



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
COUNCIL
BACKGROUND GUIDE

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dear Delegates,

It is with great enthusiasm that we welcome you to the United Nations Human Rights Council at SHISMUN 2025. This year's agenda—"Addressing the institutionalization of gender apartheid in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, with special emphasis on upholding the rights of women and girls through multilateral action"—tackles one of the most urgent and morally compelling human rights crises of our time.

Since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, Afghanistan has witnessed the rapid erosion of women's fundamental rights. Girls have been banned from secondary and higher education, women have been forced out of the workforce, and public spaces are increasingly segregated or closed off entirely to half the population. These systematic and state-imposed restrictions have led human rights experts to call this regime a form of gender apartheid—an institutionalized, ideologically driven system of discrimination that is not only regressive but illegal under international law.

The United Nations Human Rights Council bears the responsibility to safeguard the dignity and freedoms of all people—especially the most vulnerable. In this committee, you will explore the intersection of culture, politics, and human rights, and examine how international legal frameworks such as CEDAW, the UDHR, and the ICCPR can be used to combat gender-based oppression. But the complexity of the Afghan context demands more than condemnation—it demands action. Delegates must think critically about the role of multilateral cooperation, diplomatic pressure, sanctions, engagement with de facto authorities, and the protection of civil society and female activists on the ground.

We urge you to approach this topic with intellectual integrity, moral clarity, and cultural sensitivity. Understand the voices of Afghan women and girls not just as statistics but as central stakeholders whose futures depend on what the world chooses to do next. This committee will reward delegates who combine thorough research with empathy, bold diplomacy with realistic solutions, and who strive to reimagine the UN not as a passive observer but as a proactive guardian of global rights.

We look forward to passionate debates, transformative resolutions, and solutions that uphold the principle that equality is not negotiable. Let your words reflect courage, conscience, and conviction.

All the best for an engaging and impactful committee!

Warm regards,
Vaibhav Tokas
Chairperson, UNHRC
SHISMUN '25

BEGINNER's GUIDE TO MUN

Question 1: What is the United Nations?

The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945 to maintain international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights by 51 countries. United Nations have 6 principal organs.

The UN has 4 main purposes

- To keep peace throughout the world;
- To develop friendly relations among nations;
- To help nations work together to improve the lives of poor people, to conquer hunger, disease and illiteracy, and to encourage respect for each other's rights and freedoms;
- To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations to achieve these goals

Question 2: What is the Model United Nations?

Model United Nations is a simulation of the actual United nation which is done to enhance knowledge about pressing international issues. It is called Model United nation not mock United nation because it does not work as an exact replica of the United Nations, it is just an attempt to understand the working of the United Nations by practicing some of its working mechanisms. Every person who participates is given a country to represent and are called Delegates of their respective committees. There are some rules that we follow in MUNS to facilitate the debate called rules of procedure. The procedure that is closest to what is followed in the actual UN.

Question 3: What is considered to be valid evidence in the Model United Nations?

Evidence or proof that is acceptable from sources

News Sources:

- REUTERS- Any Reuters article which clearly makes mention of the factor is in contradiction of the fact being stated by a delegate in council.

<http://www.reuters.com/>

- State-operated News Agencies – These reports can be used in the support of or against the state that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any Country as such but in that situation, they can be denied by any other country in the council.

Some examples are.

RIA Novosti (Russia) <http://en.rian.ru/>

IRNA (Iran) <http://www.irna.ir/ENIndex.htm>

BBC (United Kingdom) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

Xinhua News Agency and CCTV (P.R. China) <http://cctvnews.cntv.cn/>

- Government Reports: These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country.
- Government Websites like the State Department of the United States of America (<http://www.state.gov/index.htm>) or the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (<http://www.eng.mil.ru/en/index.htm>)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of various nations like India (<http://www.mea.gov.in/>). People's Republic of China (<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/>), France (<http://www.diplomatic.gouv.fr/en/>). Russian Federation (http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/main_eng)
- Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Reports <http://www.un.org/en/members/> (Click on any country to get the website of the Office of its Permanent Representative) d. Multilateral Organisations like the NATO (<http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/index.htm>).
- ASEAN (<http://www.ascansee.org/>), OPEC (http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/), etc.
- UN Reports: All UN Reports are considered credible information or evidence for the Executive Board of the Security Council.
- UN Bodies: Like the SC (<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>), GA (<http://www.un.org/en/ga/>), HRC (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/HRCIndex.aspx>) etc.
- UN Affiliated bodies like the International Atomic Energy Agency (<http://www.iaea.org/>), World Bank (<http://www.worldbank.org/>), International Monetary Fund (<http://www.imf.org/external/index.htm>, International Committee of the Red Cross (<http://www.icrc.org/eng/index.jsp>), etc. C. Treaty Based Bodies like the Antarctic Treaty System (<http://www.ats.aq/e/ats.htm>), the International Criminal Court (<http://www.icccpi.int/Menus/CC>)

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https://drive.google.com/file/d/18kgA2JohSFiEV_Ny6LVdmslOATSWKQg6/view?usp=sharing

UNHRC MANDATE

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote and protect the enjoyment and full realization, by all people, of all human rights. The Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and international human rights laws and treaties established those rights.

UN Human Rights was created by the General Assembly in 1993 through its resolution 48/141 (<https://documents.un.org/doc/resolution/gen/nr0/712/25/img/nr071225.pdf>), which also details its mandate.

UN Human Rights is mandated to:

1. **Promote and Protect All Human Rights for All:** Ensure that human rights are universally respected and upheld without discrimination, focusing on civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.
2. **Recommend Improvements:** Advise various UN bodies and mechanisms on enhancing the promotion and protection of human rights within the UN system.
3. **Promote and Protect the Right to Development:** Support efforts to ensure that development processes are inclusive, equitable, and respect human rights, including the right to participate in and benefit from development.
4. **Provide Technical Assistance:** Offer support and guidance to states in their human rights activities, including capacity building, training, and technical assistance to strengthen national human rights frameworks.
5. **Coordinate Human Rights Education and Public Information:** Develop and implement educational and public awareness programs to promote understanding and respect for human rights globally.
6. **Remove Obstacles and Prevent Violations:** Actively work to identify and eliminate barriers to the realization of human rights and prevent the occurrence and continuation of human rights violations.
7. **Engage in Dialogue with Governments:** Foster constructive engagement with governments to promote and ensure respect for human rights, addressing concerns and supporting compliance with international standards.
8. **Enhance International Cooperation:** Strengthen global and regional cooperation to advance human rights, fostering collaboration among states, international organizations, and civil society.

9. **Coordinate Human Rights Activities:** Ensure coherence and effectiveness in human rights promotion and protection across the entire UN system, coordinating efforts and avoiding duplication.
10. **Rationalize and Strengthen Human Rights Machinery:** Streamline and improve the UN human rights system to enhance its effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness to global human rights challenges.

In addition to these core responsibilities, UN Human Rights also plays a critical role in:

1. **Monitoring and Reporting:** Collecting and analyzing information on human rights situations globally, producing reports, and making recommendations to the UN General Assembly and other bodies.
2. **Advocacy and Policy Development:** Advocating for the development and implementation of human rights policies and frameworks, both at the international and national levels.
3. **Supporting Human Rights Defenders:** Providing protection and support to individuals and organizations working to promote and protect human rights, including those facing threats or persecution.
4. **Addressing Emerging Human Rights Challenges:** Responding to new and evolving human rights issues, such as those arising from technological advancements, conflicts, and global crises.

The mandate of UN Human Rights reflects its commitment to ensuring that the universal principles of human rights are upheld and promoted in every corner of the world, working towards a just and equitable global society.

INTRODUCTION

The agenda at hand aims to address a deeply alarming and systemic human rights crisis: the institutionalization of gender apartheid in Afghanistan since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021. The Taliban regime has implemented a series of decrees that intentionally exclude women and girls from public life, effectively rendering them invisible in education, employment, civic engagement, and even access to basic healthcare and humanitarian aid. This agenda calls upon the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to explore not just the violations themselves, but the institutional mechanisms by which these violations are being enforced—through legislation, policing, social control, and ideological imposition.

Framing this crisis through the lens of “gender apartheid” moves the discussion beyond isolated incidents of abuse to acknowledge the systemic and state-sponsored nature of gender-based segregation and oppression. Delegates are expected to investigate whether this term can and should be codified under international human rights or humanitarian law, similar to how racial apartheid in South Africa was globally condemned and dismantled through collective pressure.

This agenda is one of the most morally urgent and legally complex issues facing the international community today. Afghan women and girls are enduring what human rights experts have described as the most serious women's rights crisis in the world. Girls above the age of 11 are prohibited from attending school; women are banned from universities, jobs in NGOs, and government roles. Women are confined to their homes, denied freedom of movement, and even restricted from visiting public parks or healthcare centers. The legal system lacks female judges and lawyers, and enforcement mechanisms such as the so-called “Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice” exist primarily to monitor and control women's behavior.

The repression is not temporary or incidental—it is deliberate, doctrinal, and systematically enforced. Such exclusion not only devastates individual lives but also hollows out the entire foundation of Afghan society, perpetuating poverty, health crises, generational trauma, and the collapse of civic life. By addressing this issue, the UNHRC is called upon to reassert its fundamental role in defending universal human rights—particularly for those most vulnerable to systemic injustice.

This agenda has been selected due to its timeliness, legal gravity, and global implications. The Taliban regime's actions have sparked condemnation from various UN agencies, governments, civil society groups, and human rights organizations, yet a coherent and coordinated global response remains absent. As conflicts in other regions dominate headlines, the gender crisis in Afghanistan risks fading from international focus, allowing impunity to fester and the normalization of gender apartheid to take root.

Moreover, the issue raises broader geopolitical and diplomatic challenges: Should the Taliban be engaged diplomatically if they continue to violate basic human rights? Can humanitarian aid be delivered without empowering a regime that institutionalizes misogyny? Is the global legal framework prepared to recognize and respond to gender apartheid as a crime against humanity? And what role can multilateral diplomacy play when national sovereignty clashes with universal rights?

In today's increasingly polarized global landscape, this agenda provides a critical opportunity for delegates to examine how the international community can and should act when one half of a nation's population is systematically erased from public life. Delegates will need to debate sanctions, aid conditionality, legal accountability, regional diplomacy, and cultural relativism, all while centering the lived experiences and demands of Afghan women and girls.

Understanding Gender Apartheid as a Human Rights Violation

"Gender apartheid" is a term increasingly used by human rights experts, international legal scholars, and UN officials to describe a systematic, state-sponsored regime of segregation and oppression based on gender. Much like racial apartheid, gender apartheid does not refer merely to individual acts of discrimination or abuse—it refers to a structured system in which one gender, typically women and girls, is institutionally subordinated and excluded from public, political, economic, and social life. It is implemented through laws, policies, religious edicts, and social norms that are codified and enforced by those in power.

Legally, however, the term "gender apartheid" has yet to be codified under international law in the same way racial apartheid has been. The 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid defines apartheid as "inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them." Although this definition specifically addresses racial groups, many legal scholars and human rights organizations argue that a similar framework should apply to gender-based domination, especially when a government enacts laws and policies that systematically segregate and repress people based on their sex or gender.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), often called the "international bill of rights for women," prohibits both direct and indirect forms of gender-based discrimination. Article 2 of CEDAW requires states to pursue a policy of eliminating discrimination against women "by all appropriate means and without delay." Furthermore, General Recommendation No. 28 by the CEDAW Committee explicitly recognizes that discrimination includes any act or practice that intentionally or unintentionally disadvantages women. However, the term "gender apartheid" remains largely political and rhetorical—powerful in its symbolism but yet to be fully integrated into enforceable legal frameworks.

Recent movements have begun advocating for the recognition of gender apartheid as a distinct international crime, particularly within the framework of crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Such recognition would elevate gender apartheid from a moral or political concern to a punishable international offense, thereby obligating states to act under principles of universal jurisdiction. This legal evolution is ongoing but increasingly urgent, especially in light of current events in Afghanistan.

Historical Precedents

The most widely recognized form of apartheid in international legal discourse is racial apartheid, which was institutionalized in South Africa between 1948 and the early 1990s. Under this system, the white minority enforced a regime of racial segregation, systematically denying Black South Africans and other non-white groups access to education, property, political representation, public spaces, and human dignity.

Apartheid in South Africa was not merely about racial bias—it was about a deliberately engineered structure of inequality maintained through law, violence, and indoctrination.

The international community's response to racial apartheid in South Africa laid the groundwork for collective action against systemic human rights violations. Through economic sanctions, arms embargoes, cultural boycotts, and political isolation, global actors played a key role in pressuring the apartheid regime to dismantle. Most importantly, the international community defined apartheid as a crime against humanity—a recognition that carried legal, moral, and political weight. The 1998 Rome Statute of the ICC further reinforced this by including apartheid as a prosecutable offense under Article 7.

The comparison between racial apartheid in South Africa and gender apartheid in Afghanistan lies in the methodical, codified, and enforced segregation and subordination of a specific population group—in this case, women and girls. Both systems seek to erase a group's agency, autonomy, and participation in society. Both rely on ideology, fear, and state control to sustain their power. Just as the world ultimately took a stand against racial apartheid, the question today is whether a similar collective legal and moral consensus can emerge around gender-based apartheid.

Applicability to Gender-Based Discrimination in Afghanistan

Under Taliban rule since 2021, Afghanistan has become the only country in the world where it is illegal for girls to receive secondary education and where women are banned from working in most sectors, including NGOs, government, and healthcare. These policies are not isolated decrees—they form a coherent and systematic framework aimed at excluding women from public life and reconfiguring Afghan society along rigid patriarchal and theocratic lines.

The Taliban's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice enforces edicts that restrict women's clothing, mobility, employment, and presence in public spaces. Women are banned from gyms, beauty salons, universities, and traveling without a male guardian. Female journalists, judges, police officers, and NGO workers have been removed from their roles. Even humanitarian aid distribution has been restricted, with women barred from participating in aid delivery or being the primary recipients of assistance in some areas.

This comprehensive exclusion of women and girls from nearly all facets of public life closely mirrors the architecture of apartheid. It is not cultural practice—it is state policy. The Taliban enforces these rules through law enforcement, religious police, surveillance, intimidation, imprisonment, and even public punishment. Afghan women and girls today are not merely facing discrimination; they are enduring legalized segregation based on gender, making the framework of gender apartheid not just applicable but urgently necessary.

Furthermore, these actions violate multiple international commitments Afghanistan remains a party to, including CEDAW, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The Taliban, despite not being formally recognized as the legitimate government, exercises de facto control, making it subject to international legal scrutiny.

The use of the term “gender apartheid” serves not only as a powerful tool for advocacy, but potentially as a gateway to legal accountability. Recognizing the situation in Afghanistan as gender apartheid would allow the international community to trigger legal obligations, apply targeted sanctions, initiate international investigations, and advocate for global legal reform that includes gender apartheid within the category of crimes against humanity.

Case Study: Taliban Rule in Afghanistan

Historical Background of the Taliban's Rise

The Taliban, a radical Islamist movement, first rose to prominence in Afghanistan in the early 1990s following the withdrawal of Soviet forces and the collapse of the Soviet-backed Afghan government. The group quickly capitalized on the chaos and civil war that followed, taking control of Kabul in 1996 and ruling much of the country until the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, which came in response to the 9/11 attacks. During their first rule (1996–2001), the Taliban imposed a harsh interpretation of Sharia law, which included severe restrictions on women's rights, public executions, the banning of music, and destruction of cultural heritage sites like the Bamiyan Buddhas.

After being overthrown, the Taliban remained a potent insurgent force, gradually regaining strength over the next two decades. In August 2021, following the U.S. and NATO troop withdrawal, the Taliban rapidly captured key provincial capitals and re-entered Kabul without facing major resistance. The collapse of the Afghan National Government was sudden and total, leaving the Taliban as the de facto rulers of Afghanistan once again.

Despite initial promises of a more moderate rule, the Taliban quickly began reinstating the same extreme policies that had defined their 1996–2001 regime—particularly against women and girls.

Systematic Suppression of Women and Girls' Rights

Since returning to power, the Taliban have launched a coordinated and ideological campaign to erase women and girls from Afghan public life. While some decrees have been overt and highly publicized, others have taken the form of gradual administrative restrictions, implemented province by province and enforced through both official channels and local religious authorities.

What sets this repression apart from isolated instances of discrimination is its institutional nature. The Taliban have used state institutions—including ministries, law enforcement, religious police, and local councils—to systematically limit the rights and visibility of women and girls across education, employment, healthcare, mobility, and cultural life. Civil society organizations advocating for women's rights have been shut down, and vocal activists have been harassed, detained, or forced into exile.

The regime's goal is not merely control but exclusion—an attempt to rebuild Afghan society along a patriarchal theocratic framework in which women are confined to domestic roles and have no active voice in the country's political or civic future. This is what justifies the use of the term “gender apartheid.”

Impact on Education, Employment, Movement, and Public Life

Education:

Afghanistan has become the only country in the world where girls are banned from attending secondary and higher education. This ban affects over 1.1 million girls, leading to widespread trauma, forced early marriages, and a lost generation of potential professionals, leaders, and educators. Secret schools have emerged in defiance of the ban, but these operate at great risk to both teachers and students.

Employment:

Women have been barred from working in most government jobs, including in education, health, and civil services. Private sector and NGO employment has also been heavily curtailed. Women who were once journalists, entrepreneurs, academics, and aid workers have either gone into hiding, fled the country, or faced public punishment. The female unemployment rate has skyrocketed, and families reliant on dual incomes have fallen deeper into poverty.

Freedom of Movement:

Taliban decrees severely restrict women's ability to travel or appear in public without a male guardian. This limits their access to medical care, education, work, and even participation in humanitarian programs. In rural areas, enforcement is particularly brutal, with reports of beatings and detentions for violations of dress or mobility codes.

Public Life and Civil Society:

Women are virtually erased from media and political representation. There are no female judges, politicians, or senior civil servants. Women's voices have been silenced in public discourse, and protest movements have been violently suppressed. Female-led civil society, once one of Afghanistan's most vibrant sectors, has been dismantled. Art, music, fashion, and literature—once areas of subtle resistance—have been heavily censored or destroyed.

The Taliban's current governance constitutes a deliberate and systemic rollback of the rights of Afghan women and girls. Unlike previous authoritarian regimes that suppress political dissent, the Taliban's policies specifically target gender identity as the basis for exclusion, making the situation not just a matter of human rights violation, but potentially a crime against humanity under the emerging concept of gender apartheid.

This case study is central to the UNHRC's deliberations. Delegates must consider how international law, humanitarian intervention, and multilateral diplomacy can address a crisis where half a nation's population is legally and socially erased—and how global inaction might allow such ideologies to spread elsewhere.

Violation of International Human Rights Instruments

The systematic oppression of women and girls under Taliban rule constitutes a clear and ongoing violation of multiple international human rights instruments, many of which Afghanistan remains legally bound to as a state party. These instruments—developed under the framework of the United Nations—establish universal norms of dignity, equality, and freedom. The Taliban's policies not only contravene these norms but also represent a form of gender-based persecution that challenges the foundational ideals of international law and the global human rights regime.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

Adopted in 1979 and often referred to as the “international bill of rights for women,” CEDAW is a binding treaty that requires state parties to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in all spheres of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. Afghanistan ratified CEDAW in 2003 without reservations, making it legally obligated to uphold its provisions.

Violations under Taliban rule include:

- Article 10: Guarantees equal access to education. The Taliban's nationwide ban on girls' secondary and university education violates this directly.
- Article 11: Mandates equal employment opportunities. The Taliban's prohibition of women working in NGOs, government roles, media, and health sectors contradicts this principle.
- Article 15 & 16: Address equality before the law and within marriage and family relations. Under the Taliban, women lack legal protection, cannot access courts freely, and face forced or early marriages—many of which are coerced under economic and social pressure.

General Recommendation No. 19 of the CEDAW Committee explicitly recognizes gender-based violence as a form of discrimination. Public floggings, intimidation, and the systemic denial of rights amount to state-enabled gender-based violence.

The Taliban's conduct is in direct breach of the CEDAW's core obligation: to ensure the full development and advancement of women, so they can exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Though not a treaty, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is a foundational document of international law and widely recognized as customary international law. It outlines inalienable rights that every individual is entitled to, regardless of gender, nationality, religion, or any other status.

Relevant provisions violated by the Taliban include:

- Article 1: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” The Taliban’s doctrine of gender segregation and subordination directly undermines this universal premise.
- Article 2: Prohibits discrimination of any kind. The institutional exclusion of women from education, work, and healthcare constitutes clear discrimination.
- Article 19: Guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Women journalists, writers, and civil society members have been censored, harassed, and imprisoned.
- Article 23 & 26: Establish the right to work and the right to education—both denied to Afghan women and girls.
- Article 3 & 5: Ensure the right to liberty and freedom from degrading treatment. Women in Afghanistan today live under constant surveillance, forced dependency, and the threat of violence for acts as simple as walking without a male guardian.

The Taliban’s policies represent a complete dismantling of the UDHR’s vision, reducing women and girls to second-class citizens without dignity, choice, or voice.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Afghanistan ratified the ICCPR in 1983, making its provisions legally binding. The ICCPR protects civil liberties and political rights, many of which are being systematically denied to women under Taliban rule.

Violations include:

- Article 2(1): Requires equal enjoyment of all rights without distinction, including based on gender. The Taliban’s framework is entirely gender-discriminatory.
- Article 3: Ensures the equal right of men and women to enjoy all civil and political rights. Women cannot vote, run for office, or serve in any form of public governance.
- Article 18 & 19: Protect freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and expression. Women’s rights activists, teachers, and even social media users face arbitrary detention or worse for expressing dissent.
- Article 21 & 22: Provide for freedom of assembly and association. Women’s protests have been violently dispersed, and civil society groups dissolved.
- Article 26: Asserts that all persons are equal before the law and entitled to its protection. Under Taliban courts, women are neither equally represented nor equally protected.

The ICCPR was created to protect individuals from oppressive governments. Under Taliban rule, women are not just denied these rights—they are treated as property, not citizens.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

The ICESCR, ratified by Afghanistan in 1983, ensures that all people have the right to education, work, health, and an adequate standard of living—without discrimination. Under Taliban rule, these economic and social rights have been aggressively curtailed for women and girls.

Violations include:

- Article 6 & 7: Right to work and fair labor conditions. Women are banned from nearly all professional sectors, including humanitarian aid.
- Article 12: Right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Female patients face barriers to medical access due to restrictions on mobility and the banning of female healthcare workers in many provinces.
- Article 13: Right to education. Girls beyond grade six are categorically barred from formal education; informal learning is punished.
- Article 10: Protection of family and the rights of mothers. Women face early and forced marriages, without consent, in violation of this clause.

As a direct result of these policies, female literacy rates, income levels, life expectancy, and mental health outcomes have drastically worsened, with entire communities collapsing under gender-segregated governance.

The Taliban's ongoing gender-based oppression is not simply a national issue—it is a clear breach of the international legal order. It reflects a deliberate campaign to strip women and girls of rights guaranteed to them under global treaties that Afghanistan, as a state party, is obligated to uphold.

Recognizing these violations is essential, but not sufficient. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) must now explore how to move beyond condemnation toward enforceable accountability mechanisms—including international investigations, sanctions, universal jurisdiction claims, and possible expansion of international legal definitions to include gender apartheid as a crime against humanity.

Current Humanitarian and Social Impacts

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan today is not only defined by poverty, famine, and economic collapse—it is uniquely compounded by a gendered dimension of suffering that disproportionately affects women and girls. Under Taliban rule, the systemic repression of women is not simply a political policy—it is a social engineering project that has triggered devastating consequences for half the country's population. These consequences manifest not only in visible restrictions but in widespread psychological trauma, rising violence, and the disintegration of social safety nets for women.

Psychological Effects on Afghan Women and Girls

For Afghan women and girls, the Taliban's policies have created an environment of constant fear, humiliation, and hopelessness. The sudden erasure of rights—education, employment, freedom of movement—has led to widespread cases of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Mental health professionals, including those formerly working in Afghanistan, have described the emotional toll as equivalent to living under siege.

Young girls, once hopeful about becoming doctors, teachers, or artists, now face a future confined to the walls of their homes, their ambitions forcibly abandoned. The abrupt school closures have caused widespread trauma in children and adolescents, with long-term developmental consequences. Isolation, lack of routine, and social disengagement are stunting the intellectual and emotional growth of an entire generation of Afghan girls.

Reports from UNICEF and Human Rights Watch indicate that even in provinces where some underground education programs exist, the psychological burden of secrecy, fear of arrest, and constant surveillance leaves both students and teachers in a state of emotional exhaustion. Afghan women are not only grieving their present; they are mourning the death of a future they fought decades to build.

Gender-Based Violence and Forced Marriages

With legal protections dismantled and women's mobility restricted, gender-based violence (GBV) has sharply increased under Taliban governance. Reports indicate that many Afghan women, especially widows and young girls, have been subjected to forced and early marriages—sometimes to Taliban fighters as a form of loyalty reward. The UN and multiple NGOs have documented cases where families, facing poverty and hunger, feel coerced into “offering” daughters for marriage in exchange for financial security or protection from retaliation.

There is no legal recourse for survivors. The former legal apparatus that included female judges, lawyers, and family courts has been dismantled. Victims are instead subjected to Taliban religious courts, where their testimony holds little value and justice is shaped

by patriarchal ideology rather than law. Domestic violence cases go largely unreported due to fear of social stigma and the total absence of institutional support.

Women who protest or resist Taliban decrees—such as the right to education or dress codes—are often met with arbitrary detention, beatings, and public humiliation. The space for resistance is narrowing, and those who speak up frequently pay a personal cost far beyond arrest—many simply disappear.

Collapse of Female-Led Civil Society

Prior to August 2021, Afghanistan had one of the most vibrant women-led civil society movements in the region. Women founded and led organizations focused on education, healthcare, human rights, media, arts, and economic empowerment. Many served in Parliament, practiced law, ran businesses, or anchored national news broadcasts. This infrastructure did not emerge overnight—it was built through years of tireless effort and international partnership.

In less than two years, this progress has been nearly erased. The Taliban have shut down hundreds of women-run NGOs, forcibly evicted female journalists, and expelled women from public sector positions. Civic activism is now labeled “Western propaganda,” and many prominent women leaders have fled the country or live in hiding.

What remains is an atmosphere of total silence. With no access to legal, political, or media platforms, Afghan women have been stripped not only of their rights—but also their voice. The collapse of this civil society ecosystem has left women with no organized means of collective resistance, and the international community has struggled to fill this vacuum with sustainable support mechanisms.

Women’s Exclusion from Aid Distribution and Healthcare

Afghanistan is in the midst of one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world, with over 28 million people—more than two-thirds of the population—requiring urgent aid. But women’s ability to access and distribute humanitarian aid has been severely undermined by Taliban restrictions.

In December 2022, the Taliban banned women from working with local and international NGOs, including aid delivery roles. This has had catastrophic consequences, particularly for female-headed households and communities where cultural norms prohibit men from interacting with unrelated women. In such areas, the ban effectively blocks aid altogether for women and children, leading to hunger, untreated illness, and preventable deaths.

Similarly, restrictions on mobility mean that many women cannot travel to hospitals or clinics without a male escort. In some provinces, the Taliban have also banned women from working in healthcare, resulting in the closure of gynecology and maternity

services. As a result, maternal mortality has surged, and Afghan women face growing barriers to essential care, from childbirth to chronic disease treatment.

These policies have weaponized humanitarian aid and public health systems against women—transforming even the delivery of food or medicine into a battlefield of gender-based control.

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan today cannot be viewed in gender-neutral terms. Women and girls are not merely affected by the crisis—they are uniquely targeted by it. The Taliban's policies have led to a multidimensional human rights catastrophe: psychological despair, physical violence, institutional erasure, and systematic exclusion from survival systems like education and healthcare.

As the United Nations Human Rights Council, it is imperative to recognize that the crisis facing Afghan women is not a passive consequence of conflict—it is the active outcome of a political ideology that seeks to eliminate women's agency in every sphere of life. Any response that fails to center gender in humanitarian action will be incomplete, ineffective, and ethically insufficient.

Past International Responses and Multilateral Actions

The return of the Taliban to power in August 2021 triggered swift international condemnation, particularly for their backsliding on women's and girls' rights. Over the past three years, various UN bodies, regional alliances, and civil society networks have issued statements, passed resolutions, and attempted to initiate humanitarian and diplomatic responses. However, these efforts have often been fragmented, reactive, and constrained by geopolitical limitations, with limited success in reversing or halting the Taliban's gender apartheid policies.

This section outlines key international and multilateral efforts taken to address the gender crisis in Afghanistan.

UN Resolutions and Statements on Afghanistan

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have adopted a number of resolutions related to the situation in Afghanistan, although few have directly used the language of "gender apartheid" or included enforcement mechanisms.

UNGA Resolution 76/231 (December 2021): Called on the Taliban to respect the human rights of all Afghans, especially women and girls, and to ensure inclusive governance. The resolution expressed "deep concern" over the erosion of women's rights, but was non-binding.

UNSC Resolution 2593 (August 2021): Passed shortly after the Taliban's takeover, this resolution demanded that Afghan territory not be used to harbor terrorists and emphasized the importance of upholding human rights, particularly for women, children, and minorities. However, it lacked follow-through on enforcement or targeted accountability.

Annual Resolutions at the Human Rights Council (2022–2024): The UNHRC has passed resolutions mandating continued reporting on Afghanistan's human rights situation, including a special focus on gender rights. While these resolutions have helped maintain visibility on the issue, they have not resulted in decisive action or binding obligations for the Taliban or member states.

Despite repeated condemnations and expressions of concern, the absence of a clear legal mechanism to compel Taliban compliance has left many UN resolutions symbolic in effect.

Actions by UN Women, OHCHR, and the Special Rapporteur

Several UN entities have taken an active role in documenting and advocating against the Taliban's gender-based repression:

UN Women: The agency has consistently reported on the evolving gender crisis, referring to Afghanistan as the “most repressive country in the world for women and girls.” In 2022 and 2023, UN Women launched gender-responsive aid programs and called for the recognition of gender apartheid as a legal framework under international law.

OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights): OHCHR has produced a series of high-impact reports and briefings detailing the human rights abuses in Afghanistan. In July 2023, OHCHR described the Taliban's actions as a form of “institutionalized, systematic discrimination”, warning of the long-term consequences for Afghan society and global human rights norms.

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan: Appointed by the UNHRC in 2021, Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett has published multiple reports identifying specific violations, including bans on education, restrictions on employment, arbitrary arrests of protestors, and denial of access to justice. He has openly called for international recognition of the situation as “gender apartheid.”

Despite these efforts, most UN agencies remain dependent on member state consensus and host country cooperation, limiting their access and impact in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

Regional and NGO-Led Initiatives

In the absence of direct UN enforcement, a number of regional actors and NGOs have attempted to support Afghan women through parallel and grassroots mechanisms:

Qatar, Turkey, and Uzbekistan have hosted diplomatic forums attempting to bring Taliban officials into dialogue with international stakeholders, sometimes with the inclusion of women's rights on the agenda. However, these efforts have yielded few policy concessions.

Pakistan and Iran, while hosting large numbers of Afghan refugees, have not consistently advocated for women's rights, and in some cases have repatriated female asylum seekers.

Civil society coalitions and diaspora groups, such as Women's Forum on Afghanistan, Afghan Women's Network, and Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), have continued to operate underground schools, emergency shelters, and digital education platforms for girls. They also conduct global advocacy campaigns demanding accountability.

International NGOs like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, CARE, Save the Children, and Norwegian Refugee Council have released detailed documentation of abuses and supported advocacy efforts to bring Afghan women's issues to the forefront of global diplomatic conversations.

Nonetheless, these efforts are often undermined by Taliban restrictions, lack of funding, and limited access to remote or rural areas.

Taliban's Response to International Pressure

The Taliban leadership has shown resilience and increasing defiance in the face of international criticism. While initially signaling openness to engagement and moderation, they have progressively ignored calls for reform. Their official response strategy has included:

Framing women's rights as a Western imposition, thereby portraying UN demands as "cultural imperialism."

Accusing the international community of "politicizing" humanitarian aid and infringing on Afghanistan's "sovereignty and Islamic values."

Issuing ambiguous or misleading statements claiming that restrictions are "temporary" or "under review," while continuing to expand and enforce repressive policies.

Restricting access to UN missions and NGOs that criticize or document human rights abuses.

In effect, the Taliban have adopted a public diplomacy strategy of strategic ambiguity—signaling possible reforms to appease donors while simultaneously entrenching their fundamentalist governance model. This duality has allowed them to retain a level of international engagement without actually altering their policies.

The global response to the gender crisis in Afghanistan has thus far been strong in rhetoric but weak in enforcement. UN agencies, NGOs, and regional actors have kept the issue alive through reports, resolutions, and advocacy—but without unified political will or binding accountability mechanisms, the Taliban remains largely unchallenged in its pursuit of gender apartheid.

The Human Rights Council must now explore stronger multilateral frameworks—whether legal, diplomatic, or humanitarian—to shift from condemnation to action. This includes supporting recognition of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity, pursuing sanctions or legal actions under universal jurisdiction, and empowering Afghan women-led movements both inside and outside the country.

Bloc Positions

As the international community grapples with the Taliban's repressive gender policies, divergent bloc positions have emerged. These reflect varying degrees of political will, ideological orientation, and regional sensitivities. Delegates must be familiar with these perspectives to effectively negotiate, build coalitions, and craft inclusive resolutions that resonate across divides.

Islamic and Regional Neighbors: Balancing Ideology and Diplomacy

Islamic and neighboring countries maintain a delicate balance between cultural-religious solidarity, strategic interests, and domestic politics. Pakistan, with its historical ties to the Taliban, refrains from harsh criticism, opting instead for quiet diplomacy. Its position is shaped by cross-border ethnic ties, security calculations, and internal religious politics. While it may support the restoration of humanitarian access or basic rights in principle, it will resist language that directly confronts the Taliban or labels their governance as "gender apartheid."

Iran's stance is shaped by both sectarian rivalry and refugee pressures. Though historically opposed to the Sunni Taliban, Iran has chosen a cautious, pragmatic engagement, occasionally criticizing women's exclusion but stopping short of endorsing punitive multilateral actions. Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE have largely avoided direct condemnation, preferring to engage through backchannels. They emphasize Islamic values of compassion and education, offering aid and occasionally hosting negotiations. However, they rarely support overtly rights-based interventions that might be seen as Western-imposed or destabilizing.

More moderate Muslim-majority nations, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, have taken more progressive positions, citing Islamic teachings that uphold gender dignity and educational access. These countries may serve as diplomatic bridges, pushing for internal reform within an Islamic framework while rejecting harsh rhetoric or legalistic condemnation.

Western Democracies: Advocating Accountability and Legal Recognition

Western nations have been the most forceful in their denunciation of the Taliban's gender policies. The European Union and its member states, particularly Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden, have pushed for stronger accountability measures—including recognizing gender apartheid as a crime under international law. These nations view the Taliban's decrees as violations not just of moral values but of binding international conventions such as CEDAW and the ICCPR.

The United States, while constrained by the political legacy of its 2021 withdrawal, continues to exert diplomatic pressure through sanctions, public statements, and support for Afghan women-led initiatives in exile. Canada has emerged as a vocal advocate for the legal codification of gender apartheid, aligning with its feminist foreign policy

stance. Similarly, the United Kingdom and Australia have spoken out in favor of humanitarian access and have championed the inclusion of Afghan women in all future peace dialogues.

Western democracies are expected to lead the charge in the Human Rights Council to draft resolutions that do not shy away from naming and shaming the Taliban regime, demanding tangible international responses and legal accountability mechanisms.

South and Central Asia: Security-Driven Engagement and Cautious Advocacy

South and Central Asian countries exhibit a blend of security-driven pragmatism and humanitarian concern. India, deeply wary of Taliban-aligned extremism and its implications for Kashmir and domestic radicalization, has maintained a critical stance toward the Taliban while simultaneously extending humanitarian aid. However, India typically avoids provocative language in multilateral forums and may prefer terms like “gender repression” over “gender apartheid.”

Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, while supportive of universal education and gender rights, rarely lead in rights diplomacy. They may favor non-confrontational approaches that highlight humanitarian access and refugee protection. In Central Asia, countries such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan share borders and security concerns with Afghanistan. They often cooperate with the Taliban to ensure cross-border stability and counter-extremism, making them unlikely to support strongly worded resolutions that risk antagonizing the regime. Instead, their focus may lie in maintaining border security and safeguarding aid channels without engaging deeply in legal or ideological confrontations.

Humanitarian and Rights-Focused States: Voices of Principle

Countries with strong traditions of human rights diplomacy and feminist foreign policy, such as the Nordic nations (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark), New Zealand, Ireland, and Switzerland, are expected to champion a principled stance against the Taliban’s gender repression. These countries have historically supported women’s rights at the forefront of their multilateral engagements and are likely to advocate for robust measures—including formal recognition of the Taliban’s policies as systemic gender apartheid.

Norway and Sweden have also played key roles in backchannel negotiations with Afghan civil society and may push for the inclusion of Afghan women in any future multilateral framework. Switzerland, with its neutrality and commitment to the Geneva Conventions, may adopt a mediating role but will insist on language consistent with international human rights law.

These countries may also push for greater involvement of UN Special Rapporteurs, investigative mandates, and independent fact-finding missions, aiming to keep the issue

of Afghan women's rights on the international agenda long after media coverage has faded.

While there is a broad recognition of the crisis faced by Afghan women and girls, the routes toward resolution diverge significantly. For some states, religious or geopolitical considerations limit the scope of public condemnation. For others, especially in the Global North, this agenda represents a red line—a moral imperative that demands a legal, enforceable international response.

For delegates, the challenge lies in reconciling these perspectives to craft balanced yet effective resolutions. Can language be framed to mobilize moderate Islamic states without alienating progressive actors? Can humanitarian goals be achieved without derailing regional diplomacy? Can legal accountability be pursued without isolating blocs whose cooperation is vital for implementation?

Your ability to understand these positions and build diplomatic bridges across them will determine whether this committee can deliver more than just words—whether it can offer a meaningful path forward for the women and girls of Afghanistan.

QUESTIONS FOR DELIBERATION

1. To what extent does the systematic exclusion of women and girls from public life in Afghanistan constitute a violation of international human rights instruments such as CEDAW, the ICCPR, and the UDHR?
2. Can the Taliban's treatment of women and girls be legally classified as "gender apartheid" under international law, and if so, what are the implications for international accountability?
3. How can the UNHRC and other international mechanisms operationalize the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) when a non-state actor is the primary violator of human rights?
4. What diplomatic, economic, or legal measures can the international community adopt to pressure the Taliban regime while safeguarding the already vulnerable Afghan population?
5. What role can regional organizations (e.g., SAARC, OIC) and neighboring countries play in protecting the rights of Afghan women and girls, especially through asylum, education access, and humanitarian relief?
6. How can the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan be better equipped and supported to investigate and report on gender-based abuses under Taliban rule?
7. What safeguards can be implemented to ensure that humanitarian aid does not indirectly legitimize or fund institutions that are perpetuating gender-based oppression?
8. How can Afghan civil society actors, particularly women-led organizations in exile or underground, be meaningfully included in global policy responses and multilateral dialogues?
9. What mechanisms can the UNHRC propose to protect the right to education, mobility, healthcare, and employment for Afghan girls and women in defiance of Taliban-imposed restrictions?
10. Should the international community explore the recognition of gender persecution as grounds for refugee status under international refugee law in the case of Afghan women and girls fleeing Taliban policies?

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