

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by Ms. Yalda Royan
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President, excellencies, civil society colleagues,

I am Yalda Royan from Afghanistan, the worst country in the world for women and the only country where girls over grade six are not allowed to attend school. I represent VOICE, a feminist humanitarian organization, and am a founding member of the Afghan Women's Advocacy Group.

President, Afghan women warned this Council that the Taliban's promises to respect women's rights were false. You ignored us, and now we are paying the price for the negligence of the international community, including all those sitting at this table.

The current crisis

Under the Taliban, we have witnessed vicious atrocities, severe hunger, and suppression of our human rights. Activists and journalists have stopped their work out of fear of retaliation. Since August, the Taliban have announced more than 30 policies, only some of which have made international headlines, that are systematically eliminating women from all aspects of society.

The Taliban are imposing these edicts through intimidation and violence. For example, in April of this year, the Taliban brutally tortured and killed a young midwife in Mazar e Sharif; they amputated her legs, stabbed her, and then shot her 12 times — simply because she was a woman and a Hazara. Yet Afghan women continue to risk their lives by protesting such violations of their human rights by the Taliban.

In addition, hundreds of former officials, as well as anyone who resists Taliban rule, have been targeted, tortured or killed. Tajiks in Panjshir, Baghlan, and Takhar provinces continue to be arbitrarily arrested, killed, tortured, and forcibly displaced. On June 10, the Taliban arrested Zamanuddin, a Tajik student, along with his brother in Panjshir. They asked him to reveal the location of the National Resistance Front's (NRF) bases. When he said he didn't know, the Taliban cut off one of his ears, shot him in the eye, and threw him off a mountain. His brother was also killed. This is the true face of the Taliban, who seek your recognition and legitimacy.

Since March, the Kuchis have attacked Hazaras in Behsud, Malistan, Jaghori, and Shaikh Ali districts according to local activists, killing and injuring 31 people, burning hundreds of houses and taking 21 people hostage, many of whom are still missing. Hazaras were also targeted in 8 explosions in April alone, but the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's (UNAMA) condemnation of these attacks did not even mention the victims' ethnicities. I ask the Security Council, in order for such acts to be recognized as genocide — a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, in whole or in part — how many more Hazaras must be killed?

UNAMA's role in addressing the current crisis

In March, this Council took an important step by renewing UNAMA's mandate, and putting human rights, including women's rights, at the core of its work. While UNAMA has failed us in the past, it now has the potential to meaningfully serve the Afghan people going forward.

Despite the numerous, shocking violations like those I have detailed above, UNAMA had not publicly reported on these atrocities until now, nor has it published its protection of civilians reports since July 2021. In many instances, the numbers reported by UNAMA have also been a vast undercount. For instance, UNAMA reported 10 extra-judicial killings of individuals accused of affiliation with the NRF in the last five months, while local communities have found 10 bodies in the Panjshir river in the last two weeks. In addition, many Afghans believe that UNAMA has lacked neutrality when engaging with the Taliban and has white-washed their atrocities.

UNAMA must resume regular public reporting immediately, and all reports must provide accurate and unvarnished information that reflects the realities on the ground.

The Taliban have not formed a representative government. We have so far seen no meaningful efforts by UNAMA to facilitate inclusive dialogue between Afghans, the Taliban, and the international community in order to put Afghanistan on a path to peace. In order to have credibility in the eyes of Afghans, UNAMA must prioritize the participation of diverse Afghan women's organizations and politicians in exile, not only engage with Taliban leaders, in any future political process.

UNAMA is required to coordinate delivery of humanitarian assistance to all Afghans, without discrimination. Yet, the Taliban continue to manipulate aid distribution, making sure that their followers and regions benefit from such assistance, while women-headed households and marginalized ethnic groups do not. This illustrates why respect for human rights cannot be secondary to humanitarian concerns. If UNAMA fails to ensure accountability for aid diversion, the Taliban will continue their terrorist activities using your aid.

President, while Afghan civil society are deeply skeptical of this Council's commitment, they wanted me to convey to you that condemnation of the Taliban's abuses will only be successful if it is backed up by action. It is not just the security and stability of Afghanistan that is at stake. Under the Taliban, our country is, again, fast becoming the shelter of choice for terrorist groups whose activities will not stop at our borders.

I, therefore, call on the Council to do the following:

1. **End all exemptions for sanctioned Taliban leaders if there is no progress on women's rights in 60 days.** On Monday, the Security Council renewed travel exemptions for 13 Taliban leaders. While removing Said Ahmed Shahidkhel and Abdul Baqi Basir Awal Shah and shortening the duration of the exemption were positive steps, Afghan civil society were deeply disappointed that the Security Council did not more strongly signal to the Taliban that their utter disregard for human rights closes the door for any further dialogue. If Afghan women cannot move freely, why should the Taliban? Over the next 60 days you must closely monitor the Taliban's policies on women's rights. If they fail to reverse their recent policies violating women's rights, including the ban on girl's education, and restrictions on women's movement, dress, and right to work, or enact any further restrictions on women's rights, you must not renew exemptions on travel or lift asset freezes for any Taliban leaders. You must also end exemptions for Abdul-Haq Wassiq, General Director of Intelligence and Fazl Mohammad Mazloom, Deputy Minister of Defense, who are responsible for human rights violations, including arrests, detention and repression of human rights defenders and journalists.
2. **Call on UNAMA to prioritize facilitating an inclusive, intra-Afghan dialogue as soon as the new SRSG of UNAMA has been appointed.** The Doha process, which this Council endorsed, was deeply flawed because it was negotiated without Afghans at the table. But an inclusive, intra-Afghan dialogue, which it called for, is the only viable path to peace. UNAMA must ensure the participation of all Afghans, including women and all ethnic groups. Leaving Afghanistan in the hands of a dangerous and incompetent dictatorship will only perpetuate poverty and violence.

As Member States, I also urge you to:

- **Support all efforts to hold the Taliban accountable for its past and ongoing abuses.** Support and fully resource the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, and ensure he has full access to all parts of the country. Support the establishment of a fact-finding mission, or other investigative mechanism, to monitor, collect evidence, and regularly report on human rights violations and abuses committed by all parties.

If this Council wants the Taliban, or indeed anyone, to take it seriously, you must follow through on your words of support for women's rights. Hold UNAMA accountable for implementing its mandate, and impose costs on the Taliban for its horrendous treatment of women. Stop patronizing Afghan women with awards and empty words of praise. Together, and individually, the members of this Council have incredible power and resources — I urge you to use them to take real action and restore the dignity and rights of all Afghans.

Thank you.