



# **Marking Two Years of Taliban Oppression**

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## **Statement from the U.S. Policy Advocates for Afghan Women and Girls**

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**August 15, 2023** — Two years ago today, the Taliban took control of Kabul and assumed power in Afghanistan. Since then, the economy has [plummeted](#), the humanitarian situation has grown [dire](#), and Taliban leaders have [systematically stripped](#) Afghan women and girls of their most basic human rights. If international agreements protecting human rights have any meaning, we must not accept the current situation for women and girls in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan ranks [170th](#) out of 170 countries on the Women, Peace, and Security Index. Yet, [some](#) argue that since the Taliban took control, Afghanistan is now [safer](#). That is a false and pernicious statement for Afghan women and girls—fifty percent of the population—as well as journalists, opponents of the regime, and religious and ethnic minorities. [Child marriage](#) and attendant [maternal mortality](#) have increased, the rights of women and girls have been decimated, and gender-based violence, particularly in the home, continues to [skyrocket](#) while services to protect and respond are now virtually [non-existent](#). The courageous women who dare to [protest](#) these conditions are being [beaten](#), [arrested](#), [tortured](#), and [disappeared](#).

To date, the Taliban have issued over [75 edicts](#) that restrict Afghan women and girls' ability to participate in public life. Starting immediately in August 2021, Taliban leadership [ordered](#) women to stay home from work and prohibited girls older than [6th grade](#) from attending school. This was followed by requirements for [male chaperones](#), the [closure of female-owned businesses](#), a ban on women [delivering humanitarian aid](#) through non-governmental organizations and the United Nations (UN), and even the prohibition of women [visiting parks or historic sites](#).

The recent [joint report](#) of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls to the UN Human Rights Council details widespread and systematic discrimination against Afghan women and girls and concludes that this may amount to the crime against humanity of gender persecution under the [Rome Statute](#). Due to the Taliban's actions over the last two years, [UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres](#), [international experts](#), and the [UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan Richard Bennett](#) have denounced the Taliban's treatment of women as "[gender apartheid](#)."

The international community has watched as Afghan women and girls are experiencing the worst human rights [crisis](#) in the world. The world's ineffective response to possible crimes against humanity committed by the Taliban against women and girls sends a strong message that women's rights are not important. That message is contributing to the global backsliding of women's rights.

## Recommendations:

The United States (U.S.) must elevate efforts to support and protect Afghan women and girls as a government-wide priority with strong leadership from the highest levels of the Administration. All U.S. government agencies working on programs and policies related to Afghanistan must:

- Continuously and meaningfully consult with a diverse set of Afghan women and girls inside and outside of Afghanistan on political, economic, and humanitarian strategies to restore Afghans their rights and opportunities;
- Ensure that Afghan women and girls' rights are part of every U.S. policy decision;
- Utilize all available international and regional diplomatic, economic, and other cultural tools to secure Afghan women's and girls' rights.

The U.S. must work closely with partners and institutions like the UN Secretariat, the Security Council, and UN agencies to amplify the voices and needs of Afghan women and girls and pressure the Taliban regime to end its gender-based human rights abuses. It should cooperate with the International Criminal Court in its investigation in Afghanistan.

The circumstances for women and girls in Afghanistan are relevant to the rights, security, and well-being of women and girls everywhere. This is a critical moment to incontrovertibly assert that it is unacceptable for any member of the international community to deny basic human rights based on sex or gender. History and extensive research have shown that how a country treats women is a ["key predictor of how it will behave among the community of nations."](#) A future in which Afghanistan is safe, prosperous, and able to engage with the global community effectively will only be possible if women and girls are free to exercise their fundamental rights. The U.S. government and the entire international community must not accept anything less.



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