

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 13 February 2025 from the Permanent Representatives of Denmark, Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Denmark and Sierra Leone, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Afghanistan (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

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Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations

(Signed) Michael Imran **Kanu**
Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

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Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 13 February 2025 from the Permanent Representatives of Denmark, Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting held on 23 January 2025 on the situation in Afghanistan

On 23 January 2025, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Afghanistan. The members were briefed by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (Political) in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Georgette Gagnon, accompanied by colleagues from UNAMA and the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions on the inclusion of women and women's rights in the United Nations-facilitated Doha process, including how women's and girls' rights are being mainstreamed into the main meetings and technical working groups, and whether the process will be made more inclusive in the future. There were also multiple questions in relation to the de facto authorities' decrees, edicts and laws restricting women's rights, including how they are implemented and whether there are exceptions or workarounds being arranged at the local level, how the ban on women working for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) affects the capacity of the United Nations to assess the needs of Afghan women and girls, how the United Nations ensures the safety of its own women staff and what the main challenges are that UNAMA faces in implementing its mandate with regard to women's and girls' rights. Council members also raised questions in relation to UNAMA and the international community's engagement with the de facto authorities, including on women's rights issues, and the risk of normalization by complying with the restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities or through continued engagement. Questions were also raised about the reasons for the increasing restrictions on women's rights and whether these relate to other entities such as Da'esh, as well as the Taliban's reaction to the recent International Conference on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities: Challenges and Opportunities, organized jointly by the Muslim World League and the Government of Pakistan in Islamabad. Lastly, there were questions about the work of the United Nations on sexual and reproductive health and rights and mental health, as well as support for women's rights organizations and women's networks in Afghanistan, how the United Nations is applying a gender approach in its humanitarian work, whether Afghan women negotiate directly with the de facto authorities, what kind of restrictions there are for women working in the private sector, and the needs of refugee women and girls returning to Afghanistan.

Main points raised in the meeting

Restrictions and violations of the rights of Afghan women and girls

- The situation of women and girls has continued to deteriorate since the previous meeting of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security on the situation in Afghanistan in January 2023. In December 2024, the de facto authorities reiterated the 2022 decree banning women from working for international and national NGOs. The de facto authorities also issued an order for medical institutes to bar women and girls from studying in these institutes. The ban is estimated to prevent 36,000 midwives and 3,000 nurses from concluding their training and serving their communities, which will have a serious impact on the health of Afghan women and girls.
- In August 2024, the de facto authorities adopted a Law on the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which codified a number of restrictions that had already been issued as decrees, edicts and instructions, strengthened their enforcement and added new restrictions, such as forbidding women from speaking in public or even looking at men to whom they are not related by blood or marriage. The law assigns to the Minister for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice executive authority over its enforcement. The law and its enforcement structure have fostered a culture of self-regulation and self-censorship for Afghan women and their communities. The law has also had a severe impact on women's and girls' access to public services, healthcare and employment.
- Differences of views among the Taliban often have to do with women's rights, and particularly women's and girls' education. For instance, after the International Conference on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities: Challenges and Opportunities, which was organized by the Muslim World League under the auspices of the Prime Minister of Pakistan on 11 and 12 January 2025 in Islamabad, Pakistan, a senior Taliban leader spoke out in favour of girls' right to education. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, Roza Otunbayeva, participated in the conference and subsequently discussed the adopted Islamabad Declaration on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities. with the de facto authorities.
- On 23 January 2025, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court filed two applications for warrants of arrest before Pre-Trial Chamber II of the Court, citing reasonable grounds to believe that the Taliban leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, and the de facto Chief Justice, Abdul Hakim Haqqani, bear criminal responsibility for the crime against humanity of persecution on gender grounds, under article 7 (1) (h) of the Rome Statute.

Engagement with the de facto authorities

- UNAMA continues to conduct and facilitate principled engagement with the de facto authorities and advocate publicly and privately for the reversal of the severe restrictions affecting women and girls, which effectively exclude them from public life and society. In UNAMA engagements with Afghan women and girls across the country, Afghan women have urged the United Nations to intensify efforts in this regard.
- Some Afghan women continue to engage directly with the de facto authorities at the local level to negotiate practical solutions or workarounds to the restrictions on accessing markets, healthcare or livelihoods, as well as in some formal opportunities. For instance, during a recent high-level aid coordination forum between the United Nations, the de facto authorities and NGOs, women

were at the table, including to discuss the constraints limiting women's access to most services, activities and spaces.

- Implementation of the decrees, edicts and instructions issued by the de facto authorities to restrict women's rights differs across provinces and districts. It is critical for the United Nations, including UNAMA and its 11 field offices, to maintain its presence at the local level to be able to facilitate discussions with de facto authorities at the local level.

Women's participation and women's rights in the Doha process

- As follow-up to the third meeting of special envoys on Afghanistan in Doha in 2024, two technical-level working groups were established: one on the private sector and one on counter-narcotics. The terms of reference of both working groups are focused, among others, on the specific challenges faced by women, while seeking to develop recommendations, including on actions that promote women's participation and social inclusion. For example, the private sector working group will aim to recommend measures that promote gender equality and develop additional specific programmes to support women-owned businesses, including access to finance, and the working group on counter-narcotics is tasked with looking at sustainable licit alternative livelihoods, including for women who have been engaged in poppy farming, as well as to advocate for rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for individuals affected by drug addiction, in particular women.

Sexual and gender-based violence

- The United Nations continues to document cases of sexual violence against women, girls and boys, including instances of rape and forced marriage, despite the fear of retaliation and stigma and the lack of services, which severely limit reporting of sexual violence in Afghanistan.
- Recent reports by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan have documented allegations of sexual assault against women protesters in detention and against LGBTQI+ individuals as punishment for their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and the continuation of the practice of *bacha bazi*, which includes sexual violence against boys and has been systematically reported in Afghanistan.

United Nations country team support for Afghan women and girls

- The United Nations country team, including UNAMA, UN-Women, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, continue to deliver services to women, by women, across the country, fund programmes for women's empowerment and create spaces for Afghan women to be able to share their priorities directly with the international community. For instance, UNFPA has almost 984 facilities in all 34 provinces of the country employing close to 3,200 women who deliver reproductive services. UN-Women alone supports over 220 women-led organizations in Afghanistan, and UNDP has reached over 7.3 million women and girls with community infrastructure and basic services since 2021, from rural health facilities to primary schools and access to water.
- Humanitarian partners reached 19.8 million people in Afghanistan in 2024, including 9.5 million women and girls. It will not be possible to reach this many people in the future without women's safe, meaningful and comprehensive participation in humanitarian delivery. Humanitarian partners report some

practical cooperation with the de facto authorities when it comes to facilitating Afghan women's participation in the humanitarian response. The Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group and the Humanitarian Access Working Group conduct periodic surveys to track the impact of the bans on Afghan women working for NGOs and the United Nations. In the last survey, 63 per cent of respondent organizations had been able to secure hundreds of localized arrangements to allow the involvement of Afghan women staff in field activities, up from 54 per cent in September 2024, and 62 per cent of organizations reported that they were fully operating with women and men.

- UNDP has provided finance, equipment and training to 80,000 women-led businesses across the country since August 2021. Most of these employ an additional five to six women, leading to a significant multiplier effect on job creation for women and improving the well-being of their households. In addition, UNDP has provided digital training to over 16,000 women, enabling them to use e-commerce platforms to build their businesses and market their products, given the mobility restrictions. Since 2024, UNDP has also supported 2,500 community savings groups, of which 1,725 are made up of women, enabling more than 27,000 women to access revolving loans to start and grow businesses despite the restrictions.
- Working in close cooperation with the national partners and the local communities, UNFPA has established 523 family health houses, which are led by community midwives, to provide reproductive health services in remote areas of Afghanistan. Local communities decide where the facilities will be located and identify who from the community can be trained as a midwife. UNFPA youth initiatives have reached almost 200,000 adolescents and young people, 25 per cent of whom are girls.
- UNICEF continues to deliver services to women, adolescents and girls across all service delivery sites, facilities, schools, child-friendly spaces and community-based platforms, including through nutrition programmes, antenatal healthcare and education.
- UN-Women and UNDP, together with the World Bank, have provided more than \$11 million to 210 NGOs, which have collectively reached approximately 10,000 vulnerable women and girls. Many of the women-led organizations provide a range of services, including psychosocial support, healthcare and livelihoods. There is a growing need for flexibility in donor funding for core support to women-led organizations to allow them to adapt to the different challenges they face due to the restrictions, such as being able to incorporate the *mahram* costs or rent premises that provide separate office spaces for women and men.
- In relation to psychosocial support to women, UNFPA provides psychosocial support and counselling, while UNDP has established over 1,000 community kitchens that are social enterprises run by groups of 8 to 10 women, providing women with not only an income but also a safe place to build a sense of belonging and to address the growing social and mental health needs.
- The United Nations country team continues to advocate for women's rights through a variety of evidence-based research and knowledge products. For instance, in 2024, UNDP published a study entitled "Listening to women entrepreneurs in Afghanistan: their struggle and resilience", which outlines the challenges women face working in the private sector. Currently, UNDP is working on a study on the economic impact of the so-called morality law and the restrictions on women and girls.

- The United Nations has adopted a *mahram* policy, in consultation with Afghan women, which enables it to support its women staff and implementing partners to have a greater mobility and security, for instance, during the commute to work or during missions. UNICEF has also established a buddy system for national women staff to be accompanied by international women staff during missions.

Recommendations¹

- In the Security Council's upcoming consideration of the mandate of UNAMA, the Council should retain all of the gender-related language from resolution [2626 \(2022\)](#) and press for its full implementation, including by providing adequate resources for gender expertise and initiatives.
- The Security Council should demand women's meaningful participation in all diplomatic efforts regarding Afghanistan, including United Nations-facilitated processes, condemn all the new restrictions imposed on women and girls by the de facto authorities and demand, once again, their reversal, in line with resolution [2681 \(2023\)](#) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to which Afghanistan is a party, and urge that the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan be allowed access to fulfil his mandate.
- The Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1988 \(2011\)](#) should convene a dedicated session on the role that the Committee can play to respond to violations of women's rights in Afghanistan, including hearing from Afghan women directly, broadening the listing criteria to include women's rights violations and considering stricter conditions for the approval of travel exemptions to sanctioned Taliban leaders, and consider leveraging all the tools at the Committee's disposal.
- The Security Council should demand that humanitarian service providers be able to conduct their work safely and without discrimination on the basis of gender, including the effective delivery of services to address gender-based violence.

In addition, Council members should consider:

- Requesting more detailed information from all international partners on the participation of women and the inclusion of women's rights on the agendas of relevant diplomatic engagements by the international community, including in the working groups facilitated by the United Nations as follow-up to the third meeting of special envoys, and other diplomatic efforts, as well as any future intra-Afghan dialogues and efforts to facilitate the dialogue of Afghan civil society with the de facto authorities at the local or national levels.
- Committing to ensuring gender parity in all interactions with the de facto authorities, and ensuring that all decision-making forums concerning the future of Afghanistan address women's rights as part of the agenda and include the meaningful and safe participation of women, whether through quotas for each delegation or a women's delegation.
- Committing at least 30 per cent of all funding for Afghanistan to initiatives that directly target gender equality and women's rights, including long-term and flexible funding for women-led organizations.

¹ These recommendations are prepared by UN-Women as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group.

- Prioritizing gender-based violence risk mitigation in every relevant intervention by humanitarian and development actors, and emphasizing the need to engage with family and community actors to support the rights of women and girls.
 - Supporting refugee women and girls from Afghanistan in their efforts to seek asylum, education and employment in host countries and ensure respect of non-refoulement at all times.
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