

*United Nations Human Rights Council
(UNHRC)*

*Addressing the Women's
Rights Crisis Amid the
Emergence of the Taliban
Government in
Afghanistan*



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I. INTRODUCTION

United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is the system within the United Nations that seeks the protection and fostering of human rights worldwide (Office of the..., n.d.-a). The Council aims to safeguard fundamental freedoms for all, maintaining equality and fairness. The HRC is dedicated to address human rights violations in all forms and thus, making recommendations to the General Assembly thereafter. Inherently, the UNHRC serves as a forum for communication on human rights and to implement its principles within the United Nations system (United Nations, 2006).

The former Commission on Human Rights was established in 1946 as a subsidiary organ of ECOSOC with the purpose of creating the international legal framework to protect essential freedoms and rights. In its 60 years of operation, its 53 state members adopted a hundred resolutions, statements and decisions of relevance to all kinds of circumstances around the world, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Office of the..., n.d.-b). Nevertheless, in the early 2000s, due to the membership of nations with poor human rights records, the Commission was deemed ineffective (Weston, 2024).

Consequently, in New York in 2006 by the Resolution 60/251 the Human Rights Council was established as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly in order to replace the former Commission on Human Rights and to assume and if necessary improve its responsibilities (*UN Human Rights Council*, 2018). The UNHRC consists of 47 state members selected by the General Assembly each serving for three years terms after which they cannot be elected again immediately. In addition, the Council has a bureau with one president and four vice presidents, each representing a global region and serving for one year (Office of the..., n.d.-c).

The HRC, led by the High Commissioner who is accountable to the Secretary General (Office of the..., n.d.-d), holds three regular sessions annually for a minimum of 12 weeks; yet, the Council can also hold special sessions to address urgent matters (Office of the..., n.d.-e). Additionally, it publishes an annual report detailing achievements, developments, challenges, budget, and focus areas of work. Furthermore, the Council also conducts the

Universal Periodic Review, a special procedure in which the human rights obligations and commitments of every UN state member are assessed periodically (Office of the..., n.d.-f).

Even if the Council is limited by its advisory purpose and thus its resolutions are not legally binding, the HRC has been able to take notable actions. With its special sessions, in 2022 it was able to address several situations such as the Iranian conflict or Ukrainian conflict. Furthermore, through annual report and publications the Council raises awareness of different crisis in relation with human rights such as *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol: Handbook for Parliamentarians (revised edition)* in which it attends to the global women rights crisis (Office of the..., 2023).

In 2020, after a peace agreement signed between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, it was decided that the current level of military forces established in 2001 for the overturn of the Taliban regime and later expulsion from Afghanistan, were no longer necessary, leading to the withdrawal of the US army from Afghan territory (United States Department of State & Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020). In this panorama, the Taliban, who had been trying to regain territory after less than ten years from their removal, managed to recover its original power by August 2021 reinstating their regime (Maizland, 2023).

Guided by their extremist interpretation of the Islamic Law, the Taliban regime has systematically violated women's rights. With the establishment of the female moral police, the ban to access a proper education, the veto on women being seen outdoors and the reestablishment of corporal punishment among others; the Taliban Regime has managed to attack women's and girls' rights in every single aspect, to such an extent that their integrity cannot be ensured anymore (United States Institute of Peace, n.d.-a).

This Council seeks to discuss possible solutions to address the urgent situation with the objective of ensuring the protection of human rights and overall dignity of all women in Afghanistan. It is crucial to understand the conflicts in the past and their effect on our present to acknowledge and protect those freedoms and rights that should be shared by all.

II. HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

The Taliban:

The 1990s was a period of social and political instability in Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghan territory at the end of the Soviet-Afghan conflict, and the following crumbling of the communist regime that the same forces had established in December 1979, Afghanistan entered a chapter of violence, internal conflicts and power struggles (Britannica, 2024-a). Consequently, a religious group of students and academics in south Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, exhausted by the corruption and the iniquity of the newly established system, formed a faction known as the Taliban meaning “students” in Pashto (BBC News, 2022).

The Taliban were characterized by their ultraconservative ideology, both in political and social aspects. With an extremist interpretation of the shari’a law, the principles of Islam meant stay in line with God’s vision (Harvard Divinity School, n.d.), the Taliban started their armed resistance under the belief that the deterioration of the country was caused by a lack of strict law and thus, the only way to restore justice and security in Afghanistan was through the Islam (Kuehn, 2018).

By 1996, the recently settled government lacked success in establishing a civil order in the capital. This failure, combined with the gain of popularity of the armed resistance, allowed the Taliban to take control of Kabul and nearly two-thirds of the country, thereby creating their first regime (Britannica, 2024-b). However, this regime quickly destroyed the hope of stability in the country due to the imposition of a severe and repressive order which had a great impact on women’s freedoms and rights.

Immediately after the seizure of Kabul, the Taliban began their attack on human rights, specifically targeting women. The Taliban closed all the female universities and forced them to quit their jobs leaving them with virtually no income. This had devastating consequences on the more than 50,000 women who had no husbands nor male relatives to support them financially, forcing them to sell their belongings, beg, or worse to sustain themselves and their families. By 1998, women were restricted from access to any kind of

education with girls over the age of eight being prohibited from attending school, further diminishing women's abilities to function independently in a modern society. Additionally, the Taliban's vetoing extended to access to healthcare, restriction of movement, and dress code, that culminated with the imposition of the use of the burqa, an outer garment that covered women from head to toe (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2001).

The Taliban's policies not only limited grown women, but also eliminated childhood joy by the overall banning of toys, stuffed animals, and dolls, among others. This systematic oppression from childhood to adulthood created a cycle that reinforced women's subjugation by men and dependency on them, leaving a lasting damaging effect on Afghan society. By denying women education and autonomy, the first regime managed to limit female potential and freedom, hindering the overall development of the country (Feminist Majority Foundation, n.d.-a).

The International Intervention:

On September 11th, 2001 in New York, a hijacked flight crashed into the northern tower of the Trade World Center at 8:36 am, 17 minutes later another hijacked flight crashed into the southern tower (9/11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.). This attack was planned and orchestrated by Al-Qaeda, an armed insurgency with headquarters in Afghanistan and close ties with the Taliban. Citing article 5, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allowed its members to respond in self-defense, thus, by October 7 of that same year the United States and allied forces began their attack. Although the intervention mostly focused on debilitating Al-Qaeda, it had the same effect on the Taliban militia, and by November 2001, the Taliban regime had been crumbled by the Northern Alliance and the United States (Bergen, 2024).

The International Intervention led by American forces not only had an effect on the ongoing situation in Afghanistan but also raised awareness of the problem worldwide. The situation of Afghan women was used as a justification for military intervention by international leaders, creating the damaging idea that women in Afghanistan needed to be saved by the Western world without actually recognizing the possible consequences of how this intervention would affect them (Amnesty International UK, n.d.). The continuing armed conflict in the region, caused starvation, displacement, and homelessness among other

traumas, which inevitably affected those that originally were aimed to be protected. This cynic perspective of the conflict that was unknown by the general public and ignored by leaders, was evident in US army decisions who refused to pause their operations to allow aid agencies to ensure adequate food access resulting in millions of losses due to famine in rural regions (Kolhatkar, n.d.).

Despite these negative effects, undeniable progress was made in Afghanistan during this period regarding women's rights. As early as December of 2001 US president George W. Bush signed the Afghan Women and Children Relief Act, recognizing the atrocities committed against women and children during the Taliban regime and ensuring the promotion and protection of human rights in Afghanistan (*Afghan Women and Children Relief Act*, 2001). With this act and with the new order established in Afghanistan, the vetoes mandated by the Taliban were removed. In 2001, girls were allowed to return to schools and universities reinforcing their access to education, and by 2017 there were more than 3.5 million girls matriculated in school, becoming 39% of all children enrolled in schools (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Furthermore, there was a great improvement in access to healthcare increasing the coverage and quality, resulting in a decrease in maternal mortality, and the provision of basic maternal and child services (World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Region, n.d.). Additionally, the 2004 Afghan constitution created the legal framework that protected fundamental rights and ensured the participation of women in the legislative branch, mandating that 64 of the 250 delegates should be women (Constitute Project, n.d.).

With the overall international support during the two decades period, Afghan women became active and essential members of Afghan society. They significantly contributed to the country's production, taking key roles in different industries such as healthcare, education and media. By actively promoting the democratic transition in Afghanistan, women disproved the outdated values imposed during the Taliban. The encouragement and protection of women's rights and freedoms, initiated a gradual movement towards equality, a change that held great potential (Feminist Majority Foundation, n.d.-b).

Nevertheless, this progress eventually came to an end when due to the high cost of US army operations, the government of the United States started disengaging from participation in different international endeavors. In 2018, the United States met with Taliban

representatives to negotiate a peace agreement called the Doha Agreement, with the condition that the Taliban prevented Al-Qaeda and similar groups from reentering and operating from Afghanistan. This peace agreement was negotiated without the presence of the Afghan government; nonetheless, the American government signed the same day a joint agreement with Afghanistan with the objective of bringing peace to the country (United States Department of State & Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020). These two documents were created in February of 2020 and, during a period of more than a year, the US army withdrew from the region (Zeidan, 2024). However, the negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban were complicated due to the reluctance of the government to comply with conditions promised by the United States during the U.S.-Taliban agreement which resulted in not being able to achieve a compromise. Thus the Taliban resumed armed action (United States Institute of Peace, n.d.-b).

The Taliban Power regain:

As early as May 2021, even before the U.S. forces' withdrawal was completed, the Taliban began their offensive to regain power. Starting with rural areas, they were able to take their first provincial capital by August and recapture Kabul just ten days later. The Taliban's rapid advancement, which included the release of prisoners and the capture of military armament, was unexpected for the United States since after investing over 80 billion in the Afghan militia, contemplated a more effective defense (Congressional Research Service, 2021).

With the Taliban regaining power, old customs of the first regime started to be reimplemented, which began with fundamentally obliterating the 2004 constitution in favor the reenactment of parts of the 1964 constitution (Kamil, 2022); constitution that was created during the Kingdom of Afghanistan period (Government of Afghanistan, 1964). Nevertheless, the destruction of the progress made during the last two decades didn't end there. Less than a month after Kabul's capture, the Taliban imposed a ban on girls attending secondary school arguing that educated girls wouldn't comply with their ideology (The conversation, 2024). Additionally, many women were banned from attending university, and those who weren't, were imposed gender-segregated classrooms, as well as being blocked from many college major options arguing that they were too complex for women (Reuters, 2021).

These restrictions were extended to the workplace, in which similarity to universities, were partially banned or segregated after the replacement of the Ministry of Women's Affairs with the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. Furthermore, women were blocked from watching any kind of media on the TV while female presenters were ordered to cover their faces. Into the bargain, women were prohibited from having any kind of life outside, starting by being ordered to stay indoors due to the lack of training to respect women that the Taliban soldiers had, forbidden from traveling long distances, prohibited from playing sports or even banned from visiting parks at the same time as men (United States Institute of Peace, n.d.-c).

This systematic destruction of freedoms, rights, and overall integrity of women culminated with the dissolution of Afghanistan's Human Rights Commission in May of 2022 revealing that in the Taliban's vision of Afghanistan's future, women and their rights are not a priority (Yunus, 2022).

III. CURRENT SITUATION

Restrictions on aid:

In the last two years, the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan has further deteriorated. After past periods of ongoing conflicts in the country, two-thirds of the Afghan population are currently in need of humanitarian aid, primarily to address the food security problem, which requires over 4 billion in funding. Nevertheless, the Taliban administration has made it almost impossible to help those in need. With their ever-growing restrictions, half of its medics, scientists and reporters, among others, are confined to their houses simply because they are women, hindering the possibility of providing that urgent aid (United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2023).

Moreover, other Taliban restrictions have interfered with NGOs operations. In December 2022, the Taliban ordered an immediate suspension of female employees from working in national or international NGOs, further limiting their capacity to help (Gul, 2022). In June 2023 the administration banned foreign NGOs from providing educational programs,

which, according to UNICEF, will affect over 300,000 girls (Associated Press, 2023). Additionally, Afghan female workers in the UN were also banned from attending work in 2023 (United Nations News, 2023). These actions not only highlight the Taliban's disregard for women's rights but also exacerbate the country's humanitarian crisis by forcing many NGOs, such as Islamic Relief, International Rescue Committee or Save the Children, out of the country by the end of 2023 (Latifi, 2023).

Legal implications:

As time progressed, the restrictions' scope has expanded to the legislative and judicial branches. In August 2022, the recently established Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, introduced the Female Moral Police. This force focused on "guiding women" to adhere to the new social order while paying special attention to the proper enforcement of dress code. Paradoxically, even though women were banned from taking part in most public activities, they were part of the department, meaning that the Taliban's laws against women were enforced by women themselves, creating a damaging mentality where women are pitted against women (Nimrokh Media, 2022).

Increase severity of punishments:

As the amount of restrictions increased, so has the severity of the punishments. During the emergence of the Taliban government, corporal punishments and death penalties have been enacted. During 2022, according to the UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan), there were at least 18 cases of public lashing with 57 victims from which 22 were women and 2 of them were underage girls. Even though these punishments were not limited to females, women were punished for crimes such as relationships outside or before marriage or running away from home (Clark, 2023).

These punishments saw a noticeable increase in November 2022 after one tweet on the 13th made by a spokesperson voiced that the Taliban leader had spoken with judges and had drawn attention to the necessity of the use of punishments when the Shari'a conditions were met (Zabihullah, 2022). Consequently, on the 7th of December 2022, the first *de facto* public execution sanctioned by judicial authorities was implemented, and in June 2023 the second was carried out. Additionally, other 435 instances of corporal punishment, with 58

involving women, were also reported as a consequence of this announcement. Concerns about the legitimacy of these punishments arose due to reports of punishments being carried by non-judicial authorities or/and without a formal decision (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2023).

The situation continues to highlight the lack of transparency of Afghan authorities during the judicial process that preceded the implementation of such punishments, raising concern among international human rights organizations. Such organizations wonder how long it will take for such punishments to be applied to women, who have already suffered from inhumane treatment under the Taliban administration (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2023-a).

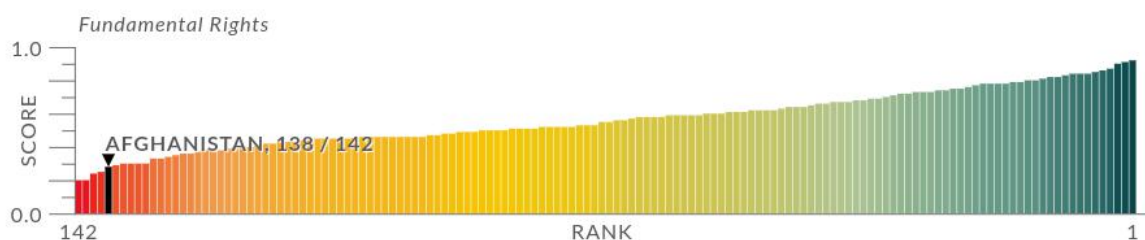
Erosion of fundamental rights:

UNAMA reports that the Afghan legal system continues failing to hold fair trials and protect legal processes, essentially abandoning its citizens in their pursuit of justice. Consequently, the Taliban through its continued erosion of human rights, have turned Afghanistan into one of the most inhumane countries in the world (Office of the..., 2022), a reality highlighted by the following diagram:

Afghanistan Ranked 138th Across 142 Countries, 2023

Compare 2023 score rankings for Afghanistan by toggling between global, South Asia regional peers, and Low income peers.

GLOBAL REGION INCOME GROUP



(WJP Rule of Law Index, 2023)

As of the end of 2023, the World Justice Project ranked 142 countries around the world based on the fundamental rights their citizens enjoy. Afghanistan ranked 138th out of 142, reflecting a significant decline in rights, with a 0.4 decrease in score from 2022; nonetheless, this decreasing tendency started in 2020, the moment in which the Taliban

regained power. This alarming trend highlights the damaging lasting effects of the Taliban's restriction on the Afghan population, which currently fails in almost every aspect regarding fundamental rights including discrimination, security, due legal processes, freedom of opinion or freedom of belief among others (WJP Rule of Law Index, 2023).

Right to self-determination:

The Taliban faction emerged as the consequence of ongoing international intervention in Afghan territory, thus, the establishment of the Taliban administration, is an assertion of Afghanistan's right to self-determination. This ideology underpins the government's avoidance of any kind of foreign interference, even humanitarian aid, thereby hindering NGOs operations. However, several organizations have pointed out that the Taliban administration, sheltered by Afghanistan's seek for independence, has established a new order in which women and girls lack protection (Middle East monitor, 2021).

The humanitarian crisis worsens as the new government gains more power, underscoring the urgency of protecting and promoting women's human rights while still maintaining the country's sovereignty and autonomy highlighting the need of addressing this issue from both international and national perspectives (Office of the..., 2023).

IV. UN ACTIONS

Aware of the humanitarian crisis developing in Afghanistan, the United Nations has taken several actions to address this issue. In 2002, through resolution 1401, the Security Council established the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) (United Nations Security Council, 2002). This special political mission, headed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, aims to assist the peace and reconsolidation process in Afghanistan while maintaining human rights standards (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2023-b). In 2008, UNAMA became an integrated mission, meaning all UN agencies, programmes, and funds would work together to provide humanitarian aid with a more holistic approach (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, n.d.). UNAMA plays a critical role in gathering data on the ongoing situation in Afghanistan and through its regular reports, it informs the UN and the international

community about Afghan women's reality. Additionally, with continuing dialogue with de facto authorities, UNAMA advocates for the promotion of human rights and raises awareness of rights violations (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2024).

In 2018, the UNAMA made the 2018-2021 "One UN for Afghanistan" strategic framework to support Afghan authorities to promote the country's social and economic development. Preceded by four other frameworks implemented between 2006 and 2019, "One UN for Afghanistan", had similar areas of focus such as healthcare, education, governance, and most importantly women's empowerment. With close partnership with the Afghan government, UN efforts were organized and effectively supported the women's human rights crisis, among other urgent situations (United Nations Afghanistan & Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2018).

Nonetheless, after the Taliban's overtake of power, collaboration of Afghan authorities became deficient. Consequently, in 2022, the United Nations developed the Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF), a more flexible framework to address the new challenges of Afghanistan. The TEF focused on providing the necessary humanitarian aid, essential services, and economic stability amidst the armed conflict. Despite the governmental changes, the UN continued advocating for human rights, especially women who were, more than ever, threatened by the new administration (United Nations Afghanistan, 2022). With international support, the TEF was able to deescalate the humanitarian crisis until June 2023, moment in which its mandate expired (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2023-c).

The Human Rights Council has also taken actions due to the urgency of the situation. Even though it is limited to its advisory nature, the Council dedicated a part of its annual report in 2023 to Afghanistan. Besides focusing on the humanitarian situation, justice administration, and lack of accountability, the HRC made a detailed timeline describing the most relevant restrictions and policies implemented during the Taliban administration that affected women and girl's enjoyment of human rights. Set report has played a key role in divulging relevant information to the General Assembly, where resolutions regarding women in Afghanistan are discussed (Human Rights Council, 2023).

The HRC report was complemented by the United Nations Afghanistan Annual Report 2023, which revealed that UN actions which aimed at improving transparency, inclusiveness, accountability, and responsiveness of local governments, had reached over 314,144 women by December 2023. Nonetheless, acknowledging the limitations and future improvements that could be made, the report included several policy recommendations suggested by IOM, UN Women and UNAMA that had been made to the Taliban administration and might be implemented in the future (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2023).

Recognizing the steady but slow progress in Afghan society, the UN developed the 2023-2025 United Nations Framework for Afghanistan. This multi-year strategic planning framework, created in alignment with implementing partners and donors, outlines the UN's approach addressing human rights in Afghanistan while working towards the 2030 agenda and providing special support to vulnerable groups such as women and girls (Shinwari, 2023). This framework addresses both the sociocultural context and economic panorama, ensuring a comprehensive integrated plan that is constantly monitored and may be implemented with joint work plans in the future to provide further assistance to the situation (United Nations, 2023).

The United Nations has been aware of the constant deterioration of the women's rights crisis in Afghanistan after the Taliban's overtake of power; thus it calls upon international cooperation while still respecting the sovereignty of Afghanistan and the right of self-determination of Afghans (United Nations News, 2024).

V. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

As the Taliban administration continues retaking power, international cooperation becomes essential to prevent further impact in women's rights and to recover those freedoms that were lost during the governance change. The following proposed solutions may be the course of action needed to attend the situation:

- I. Enhancing the operational capacity of regional NGOs and CSOs

- a. Such enhancement will be plausible by encouraging an increased funding from the international community. This funding will enable NGOs and CSOs to enhance their capacity and reinforce local networks, thus strengthening the effectiveness of their aid.
- b. Due to the recent restrictions implemented by the Taliban administration limiting international NGOs and CSOs operations, collaboration between international and national non-profit organizations should be encouraged to improve their effectiveness and reach more women in need while adhering to the Taliban's requirements (UNDP Afghanistan, n.d.).

II. Expanding the provision of digital education for women and girls

- a. Education is essential for the development of women and Afghan society. However, the Taliban administration has made several restrictions in this area, limiting Afghan women outside their households and emphasizing the importance of gender-based divided education. Neither requirements can be effectively implemented in Afghanistan, consequently, digital education is able to ensure girls and women rights to be educated while complying with the Taliban's restrictions (Siddique, 2023).
- b. To provide this education, a specific digital platform should be developed in collaboration with the Afghan administration. This platform would be customized to women and girls' needs while implementing a curriculum decided by the Afghan Ministry of Education so it properly adheres to the Taliban's current educational requirements. Acknowledging the economical limitations of a developing country such as Afghanistan, digital education would be supported by local NGOs and CSOs. These organizations will assist in the process of platform development, distribution of devices to those women unable to acquire them and providing training to the professionals needed to impart the education.

III. Promoting international diplomatic pressure on the Taliban administration to ensure women's rights

- a. The use of economic sanctions as international pressure could further deteriorate the already weakened Afghan economy; thus, the implementation of this solution should be focused towards economic incentives, such as providing conditional aid and development assistance with the reduction of women's restrictions. This encouragement would incentivize the Taliban administration to improve women's situation while contributing to Afghan economic development.
- b. To address the systematic gender-based violence against women committed by Afghan organizations under the Taliban administration, it should be recommended to the international community to seek accountability in the International Criminal Court (ICC). Taking these legal actions would prevent future crimes and create a safe environment for Afghan women (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024).

IV. Establishing a neutral overseeing body to ensure women's legal rights during judicial processes

- a. During the Taliban administration there has been a severe increase in public sentencing, severity of punishment, and condemnations that lacked legitimacy. In a judicial system where human rights aren't respected, a special rapporteur under a UN agency such as UNAMA or UNHRC should be established to report and monitor Afghan legal proceedings involving women to safeguard their human rights (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2023-d).
- b. Taking into account the cases of women's human rights abuse during legal proceedings or punishments implementation that may have happened before the establishment of the special rapporteur, the neutral overseeing body will be able to take reports from past cases to provide justice and to use such information to improve the Afghan legal system (The Law Society, 2023).

VI. COUNTRIES INVOLVED

1. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Ever since the Taliban's overtake of the capital city, Kabul, in August 2021, Afghanistan has been suffering from social instability. With the ever-growing restrictions affecting women's education, employment, and even public lives; the Taliban administration has shown a lack of interest in protecting essential human rights and liberties, turning Afghan women into one of the most vulnerable groups in the country. Women, who had been subjugated to an archaic ideology, forced to cover themselves, refuse to be let out of the country, and overall denied being a person; have also been abandoned by the legal system. Public sentencing and public flogging had become a common punishment justified by the Shari'a law and as time goes on, the legitimacy of such sentences has become questionable. As the Taliban continue gaining power, the humanitarian crisis further escalates; nonetheless due to the sovereignty of the country and Afghan's rights to self-determine, essentially, the delegation who can best tackle the situation is Afghanistan (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

2. United States of America

The United States has been involved with the Taliban administration several times throughout the years, especially in the recent years. In 2001, after an attack by an armed insurgency, the American forces intervened in Afghan territory forcing the Taliban into exile. After the intervention, the United States showed great preoccupation with the humanitarian crisis developing in Afghanistan; thus, during the 20 year period in which the American forces continued their operation, the US worked towards the social and economic development of Afghanistan. While raising international awareness of the Afghan women's reality, they provided substantial economic resources to provide educational programs, rebuild infrastructure, provide healthcare, and overall ensure women's rights (US Department of State, n.d.). Nonetheless, that support to women was lost in 2020 when the US signed agreements with both the Taliban and the Afghan government; action that would later on result in the Taliban's power regain. However, even after the governance change, the US

continued to provide humanitarian aid for the development and empowerment of women (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2021).

3. Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a border which has contributed to the fostering of a longstanding relationship marked by shared languages, culture and religion. Despite past conflicts, Pakistan has advocated for Afghan peace, greatly contributing to its socioeconomic development, seen in the 1.5 billion transit traffic across the shared border in which several Afghan sectors such as education, infrastructure, health, agriculture, and human resource development, have been benefited (Pakistan Embassy in Kabul, n.d.). During the ongoing conflict, Pakistan improved refugee transit by opening new border points and allowing Afghan refugees to open bank accounts, aiding thousands of Afghan women who fled due to the restrictions (Institute for Policy studies, 2020). Furthermore, Pakistan's close relationship with the Taliban has facilitated their amicable relationship with international governments, including the US, which may result in a reduced number of restrictions on women in the future. Overall, the strengthening of the Pakistani-Afghan relationship is crucial to the development of both nations and the improvement of Afghan women's current situation (Easterly & Threlkeld, 2021).

4. Islamic Republic of Iran

Due to their geographical closeness, Iran and Afghanistan share a complex history. Despite past differences, Iran is Afghanistan's biggest trading partner with a trade volume of more than 1.84 billion (Trading Economics, 2023); additionally, Iran hosts almost 3 million Afghan refugees and provides them with education since 2015, supplying Afghan women liberties and rights that were unavailable in their native country (USIP Staff & Worden, 2018). Furthermore, Iran currently has a positive relationship with the Taliban, with whom they share ideology due to their similar interpretation of the Islam. Nonetheless, with their continuous dialogue, Iran has promoted a more inclusive Afghan government representing all ethnicities and religions expressing their concerns for the security of Afghan most vulnerable groups in which women are included. Recognizing the humanitarian crisis occurring in the country, Iran has reaffirmed their commitment to cooperation with the Taliban administration

in hopes of ensuring peacebuilding in Afghanistan while protecting those groups who have suffered from persecution and violence (Al Jazeera Staff, 2023).

5. Russian Federation

Russia and Afghanistan have a complicated history marked by the Soviet invasion which lasted until 1989. However, in recent times, the Kremlin has been trying to foster a relationship with the Taliban, evident by the fact that the Russian ambassador in Afghanistan became the first foreign diplomat to meet with Taliban representatives after Kabul's takeover. With this strengthened diplomatic relationship, Russia has shown great interest in Afghanistan's economic development, promising to supply resources essential for Afghan reconstruction (Suleymanov, 2023). Additionally, aware of the food assistance crisis, Russia has contributed with economic resources to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), an aid that has reached over 150,000 Afghans (OCHA, 2024). This close relationship has enabled Russian diplomats to dialogue with the current Afghan administration, emphasizing the implementation of international community demands. Consequently, Russian diplomacy has been advocating for a more equal and inclusive government, decreasing restrictions on women and overall ensuring human rights (Nina Burna-Asefi, 2023).

6. Arab Republic of Egypt
7. Commonwealth of Australia
8. Czech Republic
9. Dominion of Canada
10. Federal Republic of Germany
11. Federative Republic of Brazil
12. French Republic
13. Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
14. Kingdom of Denmark
15. Kingdom of Norway

16. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
17. Kingdom of the Netherlands
18. People's Republic of China
19. Republic of India
20. Republic of Indonesia
21. Republic of Italy
22. Republic of Korea
23. Republic of South Africa
24. Republic of Türkiye
25. Republic of Uganda
26. State of Japan
27. State of Qatar
28. Swiss Confederation
29. United Arab Emirates
30. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

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