



Position Paper

1000 Days of Girls Ban from Schools in Afghanistan



June 13, 2024, marks 1,000 days since the Taliban issued an official decree on September 18, 2021, closing the doors of schools to Afghan girls. This decree has barred Afghan girls from attending secondary and higher education institutions, stripping them of their basic right to quality education and effectively removing them from the country's educational system. Afghanistan is now the only nation in the world where girls and women are deliberately and discriminatorily denied their fundamental rights.

The Taliban's takeover of Kabul marked the beginning of a dark and oppressive era for Afghan girls and women. Through over 100 stringent decrees¹, the Taliban have systematically oppressed, confined, and excluded the majority of girls and women from participating in normal societal life. The prospects of reopening schools and universities and enabling the active presence of women in society remain bleak.

Afghanistan will never fully recover from this ongoing generational loss. The unfulfilled potential during this period has stopped female teachers, academics, artists, doctors, poets, and engineers, who will never have the chance to contribute their skills to their country, is irreplaceable. Afghanistan will face enduring challenges in its recovery from the substantial loss of numerous potential female professionals, especially in a country already struggling with low levels of youth literacy. With each passing day, more dreams and souls fade away.

These bans have not only deprived girls and women of education but have also kept them away from societal participation. They have extinguished the motivation for learning among girls, boys, parents, and teachers involved in the educational process. In the long run, this stance will have severe social impacts, leading to poverty, violence, ignorance, illiteracy, superstition, devaluation of human rights, and humanitarian crimes for Afghan citizens and the region.

"I want you to imagine this for a moment: Your daughter is not allowed to go to school or university, your wife is not permitted to leave the house for work, shopping, or leisure, and you are unemployed and unable to provide daily food for your family. If you can imagine this with an awakened mind, then think about the fact that millions of people in Afghanistan are experiencing this situation. What would you do in the face of this disaster? Will you just be a spectator, or do you feel a responsibility towards us based on your commitments?" - Rahela, 12th-grade student, Afghanistan

This situation² has placed Afghanistan in the worst international position regarding its commitments. According to the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) implementation report by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and Dublin University³, Afghanistan ranks 158th out of 166 countries. This starkly illustrates that Afghanistan is failing to make progress toward achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 4, which aims for quality education by 2030⁴.

¹ <https://msmagazine.com/2023/08/15/list-timeline-taliban-orders-women-girls-afghanist/>

² <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/afghanistan?fbclid=IwAR1Mjkb8nKzCg-n0H0TExPr0dqdJD2jHLx9i-UNRXzCUCg9MqbHuic3FKTk>

³ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2023/2023-sustainable-development-report.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2023-en.pdf>

The imposition of restrictions on the presence of girls and women in society, and the prohibition of their freedoms and rights, aligns with international conventions such as Article 7, Clauses (k) and (h) of the Rome Statute⁵, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Article 1)⁶ and (Article 2)⁷, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 1 and Article 26, Clause 1)⁸, the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (Article 9, Clause A)⁹, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article 5, Clause E)¹⁰, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 9, Clause 1)¹¹, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13, Clause 1)¹², the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (Article 3)¹³. These actions constitute gender-based discrimination and human rights violations and are concrete examples of "Gender Apartheid"¹⁴ in this country, which has led its citizens to a humanitarian catastrophe, with conditions worsening every day.

"The world's shameful silence regarding the education of Afghan girls and women is more bitter than ever, indicating that all human and ethical values have been ignored in political dealings and negative power plays, resulting in the trampling of our rights." - Rabia, 11th-grade student, Afghanistan

Recommendations

Given the urgent and severe circumstances, the Education Defenders Network calls on the United Nations, its member states, Islamic countries, and international organizations involved in Afghanistan to address the following issues promptly and effectively:

1. International Actions

The United Nations, its member states, and global leaders must, considering their international obligations to Afghanistan, urgently implement practical and serious measures to end this humanitarian disaster. Nearly three years have passed, and expressions of sympathy have not led to solutions or held the Taliban accountable for women's and girls' rights. Therefore, international institutions must stand with millions of Afghan girls and women demanding the reopening of schools, access to work, and the immediate and full restoration of social, political, and cultural rights in Afghanistan. Diplomatic and political pressures must be applied to ensure the reopening of schools and universities to girls, guaranteeing their access to quality education and standard curricula. Promoting gender equality and social inclusion must be at the core of the international partners' policies, ensuring that all Afghan girls and women have access to quality education and employment opportunities without discrimination.

⁵ <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

⁷ https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1954/07/19540707%2000-40%20am/ch_xvi_1p.pdf

⁸ https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf

⁹ https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/pages/conventions/en/CDHRI_2021_ENG.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-elimination-all-forms-racial>

¹¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

¹² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights#:~:text=event%20of%20sickness.,Article%2013,human%20rights%20and%20fundamental%20freedoms.>

¹³ https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1954/07/19540707%2000-40%20am/ch_xvi_1p.pdf

¹⁴ <https://hrlr.law.columbia.edu/files/2022/12/Bennoune-Finalized-12.09.22.pdf>

2. Regional Cooperation

Islamic countries, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation¹⁵, neighboring countries of Afghanistan, and regional actors must take urgent and practical steps to increase pressure on the Taliban to lift the ban on girls' education, and women's right to work, and ensure the safe return of girls and women to schools, universities, and workplaces. Political leaders, scholars, and Islamic communities have a religious, moral, and regional responsibility to stand by Afghan girls, women, and citizens and support their legitimate voices to create a future for Afghanistan.

3. Documentation, Awareness, and Continuous Monitoring & Evaluation

Representatives and specific structures designated by countries for Afghanistan, international organizations, human rights bodies, research institutions, and media must document and publicize human rights violations, gender-based discrimination, gender apartheid, genocides, and war crimes at the international level. Afghanistan must not be forgotten, and the world should not normalize the current situation, or new regional and international crises and extremist threats will emerge, which will be irreparable¹⁶. Partner countries and international organizations must continuously monitor and evaluate the human rights and gender equality situation in Afghanistan, publishing transparent reports to apply pressure on the Taliban and support women's rights.

4. Expansion of Employment Opportunities for Women

Creating and expanding employment opportunities for women and girls should be a priority. International partners and cooperating countries should launch programs to economically empower Afghan women through job skills training, microloans, and establishing women's support networks.

5. Support Social Movements and Civil Society Organizations

Social movements and civil society organizations working on women's rights and gender equality should receive increased financial and technical support. These entities play a crucial role in supporting women and girls and promoting gender equality and must be enabled to continue their activities.

6. Social Mobilization

The reasons and excuses presented by the Taliban for banning girls' education and women's presence in society are contrary to the principles of Islam, which advocates enlightenment and liberation from ignorance. Therefore, Afghan citizens must mobilize to support their daughters' right to quality education and women's presence in society. Scholars and social leaders must exert internal pressure on the Taliban to demand the reopening of schools and access to quality education for girls.

Conclusion

Afghanistan's progress and prosperity can only be achieved through equal, quality, and widespread educational opportunities for both girls and boys. Education is one of the most powerful tools for reducing poverty and inequality and is fundamental for sustainable economic growth. The international community must act now to support the rights of Afghan girls and women, ensuring their access to education and social participation.

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¹⁵ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2404866/saudi-arabia>

¹⁶ <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2095654/N2318974.pdf>