantled, as detailed in previous Amnesty International research.[6] Courts that were set up to try cases of domestic violence and shelters that gave refuge to women fleeing violent spouses have also been closed.

In addition to domestic abuse, women are at at a heightened risk of of sexual and gender-based violence from the Taliban soldiers or local communities if they seek to exercise their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Dozens of women have been arrested and tortured for holding peaceful rallies demanding their rights. (Detailed in the section *Arbitrary arrests and torture*). Some have suffered an even worse fate. In one case on 20 October 2021, a civil society activist Frozan Safi went missing in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif after organizing anti-Taliban protests.[7] Her family claimed that Frozan received a call asking her to come to the airport with a promise of evacuation. Her body was found along with the bodies of three other women on 5 November 2021 by the Taliban patrol.

Taliban intervene in women holding a demonstration for women's rights in Kabul, Afghanistan on September 04, 2021. Photo credit: Getty images

4 Amnesty International, Death in Slow Motion: Women and Girls Under the Taliban Rule, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA11/5685/2022/en/
5 NDTV, "Women Can't Be A Minister… They Should Give Birth": Taliban https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/taliban-spokesperson-zekrullah-hashimi-woman-cant-be-a-minister-they-should-give-birth-2536193
6 Amnesty International, Afghanistan: Survivors of gender-based violence abandoned following Taliban takeover, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/afghanistan-survivors-of-gender-based-violence-abandoned-following-taliban-takeover-new-research/
7 The Guardian, Women's rights activist shot dead in northern Afghanistan, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/05/womens-rights-activist-shot-dead-in-northern-afghanistan

Women have also been subjected to violence by the Taliban as a way of punishing their family members. On 27 June 2022, the Taliban attacked and killed a 22-year-old woman named Lida who was eight months pregnant, along with her two children, aged two and four. Lida was attacked in district four of Qala Naw city, Badghis province, in an apparent act of retaliation against her husband, who was a military officer under the previous regime. Abdul Ghafoor Mahmoodi, the victim's husband, had fled to Iran because he feared persecution by the Taliban as he was a former member of the Afghan security forces.

BAN ON GIRLS EDUCATION

Afghanistan is the only country in the world where girls above grade six are barred from going to school. When secondary schools reopened on 17 September 2021 after the Taliban takeover, girls above grade six were not allowed to attend.[8] The Taliban officials claimed that this was a temporary situation while they recruited additional female teachers and ensured 'appropriate' conditions were put in place for gender segregated education and uniforms. However, the planned reopening of girls' schools on 23 March 2022 was reversed in a cruel twist. Only hours after being able to return to school, girls were sent home once again.

While these dynamics play out, secondary school girls have now missed almost an entire year of schooling, with extensive repercussions for their future and the future of the country. International NGO Save the Children estimates that around 80% of secondary school age girls are currently denied the right to education in Afghanistan; the organization estimates that approximately 850,000 out of 1.1 million girls in this age group are currently forced to stay at home.[9]

8 Al Jazeera, Taliban says classes resume for Afghan boys, no mention of girls, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/17/taliban-says-classes-resume-afghan-boys-no-mention-girls
9 Save the Children, 80% OF SECONDARY SCHOOL GIRLS IN AFGHANISTAN MISSING OUT ON EDUCATION, ONE MONTH SINCE TALIBAN BAN EXTENDED; https://www.savethechildren.net/news/80-secondary-school-girls-afghanistan-missing-out-education-one-month-taliban-ban-extended#:~:text=KABUL%2021%20April%202022%20%E2%80%93%20Almost,girls%2C%20Save%20the%20Children%20said

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I was restless but was looking forward to returning to school after almost seven months. I was missing my school, my friends, my teachers. My siblings and I screamed with joy as we heard that we will be allowed to return to our classes. We went to buy a new uniform and white headscarf, new black shoes, socks, notebooks, pens, pencil-case and all other material for myself and my sister. The mood in our family changed and it seemed that everyone was much happier than they were before the announcement.

On 23 March 2022, my sister and I walked out of our house and the street looked beautiful. As we entered our classes, sat at our desks and the teacher started talking about the schedule, a school staff member asked our teacher to go to school office for a meeting. We saw our teacher return weeping. She informed us that the Taliban have ordered the schools to close for girls above grade six. She and other teachers were ordered to ask all the girls to return home and wait for further instructions. We were ordered to leave. On the way home, everyone I saw was sad or crying including the men selling snacks on the street - they wouldn't make eye contact with us. Now I feel that I have lost my life, my hope, and my future. I don't know what the future will look like for me, my dream of becoming a doctor is shattered and I never felt so empty in my life.

Lolah (a pseudonym), a 16-year-old student in year 10 of high school

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When the Taliban entered Kabul on 15 August 2021, I was still in the school teaching. My husband called me to return home as the Taliban had entered the city. I told the students that we were done for the day, and they could go home; the students didn't understand the sudden announcement and started inquiring. I went home and all the way I was thinking how history repeats itself. I was a teenager in 1990s when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan and banned girls from school. I was home-schooled by my parents. I thought that era was a nightmare and could not be repeated; that my daughter would never experience what I did in the 1990s. But now the truth is in front of me; it is brutal to think that we are repeating history - and the worst part of that history.

Since 15 August 2021, I have been going to the school requesting my salary. Sometimes I was given half of it, sometimes nothing and lately they do not allow us to enter the school, telling us to wait till the Minister of Education changes his mind and lets women and girls back to school and teaching. I look at my uniform, remembering the school days, students, and teachers but I am left with no choice but to stay home. The Taliban want women to be uneducated and illiterate. They fear empowered women, and they fear women in general, even women with their blue burqas!

Meena (a pseudonym), a 29-year-old teacher from Kabul

2 FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The Taliban takeover has crushed Afghanistan's otherwise progressive media. The Taliban has quickly moved to stifle freedom of expression and dissent through harassment, intimidation, and detentions. The media in the country has been hammered by a combination of the Taliban curbs and the financial crisis precipitated by the group's victory. A survey coordinated by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) found that 43% of media outlets had disappeared within three months of the Taliban's capture of Kabul; 84% of female journalists and 52% of male media workers lost their jobs during this period.[10]

Afghanistan is now ranked 156th out of 180 countries in the 2022 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, a significant deterioration from its 122nd place in 2021. According to RSF, at least 50 journalists and media workers were detained by the Taliban between August 2021 and April 2022. Many were beaten[11] and tortured during their detention, lasting from a few hours to several days.[12] Arrests of journalists are now so frequent that it is nearly impossible to keep a track of the numbers. The Committee for the Protection of Journalists' reported 11 detentions in Afghanistan in May and June alone.[13]

Various agencies appear to be involved in policing Afghan media, including Ministry for the Preaching and Guidance and the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice and the General Directorate for Intelligence being particularly active.[14] On 19 September 2021, the Government Media and Information Centre (GMIC) issued 11 rules for the media,[15] which contained vague and overbroad wording forbidding journalists from publishing stories 'contrary to Islam' or 'insulting to national figures'. A second directive regulating media activities was issued by the Vice and Virtue Ministry on 22 November 2021; this decree included an order that journalists must not interview commentators who might criticize the de-facto authorities.

In one of the early cases of violence against the media, two journalists from the Etilaat Roz newspaper were detained while they were covering women's protests in Kabul on 9 September 2021.[16] They were arrested when they started to take pictures of the anti-Taliban rally; they were held for several hours and badly beaten by Taliban soldiers. Despite an international outcry over the scale of the journalists' injuries on their backs, legs and faces, brutal beatings of media workers continue, and are regularly reported.[17]

11 JOURNALISM RULES IMPOSED BY TALIBAN

Rule One to Three:

Forbid journalists to broadcast or publish stories that are "contrary to Islam," "insult national figures" or violate "privacy"

Rule Four to Six:

Conform to what are understood to be ethical principles. Journalists must "not try to distort news content," they must "respect journalistic principles" and they "must ensure that their reporting is balanced."

Rule Seven and Eight:

"Matters that have not been confirmed by officials at the time of broadcasting or publication should be treated with care" and that "matters that could have a negative impact on the public's attitude or affect morale should be handled carefully when being broadcast or published."

Rule Nine to Eleven:

"Adhere to the principle of neutrality in what they disseminate, only publish the truth, designed a specific form to make it easier for media outlets and journalists to prepare their reports in accordance with the regulations, and that from now on, media outlets must prepare detailed reports in coordination with the GMIC."

10 Reporters Without Border, https://rsf.org/en/country/afghanistan
11 BBC, Afghanistan: Journalists tell of beatings by Taliban, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58500579
12 Reporters Without Border, Afghan journalists increasingly harassed by Taliban intelligence and new ministry https://rsf.org/en/afghan-journalists-increasingly-harassed-taliban-intelligence-and-new-ministry
13 Committee to Protect Journalist, https://cpj.org/asia/afghanistan/
14 Afghan journalists increasingly harassed by Taliban intelligence and new ministry | RSF
15 Reporters without Border: Afghanistan : "11 journalism rules" imposed by Taliban open way to censorship and arbitrary decisions , RSF warns | RSF
16 BCC, Afghanistan: Journalists tell of beatings by Taliban, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58500579
17 Committee to Protect Journalist,https://cpj.org/2022/06/taliban-forces-beat-journalist-reza-shahir-charge-3-others-over-corruption-reporting/

↑ *Journalists from the Etilaat Roz newspaper, Nemat Naqdi, 28, a video journalist, left, and Taqi Daryabi, 22, video editor, show their wounds. They say Taliban fighters tortured and beat them while they were in custody after being arrested at a women's rights protest in Kabul, Afghanistan. Photo credit: Marcus Yam / Los Angeles Times*

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One morning, I was on my way to work when two vehicles suddenly appeared and blocked my car, from the front and at the back. I had to brake very hard to stop. I saw a group of plain clothed men with guns run out of the cars, which were marked with the Taliban intelligence department logo. They shouted at me to put my hands on my head and to get out of the car. At first, I thought it might be a mistake; I tried to put the window down to speak and introduce myself, but they shouted, “Don't move, put your hands on your head and come out of the car!” I did as they asked and as I got out of my car, several Taliban members stormed in front of me, pushed me to the ground and put handcuffs on me. Some bystanders tried to take a video, but the Taliban beat them and either took away or broke their phones. Then they put a black sack over my head, forced me into the back of one of their cars and drove away.

After around 2 hours, one of the Taliban took the blindfold off and untied my hands. As my eyes readjusted, I could see the faces of at least 11 Taliban members. We seemed to be in a private home. The first thing they did was slap me very hard in the face, even before allowing me to say anything. I told them, “Listen, I don't know why you brought me here, I am Yunis and I am a journalist.” I still thought that they had arrested me by mistake. Then one of the men who was in his mid-20s shouted that they knew who I was and that was exactly the reason that I was there. They asked me to unlock my phone and my laptop; they extracted everything and retrieved all the deleted messages from my phone. They were asking about messages, emails, and phone calls I had made. What was even more scary was that they had all the photos of my friends and family and were asking about each of them. They threatened to arrest my family members if I didn't tell them the truth or didn't share information with them.

I was kept for several days. I was beaten and whipped so hard on my legs that I couldn't stand. My family had heard from bystanders that I had been taken by the Taliban but they had no idea where I was. My relatives went to the Taliban police chief, governor and several other officials who said that they didn't arrest me and that I was not in their custody. Finally my family had to pay a hefty bribe to a Taliban commander who found out where I was and promised to secure my release, which he didn't. He told my family that Yunis had been taken by the intelligence service and that no-one had the power to release him except the intelligence service themselves.

Finally, after almost 10 days I was transferred from the private house to a detention center where my family could visit. The Taliban brought me for two or three minutes and showed me to my family saying, “Look at your son, he is alive and well; we will release him once we do the formal procedures.” I couldn't say much except Salaam to my family; my father was crying seeing me in that state. As a condition for my release my family had to sign a document and a business owner had to sign to act as a financial guarantor on my behalf. My family signed the document, promising that I would not speak out about what happened to me after my release; if I did, the Taliban would have the right to arrest my entire family and confiscate the financial guarantor's business.

Yunis (a pseudonym), a journalist and civil society activist

3 FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The Taliban has shown a zero-tolerance policy towards demonstrations from the moment they seized power in Kabul. Peaceful protests that reject the Taliban takeover have repeatedly been dispersed with excessive force, with the Taliban soldiers beating and shooting unarmed protesters.[18] In its first official decree on 8 September 2021, the Taliban-run Interior Ministry formalised its opposition to Afghans' freedom of assembly, banning 'unauthorized' gatherings and stating that any gatherings must receive approval in advance, as must slogans and banners.[19]

Within the first few weeks of Taliban rule, the group used violence to disperse protests in many cities, including Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Jalalabad. At least two people were killed on 18 August 2021 when Taliban soldiers fired their guns into crowds at anti-Taliban rallies in Jalalabad. A man and a boy had reportedly been trying to replace the Taliban flag with the national flag when they were killed. On 7 September 2021, Taliban soldiers opened fire in the city of Herat on a group that were protesting peacefully outside the governor's office; two people were reportedly killed.

These violent incidents and the threat of arrest (and disappearing into an ad hoc and opaque detention system with no due process) have managed to curtail large anti-Taliban protests in more recent months, though smaller gatherings have continued. While groups of workers or retirees have held periodic rallies demanding salaries and pensions, most protests have been held by women. Demonstrations by women and girls most often call for access to education and employment – both things that Taliban officials promised they would not obstruct, prior to taking power.

Women's protests are usually short-lived because Taliban soldiers use force to disperse them as soon as they become aware of them. Peaceful women protesters are routinely insulted and beaten by Taliban soldiers, while many women attending such gatherings have been arbitrarily detained.[20] Journalists covering the protests also frequently face beatings and arrests.

Between January and February 2022, Taliban's anger at women's rights activists' continued protest activity resulted in the abduction of several women protesters from their homes, often along with family members, and incommunicado detention. Taliban spokespeople denied any connection with the disappearances and claimed the women were making up stories as a way of claiming asylum overseas.[21] However, it later became apparent that the women had indeed been arbitrarily detained along with their relatives by the General Directorate of Intelligence.[22] Most of these women were eventually released after extensive lobbying by the international community, but very few have given details of their detention, and all are believed to have been threatened not to talk to the media.

The Taliban broadcasted forced 'confessions' on the state-run Radio Television of Afghanistan (RTA) on 21 February 2022 of another group of women protesters.[23] The group, which had reportedly been detained during a raid on a safe house in Kabul, said in a clearly staged interview that they had been encouraged to protest by activists based outside Afghanistan who had promised them help with relocation if they held anti-Taliban demonstrations.[24]

Taliban members stop women protesting for women's rights in Kabul on October 21, 2021. Photo credit: Getty images

18 United Nations, Taliban response to protests increasingly violent, warns OHCHR, https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1099552
19 The Guardian, Taliban ban protests and slogans that don't have their approval, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/08/taliban-ban-protests-and-slogans-that-dont-have-their-approval

20 Amnesty International, Afghanistan: Survivors of gender-based violence abandoned following Taliban takeover, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/afghanistan-survivors-of-gender-based-violence-abandoned-following-taliban-takeover-new-research/
21 The Guardian, Taliban launch raids on homes of Afghan women rights activists, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jan/20/taliban-arrest-afghan-womens-rights-activist-witness-says
22 The Washington Post, Taliban arrests Canadian aid worker amid widening crackdown on activists and foreigners, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/07/afghanistan-canada-nadima-noor-taliban/
23 Gandhara, Detained women activists in Afghanistan apparently forced to confess before release https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/afghan-women-activists-forced-confessions/31718590.html
24 https://twitter.com/HuriaSamira/status/1495626256351887361?s=20&t=DKiYJkxDAvMMmsw1EaJ6QA

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On the morning of 7 September 2021, I came out of my home and saw a crowd of men and women gathering near the Shahr-e- Naw area of Herat city holding banners. Some of the banners had anti-Pakistan slogans and some others included messages about women's rights to education and employment; others were about equal rights and freedoms of all Afghans. Many other people and I joined the protests and we walked slowly towards the Herat governor's office; by that time, we were around 200-300 people. We were chanting slogans, but we were all peaceful; there was no use of violence, just chanting slogans against the Taliban. The crowd was getting bigger and bigger when Taliban soldiers started shooting in the air which made the crowd disburse in fear as we saw the bullets were coming towards the people. I saw several protesters getting injured, and I saw one man lying in a pool of blood in a ditch in the street; I believe he had been killed. As we were running the bullets kept coming towards us, men and women were running in all directions. Many other protesters and I got injured as we were running away. My hand was fractured but I didn't go to the hospital, fearing that I could be arrested for participating in the protests. I know several other protesters were also arrested after they were identified by the Taliban. I had to flee to Iran.

A protestor from Herat province*

** Eyewitness testimonies have been lightly edited for clarity and brevity*

4 EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

There have been several reports of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances since the Taliban takeover.[25] These have continued to be reported at an alarming pace, despite the general amnesty announcement and various statements from Taliban officials that such activity was not condoned by the Taliban leadership.[26] Former members of the security forces have been the most heavily targeted, but dozens of judges, prosecutors, media workers, civil society activists and human rights defenders have also been killed apparently in connection with their work under the previous government. Alleged members or sympathisers of ISIS-K have also been killed by Taliban soldiers.

In more recent months as armed resistance to the Taliban has escalated, a new pattern has emerged of abuses against people or their family members suspected of involvement in resistance activities.[27] As violent resistance against the Taliban has escalated since the spring, reports of collective retaliation against local communities have also increased. Killings of civilians have been reported, particularly in Panjshir province, the Andarab district of Baghlan province and the Balkhab district of Sar-e Pol province.[28]

With closure of AIHRC and other national NGOs that were documenting, investigating, and reporting on extrajudicial killings in the past and because of absence of official systems and processes put in place by the Taliban de-facto authorities for

25 Human Rights Watch, Afghanistan: Taliban kill, 'Disappear' Ex- Officials, https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/30/afghanistan-taliban-kill-disappear-ex-officials
26 US Department of State, Joint Statement on Reports of Summary Killings and Enforced Disappearances in Afghanistan, https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-reports-of-summary-killings-and-enforced-disappearances-in-afghanistan/
27 Human Rights Watch, Afghanistan: Taliban Torture Civilians in Panjshir https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/10/afghanistan-taliban-torture-civilians-panjshir
28 Amnesty International, Afghanistan: Taliban must immediately stop unlawful killings and arbitrary arrests in Panjshir, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/afghanistan-taliban-must-immediately-stop-unlawful-killings-and-arbitrary-arrests-in-panjshir/

investigation and redress, as well as the fear of facing additional violence for speaking up it is difficult to keep a record of the total number of extrajudicial killings and disappearances.

However, documentation by various international human rights organisations of reported killings suggest that cases targeting former security force personnel are in the hundreds.[29] On 4 December 2021, the governments of 22 countries, including the European Union, issued a joint statement expressing their concerns and condemned the Taliban for crimes of enforced disappearances and summary executions in Afghanistan, calling for accountability over credible reports of summary executions and enforced disappearances of Afghans by the de facto authorities.[30]

Accessing verified information about summary executions of suspected resistance fighters is particularly difficult. Gaining access to the areas where fighting is taking place is almost impossible and the Taliban is, in effect, imposing a media blackout on these locations. In a recent report to the UN Security Council General Assembly, the UN Assistant Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) stated, "Between 1 January and 22 May, UNAMA documented at least 40 extrajudicial killing. These included at least 10 extrajudicial killings of individuals accused of affiliation with the National Resistance Front by the de-facto authorities, a marked increase compared with the previous reporting period."[31] Between January and March 2022, one local human rights organization documented at least 30 reports of arbitrary arrests and eight killings of civilians accused of involvement in resistance activities, while also stating that these numbers were likely to be a small fraction of the total number.[32]

29 The New York Times, The Taliban Promised Them Amnesty. Then They Executed Them. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/04/12/opinion/taliban-afghanistan-revenge.html
30 European Union External Union, Afghanistan Joint Statement on Reports of Summary Killings and Enforced Disappearances in Afghanistan, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/afghanistan-joint-statement-reports-summary-killings-and-enforced-disappearances-afghanistan_en
31 United Nations General Assembly Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/220615_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.485.pdf
32 Safety and Risk Mitigation Organization, Civil Space Quarterly Report, Jan- Mar 2022, http://srmo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/SRMO%20Civic%20Space%20Quarterly%20Report%20Jan-Mar%202022.pdf

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My uncle was a member of the ousted government's army and went into hiding after the Taliban took control. He was living in one of the southern provinces but had to flee to Kabul and live in hiding at his sister's place. He had been working in the technical unit of the Afghan National Army (ANA). He received several calls from the Taliban who encouraged him to return to work as there was a great need for his skills; he was promised amnesty and safety by the Taliban commander-in-charge of the army unit in the South. Despite his family's fears that he will be harmed, he insisted that the Taliban commander had given his word and that he wouldn't let him be harmed. In the month of October 2021, he returned to Kandahar and went to his office.

According to one of our acquittances, who is also a member of the Taliban and was an eyewitness, the commander greeted my uncle warmly and asked him to sit near him. He offered him tea and asked how he felt returning and sharing the office with the Taliban, the ones who he had fought against. Then the commander asked his men to take my uncle to the workshop so he could see the equipment that needs repair; he left with three armed Taliban but never returned home. We looked everywhere for him, his brothers, father, and several other relatives went to the office and inquired about him. The commander first said that he never came to the office; then he said that he had come for a brief meeting and then left. We knew immediately what had probably happened to him. After several days his body was found, riddled with bullets and with signs of severe torture all over his body.

The family didn't dare ask for an investigation, fearing that it could cost them another life or maybe more. He left behind six young children, a widow, and a broken family. There was no justice for him, and no one was held responsible for the attack. He trusted the Taliban, but in return he got killed.

Mohammad Musa (a pseudonym), the relative of a former member of the Afghan national army

In addition to hundreds of extrajudicial killings where bodies have been found with gunshot wounds or signs of torture, there have been dozens of cases where people have disappeared and whose whereabouts remain unknown. Most of these cases are likely to be enforced disappearances related to victims' work under the previous government or because they are suspected of being involved in resistance activities against the Taliban. Disappearances are cruel for victims' families, who do not know if their relatives are alive or dead and have no information about their fate.

Alia Azizi is among scores of former government officials and civil servants who have disappeared since August last year.[33] Alia Azizi, a member of the ethnic Hazara community and the Head of Herat Women's Prison, never returned home after going to work on 2 October 2021. Despite many efforts by her family and pleas of Afghan human rights activists and members of the international community, Alia Azizi's disappearance is yet to be investigated by the Taliban and no answer given about her whereabouts. The only information the family have received in response is that she is not with the Taliban.

Her brother told Amnesty International[34] that Alia Azizi returned to her job on 24 August 2021 at the Taliban's request, just nine days after the collapse of the Afghan Government. She had been given an amnesty letter by the Taliban on 12 August 2021, the day the group took over Herat province, guaranteeing her safety. Since Alia Azizi's disappearance, her telephone has been disconnected and, according to a relative when the family tracked her phone conversations through the service provider, Alia's last communication was with the Taliban's Head of Herat Prison.

33 Amnesty International, Afghanistan: Taliban authorities must reveal Alia Azizi's whereabout, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/01/afghanistan-taliban-authorities-must-reveal-alia-azizis-whereabouts/
34 Amnesty International, Afghanistan: Taliban authorities must reveal Alia Azizi's whereabout, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/01/afghanistan-taliban-authorities-must-reveal-alia-azizis-whereabouts/

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A couple of days after the Taliban had announced a 'general amnesty', I learned from my friends that the Taliban were looking for former members of the army, police and intelligence services in the eastern region. Several former members of the security forces had been executed after they were taken from their homes. After hiding for weeks, I fled to Kabul on 22 August 2021; I was hiding at my sister's place as I kept receiving reports that the Taliban were executing former security forces in the eastern region, some of whom I knew personally. People would share their photos on social media. Others, who were living in more remote areas, did not have access to social media and I would only find out via their relatives that my friends, my colleagues and my acquaintances working for the National Security Forces had either been killed or had disappeared. A few days after I had fled to Kabul, my brother called me to tell me that the Taliban had raided my home. They asked of my whereabouts and my family told them that they didn't know. Then they started beating up my family members and ransacked my home. They stole lots of our personal property and kept asking my family where my guns were.

Several of our former colleagues went to obtain a so-called 'pardon letter' from the Taliban so that they could travel around freely without fear of prosecution. My friend Jalal (a pseudonym) was one of them. He emphasized that without a pardon letter they could be severely punished or killed by the Taliban if they were caught. He told me that he got his pardon letter without any problems, and he even encouraged us to do the same. However, I didn't trust the Taliban and along with some other friends we decided to leave Afghanistan. As we planned our escape, we kept it among a small group of friends including Jalal, who had been a member of the Special Forces. When we were ready to leave, I called Jalal but got no response. After calling his brother we found out that Jalal has been arrested by the Taliban. His brother explained that Jalal had showed his pardon letter to the Taliban but that they didn't listen. They beat him while they were detaining him; Jalal told them not to beat him in front of his wife and children because they would be scared and traumatized but they wouldn't listen. The Taliban tied his hands behind him, blind-folded him and kept beating him while his wife and children, parents and younger siblings were crying and screaming. He eventually passed out and the Taliban dragged him into their vehicle and drove off.

His brother told me not to respond to any calls from Jalal's phone because he is in Taliban custody. Finally, I managed to flee the country with a couple of my friends, but Jalal is still missing. His family went to every single Taliban office including the Intelligence department, police, army, governor, and police chief. The family even went to the Ministry of Interior in Kabul, but Jalal is nowhere to be seen. At first the Taliban denied having taken Jalal. However, when the family named the commander who had taken him away (the commander was a well-known local figure), the head of intelligence in the province finally told us, that "Jalal is with us, we are still interrogating him and if he is innocent, we will set him free." Two months ago, the family went to see the head of intelligence to find out if they had finished their interrogation, and to ask if they could visit Jalal to ensure that he was alive; the head of intelligence told the family,"If you come again and ask about Jalal, I will make sure to take away all the men from your family and send them where Jalal is". It has been almost ten months since Jalal disappeared and no one is answering the family's questions about what happened to him.

Torab Kakar (a pseudonym), a 34-year-old former member of the National Security Forces

5 ARBITRARY ARRESTS

Since August 2021, the Taliban have unlawfully detained hundreds of civilians, including peaceful protesters, journalists, critics, bloggers, and YouTubers, as well as members of the former government and security forces. The Taliban have essentially dismantled the existing legal system and say that law is now based on Shariah.[35] However, Shariah is not codified and is open to widely varying interpretations; in practice there is no agreed legal process, and detainees face an incredibly opaque and ad hoc system.

According to Rukhshana Media,[36] the Taliban have arrested 1,247 people including 188 women since they seized the capital in August 2021. This tally is based on arrests that were reported in the local and international media and is likely to represent only a proportion of the total number. Most of these arrests were for political reasons, most of the women detainees were women protesters, journalists, media workers and Taliban critics.

Sahiba (a pseudonym) was unlawfully detained and tortured by the Taliban after taking part in a peaceful rally against the Taliban's discriminatory treatment of women and girls and the deprivation of their fundamental rights.

35 The religious law of Islam is seen as the expression of God's command for Muslims and, in application, constitutes a system of duties that are incumbent upon all Muslims by virtue of their religious belief. Known as the Sharīʿah (literally, "the path leading to the watering place"), the law represents a divinely ordained path of conduct that guides Muslims toward a practical expression of religious conviction in this world and the goal of divine favour in the world to come.

36 Rukhshana Media, Taliban detained 1,247 critics and former government soldiers since August, https://rukhshana.com/en/taliban-detained-1247-critics-and-former-government-soldiers-since-august

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It was an autumn morning when a group of other women, girls and I went to the streets. We called on the Taliban to open the school doors and we asked them to allow women to return to work. While we were chanting and walking with our hand-written placards, suddenly a group of armed Taliban soldiers arrived with their vehicles; they rushed into the crowd and started to arrest women protesters as well as a group of bystanders who were filming our protest with their mobile phones. They started to shoot in the air to disperse the crowd. I saw them detain several people who had been filming and they beat them if they resisted arrest. A few other women and I ran away but the Taliban were following us; at that time no one dared even to film the situation. We hid inside a clothing shop, where the shopkeeper told me to change my headscarf. I did so and waited for half an hour or so.

When I saw the Taliban had gone, I walked out of the shop and started walking normally as if I was an ordinary customer. A few yards away, I saw three women covered head to toe in black walking towards me. I didn't know they were part of the Taliban. They grabbed me and took me towards a Taliban vehicle; I was screaming and asking for help, but the women told people nearby that I was a pickpocket arrested for stealing. I was put at the back of the Taliban vehicle in between the three women. The vehicle sped off and the women blindfolded me. I didn't know where I was and after 30 minutes or so I was taken to a small office where they removed the blindfold. I screamed, asking who they were and where had I been taken? Suddenly I felt a slap in my ear and pain ran through my face; it was one of the women members of the Taliban. I was asked to sit and not to scream as I would be questioned.

They then searched me, took away my telephone and my handbag. They asked me to open my phone screen lock and I had no choice but to open it for them. I was sitting there for several hours, and no one showed up; I was crying, remembering my family, thinking what my mother would be thinking about me disappearing this way. I was thinking even if I am killed or smuggled somewhere, no one would know. After several hours, I was taken to another room where there were several other women and girls like me.

The next day the women came around 10 am; they brought us tea and bread, but we didn't eat; we couldn't eat because we had no appetite. I had a very bad headache that day but couldn't get any painkillers. One of the women returned and told us to eat because we would need strength for when we were questioned, but we all refused. The other women who were being held told me that their phones had been taken away and that they had been there one or two days before me. Some had children and husbands, and some were unmarried, we all had one thing in common - that we were abducted from the streets and none of our family members knew what had happened to us.

Several hours later, another woman came and asked me to go for questioning; two other women had gone before

me, but they did not return. I was scared and didn't know what would be waiting for me. I was guided through a corridor that contained a mix of offices and rooms with closed doors which I assumed were detention rooms. I entered a room where several Taliban were sitting; one of them who had long hair and was wearing military uniform asked the woman who had escorted me there to leave. Seeing all those men I felt as if I had lost all my strength and I couldn't feel my feet on the ground.

He started very nicely, saying, "If you cooperate with us, we will make sure to release you as soon as possible. Will you cooperate?" I asked him what cooperation are you asking of me? He replied, "who told you to come for the protest? Who was organizing the protest?" I told him that I was not at the protest, that I was buying clothes when his people had arrested me and falsely accused me of stealing. He then, opened my phone, showing me all my messages with other women about the protest; he had access to my social media accounts, my family, my friends and anyone that I had been in contact with. I had to tell him the truth about my participation in the demonstration; there was nothing I could hide except the location of other women protesters. He asked me about individuals, and I told him that I didn't know them and that it was my first ever protest. He slapped me so hard in the face that I fell from my chair; it was several minutes before I was able to stand up. He asked me about my family's involvement in protests and I kept telling him that they didn't know anything about it. I was hit in the face again, then two women came, beat me, kicked me and swore at me. They called me a whore and said they would make sure to arrest my brothers and the rest of my family members, I was so scared for my family.

I was kept there for several days; some of the women and girls who were with me in the same room never returned and none of us knew what happened to them. After a few days I was released. My family said that they had looked everywhere for me and went to several Taliban offices but couldn't get any information. The Taliban told them that they knew nothing about my whereabouts and said they had not made any arrests of women on that day.

When I returned home, I was shaken, scared, frail and in a lot of pain from the bruises all over my body. In return for my release the Taliban asked me to sign a document and agree that I would not speak out about their treatment of me. If for any reason I did, they said they would arrest my entire family and would charge me for crimes against national security. A few days later, my family and I had to flee Afghanistan. There was no court, no charges and no due process; we were abducted from the streets, kept in a private jail for several days during which we had no access to our family, lawyer or any other official.

Sahiba (a pseudonym), a female protestor

6 TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

There are widespread reports of Taliban soldiers beating Afghans who they consider to be transgressing the stipulations around behaviour or conduct, or those they accuse of working with the former government; beatings during arrests are commonplace and often involve hitting people with rifle butts or using whips. There are scores of videos on social media showing Afghan civilians being abused by Taliban soldiers. In addition, reports and witness accounts suggest that torture, degrading, and ill-treatment are systemic in Taliban detention centres and are used as a means of extracting information or forcing confessions. People who have been detained also routinely report that Taliban security forces threaten to arrest or harm family members if the detainee does not cooperate.

The fact that the Taliban's justice system is highly informal and opaque puts detainees at greater risk of torture and ill-treatment. There are no checks and balances on Taliban conduct in the group's detention centres. Relatives usually do not know where family members are being held, and different sections of the Taliban authorities do not appear to know what their colleagues are doing. Relatives enquiring about detainee's whereabouts are often told that they are not in Taliban custody, only to find out later that a different faction or department had been holding them. Many Taliban officials tasked with policing were until recently fighting in the insurgency and have no experience of civilian law enforcement, leading to vastly increased risk of ill-treatment.

In one high profile case during the Taliban's takeover of Kandahar province in late July 2021, well-known comedian Khasha Zawan was detained by Taliban soldiers at his home, apparently because of his involvement in an anti-Taliban militia. Video circulated of the comedian having his hands tied behind his back and being slapped during his arrest. Another video showed him lying on the ground being brutally beaten. His body was found several days later. The Taliban officials in Kabul promised an investigation after a national outcry, but similar cases of arrests, beatings, torture, and deaths in custody continue to be reported regularly.

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“I was on my way to the shops to buy cigarettes when a local member of the Taliban asked me to show my national ID/Tazkira, which I did. He commented that I was not a local and asked where I was coming from. I told him that I was a guest participating in a wedding. The Talib asked many questions about my relatives and then he left. Soon after I bought the cigarettes and was on my way to my relatives’ home, a Taliban police ranger car stopped, and I was told to get in. They gestured with a gun for me to get into the car and I did so without any resistance because I was scared, thinking they would kill me if I resisted. I saw several other young men sitting in the back of the ranger with two armed Taliban guarding them and we were taken to the provincial governor’s office.

I asked one of the other young men if they had also been arrested, then felt a big thud on the back of my head; a Talib hit me with his rifle butt and shouted at me to be quiet. I asked him if I was allowed to call my family and he shouted again that I couldn’t. He instructed us not to touch our telephones and not to talk. There were six or seven of us. After waiting for around an hour, the same Taliban took us to the police headquarters, where we were taken to a room, told to hand over our phones and instructed to open the screen lock.

A younger boy of around 15 years of age was scared and he entered the wrong code twice; he was slapped hard in the face by a Taliban member who told him that they do not have time for drama. We were all left locked in the room that night, during which we heard a lot of screams and could hear that they were beating people there. That night no one gave us any food or water. We were not able to sleep because we were all scared, the beds were dirty and there was no air in the room. In the morning we were given some tea and bread but were not even allowed to wash our faces.

That morning I was led to a room where I saw my father and several other relatives. We were not allowed to hug each other but they asked my father if I was indeed his son. They told my father they were going to ask me some questions and that they would release me if I was not guilty. Then they took me back to my room. Later in the afternoon I was called to another room, and I thought I would be released. There were several Taliban there who started interrogating me, asking who I was, what I was doing there, what my job was and many other questions.

They showed me the photos on my phone of my friends, colleagues and classmates, and asked about each of them. Before I travelled to the wedding, I had deleted some photos of my friends who were in the previous government serving as say, police officers. I saw that they had retrieved all the deleted photos and messages. They kept asking about my friends, myself and what I was doing there; they didn’t believe my story about being there for a wedding even though they knew there was indeed a wedding taking place.

When I told them that I didn’t know my friends’ whereabouts they started to beat me. I was hanged from one leg for several hours, after which they pulled me down, kicked and hit me. Then they hung me from two feet and asked about recent messages on my phone to my colleagues. They accused me of being a spy working for foreigners and tortured me to get me to tell them the whereabouts of my friends who had worked for the previous government as police officers or soldiers. I didn’t know where these people were, and I told them that.

The next day, they took me again to the interrogation room; this time they hung a bucket of water from my genitals. The pain was so sharp and intense that I lost consciousness and I woke up when they poured water over me. My cellmates were also tortured but we were all so scared and injured that we couldn’t even talk to each other. We were suspicious about talking to other detainees in case there was a Taliban informant among us.

They asked me to call certain numbers from my phone and ask friends to meet. Luckily none of those telephone numbers worked and it was an indication that I was telling the truth and that those people are no longer in Afghanistan or have changed their numbers. Then the torture stopped, and the Taliban became very kind to me. They brought me kebab and pepsi and offered me cigarettes and tea. Later the commander came back to me and said: “Listen, you are young, talented and have a whole future in front you. We need people like you to work for the Islamic Emirate. We will pay you well; you and your family will have full immunity if you work for us.” I asked what sort of work they wanted me to do. He said, “Nothing, just keep an eye on people - this is all we want. We are not asking for daily attendance to the office, you can stay home and become our informant. Tell us about people in your area, any newcomers, any suspicious movements, anyone suspicious, this is all we want.”

I got so scared. My mouth was dry. I wanted to throw up and was feeling very drowsy. I asked him to give me some time to think. He said the door is always open to you and anyone willing to cooperate and support the Taliban to maintain law and order. I was kept in detention until my injuries healed and I was not beaten during that time. Twice my family brought me clothes and food, but I was not allowed to see them. After almost two weeks I was released under a strong guarantee from my family. My father and my uncle had to sign a guaranteed letter saying that I will not be involved in any form of activity or negative propaganda against the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. If for any reason the IEA want to summon me, my father has a responsibility to present me to the Taliban and if he fails, he will be detained by the Taliban, until I hand myself over to them. After several weeks we managed to obtain passports via the black market and fled Afghanistan.

Sharif (a pseudonym), a victim of arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment, and torture

Former members of the security forces and police under the previous government appear to be particularly at risk of torture and ill treatment in Taliban detention, often leading to deaths in custody. In one example, Qasim Qayem, a former police officer under the ousted government was asked by Taliban officials in the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) to return to his job. His brother in an interview said that Mr. Qayem continued to work under the Taliban for several months before he was kidnapped by the Taliban intelligence service on 12 April while he was returning home.[37] His brother added, "On 12 April around 2:00 PM, when Qayem was returning from work, he was stopped by a grey vehicle with a mark showing it belonged to the intelligence service. He was handcuffed and pushed inside the vehicle. We did not hear from him for several days and finally on 17 April we received a call from his own phone; the caller told us that Mr. Qayem is dead, and we should come to receive his body from the police hospital."

On 18 April 2022, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) Spokesperson Mr. Abdul Nafih Takori told reporters in a press conference that the MoI was investigating Mr. Qayem death.[38] Subsequently on 20 April 2022, a Taliban delegation visited the family of the deceased and offered compensation of $6000. No details were given about the facts surrounding Mr Qayem's arbitrary arrest and death in custody.

37 Pajhwok Afghan News, Death of Police Officer being seriously investigated: MoI, https://pajhwok.com/2022/04/18/death-of-police-officer-being-seriously-investigated-moi/
38 Ministry of Interior Affairs- Afghanistan, https://twitter.com/moiafghanistan/status/1515982401163440129

7 PERSECUTION OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES, FORCED EVICTION AND DISPLACEMENT

During negotiations prior to the US withdrawal, Taliban officials claimed the group had changed and were open to a more inclusive style of government than during their 1996-2001 rule. One area in which they claimed to have reformed was their attitude to other ethnic groups, with whom the largely Pashtun-dominated Taliban movement had often fought in the past. They pointed to the fact that the new Taliban included numerous non-Pashtun leaders, particularly in northern provinces. However, when the Taliban's new cabinet was unveiled it was almost entirely made up of Pashtun Taliban leaders from the old guard. Representatives from ethnic and religious minority groups have been almost entirely excluded from political power and political decision-making processes.[39]

Within weeks of the Taliban taking power, reports began emerging of non-Pashtun Afghans being forcibly evicted from their homes and farms, so that the victorious Taliban could reward their followers with land taken from other groups, particularly Hazaras, Turkmen and Uzbeks.[40] Evictions were reported across the country, including in Balkh, Helmand, Daikundi, Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces.[41] Some Pashtuns were also targeted with land confiscation, including a case in Kandahar where families who had worked for the former

39 Taliban appoints New Cabinet: All male Cabinet includes FBI wanted Terrorist- Know Key Members Here: https://www.jagranjosh.com/current-affairs/taliban-appoints-new-cabinet-all-male-cabinet-includes-fbi-most-wanted-terrorist-know-key-members-here-1631086128-1
40 ABC News, Despite promises, Taliban begin evicting Afghanistan's ethnic Hazara from their Land, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-16/taliban-carrying-out-mass-eviction-shia-hazara-minority/100505874?utm_campaign=abc_news_web&utm_content=link&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_source=abc_news_web
41 Afghanistan: Taliban Forcibly Evict Minority Shia, Human Rights Watch, Afghanistan: Taliban Forcibly Evict Minority Shia | Human Rights Watch (hrw.org)

government and been given homes on government-owned land were forced to leave.[42]

These evicted families joined the already huge numbers of internally displaced Afghans. In September 2021, OCHA reported that the number of displaced Afghans had topped more than 663,000 people., as Afghans fled the Taliban advance across the country. By June 2022, OCHA estimated that the total number of displaced people within Afghanistan had grown to 822,546.[43] UNHCR also reported that by May 2022 2,069,703[44] Afghans had entered Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. The refugee agency acknowledges that the actual number of refugees is likely higher because not all refugees register themselves with UNHCR.

From spring 2022 onwards, the number of internally displaced people increased because of an escalation of fighting between the Taliban and various resistance groups, the most well-known of which is the primarily Tajik National Resistance Front (NRF).[45] Some people have been displaced by the fighting itself, while others have been expelled by the Taliban as part of their military campaigns against the resistance.[46] Such expulsions of ethnic minorities have been reported in locations where fighting is particularly intense including in Panjshir, Parwan, Baghlan, and Sar-e Pol provinces.[47]

While verified information is scarce, there are persistent, credible reports of large-scale abuses taking place as the Taliban seeks to put down these localised uprisings.[48] In addition to the previously mentioned evictions, there are reports of large-scale arbitrary detentions of men and boys, and extremely worrying reports of multiple extra-judicial killings.[49]

In a case previously documented by Amnesty International, Taliban forces on 30 August 2021 unlawfully killed 13 ethnics Hazaras, including a 17-year-old girl, in Daikundi province. Eleven of the victims were former members of the Afghan National Defence Security Forces (ANDSF), and two were civilians. According to eyewitness testimony gathered by Amnesty International, the Taliban extrajudicially executed nine of the ANDSF members after they had surrendered, killings that appear to be war crimes. Two civilians were killed as they attempted to flee, including a 17-year-old girl shot when the Taliban opened fire on a crowd of people.[50]

ISIS-K attacks on minorities

The Afghan branch of ISIS-K has long targeted religious minorities in Afghanistan and the Taliban has been unable or unwilling to stop these attacks since taking power. The Taliban de-facto authorities claim to have established a secure environment for all Afghans was contradicted by a wave of bombings targeting Shia Hazara community mosques and schools since August, including in Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif and Kunduz.[51]

ISIS-K also claimed responsibility for an attack on a Sikh temple in Kabul on 17 June 2022 which resulted in the deaths of two people and the wounding of seven others. The Afghan Hindu and Sikh population has shrunk dramatically from around half a million people[52] in the 1970s to approximately 200 today. Many of them are now trying to leave Afghanistan because of systemic discrimination and persistent violent attacks.

42 CNN, Taliban gives thousands of Kandahar residents three days to leave their homes, protestors say, https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/14/asia/kandahar-protest-evictions-afghanistan-intl-hnk/index.html
43 UNOCHA, Global Humanitarian Overview 2022, https://gho.unocha.org/
44 UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, Refugees Situation, https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan
45 The Washington Post, Inside the Taliban's secret war in the Panjshir Valley, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/06/08/afghanistan-panjshir-valley-taliban-resistance/
46 RFE/RL's Radio Azadi, Taliban Accused of Forced Evictions As Fighting Intensifies in Northern Afghanistan, https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/taliban-forced-evictions-northern-afghanistan/31887719.html
47 OCHA Services, Internal Displacement due to Conflict, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacement, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/idps
48 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Facing critical human rights challenges, Afghanistan at a crossroad, says UN expert in Kabul, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/05/facing-critical-human-rights-challenges-afghanistan-crossroads-says-un
49 Human Rights Watch, Afghanistan: Taliban Torture Civilians in Panjshir, https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/10/afghanistan-taliban-torture-civilians-panjshir

50 Amnesty International, Afghanistan: 13 Hazara killed by Taliban fighters in Daykundi province, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/afghanistan-13-hazara-killed-by-taliban-fighters-in-daykundi-province-new-investigation/
51 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Facing critical human rights challenges, Afghanistan at a crossroad, says UN expert in Kabul, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/05/facing-critical-human-rights-challenges-afghanistan-crossroads-says-un
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CONCLUSION

The cases discussed in this briefing represent a very small fraction of the human rights abuses and violations under international law that are taking place in the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The Taliban has incontrovertibly failed to follow through on its promises to pursue a more inclusive, tolerant form of governance that respects the rights of Afghan population. Afghans who chose to stay after the Taliban takeover and gave the group an opportunity to follow through on their rhetoric have been sorely disappointed.

The Taliban has dismantled the rights and protections granted to Afghans by the 2004 Constitution and instead rules by decree and by force; arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and collective punishments of minority communities are reported daily, while the de-facto authorities are overseeing a brutal crackdown on freedom of expression and freedom of association. Revenge killings, summary executions of alleged resistance fighters and other abuses reportedly committed since the Taliban takeover could amount to war crimes.

A Loya Jirga, or traditional grand assembly, held in late June 2022 served only to highlight the fact that most Afghans have had their civil and political rights curtailed. The assembly consisted entirely of men, the majority of whom were religious scholars and community elders. The electoral system has been dismantled, as have other government bodies such as the AIHRC and Ministry for Women Affairs.

Taliban claims that the legal system is now based on Shariah, overlooking the fact that Shariah is not codified and is open to widely varying interpretations. In practice, the old legal framework has been replaced with a vacuum, in which local Taliban leaders choose their own version of Islamic law and apply it in an ad hoc manner with no due process or consistency. Moreover, some Taliban decrees appear to be in direct contravention of consensus in the mainstream Muslim establishment. One key example is that women's education and employment are not only considered acceptable within Islam but are actively encouraged.

While all Afghans are living through a human rights and humanitarian disaster, the situation for women and girls is catastrophic. As the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan stated on 1 July 2022, Taliban repression is "unparalleled globally in its misogyny.'[53] The Taliban policies massively diminish women's lives, deliberately attack women and girls' autonomy, freedom and dignity, and create a culture of impunity for domestic violence, child marriage and sale and trafficking of girls, to name a few of the consequences."[54]

53 UN Human Rights Council, Urgent debate on women and girl's situation in Afghanistan, https://mobile.twitter.com/UN_HRC/status/1542818642097750017

54 United Nations, Human Rights Special Procedures, Fiftieth Session of the Human Rights Council, Urgent Debate on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, Statement by the Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and on behalf of the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures, https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohchr.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fdocuments%2Fcountries%2Faf%2Fsr%2F2022-07-01%2FHRC50-UD-Afghanistan-final-CC-and-SR-Afghanistan-statement-1-July-2022.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Taliban de-facto authorities:

- End gross human rights violations and crimes under international law taking place in Afghanistan, including reprisal killings; attacks on members of ethnic and religious minorities, women and girls, LGBTI people, human rights defenders, civil society members, judges, lawyers, former government officials, journalists and others; and attacks on protests, torture, and ill treatment of those arrested; extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions and torture, armed combatants and war prisoners, some of which may amount to war crimes. The Taliban must publicly denounce such attacks and order its personnel to stop such violations across the country.
- Ensure that any officials, security personnel and militias involved in any human rights violations and crimes under international law, including, but not limited to enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention, extrajudicial killings, freedom of association, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, enforced displacement, destroying or confiscating property are held accountable, through fair trials before ordinary civilian courts without recourse to the death penalty.
- Immediately re-open all schools, universities, and other places of education for all boys and girls of all ages across Afghanistan without any further delays. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that education is a fundamental human right for everyone and this right was further detailed in the Convention against Discrimination in Education.
- In addition to providing access to education, grant women and girls their full spectrum of rights and end harmful practices towards them; priorities for action include allowing women to return to work and ensuring that women have access to healthcare: denying women and girls medical assistance if they cannot travel to clinics with a mahram is a cruel and needless policy that is a gross violation of fundamental rights.
- All Afghans should have their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association guaranteed. In particular, must stop punishing and harassing women's rights activists. Abductions, arbitrary detentions, and beatings of women who have held rallies demanding the rights to education and employment – both rights that Taliban officials previously agreed they would respect – must end.
- Ensure that the journalists and media workers are protected and allowed to work freely without fear of repression. Ensure investigations into all reliable allegations of crimes, violations and abuses against journalists and media workers, holding the perpetrators accountable in accordance with international law without recourse to the death penalty.

To the international community, particularly through the United Nations,

- Demand inclusion of women in all public spheres of life. States and international agencies engaging in talks with the Taliban must demand inclusion of Afghan women in negotiating delegations to the greatest extent possible. The international community should advocate for the rights of all Afghans, including women and girls; fundamental rights include the right to life, the right to freedom of expression, freedom of association, access to education, access to employment, political participation, and freedom of movement.
- Donor countries should make every effort to hold the Taliban to their promises. They should seek commitments from the Taliban to fully respect the human rights of the people of the country, in accordance with Afghanistan's international human rights obligations, and push for the Taliban to respect that right.
- The UN Security Council must use their leverage to pressure the Taliban by revoking waivers on travel bans for sanctioned Taliban leaders that were originally put in place to let them travel to negotiations. Revocations should target officials representing the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue and the National Intelligence Directorate for their active role in perpetrating or allowing grave human rights violations including but not limited to torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and unlawful detentions.
- The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) should investigate the crimes committed by the Taliban and hold the de facto authorities to account for alleged war crimes reported by credible human rights organizations, including Amnesty International. The ICC Prosecutor should not limit its investigations to the post-August 2021 period but should conduct a full investigation into crimes committed by all sides in Afghanistan over the course of the recent conflict without any exclusion.
- In the absence of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), UNAMA has the obligation under its mandate to monitor, investigate and report human rights violations in Afghanistan to the UN Human Rights Council and UN Security Council, as well as to recommend practical solutions to member states on addressing those violations and how to hold the de facto authorities to account.
- All States at the HRC must encourage and support the robust approach necessary to

urgently fill the accountability gap in relation to the human rights violations in Afghanistan during Human Rights Council next session in September 2022. Failure to do so would send a dangerous message to the Taliban that those responsible for most grave crimes under International law can escape meaningful scrutiny of the HRC.

- Stand in solidarity with the victims, their families, and all those pursuing justice and the protection of human rights on the ground, often at great personal risk, by strengthening structures and mechanism that can monitor and report on the situation and collect and preserve evidence for future prosecutions through Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan human rights situation and other relevant mandate holders.

THE RULE OF TALIBAN

A YEAR OF VIOLENCE, IMPUNITY AND FALSE PROMISES

It has been a year since the Taliban took over Afghanistan.

"The Rule of Taliban: A Year of Violence, Impunity and False Promises" is a documentation of some of the gross human rights violations committed by the Taliban in the country since 15 August 2021.

Reports of various human rights violations from Afghanistan keep coming in and it is impossible to cover the full scope of these violations. This briefing aims to document some of these serious violations, highlight the lack of accountability by the Taliban and the weak international response to address the situation. It is a compilation of incidents and compelling testimonies from Afghans including former government and security officials, women protestors, girls' students, teachers, journalists, human rights defenders and women's rights defenders, whose rights have been violated by the Taliban.

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