

Afghanistan: Prison for Critics and Silence of the Media
Statement by Human Rights Defenders Plus (HRD+)

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The human rights situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating everyday due to the ruling political regime. The Taliban de facto administration has increasingly restricted civil liberties, transforming the society into a prison for dissenting voices and critics.

The Taliban intelligence agency has recently intensified its persecution and arrest of critical religious figures. Qari Sirajuddin and Mawlawi Abdul Qader Qanet in Kabul and Mawlawi Bashir Ahmad Hanafi in Helmand have been detained. According to reports, these religious scholars, critical of the Taliban, remain imprisoned by this group.

The Taliban Ministry of Information and Culture continuously targets the media, escalating restrictions further. Political and economic programs have been banned, and the publication of images of living beings is now prohibited in at least **17** provinces, encompassing approximately 50% of Afghanistan's territory. Numerous journalists have been threatened, and based on our information and documentation, currently **16** journalists and media workers remain imprisoned. Compared to last year, the situation for journalists has significantly worsened, with increasing numbers being arrested and jailed.

Taliban intelligence agencies and religious police have drastically limited the role of civil society organizations, unjustifiably revoking their permission to operate. Human rights activists and defenders of women's rights constantly face threats and humiliation, with women's roles essentially eliminated from society. Only a limited number of women, selected solely based on the Taliban's needs, remain employed in specific offices. Discrimination against various social groups has peaked, leaving ethnic communities in severe insecurity.

Widespread unemployment and growing poverty have plunged the society into economic crisis and misery. Poverty, lack of social security, and extensive human rights violations have forced many citizens to leave the country, despite extremely challenging migration conditions. At the same time, Iran and Pakistan forcibly return tens of thousands of migrants back to Afghanistan, exacerbating food prices, housing shortages, and environmental strain in major Afghan cities.

Amid these grave difficulties, the Taliban leadership in Kandahar is attempting to fundamentally undermine Afghanistan's state institutions. Instead of using official state resources and legal norms for political and structural decisions, the Taliban leadership relies on religious schools and clerics who share their ideological orientation. Such actions intensify religious extremism and discrimination, severely damaging Afghanistan's political system and human rights situation.

Human Rights Defenders Plus (HRD+) expresses profound concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan. We believe this situation clearly represents religious authoritarianism, achieved through the abuse of religion. We specifically emphasize the following points:

The ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, as well as complex political dynamics in the Middle East, especially Iran, have merged Afghanistan's human rights crisis from the international agenda. We urge the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, the European Union, and significant global conferences, to urgently place Afghanistan back onto their agendas and pay close attention to human rights values.

Some neighbouring countries and Persian Gulf states are moving towards normalizing relations with the Taliban's de facto administration. This trend overlooks crucial human rights conventions, among the most fundamental documents of international law. We strongly call upon these governments to establish respect for human rights in Afghanistan as an essential precondition in their diplomatic agendas.

We urge the UN Human Rights Council to establish a robust monitoring and accountability mechanism addressing human rights violations in Afghanistan during the upcoming session (June–July 2025), empowering it with adequate resources to effectively support victims. All human rights violations must be documented, perpetrators identified, and cases prosecuted by international courts such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

We call on national and international media, civil society and academic institutions, human rights activists, and women's rights defenders to intensify their efforts to advocate and support human rights in Afghanistan.

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