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HRD+ Statement:

Increasing Restrictions on Art and Artists in Afghanistan

The military takeover by the Taliban in August 2021 marked the beginning of a tragedy for the country's cultural and artistic community. The de facto administration has imposed numerous threats and restrictions, creating harsh living conditions through inhumane treatment, beatings, and insults. Arts such as music, sculpture, dance, theater, cinema, and painting have been banned, leading to a soulless society. Some artists have been killed, and many have been tortured and publicly humiliated. Recently, De facto authorities cut off the hand of an artist for playing the guitar and subjected him to severe physical and psychological torture, exemplifying the immense suffering inflicted on the country's culture.

Afghanistan's cultural identity is globally recognized, having offered some of the world's best cultural figures. Prestigious museums house valuable Afghan artworks. Music, traditional dances, sculpture, painting, and singing have deep historical roots. However, the de facto administration, driven by narrow-minded and dogmatic religious-political ideology, aims to eradicate cultural artifacts and impose extensive restrictions on cultural figures.

Afghanistan's multicultural identity, composed of historical subcultures, value-based traditions, and languages, is increasingly under threat. De facto authorities have banned Persian (Dari) terms, one of the world's oldest languages, and removed portraits and works of great historical figures from major galleries. These actions have severely damaged the spiritual essence of the country.

Koocheh Kharaabat, once the origin of music, celebrations, and praises, is now silent. Local cultures and traditional music in every province are being censored and replaced by De facto authorities' oppressive regime. Buildings and places dedicated to cinema, theater, music performances, traditional dances, and galleries have been attacked, and their equipment destroyed. National and international fine arts departments have been removed from the education system, and the Music School and the Afghanistan Institute of Music have been closed. Civil institutions supporting culture in Afghanistan are no longer allowed to operate.

De facto authorities consider art contrary to their ideological doctrine, interpreting artistic activities as anti-religious and heretical. This approach has inflicted severe damage on the status of culture, art, and artists in the country, putting them in an unfavorable environment with serious security threats. This negative attitude has also deeply affected their families,

causing psychological depression.

Most artists have left the country and are in a painful state of displacement in neighboring countries. Reports from cultural organizations emphasize that many Afghan artists suffer from depression and mental health issues. For artists, art is a dignified job and means of providing for their families, but under the current regime, they face severe economic hardship and poverty.

Human Rights Defenders Plus (HRD+) expresses deep concern over the cultural setbacks in Afghanistan and calls on the international community and cultural organizations to pay serious attention to the dire situation. HRD+ urgently requests UNESCO to address cultural rights and the cultural and artistic disaster in Afghanistan and hold the de facto Taliban administration accountable.

HRD+ calls on states, especially UN Security Council and Human Rights Council member states, to activate cultural diplomacy to address the cultural disaster in Afghanistan and make it a priority in international interactions with the country.

HRD+ urgently requests the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan to investigate cultural and artistic violations thoroughly and prepare a comprehensive report through a dynamic dialogue with artists and cultural rights activists, presenting serious recommendations to the international community.

HRD+ respectfully asks all Special Envoys of the States on Afghanistan to consider the cultural disaster seriously and implement effective programs to improve the situation.

HRD+ invites all civil society stakeholders, freedom of expression advocates, and media to not remain silent in the face of this disaster and to organize international advocacy programs.

Every Afghan citizen, both inside and outside the country, should not remain indifferent to our common spiritual values. HRD+ stands with the people of Afghanistan and will strive to preserve the cultural rights of our people as a key strategic principle.

Human Rights Defenders Plus (HRD+)