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## **AFGHANISTAN: UN experts decry Taliban measures to "steadily erase" Afghan women & girls from public life**

UN (17.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3KnpRxx> - Taliban leaders in Afghanistan are institutionalizing large scale and systematic gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls, a group of UN human rights experts\* said today.

The experts reiterated their alarm expressed since August 2021 at a series of restrictive measures that have been introduced since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, particularly those concerning women and girls. "Taken together, these policies constitute a collective punishment of women and girls, grounded on gender-based bias and harmful practices," the experts said.

"We are concerned about the continuous and systematic efforts to exclude women from the social, economic, and political spheres across the country." These concerns are exacerbated in the cases of women from ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities such as the Hazara, Tajik, Hindu and other communities whose differences or visibility make them even more vulnerable in Afghanistan, they added.

The experts also noted the increased risk of exploitation of women and girls including of trafficking for the purposes of child and forced marriage as well as sexual exploitation and forced labor.

These exclusionary and discriminatory policies are being enforced through a wave of measures such as barring women from returning to their jobs, requiring a male relative to accompany them in public spaces, prohibiting women from using public transport on their own, as well as imposing a strict dress code on women and girls.

"In addition to severely limiting their freedom of movement, expression and association, and their participation in public and political affairs, these policies have also affected the ability of women to work and to make a living, pushing them further into poverty," the experts said. "Women heads of households are especially hard hit, with their suffering compounded by the devastating consequences of the humanitarian crisis in the country." Of particular and grave concern is the continued denial of the fundamental right of women and girls to secondary and tertiary education, on the premise that women and men have to be segregated and that female students abide by a specific dress code. As such, the vast majority of girls' secondary schools remain closed and the majority of girls who should be attending grades 7-12 are being denied access to school, based solely on their gender.

"Today, we are witnessing the attempt to steadily erase women and girls from public life in Afghanistan including in institutions and mechanisms that had been previously set up

to assist and protect those women and girls who are most at risk," the experts said in reference to the closure of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the physical occupation of the premises of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.

"Various vital, and sometimes lifesaving, service providers supporting survivors of gender-based violence have shut down for fear of retribution, as have many women's shelters, with potentially fatal consequences for the many victims in need of such services." Other efforts aimed at dismantling systems designed to prevent and respond to gender-based violence have included discontinuing specialized courts and prosecution units responsible for enforcing the 2009 Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and preventing many women aid and social workers from being able to fully perform their jobs and assist other women and girls.

While these measures have affected women and girls of all spheres of life, the experts highlighted their particular concerns for women human rights defenders, women civil society activists and leaders, women judges and prosecutors, women in the security forces, women that were former government employees, and women journalists, all of whom have been considerably exposed to harassment, threats of violence and sometimes violence, and for whom civic space had been severely eroded. Many have been forced to leave the country as a result.

"We are also deeply troubled by the harsh manner with which the de facto authorities have responded to Afghan women and girls claiming their fundamental rights, with reports of peaceful protesters having been often beaten, ill-treated, threatened, and in confirmed instances detained arbitrarily," the experts said.

"We are also extremely disturbed by the reports of extrajudicial killings and forced displacement of ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Hazara, which would suggest deliberate efforts to target, ban, and even eliminate them from the country."

The experts reiterated their call to the international community to step up urgently needed humanitarian assistance for the Afghan people, and the realization of their right to recovery and development. The financial and humanitarian crisis has been particularly devastating for groups in situations of heightened vulnerability within the Afghan population, particularly women, children, minorities and female-headed households. At the same time, the international community must continue to hold the de facto authorities accountable for continuous violations of the rights of half of the Afghan society and to ensure that restrictions on women and girl's fundamental rights are immediately removed.

"Any humanitarian response, recovery or development efforts in the country are condemned to failure if female staff, women-led organizations, and women in general - particularly those from minority communities - continue to be excluded from full participation in the needs assessments as well as in the decision-making, design, implementation and monitoring of these interventions," the experts said.

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The Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

The [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#) monitors States parties' compliance with the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), which to date has [189](#) States parties.

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## **AFGHANISTAN: Taliban religious police issue posters ordering women to cover up**

France24 (07.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3q9yzHg> - The Taliban's religious police have put up posters around the capital Kabul ordering Afghan women to cover up, an official said Friday, the latest in a string of creeping restrictions.

The poster, which includes an image of the face-covering burqa, was slapped on cafes and shops this week by the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. Since returning to power in August, the Taliban have increasingly curtailed freedoms -- particularly those of women and girls.

"According to Sharia law, Muslim women must wear the hijab," the poster reads, referring to the practice of covering up.

A spokesman for the ministry, responsible for enforcing the Taliban's harsh interpretation of Islamic law, confirmed to AFP on Friday that it was behind the orders.

"If someone does not follow it, it does not mean she will be punished or beaten, it's just encouragement for Muslim women to follow Sharia law," Sadeq Akif Muhajir said.

In Kabul, women already cover their hair with headscarves, though some wear modest western clothing.

Outside of the capital the burqa, which became mandatory for women under the Taliban's first regime in the 1990s, has remained common.

"What they're trying to do is to spread fear among the people," a university student and women's rights advocate, who did not want to be identified, told AFP.

"The first time I saw the posters I was really petrified, I thought maybe (the Taliban) will start beating me. They want me to wear a burqa and look like nothing, I would never do that."

The Taliban, which is desperate for international recognition to allow funding flows to reopen to the war-racked country, have so far refrained from issuing national policies. Instead, they have published guidance for men and women that has varied from province to province.

"This is not good. 100 per cent, this will create fear," said Shahagha Noori, the supervisor of a Kabul restaurant where the poster had been put up by the Taliban.

"I think if the Taliban get international recognition, then they will start to enforce it."

Although the Taliban have promised a lighter version of the hardline rule that characterised their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001, women are largely excluded from government employment, and secondary schools for girls have remained shuttered in several provinces.

They have also been banned from travelling alone on long journeys.

No nation has yet formally recognised the Taliban government and diplomats face the delicate task of channelling aid to the stricken Afghan economy without propping up the hardline Islamists.

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## **INDONESIA: Indonesian woman flogged 100 times for adultery, partner gets 15**

Channel News Asia (13.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3tIEY4i> - An Indonesian woman was flogged 100 times on Thursday (Jan 13) in conservative Aceh province for adultery while her male partner, who denied the accusations, received just 15 lashes.

Ivan Najjar Alavi, the head of the general investigation division at East Aceh prosecutors office, said the court handed down a heftier sentence for the married woman after she confessed to investigators she had sex out of her marriage.

Judges found it difficult to convict the man, who was then the head of East Aceh fishery agency and also married, because he denied all wrongdoings, Alavi added.

"During the trial, he admitted nothing, denying all accusations. Thus, [judges] are not able to prove whether he is guilty," Alavi told reporters after a public flogging for Sharia law offenders in East Aceh on Thursday.

Aceh is the only region in Muslim-majority Indonesia to impose Islamic law, which allows whipping for charges including gambling, adultery, drinking alcohol, and gay sex.

As an alternative punishment, instead the judges found the married man guilty of "showing affection to a female partner who is not his wife" after the couple were caught by locals at a palm oil plantation in 2018.

He was initially sentenced to 30 lashes but his successful appeal at the Sharia Supreme Court in Aceh reduced the sentence to 15.

The woman's flogging was briefly paused because she couldn't bear the pain, according to an AFP reporter in the field.

Another man convicted of having sex with a minor was also whipped 100 times on Thursday.

The man will also serve 75 months in prison for the crime after the flogging according to prosecutors.

Dozens watched, recorded and put Thursday's flogging on social media, a spectacle criticised by rights groups but which regularly attracted hundreds before the pandemic.

Unlike the rest of the nation, Aceh follows religious law as part of a 2005 autonomy deal agreed with the central government that ended a decades-long separatist insurgency.

Human rights groups slam public caning as cruel, and Indonesia's President Joko Widodo has called for it to end.

However, it has strong support among Aceh's population.

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