

## CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

### Statement by Ms. Azadah Raz Mohammad UN Security Council Briefing on Afghanistan 10 March 2025

Excellencies,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you on the human rights crisis in Afghanistan.

My name is Azadah Raz Mohammad. I am a lawyer from Afghanistan and the co-founder of the Ham Diley Campaign, which has been calling for accountability for the grave international crimes that have been committed in Afghanistan for decades, and that continue with impunity under the Taliban today.

In 2021, the Taliban tried to sell themselves to the international community as a reformed group,<sup>1</sup> promising to respect human rights, including women's rights<sup>2</sup> — a lie the international community was too quick to believe. Afghan women warned you then that given the chance, the Taliban would destroy every gain we had fought for since their brutal rule in the 1990s.

Over the last 3.5 years, our fears have become reality. Through at least 126 brutally enforced decrees,<sup>3</sup> the Taliban have deprived Afghan women and girls of their most fundamental rights — to education, employment, movement, assembly, and speech, and to live free from violence. Women's access to health care and justice has been severely restricted. The Taliban have erased Afghan women so thoroughly that even hearing their voices or seeing their faces<sup>4</sup> in public is now a crime. They are suffocating in their homes, banned from even looking out the window.<sup>5</sup>

We, the women of Afghanistan, along with international experts, call this systematic and institutionalized oppression of women gender apartheid.<sup>6</sup>

The Taliban is ready to crush anyone who resists them, including protestors and women human rights defenders,<sup>7</sup> health workers,<sup>8</sup> educators,<sup>9</sup> journalists,<sup>10</sup> legal professionals,<sup>11</sup> and former security and government officials.<sup>12</sup> Punishments at the hands of the Taliban include extrajudicial killings,<sup>13</sup> arbitrary detentions,<sup>14</sup> enforced disappearances,<sup>15</sup> torture,<sup>16</sup> sexual violence,<sup>17</sup> corporal punishment,<sup>18</sup> public flogging,<sup>19</sup> and execution by stoning.<sup>20</sup> The Taliban also systematically persecute ethnic and religious groups like the Hazaras,<sup>21</sup> Tajiks,<sup>22</sup> Uzbeks<sup>23</sup> and Baloch<sup>24</sup> through targeted attacks, forced displacement,<sup>25</sup> confiscation of land<sup>26</sup> and destruction of livelihoods.<sup>27</sup> LGBTQI+ people, already at great risk before August 2021, now face systematic violence, including murder and sexual violence,<sup>28</sup> as the Taliban attempt to impose strict, heteronormative gender roles.<sup>29</sup>

Excellencies, accountability for these grave violations is essential — and yet impossible domestically. The Taliban made it an early priority to dismantle all Afghan institutions mandated to promote human rights, such as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission,<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs<sup>31</sup> and an independent judiciary.<sup>32</sup> They aim to rule Afghanistan in a legal vacuum.

Although Afghan women have consistently appealed to world leaders to hold the Taliban accountable for their escalating repression of women's rights, we have seen alarming steps by the UN and Member States to normalize the Taliban. We were especially shocked to see the international community comply with Taliban demands at the Doha III meeting last June, during which Afghan women were excluded from formal discussions and human rights and women's rights were not on the agenda. We observed how this directly emboldened the Taliban to deepen their abuses. In the wake of that meeting, the Taliban barred the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan from the country,<sup>33</sup> and issued their most draconian declaration yet, further barring women from public life in the name of preventing vice and promoting virtue.<sup>34</sup>

We also see embassies being turned over to the Taliban,<sup>35</sup> jeopardizing important services for the Afghan diaspora. On Taliban social media accounts, there is a regular flow of smiling photos of foreign diplomats and businessmen partnering with this gender apartheid regime.

These developments do profound and permanent damage not just to the cause of Afghan women and girls, but to the cause of women's rights globally.

The announcement<sup>36</sup> by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in January that he had applied to the Court for arrest warrants for two senior Taliban leaders, including the group's Supreme Leader, is a beacon of hope for the people of Afghanistan because it pushes back against this normalization. These warrant requests recognize that the Taliban's violations of the rights of women and girls amount to gender persecution, a crime against humanity.<sup>37</sup>

We are also encouraged by efforts to hold the Taliban accountable for violations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) at the International Court of Justice.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, I extend my gratitude to the growing list of Member States calling for gender apartheid to be recognized as an international crime, including through the new UN treaty on crimes against humanity. No term better describes the crimes the Taliban are committing against Afghan women and girls, and we will never forget the States standing with us in this effort.

These historic developments should remind the international community that the Taliban have been deemed criminal actors who can never be the legitimate government of Afghanistan while their unprecedented abuses continue.

In conclusion, I leave you with the following recommendations.

To the Security Council:

- First, it is imperative to demand, at every opportunity, that the Taliban immediately reverse all policies and practices that prevent the full enjoyment of all women's human rights, in line with Afghanistan's international obligations, including CEDAW and relevant Security Council resolutions.
- Second, in accordance with the fundamental tenets of the women, peace and security agenda, the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of diverse Afghan women in all international discussions about Afghanistan's future, including in the Doha Process and the roadmap currently being prepared by UNAMA, must be non-negotiable. Meetings to decide the fate of Afghanistan without Afghan women at the table are simply not legitimate.
- Third, the Security Council should renew UNAMA's mandate, and press for its full implementation, particularly those aspects that relate to protection of women's rights and women human rights defenders, human rights monitoring, and meaningful engagement with diverse Afghan women civil society. UNAMA must continue to report regularly to the Security Council, including on the situation of women and girls.
- Lastly, I urge the Security Council to impose sanctions on all Taliban leaders who have committed human rights violations against Afghan women and girls, and not to lift sanctions, including travel bans, on those who are guilty of such crimes.

To all Member States, I urge you to:

- Provide your full assistance to the ICC in current and future efforts to pursue charges against all senior Taliban leaders who have committed acts of gender persecution and other crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed in Afghanistan since 2003.
- Use universal jurisdiction to bring Taliban leaders who are committing international crimes to justice.
- Call for gender apartheid to be codified as a crime against humanity, including through the draft treaty on crimes against humanity currently under consideration by the UN General Assembly.
- Rapidly seek remedies for Taliban violations of CEDAW, including by bringing an action at the International Court of Justice. States that have not yet joined this effort should do so.

- The UN Human Rights Council should move swiftly to create an accountability mechanism to document and preserve evidence of gender-based crimes in Afghanistan.

Excellencies,

As a woman from Afghanistan, I have witnessed how the unaddressed legacies of past crimes have trapped my country in a cycle of violence and instability. If the people of Afghanistan had been able to hold the Taliban accountable in 2001 and earlier, perhaps we would not have witnessed the Taliban's violent return to power twenty years later. If impunity is the disease, accountability is the only antidote.

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> OHCHR, "Afghanistan: UN human rights experts denounce idea of 'reformed' Taliban," 14 August 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/08/afghanistan-un-human-rights-experts-denounce-idea-reformed-taliban>.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad Seir et. al., "Taliban vow to respect women, despite history of oppression." AP News, 17 August 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-1d4b052cccf113adc8dc94f965ff23c7>.

<sup>3</sup> Based on internal tracking for a forthcoming publication by FEMENA;

USIP, "Tracking the Taliban's (Mis)Treatment of Women," accessed 26 February 2025, <https://www.usip.org/tracking-talibans-mistreatment-women>.

<sup>4</sup> Briefing by Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women, to the Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan, 18 September 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/speech/2024/09/speech-we-must-step-forward-the-situation-is-not-hopeless-and-we-are-not-helpless>;

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<sup>5</sup> France24, "Taliban leader bans windows overlooking places 'usually used by women'," 29 December 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20241229-taliban-leader-bans-windows-overlooking-women-s-areas>.

<sup>6</sup> End Gender Apartheid Campaign, accessed 26 February 2025, <https://endgenderapartheid.today/index.php>; "The phenomenon of an institutionalized system of discrimination, segregation, disrespect for human dignity and exclusion of women and girls - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan," 13 May 2024, A/HRC/56/25, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahr5625-phenomenon-institutionalized-system-discrimination-segregation>; UN Security Council Briefing on Afghanistan by Karima Bennouna, 26 September 2023, <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/resource/un-security-council-briefing-afghanistan-karima-bennouna/>.

<sup>7</sup> OHCHR, "Afghanistan: UN expert calls on the Taliban to release Women Human Rights Defenders," 8 March 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/03/afghanistan-un-expert-calls-taliban-release-women-human-rights-defenders>; Human Rights Watch, "Women's Rights Activists Under Attack in Afghanistan," 30 November 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/30/womens-rights-activists-under-attack-afghanistan>.

<sup>8</sup> "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett," ¶16-23, 20 February 2025, A/HRC/58/80, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/a-hrc-58-80-aev-1-en.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Siyar Sirat, "Taliban arrest education activist in Kabul, sources say." Amu TV, 25 February 2025, <https://amu.tv/159721/>; PEN International, "Afghanistan: Arrest of girls' education activists latest example of Taliban repression," updated 26 October 2023, <https://www.pen-international.org/news/afghanistan-arrest-of-girls-education-activist-latest-example-of-taliban-repression>.

<sup>10</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur *supra* note 7, ¶31-37; France24, "Taliban suspend Afghan women's radio station, arrest employees," 4 February 2025, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250204-taliban-raid-women-s-radio-station-in-afghanistan-broadcaster>; UNAMA, "Media Freedom in Afghanistan," 26 November 2024, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_report\\_on\\_media\\_freedom\\_in\\_afghanistan.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_report_on_media_freedom_in_afghanistan.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> OHCHR, "UN experts: legal professionals in Afghanistan face extreme risks, need urgent international support," 20 January 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/ijudiciary/statements/2023-01-17/202301-stm-sr-ijl-sr-afghanistan-day-endangered-lawyer.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Double Betrayal: Abuses against Afghan Policewomen, Past and Present," 10 October 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/10/10/double-betrayal/abuses-against-afghan-policewomen-past-and-present>.

<sup>13</sup> UNAMA, "A Barrier To Securing Peace: Human Rights Violations Against Former Government Officials & Former Armed Force Members," pp. 6-7, 22 August 2023, <https://unama.unmissions.org/barrier-securing-peace-hr-violations-against-former-government-officials-former-armed-force-members>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 7-9; Rawadari, "Arbitrary and Illegal Detentions in Taliban-Ruled Afghanistan, 15 August 2021-15 November 2022," 23 January 2023, <https://rawadari.org/230120231263.htm/>.

<sup>15</sup> UNAMA *supra* note 12, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur *supra* note 7, ¶82-85; Zholia Parsi, "I was imprisoned and tortured by the Taliban for protesting gender apartheid in Afghanistan," Atlantic Council, 14 August 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/inside-the-talibans-gender-apartheid/i-was-imprisoned-and-tortured-by-the-taliban-for-protesting-gender-apartheid-in-afghanistan/>.

<sup>17</sup> Yalda Amini, "Women arrested by Taliban for begging report rape and killings in Afghan jails," The Guardian and Zan Times, 29 November 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/nov/29/afghanistan-taliban-women-children-arrested-begging-rape-torture-killings-jails-destitution-work-ban>; "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett," ¶21-24, 30 August 2024, A/79/330, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/330>.

<sup>18</sup> UNAMA, "Brief on Corporal Punishment and the Death Penalty in Afghanistan," pp. 13-16, 7 May 2023, <https://unama.unmissions.org/unama-brief-corporal-punishment-and-death-penalty>.

<sup>19</sup> Ayaz Gul, "Men, women experience near daily public floggings in Afghanistan," Voice of America, 18 February 2025, <https://www.voanews.com/a/men-women-experience-near-daily-floggings-in-afghanistan/7979256.html>; OHCHR, "Comment by UN Human Rights spokesperson Jeremy Laurence on public executions in Afghanistan," 28 February 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/02/comment-un-human-rights-spokesperson-jeremy-laurence-public-executions> [also discussing the persistence of corporal punishment in public].

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