

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by Ms. Negina Yari
UN Security Council Briefing on Afghanistan
10 December 2025

President, Excellencies,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Negina Yari, and I am the Founder and Executive Director of Window for Hope, a network of women-led organizations operating in 26 provinces across Afghanistan.

I come from one of Afghanistan's most remote provinces, a place where access to education was once only a distant hope. Yet over the past two decades, I went to school, completed university, and led national initiatives with one purpose: to contribute to a brighter future for my country.

Despite having that same potential, millions of Afghan women and girls are now denied their human rights under Taliban rule.

Today marks International Human Rights Day. But in Afghanistan, the human rights situation continues to worsen, with UN reports of public executions,¹ corporal punishment,² torture,³ targeting of ethnic and religious minorities,⁴ and shrinking civic space,⁵ among many other violations. Virtually every right of Afghan women, to learn, to work, to participate in public and political life, has been gradually extinguished. They have been reduced to recipients of aid instead of architects of their own lives. And now, even their ability to access aid is in danger.

My remarks today will focus on one issue: the Taliban's restrictions on women humanitarian workers. Within the 135 edicts imposed by the Taliban targeting women and girls,⁶ the increasing restrictions on aid workers are having a devastating impact on the lives of women and girls.

In December 2021, the Taliban banned women from traveling, including to health centers and to deliver humanitarian aid,⁷ without a mahram (male guardian).⁸ In December 2022, the Taliban ordered national and international NGOs (INGOs) to suspend all Afghan women employees.⁹ In April 2023, they further banned Afghan women from working for the UN.¹⁰ In December 2024, the Taliban banned women from medical education.¹¹ In September, the Taliban banned national female staff from entering UN compounds.¹² In November, the Taliban demanded that all women, including patients and all women staff, from cleaners to surgeons, wear a burqa in order to enter medical facilities in Herat.¹³

Ahead of this briefing, Window for Hope interviewed 256 women from across Afghanistan. What I share with you today is not just my opinion, but their voices. Their pain. Their truth.

The women we interviewed were clear: these draconian restrictions imposed on all Afghan women staff endanger the future of humanitarian operations across Afghanistan.

Excellencies, let me explain what this means in stark terms. In a country where 22.9 million Afghans are in need of humanitarian aid,¹⁴ 5.7 million of whom are women,¹⁵ and where only 37 percent of the funds needed to deliver that aid are available,¹⁶ restrictions on women aid workers mean one thing: the millions of women and girls who depend on them will be at greater risk of harm, including death. They will lose access to life-saving medical services,¹⁷ be at greater risk of malnutrition,¹⁸ and face increased rates of gender-based violence¹⁹ and forced marriage.²⁰

The Taliban's shifting restrictions undermine the rule of law and normalize rights violations as routine governance. These policies do not merely "restrict" women: they violate their human rights, endanger lives and threaten Afghanistan's long-term stability.

In Jawzjan, a woman aid worker told us that the public humiliation and physical assaults of women by Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) officers left her exhausted, and undermined her ability to continue her work.

In Paktia, because of the absence of female aid workers and the limited presence of female nurses due to the Mahram policy, women cannot safely share their concerns with male staff, aid workers or physicians. This means they cannot receive appropriate assistance, even when it might be “available”.

In Maidan Wardak, with no women aid workers, the Taliban have eliminated biometric registration for female beneficiaries, cutting women off from the ability to register for or receive aid. The result is a system where aid is delivered by men, to men, for men.

In Herat, the new restrictions requiring all women to wear a burqa in order to enter medical facilities²¹ has already led to a sharp drop in access to care.²²

This year, of the 2.6 million people who were forcibly returned to Afghanistan from Iran and Pakistan,²³ at least 70 percent were women and children.²⁴ Previously there were over 100 women aid staff to assist them when they arrived at the Islam Qala border crossing.²⁵ But now, since the ban on Afghan women aid workers there,²⁶ barely less than 10 staff are still allowed to work,²⁷ and only under full burqa requirements.²⁸ The situation is so extreme that the UN took the unusual step of temporarily suspending its aid operations at Islam Qala.²⁹

The women we interviewed described how the Taliban’s removal of female UN staff from their workplaces has created severe operational challenges. Women’s needs are invisible. Confidential complaints mechanisms for women have been eliminated. And with women unable to report violations safely to other female staff, misconduct and aid diversion are likely to go unchecked.

Aid must reach all Afghans in need. But humanitarian actors are being forced to make impossible choices: either suspend operations entirely, or operate without women, both of which have unbearable consequences.

Excellencies, let me be clear: The human rights crisis in Afghanistan is inseparable from the humanitarian crisis. No amount of aid will address the extreme system of gender apartheid women and girls are facing every day under Taliban rule. Only respect for human rights, justice, and accountability can do that. But allowing the Taliban’s discriminatory laws and repressive practices to also dictate how humanitarians — including the UN, INGOs and others — carry out their work not only undermines humanitarian principles, it adds to the harm by further entrenching women’s exclusion. Effective and principled delivery of humanitarian aid cannot be achieved without women.

In 2023, when the Taliban banned Afghan women from working for the UN, the Security Council adopted a resolution condemning the ban.³⁰ Yet as the Taliban escalate their gender apartheid policies, this Council has largely been silent. We need you to be clear that these bans are illegal, unacceptable and cannot continue.

I therefore urge you to do the following:

- Demand that the Taliban immediately reverse all restrictions on women’s rights, including on their ability to participate in humanitarian delivery. Afghan women staff must be allowed to work – safely – for the UN, INGOs and local organizations. All humanitarian actors, including donors, must consistently uphold humanitarian principles. They must not comply with policies that exclude women. They must not operate with male-only teams. They must not accept any Taliban interference in hiring, salaries or beneficiary selection. All Afghan women staff must be paid.
- Prioritize support for Afghanistan’s courageous women human rights defenders — both inside Afghanistan and in exile. There must be expedited resettlement pathways for those at risk, sustained and flexible funding for women-led organizations, and meaningful consultation with Afghanistan’s human rights community.
- When the Taliban violate international law, including women’s human rights, there must be consequences. Hold Taliban leaders accountable through both the International Criminal Court and the International

Court of Justice, and ensure that the newly created independent investigative mechanism is fully resourced. As Afghan women have demanded, make gender apartheid an international crime. Impose targeted sanctions on Taliban leaders responsible for grave violations against Afghan women and girls, and do not lift sanctions, or grant travel exemptions, on individuals complicit in these abuses. Do not grant the Taliban a seat at the UN or any other fora.

- Looking ahead to March: Renew UNAMA’s mandate in full and insist on its effective implementation, especially the provisions that support protection of women’s rights, and ensure that UNAMA continues to report regularly on the situation of women and girls.
- Finally, demand that Afghan women can meaningfully participate in all discussions about our country’s future, including in the Mosaic Process.

Excellencies: We are not asking for charity. We are demanding our rights. Afghanistan has no future until its women are free. Thank you.

¹ OHCHR, “UN expert condemns latest execution in Afghanistan,” 22 October 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/10/un-expert-condemns-latest-execution-afghanistan>; OHCHR, “Afghanistan must immediately stop public executions and corporal punishment: UN experts,” 17 April 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/04/afghanistan-must-immediately-stop-public-executions-and-corporal-punishment>.

² “Access to justice and protection for women and girls and the impact of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett,” ¶27, 56, 11 June 2025, A/HRC/59/25, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/a-hrc-59-25-auv-1-en.pdf>.

³ “Situation of human rights in Afghanistan - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett,” ¶28, 68, 82-84, 20 February 2025, A/HRC/58/80, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/a-hrc-58-80-aev-1-en.pdf>.

⁴ “Situation of human rights in Afghanistan - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett,” ¶44-53, 20 February 2025, A/HRC/58/80, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/a-hrc-58-80-aev-1-en.pdf>.

⁵ “The situation of human rights in Afghanistan - Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,” ¶28-33, 5 September 2025, A/HRC/60/23, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/a-hrc-60-23-auv-1-en.pdf>.

⁶ Femena, “Taliban-Imposed Edicts,” accessed 8 December 2025, <https://femena.net/2025/06/11/taliban-imposed-edicts-and-authors/>.

⁷ Zahra Nader and Nargis Amini, “The Taliban Are Harming Afghan Women’s Health,” 2 March 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/02/the-taliban-are-harming-afghan-womens-health/>.

⁸ Al Jazeera, “No long-distance travel for women without male relative: Taliban,” 26 December 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/26/afghanistan-long-distance-travel-women-without-male-escort-taliban>.

⁹ Al Jazeera, “Taliban orders NGOs to send women workers home,” 24 December 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/24/taliban-bans-women-from-working-for-domestic-foreign-ngos>.

¹⁰ UN News, “Taliban order bars Afghan women from working with UN,” 4 April 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/04/1135357>.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, “Afghanistan’s Taliban Ban Medical Training for Women,” 3 December 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/12/03/afghanistans-taliban-ban-medical-training-women>.

¹² UNAMA, “UN in Afghanistan Calls for Lifting of Restrictions on Female Staff Accessing UN Premises,” 11 September 2025, <https://unama.unmissions.org/un-afghanistan-calls-lifting-restrictions-female-staff-accessing-un-premises>.

¹³ Human Rights Watch, “Taliban’s Mandatory Burqa in Herat Assaults Women’s Autonomy,” 19 November 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/11/19/talibans-mandatory-burqa-in-herat-assaults-womens-autonomy>.

¹⁴ OCHA, “Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025,” December 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-december-2024>; OCHA estimates that 22 million people in Afghanistan will require assistance in 2026. “Global Humanitarian Overview 2026 - Afghanistan,” 8 December 2025, <https://humanitarianaction.info/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2026/article/afghanistan-4>.

¹⁵ OCHA, “Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025,” p.16, December 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-december-2024>.

¹⁶ OCHA Financial Tracking Service, “Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025,” accessed 9 December 2025, <https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1263/summary>.

¹⁷ Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, “Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Afghanistan,” ¶35-36, 10 July 2025, CEDAW/C/AFG/CO/4, <https://docs.un.org/en/CEDAW/C/AFG/CO/4>; Daa Hadid and Khwaga Ghani, “A midwife says of the aid cuts in Afghanistan: ‘No one prioritizes women’s lives,’” NPR, 31 March 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goats-and-soda/2025/03/31/g-s1-56594/childbirth-usaid-afghanistan>;

-
- ¹⁸ OCHA, “Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025 - Nutrition,” 14 January 2025, <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1263/article/nutrition-0>; Women-headed households are more susceptible than male-headed households to food insecurity given restrictions on women’s work and movement; they are also more likely to report economic shocks. OCHA, “Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025 - Food Security and Agriculture (FSAC),” 14 January 2025, <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1263/article/food-security-and-agriculture-fsac-0>.
- ¹⁹ UN Women, “Afghanistan Gender Index 2024,” June 2025, pp. 56-58, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/gender-index-2024-afghanistan-en.pdf>.
- ²⁰ Fatima Jafari et. al., “The Impact of Afghanistan’s Policies on Early Child Marriage and Girl’s Education: Current Trends and Future Consequences,” *Risk Management and Health Policy*, 30 October 2025, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12583558/>; See also UN Women, “Afghanistan Gender Index 2024,” June 2025, pp. 25-26 [noting a specific increase in percentage of women-headed households arranging child marriage for daughters given escalating economic and protection needs], <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/gender-index-2024-afghanistan-en.pdf>.
- ²¹ Firuza Azizi, “Taliban Bars Women Without A Burqa From Entering Hospitals in Afghanistan,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 11 November 2025, <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-herat-women-burqa/33587547.html>.
- ²² MSF, “New restrictions limit access to care for women in Herat,” 10 November 2025, <https://www.msf.org/new-restrictions-limit-access-care-women-herat>.
- ²³ UNHCR, “Afghanistan Situation,” accessed 4 December 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>.
- ²⁴ UNCHR, “Iran-Afghanistan Returns Emergency Response #26,” 3 December 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/119948>; UNHCR, “Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns from Iran and Pakistan Emergency Update #14,” 29 October 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/119371>. OCHA estimates that women and children comprise 60% of all returns. Security Council briefing on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan by Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, 10 December 2025, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/security-council-briefing-humanitarian-situation-afghanistan-tom-fletcher-under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator>.
- ²⁵ Hannah Lucinda Smith, “Taliban edict on female staff pushes Afghan women deeper into the shadows,” *The Observer*, 15 November 2025, <https://observer.co.uk/news/international/article/taliban-edict-on-female-aid-staff-pushes-afghan-women-deeper-into-the-shadows>.
- ²⁶ Fidel Rahmati, “UN Halts Operations at Islam Qala Border After Afghan Women Staff Barred from Work,” *Khaama Press News Agency*, 5 November 2025, <https://www.khaama.com/un-halts-operations-at-islam-qala-border-after-afghan-women-staff-barred-from-work/>.
- ²⁷ Hannah Lucinda Smith, “Taliban edict on female staff pushes Afghan women deeper into the shadows,” *The Observer*, 15 November 2025, <https://observer.co.uk/news/international/article/taliban-edict-on-female-aid-staff-pushes-afghan-women-deeper-into-the-shadows>; MSF, “New restrictions limit access to care for women in Herat,” 10 November 2025, <https://www.msf.org/new-restrictions-limit-access-care-women-herat>.
- ²⁸ MSF, “New restrictions limit access to care for women in Herat,” 10 November 2025, <https://www.msf.org/new-restrictions-limit-access-care-women-herat>.
- ²⁹ UNHCR, “Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns from Iran and Pakistan Emergency Update #16,” 26 November 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/119818>; Fidel Rahmati, “UN Halts Operations at Islam Qala Border After Afghan Women Staff Barred from Work,” *Khaama Press News Agency*, 5 November 2025, <https://www.khaama.com/un-halts-operations-at-islam-qala-border-after-afghan-women-staff-barred-from-work/>.
- ³⁰ Security Council Resolution 2681 (2023), [undocs.org/s/res/2681\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/s/res/2681(2023)).