



2nd CONFERENCE ON
THE PERSPECTIVES OF
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
IN AFGHANISTAN

BERLIN, GERMANY 2024

Conference Paper



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Prospects of HRDs in Afghanistan

**2nd Round of the Strategic Dialogue of Afghan HRDs
Berlin, Germany**

December 10–11, 2024

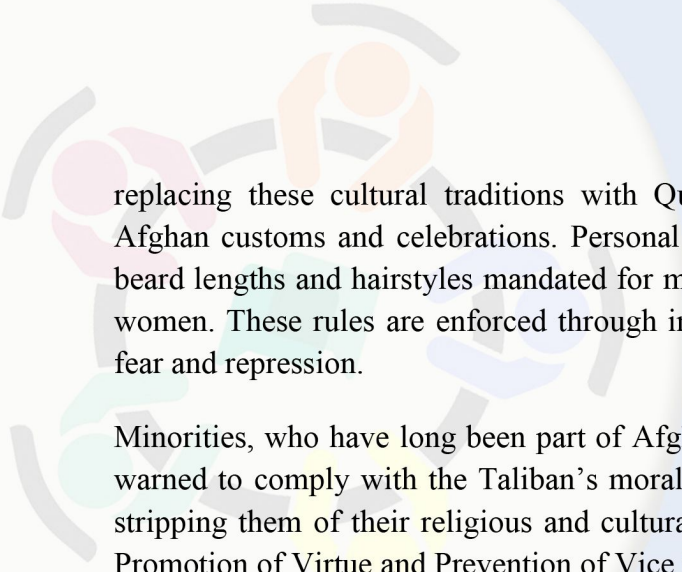
The Taliban's re-control of Afghanistan in mid-August 2021 marked a significant regression, especially in the area of human rights, plunging the country into a period of darkness and uncertainty. On 7th of September 2021, the Taliban began establishing an all-male caretaker cabinet, with all key positions occupied by Taliban affiliates. Many of these individuals are on the UN Security Council's and or individual Member States' sanctions lists, raising serious concerns about their legitimacy and commitment to human rights. To date, women have been entirely excluded from the Taliban's decision-making establishments, a stark reminder of the systemic gender discrimination that has come to define their rule.

Shortly after seizure of the power, the Taliban suspended the 2004 Constitution and dissolved all independent oversight mechanisms and institutions. This includes, among other things, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), both parliament houses, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and the Electoral Commissions. These actions effectively erased two decades of progress in building democratic governance and safeguarding human rights.

The Taliban further dismantled the existing legal frameworks, including the suspension of the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association, an institution that once played a critical role in ensuring access to justice and fair trials. Other laws suspended include the Mass Media Law, the Political Parties Law, the Election Law, and the Law on Peaceful Strikes and Demonstrations. These measures have systematically stripped Afghan citizens of their rights to freedom of expression, political participation, and peaceful assembly.

Instead, the Taliban introduced a series of vague and oppressive written decrees and verbal directives aimed at regulating nearly every aspect of daily life. These directives, numbering around two hundred, have disproportionately targeted women and girls, severely restricting their rights to education, movement, healthcare, and employment. Women and girls from ethnic and religious minorities face a double layer of discrimination, as they are subjected to both gender-based and identity-related oppression. The Taliban's policies have effectively erased women from public life, reversing decades of progress toward gender equality.

Additionally, the Taliban imposed a series of harsh and restrictive moral codes to control and restrict personal behaviour and cultural practices. Men are forced to attend congregational prayers, with penalties for non-compliance. The Taliban have banned music and dance at weddings,




replacing these cultural traditions with Quranic recitations, effectively erasing centuries-old Afghan customs and celebrations. Personal appearance is also heavily regulated, with specific beard lengths and hairstyles mandated for men, and strict dress codes imposed on both men and women. These rules are enforced through intimidation and violence, creating an atmosphere of fear and repression.

Minorities, who have long been part of Afghanistan's diverse social fabric, have reported being warned to comply with the Taliban's moral code, further marginalizing these communities and stripping them of their religious and cultural identities. In 2023, the Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice intensified its efforts to enforce these moral codes by deploying moral policing across all 34 provinces. These teams, often armed and operating with impunity, monitor public behavior, enforce compliance, and carry punishments for perceived violations, as they represent a blatant abuse of individual freedoms and human dignity. The impact of these policies is felt most acutely by women, religious minorities, and those who dare to resist the regime's oppressive norms.

Against this backdrop, the **Second Strategic Dialogue of Afghan Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Exile, held in Berlin on December 10–11, 2024**, brought together 64 in-person participants and 43 online attendees, including Afghan HRDs, international stakeholders, and advocacy experts. The conference, themed "*Prospects of HRDs in Afghanistan: Accountability and Representation*," aimed to assess the deteriorating human rights conditions, foster collaboration among activists, and develop actionable strategies to address repression under Taliban rule.

The conference featured a series of thematic panels, interactive dialogues, and working group sessions. Panel discussions focused on Afghanistan's obligations to international accountability mechanisms, strategies for justice and representation, and the transformative role of art and resilience in fostering awareness. The closing panel examined the representation of Afghanistan on the global stage, emphasizing the need for sustained international engagement. Interactive dialogues brought together various stakeholders to discuss the roles and challenges of Afghan HRDs in exile, fostering collaborative problem-solving. Working group sessions delved into specific themes, such as international advocacy and accountability mechanisms, strategies for HRDs in exile, coordination with HRDs inside Afghanistan, and collaboration with media and human rights organizations. A touching candle-lighting ceremony honoured the memory of Afghan HRDs who lost their lives defending human rights, symbolizing resilience and the need for sustained advocacy.

Despite these efforts, Afghan HRDs face immense challenges. The lack of formal diplomatic representation for Afghanistan limits engagement with international accountability mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ).



Inconsistent global support and weak engagement with Islamic countries further hinder advocacy efforts.

Within Afghanistan, civil society organizations and HRDs grapple with internal fragmentation, mistrust, and inequitable resource distribution. Those operating inside the country face severe risks, including harassment and restricted civic spaces, while exiled HRDs struggle with legal, social, and cultural isolation. We believe human rights values and norms are in line with Afghan cultural and religious norms, in contrast, extremist laws such as interference in schooling, privacy or religious beliefs are in conflict with our norms.

The politicization of human rights narratives and Taliban propaganda further undermine trust and credibility. Limited documentation of violations, weak collaboration between domestic and international organizations, and insufficient media engagement compound these challenges. HRDs and their families face life-threatening conditions, targeted harassment, and intimidation, creating a chilling effect on advocacy efforts. Financial instability, political disillusionment, and restricted civic spaces have also led to a decline in volunteerism and active participation, weakening the resilience and operational capacity of advocacy organisations.

To address these challenges, the conference participants proposed a series of actionable recommendations. As following:

To International Community:

- Establish a comprehensive accountability mechanism through the UN Human Rights Council to monitor, investigate, collect, preserve, and analyse evidence of human rights violations and crimes under international law.
- Support ongoing investigations by the International Criminal Court (ICC) into potential crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Afghanistan.
- Form technical committees to follow up on international commitments and prioritize Afghanistan's human rights issues.
- Collaborate with committed UN member states and influential Islamic countries to foster participation in justice and accountability mechanisms.
- Engage international stakeholders through consistent lobbying and advocacy to maintain pressure on the Taliban.
- Advocate for international protection measures and increased pressure on the Taliban to cease harassment of HRDs.
- Support initiatives for an inclusive political system that ensures all Afghan citizens, including minorities and women, have equal opportunities to participate and flourish.

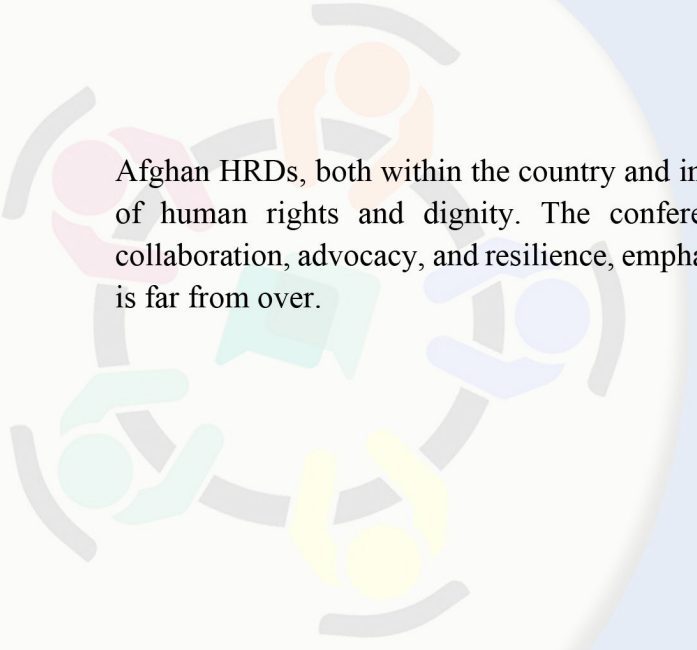
To Human Rights Organisations:

- Enhance Afghanistan-focused programmes due to the systematic opposition and regression in the human rights situation in the country.
- Increase funding for Afghan-led civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and advocacy groups to document abuses, provide aid, and raise awareness internationally.
- Support regional partnerships for safe haven initiatives to protect the rights of minorities in Afghanistan.
- Facilitate regular coordination among civil society organizations through centralized forums and mentorship programs.
- Provide secure communication tools, logistical support, and safe havens for in-country HRDs.
- Address legal and social challenges faced by exiled HRDs through legal aid programs and cultural adaptation support.
- Train HRDs in secure and ethical documentation practices to improve evidence collection.
- Strengthen collaboration between domestic and international organizations through structured working groups and joint campaigns.
- Rebuild trust and collaboration among HRDs through transparent and inclusive approaches.
- Reduce dependency on external funding by developing local funding streams and sustainability plans.
- Provide psychosocial and financial support for HRDs and their families to sustain their resilience and advocacy efforts.
- Introduce capacity-building initiatives and financial incentives to encourage civic participation.
- Establish alternative virtual civic spaces to circumvent Taliban restrictions and foster engagement.

To Media and Advocacy Groups:

- Counter Taliban propaganda with coordinated media campaigns and factual reporting.
- Establish media relations committees to train journalists and ensure accurate reporting of human rights violations.
- Provide HRDs with comprehensive digital security training and access to encrypted communication tools.
- Align human rights narratives with Afghan cultural and religious values to ensure credibility and acceptance.
- Foster dialogue with local religious scholars to promote understanding of human rights

The Second Strategic Dialogue of Afghan HRDs in Exile underscored the urgent need for collective action to address the human rights crisis in Afghanistan. The resilience and courage of



Afghan HRDs, both within the country and in exile, serve as a beacon of hope for the restoration of human rights and dignity. The conference concluded with a renewed commitment to collaboration, advocacy, and resilience, emphasizing that the fight for human rights in Afghanistan is far from over.

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