

HRD+ Statement On the Suppression of Protests in Herat and Widespread Human Rights Violations

11.06.2026

Human Rights Defenders Plus (HRD+) is following with deep concern the developments of recent days in Herat Province and strongly condemns the violent suppression of protesting citizens, the arbitrary detention of women and girls, and the expansion of intimidation and security restrictions.

The public protests in Herat began after Taliban forces detained dozens of women and girls under the pretext of “improper hijab.” This action triggered widespread reactions from citizens, families, civil society activists, and various segments of society. Protesters peacefully took to the streets, calling for respect for human dignity, fundamental freedoms, and an end to arbitrary arrests.

According to information collected from local sources, media reports, and eyewitness accounts, Taliban forces used violence, fired warning shots into the air, and in some cases resorted to direct gunfire against demonstrators. As a result of this crackdown, at least three people lost their lives, including a woman, a child, and a man. In addition, approximately 30 citizens were injured, and a number of protesters were arrested.

HRD+ is deeply concerned by reports indicating an increase in security pressures across the city of Herat. According to these reports, following the recent protests, the Taliban have:

- **Significantly increased the presence of security forces throughout the city;**
- **Initiated house-to-house searches in certain areas;**
- **Inspected and monitored citizens’ mobile phones;**
- **Exerted pressure on civil society activists, journalists, and social media users;**
- **Attempted to prevent the dissemination of images, videos, and information related to the protests.**

Numerous reports also indicate that a heavy security atmosphere has been imposed on the city. Community elders, influential local figures, and respected leaders in Herat have reportedly come under pressure to refrain from supporting public demands or engaging in independent mediation efforts. This situation has heightened serious concerns regarding freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and the security of citizens.

We welcome the recent statements issued by international bodies. **Amnesty International has described the shooting of peaceful protesters as “deeply alarming” and has stated that the use of live ammunition against civilians constitutes a clear violation of fundamental**

human rights. The organisation has called for an immediate end to the unlawful use of force, the release of detainees, and respect for the rights of Afghan women and girls.

Likewise, Richard Bennett, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, **has expressed deep concern regarding the excessive use of force against protesters and emphasised that freedom of expression, the right to peaceful protest, and the rights of women and girls must be respected. He has also called for accountability for those responsible for violence against civilians.**

HRD+ calls upon the United Nations, the Human Rights Council, the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, international organisations, and all human rights defenders not to remain silent regarding the situation in Herat. We urge them to take practical and effective measures to prevent the continuation of repression, protect civilians, secure the release of detainees, and ensure the fundamental rights of the people of Afghanistan.

We reiterate that peaceful protest is a legitimate right of citizens, and no authority has the right to respond to people's civic demands with bullets, arbitrary detention, intimidation, and repression.

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