



Toward Justice for Afghanistan

60th Session Human Rights Council

Afghanistan – News Letter 08 September – 08 October 2025

Introduction:

Let us once again raise our voices for justice and accountability for the people of Afghanistan—especially women, girls, minorities, and marginalized communities—who continue to face systemic persecution under Taliban rule.

From 8 September to 8 October 2025, the 60th Session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC60) convened in Geneva, bringing together states, experts, NGOs, and civil society to address Afghanistan’s worsening human rights crisis. Fundamental freedoms remain under attack, with women, girls, and minorities most affected.

During the session, CSHRN, HRD+, OMCT, ADDO, and partners engaged in high-level dialogues and interactive discussions to amplify the voices of survivors, women leaders, and minority groups—urging accountability, justice, and international protection.

The OHCHR report (A/HRC/60/231)¹ confirmed the ongoing deterioration, highlighting gender persecution, bans on girls’ education, discriminatory laws, and the suppression of free expression and minority rights.

¹ https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc6023-situation-human-rights-afghanistan-report-office-united-nations?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Highlights on Afghanistan:

New Data on Torture and Detention in Afghanistan:

Torture and arbitrary detention remain long-standing and systemic issues in Afghanistan, affecting women, LGBTQ+ individuals, ethnic and religious minorities, and human rights defenders.

Recent research², presented at the side event jointly organized by ADDO, HRD+, CSHRN and OMCT highlighted new insights into detention conditions, risk areas, and gaps in accountability under current governance. The findings draw on the Global Torture Index, which now includes Afghanistan as its 27th country.

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (60th SESSION)
HYBRID - SIDE-EVENT:
New Data on Torture and Detention in Afghanistan
Geneva, Switzerland, UN Human Rights Council
08 September 2025 | 12:00 - 13:00 (CET) | Room VII

Speakers:
Mary Lawlor
UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders
Abdullah Ahmadi
Executive Director, ADDO and Steering Committee member of HRD+
Artemis Akbary
Afghan LGBT+ Organization - ALO
Meetra Qutb
Human Rights Activist/Researcher

Moderator:
Gerald Staberock
Secretary-General, OMCT

Organizer: with partnership of:
Co-Sponsors:

Key Discussion

- **Detention Conditions:**
 - Afghanistan has ordinary prisons and special security facilities, with restricted access for monitoring bodies.
 - Overcrowding is severe, reaching nearly 180% of capacity.
 - Torture practices documented include physical abuse, electric shocks, sexual violence, and humiliation.
- **Vulnerable Populations:**
 - Women face severe restrictions on movement, education, work, and freedom of expression.

² <https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index?country=afghanistan>

- LGBTQ+ individuals are systematically persecuted, often in secrecy due to fear of social stigma.
- Ethnic and religious minorities remain highly vulnerable to attacks with little protection.
- **Civic Space & Right to Defend:**
 - Human rights defenders face intimidation, arbitrary detention, and barriers to legal representation.
 - Media and civil society face shutdowns and censorship, limiting oversight and documentation of abuses.
- **Risk Assessment:**
 - Afghanistan ranks as “very high risk” across key pillars: political commitment, detention conditions, victims’ rights, and civic space.
 - Lack of transparency and independent oversight exacerbates impunity for perpetrators.



Recommendations

- **Independent Accountability Mechanism:** Establish a body to document, preserve, and investigate human rights violations and torture.
- **Support Local Civil Society:** Strengthen networks and provide training for documentation and advocacy, particularly in remote and high-risk areas.

- **International Protection for Defenders:** Create safe pathways and visas for Afghan human rights defenders at risk of persecution.
- **Raise International Awareness:** Ensure that the international community keeps Afghanistan human rights crisis at the agenda and to prevent normalization of impunity.

While torture in Afghanistan is a long-standing issue, the side event highlighted its intensified and systematic nature, particularly under the current governance. Urgent international support, accountability mechanisms, and protection for human rights defenders are critical to addressing these ongoing abuses.

Towards an international accountability mechanism for Afghanistan:

Forum Asia in coordination with CSHNR, HRD+, Amnesty International, Human rights watch, FIDH and Human Rights Institute hosted a side event at the Human Rights Council to discuss the urgent need for an international accountability mechanism for Afghanistan.

Panelists included Richard Bennett, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Sayed Hussain Anosh, Executive Lead HRD+, Fereshta Abbasi, Afghanistan Researcher, Human rights Watch, and Zaman Sultani, Afghanistan Research at Amnesty International, alongside testimony from a women survivor from inside Afghanistan.

Speakers underscored that Afghan civil society has been calling for such a mechanism for over three years, while repression inside Afghanistan continues to silence women and activists, forcing resistance underground.

60th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council
Side event

TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISM FOR AFGHANISTAN

13H00 - 14H00 | 10 SEPTEMBER 2025
ROOM VIII, PALAIS DES NATIONS

Panelists

	Richard Bennett UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan		Fereshta Abbasi Afghanistan Researcher, Human Rights Watch
	Sayed Hussain Anosh Executive Lead, HRD+		Zaman Sultani Afghanistan Researcher, Amnesty International

...with testimonies from women human rights defenders from Afghanistan.

Logos: FORUM-ASIA, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, FIDH, HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE

The discussion emphasized that Afghan women face the world's most severe human rights crisis, compounded by the Taliban's discriminatory laws and brutal tactics such as torture, enforced disappearances, and violent crackdowns on protests. Panelists argued that all conditions for establishing an accountability mechanism have already been met, and that it would provide



essential documentation, investigate perpetrators, and help prevent future violations.

Richard Bennett stressed that while his mandate and other UN bodies like UNAMA play important roles, they are not designed to carry out investigative functions, making an independent mechanism indispensable.

The event concluded with strong recommendations: the Human Rights Council must take concrete steps toward establishing an accountability mechanism without delay. Such a body would not only serve justice but also act as a foundation for peace, truth, reparations, and prevention. Civil society has already carried the demand forward now responsibility rests with UN member states and international partners to act.

Interactive Dialogue on Afghanistan:

On 16 September 2025, the Human Rights Council held an Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on Afghanistan, bringing together UN officials, Member States, civil society representatives, and NGOs to address the worsening human rights situation under Taliban rule.

The Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights opened the session with a stark warning about systemic abuses, calling for the abolition of the death penalty and corporal punishment, the

restoration of freedom of expression, and respect for the rights of women and girls. He stressed that accountability efforts must be pursued through multiple tracks and require a comprehensive, multi-actor approach³.

Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett painted a grim picture of the situation, citing widespread repression and 672 recorded cases of public flogging. He urged the international community to increase pressure on the Taliban and reiterated his call for the creation of an independent investigative mechanism.

Other UN voices, including CEDAW Chairperson, denounced the system of gender apartheid and highlighted the importance of amplifying Afghan women's voices. Afghan civil society speakers, including Maryam Safi and Zubaida Akbar, emphasized the silencing of women, the rise in domestic violence, the targeting of minorities, and the Taliban's systematic persecution of all dissenting voices. They warned against the normalization of Taliban rule and stressed that only genuine accountability can bring justice to victims.

A wide range of countries, including members of the European Union, Canada, Australia, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and many others, condemned the Taliban's human rights violations and reaffirmed support for the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. They also backed calls for an independent accountability mechanism to document and investigate ongoing abuses. UN agencies such as UNICEF and UN Women further underscored the particular vulnerability of women and children, urging stronger international protection and support.

Civil society organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, echoed these concerns, urging the Council to renew and strengthen the Special Rapporteur's mandate while ensuring that Afghan human rights defenders receive the resources and protection they need. Closing the dialogue, Richard Bennett warned that the UN liquidity crisis were undermining his ability to carry out his mandate effectively and insisted that statements alone are insufficient. The Deputy High Commissioner concluded by stressing the necessity of a comprehensive, coordinated approach with accountability at its core, making clear that Afghanistan must remain a priority for the Council.

³ <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1c/k1ciaoo4ew>

Advocacy Meetings with UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and her office:

Civil society delegation has a meeting with Mary Lawler the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Defenders and her team members. HRDs shared their concern on the human rights issues and shrinking civic space inside the country. The protection of HRDs and finding sustainable solution for HRDs were the main issues raised in the meeting. HRDs were encouraged, with the consent of HRDs their case be shared with her office.



Advocacy Meetings with UN Missions in Geneva:

Learning from the Myanmar Mechanism: The experience of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) offers important lessons for Afghanistan. Emerging from a UN Fact-Finding Mission, the IIMM has documented atrocities through close engagement with affected communities, legally sound evidence collection, and cooperation with international courts. Its work has already supported cases before the ICC, ICJ, and universal jurisdiction cases in Argentina, leading to international recognition of the Rohingya genocide and the issuance of arrest warrants—despite political deadlock at the UN Security Council.

The Myanmar example shows that credible documentation, strong community engagement, and creative use of international legal avenues can advance justice even in the face of political obstacles. For Afghanistan, these lessons are clear: an independent accountability mechanism is

urgently needed to preserve evidence, amplify victims' voices, and ensure that impunity for ongoing atrocities does not become the norm.

Lessons from the Syria Mechanism: A

discussion on the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria (IIIM) highlighted critical lessons for Afghanistan's pursuit of justice. Speakers stressed the importance of a victim-centered approach, noting that accountability efforts must go beyond NGOs to ensure direct involvement of victims. Drawing



on the IIIM's experience, the discussion showed how civil society documentation rooted in local language, culture, and context was transformed into credible legal case files that enabled prosecutions abroad through extraterritorial jurisdiction, even without ICC engagement.

Panelists underlined that these lessons are highly relevant to Afghanistan. Establishing an independent accountability mechanism would provide credibility, preserve evidence, and create secure avenues for justice. Strong reliance on civil society documentation and broad-based international support, including outreach to Africa and Latin America alongside Europe, were seen as essential. The session concluded that sustained advocacy, victim participation, and global alliances are vital to prevent cycles of violence and ensure justice for Afghan survivors.

Discussion with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development:

Afghan civil society representatives met with Surya Deva, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development, to explore opportunities for engagement. Since assuming the mandate in 2023, he has focused on thematic reports covering gender inequalities, participation in development, peace, technology, and migration. While acknowledging limited engagement with Afghanistan so far, he underlined the importance of inclusive, participatory, and sustainable development.

He noted that while a formal country visit would require an official invitation, academic or consultative visits could provide an initial entry point for engagement despite the challenges of Taliban non-recognition. The Special Rapporteur encouraged Afghan NGOs to actively contribute by submitting inputs to his reports, organizing side events during the Right to Development Dialogues in 2026, and sharing evidence-based submissions highlighting women's rights and development challenges. He also stressed that while an accountability mechanism may face limited impact under current conditions, targeted advocacy and influencing decision-makers could be more effective. As Chair of the Special Procedures Coordination Committee, he expressed readiness to facilitate dialogue and coordinate with other mandates, including the SR on Afghanistan, while emphasizing the need for Afghan civil society to use his mandate as a platform to amplify their voices internationally.

Advancing Accountability in Afghanistan: Civil Society Consultation with Richard:

A meeting between Richard and Afghan civil society representatives focused on the potential establishment of an independent accountability mechanism for Afghanistan, with particular emphasis on women's rights and transitional justice. Participants discussed the scope and design of the mechanism, noting that it could follow the Myanmar model by collecting evidence for criminal prosecutions while complementing the ICC, and stressed the need for operational independence, strong coordination with other international justice bodies, and protection of minorities, HRDs, and civic space.

Civil society raised concerns about funding, downsizing, and inclusion of past crimes, while Richard advised prioritizing strategic advocacy to secure resolution adoption, engaging supportive states such as Germany, the UK, and OIC countries, and ensuring coordination with other mandate holders to address intersectional issues like education, refugees, and minority rights. The meeting underscored the urgency of maintaining focus on women and girls while leveraging existing mandate work and engaging Afghan communities to inform the mechanism's development.

Swiss Mission Discusses Accountability and Human Rights in Afghanistan:

The Swiss Mission convened with civil society and representatives from Slovenia, Czechia, Austria, Australia, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK to discuss human rights and accountability in Afghanistan. The meeting emphasized Afghanistan as a priority, highlighting Switzerland's two-year engagement in Kabul and partnerships with civil society, particularly on women's rights.

Participants stressed the urgent need for a comprehensive accountability mechanism to address violations under the PVPV⁴ law and beyond, complementing ongoing ICC and IIMM efforts, while adopting an all-tools approach to prevent duplication. Discussions also addressed resource mobilization, regional stability, and the role of UNAMA, noting its engagement with the de facto authorities may limit accountability.

Civil society interventions underscored past initiatives and the importance of international support, with consensus that adopting a resolution even if a mechanism is not immediately.



⁴ <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/08/Law-on-Virtue-and-Vice-Basic.pdf>

UNHCR Strategies for Protecting Afghan Refugees:

UNHCR representatives met with civil society to discuss the growing challenges facing Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran. The discussion highlighted increasing hostility, forced returns, and risks of persecution for women, minorities, and high-risk individuals, despite UNHCR advocacy with authorities and the provision of a database of 110,000 vulnerable people. Visa restrictions, exit fees, and limited resettlement opportunities further exacerbate protection gaps, while existing registration and shelter programs face severe funding and operational constraints.

UNHCR emphasized targeted, bilateral interventions for strategic cases, advising against large-scale or publicized initiatives, and encouraged continuous engagement with member states, civil society, and legal networks. Advocacy, including through CEDAW and senior UN committees, along with EU and private funding opportunities, were identified as potential avenues to strengthen protection and support for the most vulnerable Afghan refugees.

Side Events on Afghanistan

Impact of Aid Cuts on Human Rights in Afghanistan (9 Sept 2025):

The UN Human Rights Council side event, co-hosted by HAMRAH, examined how aid cuts in Afghanistan have worsened the humanitarian crisis and undermined justice for marginalized groups. UN Special Rapporteurs, Human Rights Watch, MADRE, and ALO shared insights on operational challenges and strategies to sustain protection, accountability, and human rights.

SIDE EVENT AT THE UN HRC 60TH SESSION

THE IMPACT OF AID CUTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN

MODERATOR: Meetra Qutb, Gender Persecution Working Group

SPEAKERS: Richard Bennett, SR on Afghanistan; Surya Deva, SR on the right to development; Artemis Akbary, Afghanistan LGBTIQ+ Organisation (ALO); Fereshta Abbasi, Human Rights Watch; Lucia Withers, Hamrah Initiative

12 pm - 13 pm | September 9, 2025
Room VIII, Building A, Palais des Nations

CO-SPONSORS: MADRE, AfghanLGBT, ilga world, GPWG, CUNY SCHOOL OF LAW, HAMRAH A shared journey

The Road Ahead: From Partial Progress to full accountability for Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan (10 Sept 2025):

The panel highlighted the urgent need for an independent investigative mechanism in Afghanistan. Amb. Nasir Andisha stressed that after five years of Taliban rule, impunity persists, while Richard Bennett noted his mandate lacks resources for full criminal-standard documentation, making a new mechanism essential.

Panelists emphasized documenting violations, supporting accountability for gender apartheid, and building court-level evidence, with Hamid Formuli calling for swift establishment to reinforce existing efforts.

A panel discussion at the margins of the 60th Session of the UN Human Rights Council.

"The Road Ahead: From Partial Progress to Full Accountability for Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan"

The event will take stock of the progress on accountability efforts through the ICC, ICJ, UNSR, and end Gender apartheid initiatives, raising awareness on their current status, potentials, and limitations, ultimately identifying the gaps that need to be filled by an additional investigative mechanism, addressing as well complementarity and the concerns of duplication.

10 September 2025 | 14:00 - 15:00 Geneva time (CET)
Room III, Building A, Palais des Nations & Online via Webex

For in-person participation, register through [Indico](#). For virtual participation, please register through [this link](#).

Panelists

 Richard Bennett Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan	 Natasha Arnpriester Senior Strategic Litigation Officer, Open Society Justice Initiative	 Fereshta Abbasi Afghanistan Researcher, Human Rights Watch	 Azadah Raz Mohammad Advisor, End Gender Apartheid Campaign, PhD Candidate at Melbourne Law School
 Opening remarks: Amb. Nasir Andisha , Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to UNOG	 Moderator: Hamid Formuli , Human Rights Fellow Center for Dialogue and Progress - Geneva		

Organizers:  **CDP-G**
Center for Dialogue and Progress - Geneva

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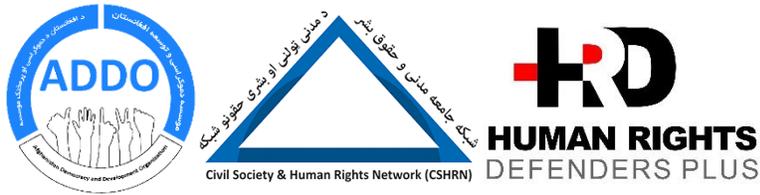
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Annexes⁵

Oral Statement for the 60th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

Thank you, Mr. President,

Four years after the Taliban's return to power, Afghanistan remains one of the most repressive countries in the world. Women and girls face institutionalized discrimination, barred from education, employment, and public life.

The Global Torture Index reveals alarming patterns of arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment, with human rights defenders, journalists, minorities, and former officials most at risk.

We are deeply concerned by the forced return of over two million Afghan refugees from Iran and Pakistan this year, including unaccompanied children and others at grave risk, in violation of non-refoulement.

Meanwhile, provinces like Kunar and Nangarhar suffer the impacts of recent earthquakes, with urgent medical needs unmet especially for women and girls. This underscores the importance of women's education and employment, as female doctors and professionals are vital in emergencies.

We urge this Council to establish an independent accountability mechanism to investigate violations and end impunity.

Thank you. Read by Atefa Tayeb

⁵ <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1c/k1ciaoo4ew>