

Open Letter

28 August 2025

To: Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Dear Excellencies,

We, the undersigned Afghan and international civil society organisations, write to you, once again, to share our grave concerns regarding the deepening human rights and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. We also reiterate the urgent need for the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) to establish an independent international accountability mechanism for Afghanistan (hereafter accountability mechanism) to support accountability for gross and systematic human rights violations and abuses and crimes under international law, including those that were committed in the past and those that continue to be committed across Afghanistan.

Since 2021, a growing number of civil society organisations, including this broad-based group of Afghan and international human rights organisations, have called on the HRC to establish an accountability mechanism, with a mandate to investigate and to collect, preserve and analyse evidence of crimes under international law and other grave human rights violations and abuses in Afghanistan. This appeal¹ is based on consultations and continued, consistent advocacy by and among Afghan civil society and human rights defenders inside and outside of the country.

More recently, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan² and a cross-regional group of states³ have also added their voices to the appeal. In 2024, the HRC itself recognised the need to “give consideration to ensuring the capacity for collecting, preserving and analysing evidence of the most serious international crimes and violations of international law in a way that could be used to facilitate future accountability and transitional justice processes.”⁴

In addition, the UN General Assembly recently adopted a resolution (GA/12469) emphasising “the necessity of investigating allegations of current and past human rights abuses and violations, as well as violations of international humanitarian law, in Afghanistan, and stress[ing] the importance of facilitating the provision of efficient and effective remedies to the victims and survivors and of bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with national and international law.”

An accountability mechanism for Afghanistan would be a key tool in addressing the decades-long, entrenched impunity at the heart of the current crisis in the country, as well as for supporting access to justice, truth and reparation for victims and survivors of rights violations. The accountability mechanism could work to strengthen pathways to victim- and survivor-centred justice and accountability in Afghanistan; ensure robust and comprehensive investigations of serious human

¹ Including previous letters in [2023](#) and [2024](#) ahead of the 54th and 57th sessions of the HRC.

² Recommendation by the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan in his report to HRC59 (A/HRC/59/25), Para 113 called on states to: “establish an independent accountability mechanism with a comprehensive mandate to investigate and establish the facts and root causes of past and ongoing violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law, collect and preserve evidence, identify alleged perpetrators, and prepare case-files to support future prosecutions and other forms of accountability, including truth, justice, and full and effective reparation.”

³ Iceland, South Africa, Chile, Costa Rica, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Colombia, Slovenia, Spain, Czechia, Mexico, France, Afghanistan.

⁴ [A/HRC/RES/57/3](#), OP21.

rights violations and abuses across the country, including sexual and gender-based violence; and contribute to preventing the recurrence of human rights violations and abuses: and end the vicious cycles of violence and impunity in the country.

It would be distinct and complementary to the vital mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, which should also be renewed and fully resourced. Furthermore, it could complement and support ongoing and possible future efforts at the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and at national level, including through the use of universal or other forms of extraterritorial jurisdiction in the courts of third countries, as well as potential future transitional justice initiatives.

Afghanistan has experienced 47 years of armed conflict, and two generations of Afghans have been trapped in cycles of conflict. The [Bonn Agreement](#) of 2001, which laid the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, started with a determination “to end the tragic conflict in Afghanistan and promote national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability and respect for human rights in the country”. In 2005, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) published [A Call for Justice](#) — a landmark report that gathered the voices of thousands of Afghans demanding truth, accountability, and redress for decades of conflict-related atrocities. It showed that victims and survivors and communities across Afghanistan wanted the prosecution of alleged perpetrators of crimes under international law, an end to the culture of impunity, and meaningful transitional justice to heal the country’s deep wounds.

Several important initiatives took place between 2004 and 2012, namely the above-mentioned Call for Justice, [The UN Mapping Report, the Afghanistan Justice Project](#) and, most importantly, the AIHRC Conflict Mapping Report, which remains unpublished.

In the past four years, the Taliban have reversed previously-adopted legal and policy measures for the promotion and protection of human rights in Afghanistan. The Taliban, as the *de facto* authorities, have spurned Afghanistan’s international obligations and have continued to introduce arbitrary, unlawful and wide-ranging restrictions on human rights.

The Taliban have engaged in efforts to effectively erase women and girls from society. Women and girls continue to face bans on access to secondary and higher education, restrictions on employment, freedom of movement, prohibitions on showing their faces and using their voices in public, and other severe restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms codified in the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV law issued on 21 August 2024), as well as access to essential services. Moreover, women and girls belonging to minority communities and/or with disabilities, as well as [LGBTQI+ people](#), continue to experience multiple layers of discrimination. On 8 July 2025, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Haibatullah Akhundzada, the Taliban’s supreme leader, and Abdul Hakim Haqqani, the chief justice, for crimes against humanity, including the persecution of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals based on gender.

Marginalisation and exclusion of religious and ethnic minorities in Afghanistan have been compounded under the Taliban. Religious communities, including Hazaras, Shias, Ismailis, Sikhs and Hindus, face limitations in organising and participating in their religious and cultural ceremonies. Amid the deepening humanitarian and economic crises, the restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women’s work have obstructed monitoring of aid deliveries, notably to women-headed households and other marginalised and vulnerable groups.

All forms of public dissent and criticism of the Taliban result in harsh, arbitrary punishment and violent reprisals. Women who peacefully advocate for their rights, human rights defenders, civil society activists, journalists, artists, musicians, judges and lawyers, educators, critics, and others continue to be targeted. They have been threatened, arbitrarily arrested and detained, as well as tortured and otherwise ill-treated. Former government and security officials have been subjected to extrajudicial, arbitrary, and summary executions and enforced disappearances. The Taliban have carried out cruel and inhumane punishments, including public executions, flogging and other forms of corporal punishment of men and women, including LGBTQI+ people. LGBTQI+ people face compounded exclusion, as well as unlawful detention, extortion, torture and killing.

Afghanistan's independent legal and judicial systems have been replaced by a system that is based on the Taliban's arbitrary interpretation of religious edicts and rulings and no longer functions in a way that could protect the rights of the people of Afghanistan. As a joint statement by over 28 UN Special Procedure mandates on 14 August 2024 makes clear, "avenues for justice within Taliban-controlled Afghanistan [are] virtually non-existent."⁵ Under these circumstances, the Taliban have prohibited the Special Rapporteur from having on-the-ground access to closely monitor and report on their ongoing pervasive and continue human rights violations and abuses.⁶

The vast majority of crimes under international law committed in the past, including extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings, tens of thousands of enforced disappearances, sexual and gender-based crimes, and torture and other ill-treatment, by the former government, international forces, and other militias that previously held power in parts of the country, remain undocumented and unreported. All of these violations have been committed with complete impunity, fuelling further cycles of human rights violations and abuses and highlighting the need for an independent international accountability mechanism for Afghanistan.

In light of the above, we reiterate our calls and urge Member and Observer States of the HRC to build on the consensus found in resolution 57/3, and urgently establish an independent international accountability mechanism for Afghanistan when the HRC meets for its 60th session, with a mandate to:

- Investigate all allegations of past and ongoing violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as well as crimes under international law, including the crime of gender persecution against women, girls and LGBTQI+ people;

⁵ Joint Statement, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan; Working group on discrimination against women and girls; Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child; Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; Special Rapporteur on Minority issues; Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on the right to education; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease) and their family members; Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights; Special Rapporteur on the right to food; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967; Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, *International community must not normalise Taliban rule in Afghanistan*, OHCHR (14 August 2024), <https://shorturl.at/wlS8T>.

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/08/un-special-rapporteur-says-committed-people-afghanistan-despite-taliban-barring>.

- Consistent with international standards, collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence, and prepare files, of such past and ongoing violations and abuses, including sexual and gender-based crimes, in view of any future legal proceedings and accountability efforts;
- Identify, where possible, individuals alleged to have committed such violations and abuses, including those amounting to crimes under international law, with a view to ensuring they are held accountable;
- Support relevant judicial and other proceedings, including in national courts through the use of universal and other forms of jurisdiction, and through international judicial institutions, including ongoing and possible future proceedings at the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ);
- Make recommendations with a view to ending impunity and ensuring accountability, including access to justice, truth and reparations for victims and survivors;
- Present recommendations to tackle impunity for ongoing and past crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations to the UN Human Rights Council and to other UN bodies, such as the UN Security Council and UN General Assembly; and,
- Collaborate with and complement the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan and other UN bodies and mechanisms.

Such a mechanism should integrate a gender perspective and a children's rights perspective, and ensure an intersectional, and victims- and survivor-centred approach throughout its work. Finally, it should ensure extensive engagement with Afghanistan's civil society.

At its 60th session, the HRC should also renew and support with necessary resources, the vital mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, and ensure the continuation of a dedicated space for an enhanced interactive dialogue on the human rights situation, in particular of women and girls, in Afghanistan. The HRC should also take action to meaningfully follow-up on the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur.

We urge Member and Observer States of the HRC to take concrete action without further delay, and to stand in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan in supporting victims, survivors, and their loved ones seeking justice and accountability for violations and abuses committed against them, and the human rights defenders who continue their work at great personal risk.

Supported by: National Organisations⁷ (alphabetical order)

1. Afghan Canadian Civil Society Forum - ACCSF
2. Afghan Human Rights Defenders in Exile - AHRDE
3. Afghan Journalists in Exile - AJE
4. Afghan Women Coordination Umbrella - AWCU
5. Afghan Women Education and Vocational Services Organization - AWEVSO

⁷ We have also received endorsements from dozens of national and three international human rights and humanitarian organisations operating within Afghanistan. However, due to security considerations, we are not in a position to disclose their names.

6. Afghan Women News Agency - AWNA
7. Afghan Youth in New Era Organization - AYNEO
8. Afghanistan Civil Society Forum Organization - ACSFO
9. Afghanistan Democracy and Development Organization -ADDO
10. Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization – AHRDO
11. Afghanistan Human Rights Center - AHRC
12. Afghanistan Human Rights Defenders Committee - AHRDC
13. Afghanistan LGBTIQ+ Organisation - ALO
14. Afghanistan Powerful Women Movement - APWM
15. Afghanistan Research & Advocacy Institution for Human Rights - ARAIHR
16. Afghanistan Service, Cultural and Rehabilitation Center — ASCRO
17. Afghanistan Vision Forum 2030
18. Afghanistan Women’s Studies Academy (AWSA)
19. Afghanistan Women’s Solidarity Movement - AWSM
20. Afghanistan Women's New Future Movement - AWNFM
21. Afghanistan Women's Political Participation Network - AWPPN
22. Afghanistan’s Powerful Women’s Movement - APWM
23. Alternative Links for Training and Development - ALTD
24. Aria Afghan Media Group - AAMG
25. Armanshahr | OPEN ASIA
26. Assembly of Scientists and Experts of Afghanistan - ASEA
27. AWA Legal and Social Advisory Hub - AWA
28. B-BOLAQ
29. Borderless Amu Movement – BAM
30. Cultural Front of Afghanistan - CFA
31. Civil Society and Human Rights Activists Network - CSHRAN
32. Civil Society and Human Rights Network - CSHRN
33. Civil Society Joint Working Group - CSJWG
34. Community Relief and Care Organization - CRCO
35. Development and Support of Afghan Women and Children Organization - DSAWCO
36. Dialogue Hub - DH
37. Digital Civil Society Institute - Azady
38. Edmonton Hazara Association - EHA
39. Education Defenders Network - EDN
40. Equality and Social Cultural Organization - ESCO
41. Fatema Foundation - FF
42. Fekr-e-Sabz Organization - FSO
43. Femena
44. Feminine Solidarity for Justice Organization - FSJO
45. Generation of Peace Society - GPS
46. Generation Positive - G+
47. HAMRAH
48. Hazara Council of Great Britain - HCGB
49. Human Rights Defenders Plus - HRD+

50. Humanitarian Assistance Empowerment Organization - HAEO
51. Incident Prevention to Assist the People Organization - IPAPO
52. Independent Coalition of Afghanistan Women's Protest Movements - ICAWPM
53. Lajivard Yolu Research & Policy Center - LYRPC
54. LEARN Afghan_
55. Mawoud Academy - MA
56. Multi culturele Vrouwen Vereniging - McVV
57. Nationals Movement Against Discrimination - NMAD
58. Network of Afghan Women in Urban Government - NAWUG
59. New-Naweed Weekly
60. Not To Rigor Organization - NRO
61. Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies - DROPS
62. Par Cultural Center - PCC
63. Pol Non-Profit Organisation - PNPO
64. Progressive Forces of Afghanistan Movement - PFAM
65. Rah-e-Madanyat Daily
66. Rawadari
67. Shahmama
68. Shahrvand Social and Legal Research Organization - SSLO
69. Spontaneous Movement of Afghan Women Protesters - SMAWP
70. Support for Afghan Girl's Education - SAGE
71. Tabesam Cultural and Social Services Institute – TCSSI
72. Terrorism Victims Protection Organization- TVPO
73. The Rahyab Initiative - RI
74. Together for Equality Organization -T4E
75. Tolo Social and Civic Organization - TSCO
76. Transitional Justice Coordination Group - TJCGJ
77. Verband afghanischer Organisationen in Deutschland e.V. - VAFO
78. Wahaj Welfare Organization for Afghanistan - WWOA
79. Window For Hope – W4H
80. Women Advocacy Committee - WAC
81. Women and Children Advocacy Network - WCAN
82. Women Beyond Borders - WBB
83. Women Media Advocacy Group – WMAG
84. World Council of Panjshirians
85. Yaar.e.V
86. Youths Foundation of Democracy Proponents - YFDP

Supported by: International Organizations

1. Amnesty International – AI
2. Asia Democracy Network - ADN
3. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development - FORUM-ASIA
4. Center for Human Rights Advocacy - CHRA

5. Centre for Dialogue and Progress- Geneva – CDP-G
6. Coalition for Genocide Response - CGR
7. Freedom Now
8. Global Justice Center - GJC
9. Human Rights Activists Union - HRAU
10. Human Rights Watch - HRW
11. International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute – IBAHRI
12. International Federation for Human Rights - FIDH
13. International Service for Human Rights - ISHR
14. MADRE
15. South Asia Collective - SAC
16. South Asia Justice Campaign– SAJC
17. South Asians for Human Rights - SAHR
18. The Alliance for the Prevention of Atrocity Crimes - APAC
19. The Duty Legacy - TDL
20. The International Commission of Jurists - ICJ
21. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom - WILPF
22. World Organisation Against Torture - OMCT