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AFGHANISTAN: Taliban unmoved by UN call to lift bans on Afghan women & girls

By [Ayaz Gul](#)

[VOA](#) (22.06.2023) — Afghanistan's Taliban rejected a fresh call Thursday from the United Nations to remove what it says are "punishing restrictions" on the impoverished country's female population.

The rebuke comes a day after a meeting of the U.N. Security Council was told the restrictions block Afghan women and girls from accessing education and work and participating in public life at large.

Since regaining control of Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban has banned girls from universities and teenage girls from attending schools beyond the sixth grade. They have also ordered most public sector female employees to stay at home. Women have also been barred from visiting parks and gyms.

Responding to the criticism from the U.N., the Taliban-led foreign ministry in Kabul called the remarks an interference in the country's internal affairs.

"The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan remains committed to international norms and obligations that do not contradict the principles of Islamic law, contravene Afghanistan's cultural norms or undermine our national interests," the statement said, using the official name of the Taliban government.

"We, therefore, urge all actors to respect the peremptory norm of non-interference and cease all attempts at meddling in our internal affairs, including the modalities and composition of our governance and laws."

The Taliban is not recognized by any foreign government or international organization and their curbs on women and girls are seen as a major obstacle in its efforts to be regarded as Afghanistan's legitimate government.

While briefing the U.N. Security Council on Wednesday, Roza Otunbayeva, head of the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, slammed Taliban edicts banning her organization and other agencies from employing local women.

She urged the Taliban to "rescind" the ban to enable the United Nations to continue its full support to millions of Afghan families in need of urgent assistance.

Otunbayeva also rejected Taliban suggestions to replace female national staff with male Afghans. Since the ban went into effect on April 5, the U.N. has instructed its female staff to work from home and for non-essential male staffers to also work remotely.

"We have been given no explanations by the de facto authorities for this ban and no assurances that it will be lifted. We will not put our national female staff in danger and therefore we are asking them not to report to the office," she said.

The U.N. envoy said she had told the Taliban that as long as restrictions on Afghan women "are in place, it is nearly impossible that their government will be recognized by members of the international community."

In a meeting earlier this month, Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada directed government spokespersons to emphasize the enforcement of Islamic law in their statements.

"The United Nations and the United States have held the entire world hostage and nothing moves without their dictation," he told the meeting in the southern city of Kandahar, which is known as the birthplace of the Taliban.

"The Islamic Emirate [the Taliban] effectively controls all parts of Afghanistan, but non-Muslim and even Islamic countries refuse to recognize it," the reclusive Taliban leader, who rarely leaves Kandahar, was quoted as saying.

The Taliban welcomed parts of Otunbayeva's speech on Wednesday, where she acknowledged that the group's ban on opium cultivation in Afghanistan had been "effectively enforced," and decreased the cultivation "significantly."

New satellite images examined by geospatial analytics firm [Alcis](#) and longtime Afghanistan expert David Mansfield revealed this month that the scale of the reduction in opium production across the country is unprecedented, with cultivation in southern provinces down by at least 80% compared with last year when the Taliban banned the growing of poppies for opium.

The U.N. envoy also praised the Taliban's efforts to improve the Afghan economy, reduce corruption and generate "sufficient" revenues to finance government operations, including paying civil-service salaries.

AFGHANISTAN: Taliban 'ban' contraceptives for women- 'haram' in sharia

Women in Afghanistan have said that midwives have refused to provide contraceptives where they previously would have

By [Umang Sharma](#)

[First Post](#) (10.02.2023) - The Taliban have allegedly stopped selling contraceptives to women, claiming that it is "haram" or forbidden under Sharia law. Drug stores and pharmacies across Afghanistan have allegedly been directed not to stock any pills, ampoules, or medicines used as contraceptive.

'Outrageous'

Reacting to the move, though there has been no official announcement to this effect, Former Policy Advisor to Minister for Afghan Resettlement & Minister for Refugees, Shabnam Nasimi tweeted: "Access to contraception is a universal human right. This is outrageous."

Contraceptive prices skyrocket

According to Afghanistan-based online news agency *Rukhshana Media*, selling contraceptives to women has been quietly stopped in Kabul and Balkh provinces.

The unofficial ban has doubled the price of contraceptives. There is, however, no regulation on drugs as the report said they are secretly sold on the grey market as the imports go unchecked by the Taliban.

'Don't know whether to laugh or cry'

Women in Afghanistan have said that midwives have refused to provide contraceptives where they previously would have.

The report quoted a 35-year-old Kabul resident and mother of three, whose youngest child is a year old, saying to prevent another pregnancy, she would visit a midwife every two months for contraception injections.

"The midwife I always visit said the Taliban has told them not to inject contraceptives because it is haram," she said.

"When she said that it was haram, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry," the woman added saying that when she to buy tablets instead from outside, she was charged double the amount.

'Decision violates women's rights'

Afghan women say that the decision to ban contraceptives violates the right of women to make a personal choice and the right of families to make decision about having children.

"They (Taliban) have even taken away the peace inside our house," a woman said.

The report quoted another 42-year-old woman and a mother of four saying that she has been using birth control pills for past five years. Since the last three weeks, she has been running pillar to post for contraceptives.

"Contraceptive tablets were not found in many pharmacies in Kabul. The pharmacists told me that it is forbidden, so the price has gone up and it is sold secretly," she said.

"They (pharmacies) said they don't have it and it is forbidden," he added.

'Kabul bans import of contraceptives'

Reports quoted drug wholesalers in Kabul city confirming that the Taliban has stopped importing these drugs and other related equipment which in turn has pushed the price higher on the black market.

The *Rukhshana Media* report quoted a drug dealer saying that the Taliban banned all types of contraceptives 20 days ago.

"Currently, any type of drug that women use for contraception are prohibited. Although they did not tell us a specific reason, but the [the Taliban] said it is not permissible and it is forbidden," the dealer said.

"About fifteen days ago, four Taliban forces came dressed in white clothes and told us that we no longer have the right to sell these drugs," he said, adding that they also confiscated some of the medicines that were there in his shop.

Midwives in Afghanistan challenge ban

The ban has been challenged many midwives with one in Mazar-e-Sharif saying that the Taliban visited their clinic three weeks ago to tell them to stop providing contraception.

AFGHANISTAN: Woman dies by suicide in Afghanistan before Taliban could stone her for running away from home

The Print (16.10.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3T4UueR> - A woman in Afghanistan's Ghor province died by suicide before Taliban forces could kill her for running away from home, local media reported citing local Taliban.

According to Khaama Press, the Taliban planned to stone the woman, who ran away from home with a married man, on Friday, but before that, she took her life to avoid public humiliation.

The man with whom the woman ran away from home was executed on Thursday, October 13, the officials added.

Abdul Rahman, the acting spokesperson for the provincial police chief of the Taliban for Ghor, said that the woman was sentenced to publicly stoning due to the lack of a women's prison, Khaama Press reported.

According to the Taliban security official, the woman strangled herself with a scarf, ending her life before receiving the punishment.

The reports of women running away from home have recently increased in different provinces of the country, while the Taliban government has determined to stone them to death or publicly flog them.

This comes after the Taliban imposed several restrictions on women. Starting with placing restrictions on education. The female students above grade six were banned from going to school, according to Khaama Press.

The Taliban regime which took over Kabul in August last year has curtailed women's rights and freedoms, with women largely excluded from the workforce due to the economic crisis and restrictions.

As a result, women and girls in Afghanistan are facing a human rights crisis, deprived of the fundamental rights to non-discrimination, education, work, public participation, and health.

Even taxi drivers and other urban transportation services were forbidden from picking up and dropping off women without a Mahram by the Taliban and imposed decree against the women's dress code was issued after a month.

Around 80 per cent of women working in the media have lost their jobs, and almost 18 million women in the country are struggling for health, education, and social rights. Many women, particularly those who worked in security agencies, lost their jobs after the Islamic Emirate was re-established.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) released a report in August, outlining the human rights situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover.

The reports summarized UNAMA's findings with regard to the protection of civilians, extrajudicial killings, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and detentions, the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, fundamental freedoms, and the situation in places of detention.

Amid this, the rehiring of women officers comes as a ray of hope for the women facing several severe challenges in the country.

Some female police forces urged the Islamic Emirate to allow more women to work in government institutions. "We ask the Islamic Emirate to let all the women return to their jobs," said Mashoqa, a police officer. (ANI)

AFGHANISTAN: Afghan women leaders conference held in Istanbul

However, the Islamic Emirate said that the rights of women and girls are respected within the framework of Islamic laws in the country

By Waheeda Hasan

Tolo News (27.08.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3B8QG5H> - They voiced concerns about women's lack of access to work and education and asked the international community to assist Afghan and international organizations working for women's rights.

"There should be a detailed investigation mechanism to follow up on the actions of the Taliban. Second, the issue of girls' education should be invested in for different alternatives for girls' education and. Third, investments should be made in girls' employment," said Rahila Sidiqi, a women's rights activist.

"If the demands listed here are presented to the world community, international organizations and institutions, and the concerned countries, and this message is also delivered to the Taliban, then women will continue their battles and protests if they are not accepted," said Soraya Paikan, a women's rights activist.

Meanwhile, Rina Amiri, the US Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights called on Muslim majority countries to be the loudest voices on women's rights and human rights in Afghanistan.

In an interview with Okaz/Saudi Gazette, Amiri said it is important for Saudi Arabia to be a leading voice in countering the Islamic Emirate narrative, as the Kingdom is the country that the Muslim world overall looks to.

"I am Muslim. I know from my own experience and from history that Islam is the first religion that gave women their rights. I look to Muslim countries to engage with the Taliban, to challenge that narrative, to engage Afghans, and to say no."

She said: "Islam is a religion very much aligned with human rights and with women's rights."

"The security council should be looking to add more Taliban leaders to the list of people subject to travel bans and to other measures based on their involvement in human rights violations. Second of all, when the human rights council convenes again in September, it should be looking to put in place a new mechanism to greatly enhance the UN's ability ... to report on and to provide accountability for human rights violations that are happening in Afghanistan right now," said the associate director of the women's rights division at Human Rights Watch, Heather Barr.'

"Women's rights in Afghanistan should be protected in a similar way to that of women in other Islamic nations. Schools are open and women are employed in other Islamic nations. We have to get to this point," said Tariq Farhadi, political analyst.

However, the Islamic Emirate said that the rights of women and girls are respected within the framework of Islamic laws in the country.

"The rights of all women and girls in Afghanistan have been preserved since the Islamic Emirate's arrival, and the Islamic Emirate is working to address any issues and find solutions to all the problems," said Bilal Karimi, deputy spokesman of the Islamic Emirate.

Earlier, a number of countries and international organizations called for the observance of human rights, particularly the right to work and the education of women and girls.

AFGHANISTAN: Taliban turn away girls from secondary schools

The New Arab (2303.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3uxITKp> - [The Taliban](#) ordered girls' secondary schools in Afghanistan to shut Wednesday [just hours after they reopened](#), an official confirmed, sparking confusion and heartbreak over the policy reversal by the hardline Islamist group.

"Yes, it's true," Taliban spokesman Inamullah Samangani told *AFP* when asked to confirm reports that [girls had been ordered home](#).

He would not immediately explain the reasoning, while education ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmad Rayan said: "We are not allowed to comment on this".

An *AFP* team was filming at [Zarghona High School](#) in the capital, Kabul, when a teacher entered and said class was over.

Crestfallen students, back at school for the first time since [the Taliban](#) seized power in August last year, tearfully packed up their belongings and filed out.

"I see my students crying and reluctant to leave classes," said Palwasha, a teacher at Omra Khan girls' school in Kabul.

"It is very painful to see your students crying."

United Nations envoy Deborah Lyons called reports of the closure "disturbing".

"If true, what could possibly be the reason?" she tweeted.

"The UN in Afghanistan deplores today's reported announcement by the Taliban that they are further extending their indefinite ban on female students above the 6th grade being permitted to return school," the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan said in a statement.

When the Taliban took over last August, schools were closed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, but only boys and younger girls were allowed to resume classes two months later.

There were fears the Taliban would shut down all formal education for girls, as they did during their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001.

The international community has made the right to education for all a sticking point in negotiations over aid and recognition of the new Taliban regime, with several nations and organisations offering to pay teachers.

On Wednesday, the order for girls' secondary schools to resume appeared to only be patchily observed, with reports emerging from some parts of the country -- including the Taliban's spiritual heartland of Kandahar -- that classes would restart next month instead.

But several did reopen in the capital and elsewhere, including Herat and Panjshir -- temporarily at least.

"All the students that we are seeing today are very happy, and they are here with open eyes," Latifa Hamdard, principal of Gawharshad Begum High School in Herat, told *AFP*.

Barriers

The education ministry said reopening the schools was always a government objective and the Taliban were not bowing to international pressure.

"We are doing it as part of our responsibility to provide education and other facilities to our students," ministry spokesman Rayan told *AFP* Tuesday.

The Taliban had insisted they wanted to ensure schools for girls aged 12 to 19 were segregated and would operate according to Islamic principles.

The Taliban have imposed a slew of restrictions on women, effectively banning them from many government jobs, policing what they wear and preventing them from travelling outside of their cities alone.

They have also detained several women's rights activists.

Even if schools do reopen fully, barriers to girls returning to education remain, with many families suspicious of the Taliban and reluctant to allow their daughters outside.

Others see little point in girls learning at all.

"Those girls who have finished their education have ended up sitting at home and their future is uncertain," said Heela Haya, 20, from Kandahar, who has decided to quit school. "What will be our future?"

It is common for Afghan pupils to miss chunks of the school year as a result of poverty or conflict, and some continue lessons well into their late teens or early twenties.

Human Rights Watch also raised the issue of the few avenues girls are given to apply their education.

"Why would you and your family make huge sacrifices for you to study if you can never have the career you dreamed of?" said Sahar Fetrat, an assistant researcher with the group.

The education ministry acknowledged authorities faced a shortage of teachers -- with many among the tens of thousands of people who fled the country as the Taliban swept to power.

"We need thousands of teachers and to solve this problem we are trying to hire new teachers on a temporary basis," the spokesman said.

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

UN (17.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3KnpRxh> - 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.

ENDS

***The experts:** [Ms. Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences](#); [Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#); [Ms. Siobhán Mullally, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children](#); [Mr. Pedro Arrojo Agudo, Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation](#); [Mr. Morris Tidball-Binz, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#); [Mr. Gerard Quinn, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#); [Mr. Michael Fakhri, Special Rapporteur on the right to food](#); [Mr. Olivier De Schutter, Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights](#); [Ms. Sorcha MacLeod \(Chair-Rapporteur\), Ms. Jelena Aparac, Mr. Ravindran Daniel, Mr. Chris Kwaja, Working Group on the use of mercenaries](#); [Mr. Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association](#); [Mr. Saad Alfarargi, Special Rapporteur on the right to development](#); [Fernand de Varennes, Special Rapporteur on minority issues](#); [Mr. Tomoya Obokata, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences](#); [Ms. Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#); [Mr. Livingstone Sewanyana, Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order](#); [Ms. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons](#); [Ms. Mama Fatima Singhateh, Special Rapporteur on the Sale of children](#); [Ms. Mary Lawlor, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#); [Melissa Upreti \(Chair\), Dorothy Estrada Tanck \(Vice-Chair\), Elizabeth Broderick, Ivana Radačić, and Meskerem Geset Techane, Working Group on discrimination against women and girls](#); [Ms. Elna Steinerte \(Chair-Rapporteur\), Ms. Miriam Estrada-Castillo \(Vice-Chair\), Ms. Leigh Toomey, Mr. Mumba Malila, Ms. Priya Gopalan, Working Group on arbitrary detention](#); [Ms. Gladys Acosta Vargas, Chair of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#); [Ms. Alexandra Xanthaki, Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights](#); [Ms. Tlaleng Mofokeng, Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health](#); [Ms. Koumba Boly Barry, Special Rapporteur on the right to education](#); [Ms. E. Tendayi Achiume, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance](#).

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.

UN Human Rights, Country Page — [Afghanistan](#)

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.

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

Channel News Asia (13.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3tlEY4i> - 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.
