Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations

Statement

by

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Interactive Dialogue with Mr. Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan

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Mr. Chair,

I thank Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett for his report and his continued commitment to the people of Afghanistan. We welcome the Human Rights Council's recent renewal of his mandate and reaffirm our full support for his independent monitoring and reporting. We hope he will be granted safe and unhindered access to Afghanistan.

Mr. Chair,

This report is painful to read. For Afghans, it is even more painful to recognize in its findings the daily experiences of their families, neighbours and children. Five years after the Taliban's military return to power, Afghanistan faces interconnected political, human rights, humanitarian, economic and security crises. The Afghan people continue to suffer while the Taliban consolidate their control through discriminatory laws, repression and exclusion. These crises are not isolated. They are consequences of a system of governance that denies fundamental rights, excludes women and girls from public life, and increasingly uses fear and coercion to silence dissent.

Mr. Chair,

The report rightly places children and young people at the centre of our attention. What is happening in Afghanistan is not merely the denial of rights today; it is the destruction of opportunities for an entire generation. An estimated 3.8 million girls aged 7 to 18 were out of school in 2024. Girls remain barred from secondary education, and women from universities. Every passing year deepens the consequences of this exclusion, not only for the girls themselves, but for Afghanistan's future. We commend the courage of Afghan girls who continue learning through community initiatives and online education. These efforts deserve greater international support, but they cannot substitute for the unconditional restoration of their right to education.

Boys and young men also face increasingly limited opportunities. The deterioration of mainstream education, expansion of ideologically driven and Jahadi madrasas, child labour and recruitment into armed forces are deeply troubling. The report records the recruitment of 204 boys by Taliban forces in 2025. Education must equip young people with knowledge, critical thinking and opportunities, not subject them to ideological indoctrination.

Equally alarming is the dismantling of child protection and juvenile justice mechanisms. The report documents corporal punishment, child and forced marriages, exploitation and the detention of children alongside adults. Recent Taliban decrees have further weakened protections for women and girls, creating serious obstacles to escaping abusive marriages and undermining safeguards against child marriage and domestic violence. These policies are incompatible with Islamic teachings, Afghan traditions, and Afghanistan's international human rights obligations and must be reversed.

Mr. Chair,

We remain deeply concerned about continuing violations against former security personnel, despite the Taliban's repeated assurances of a general amnesty. According to UNAMA, at least 27 former security personnel were killed between October 2025 and June 2026. Others have reportedly faced arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment. We call for an immediate end to these violations, independent investigations and accountability for those responsible.

We are equally alarmed by reports of arbitrary arrests, torture and sexual harassment targeting women activists and media personnel, as well as enforced disappearances and summary killings of civilians accused of links to armed opposition groups.

The situation of ethnic and religious minorities also demands urgent attention. The reported killing of 13 Shia Muslims near a shrine in Herat, restrictions affecting Shia religious and family practices, usurpation of land and property and forced displacement of Hazara and Shia communities are deeply disturbing. No Afghan should face persecution, discrimination or displacement because of their ethnicity, religion or beliefs.

Mr. Chair,

The suffering of Afghans is compounded by mass returns, poverty and humanitarian hardship. More than five million Afghans have returned from neighbouring countries since October 2023, many under pressure and without adequate protection. We appreciate the longstanding generosity of host countries, but reiterate our call for full respect for the principle of non-refoulement.

Nearly nine million Afghan children face severe hunger, while 3.7 million children under five suffer from acute malnutrition. Restrictions on women's education and employment further undermine essential services, particularly health care.

Civilian lives must also be protected in all circumstances. We support calls for independent investigations into reported civilian casualties, including the strike on the Omid rehabilitation centre in Kabul which caused the loss of 269 people. We condemn targeting of civilians and violation of Afghanistan's territorial integrity. International humanitarian law must be respected by all parties, without exception.

Mr. Chair,

The international response must move beyond expressions of concern towards consistent, coordinated and measurable action.

First, restoring the rights of women and girls must remain a non-negotiable priority. Engagement with the Taliban must not become a pathway to normalization of discriminatory policies. It must be guided by clear benchmarks and independently verified improvements in human rights.

Second, humanitarian assistance must continue, particularly in education, health, child protection and livelihoods. Greater support is needed for Afghan-led initiatives, especially women-led organizations providing safe and alternative educational opportunities.

Third, accountability must advance. We welcome the establishment of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan and call for its timely operationalization and adequate resourcing. We support the call for "all-tools" approach and complementary accountability efforts, including through the International Criminal Court, CEDAW and other relevant international mechanisms. Impunity must not become another permanent feature of Afghanistan's crisis.

Fourth, Afghans must have a meaningful role in shaping their country's future. Women, young people, minorities, persons with disabilities and civil society must be included in decisions that directly affect their lives.

Ultimately, these challenges cannot be resolved without addressing Afghanistan's underlying political crisis. We reiterate our call for a coherent international approach supporting an **Afghan-led, UN-facilitated political process towards inclusive, representative and accountable governance**, grounded in the will and rights of the Afghan people.

Territorial control does not confer legitimacy. Legitimacy emanates from a social contract grounded in the will of the people, respect for their rights and accountable governance. International engagement must serve the rights and aspirations of the Afghan people and must never normalize oppression or exclusion.

Mr. Chair,

Despite the hardships documented in this report, Afghan girls continue to learn, educators continue to teach, and young people continue to seek a better future. Their determination deserves more than our admiration. It demands meaningful and sustained international action. The future of Afghanistan must not be decided without its people, nor built upon the denial of their fundamental rights.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Special Rapporteur,

I would appreciate your views on two questions:

First, what practical measures can the United Nations and Member States take to expand safe, quality education for Afghan girls and boys, while ensuring meaningful youth participation in decisions affecting their future? Second, how can Member States strengthen the documentation and preservation of evidence concerning targeted killings, enforced disappearances and violations against minorities, to ensure meaningful accountability? Thank you.