

Thursday 24 November 2022

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The Human rights situation in Afghanistan especially the deterioration of women's rights and attacks against educational institutions**European Parliament resolution of 24 November 2022 on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, especially the deterioration of women's rights and attacks against educational institutions (2022/2955(RSP))**

(2023/C 167/06)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Afghanistan, in particular those of 16 September 2021 ⁽¹⁾ and of 7 April 2022 ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 19 May 2021 on human rights protection and the EU external migration policy ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 14 November 2022 on women, peace and security, and of 15 September 2021 on Afghanistan, which outlined five benchmarks for EU engagement with the Taliban-led de facto authorities,
- having regard to the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) on Afghanistan,
- having regard to the UN Security Council resolutions on Afghanistan, including Resolutions 2626 (2022), 2596 (2021), 2543 (2020) and 2513 (2020),
- having regard to the UN General Assembly resolution of 10 November 2022 on the situation in Afghanistan,
- having regard to the UN Human Rights Council resolution of 8 July 2022 on the situation of human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan,
- having regard to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan of 9 September 2022,
- having regard to the report of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) of 20 July 2022 outlining the human rights situation in Afghanistan over the 10 months since the Taliban takeover,
- having regard to the Taliban's announcement of the creation of the caretaker government of Afghanistan of 7 September 2021,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, both ratified by Afghanistan,
- having regard to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, signed in Geneva on 28 July 1951, and the 1967 Protocol thereto,
- having regard to the Cooperation Agreement of 18 February 2017 on Partnership and Development between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, of the other part,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 117, 11.3.2022, p. 133.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 434, 15.11.2022, p. 86.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 15, 12.1.2022, p. 70.

Thursday 24 November 2022

- having regard to the EU thematic guidelines on human rights defenders, on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, and on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them,
 - having regard to Rules 144(5) and 132(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan on 15 August 2021 following the withdrawal of NATO and Allied troops; whereas it re-established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and appointed an all-male interim government, including members from the 1996-2001 Taliban regime, some of whom are wanted on terrorism charges; whereas the EU maintains a solid position of non-recognition of the de facto Taliban government;
- B. whereas the Taliban are rolling back the progress made in the past 20 years; whereas they have re-established the former Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, and closed the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and other local structures providing support to women and girls, abolished previously enforced laws protecting women and imposed harsh restrictions on women's rights; whereas the Taliban have excluded women from the administration and have not included women in their new unrecognised government;
- C. whereas women and girls have faced growing restrictions to their fundamental rights since the Taliban takeover, in particular in access to education and employment, and freedom of movement; whereas women have been virtually erased from all areas of public life;
- D. whereas girls over 12 years old are denied an education in Afghanistan; whereas the de facto authorities of Afghanistan pledged on 15 January 2022 to allow girls to return to school at all levels after the start of the new school year in the second half of March 2022; whereas female students are banned from attending seventh grade and above; whereas this is a violation of the fundamental right to education for all children as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; whereas Afghan girls and women have bravely held peaceful protests in the country, demanding that their right to education be respected; whereas child marriage has sharply increased;
- E. whereas the Taliban recently stepped up their systemic repression of women and girls through a wave of arrests of human rights defenders; whereas Alia Azizi, the director of Herat women's prison, has been missing since October 2021; whereas human rights organisations suspect she has been forcibly disappeared; whereas, on 3 November 2022, the Taliban disrupted a press conference announcing the formation of the Afghan Women Movement for Equality, arresting one woman, Zarifa Yaqobi, and four of her male colleagues; whereas, on 11 November 2022, the Taliban arrested prominent activist Farhat Popalzai, one of the founders of the Spontaneous Movement of Afghan Women; whereas, on 13 November 2022, another women's rights defender, Humaira Yusuf, was taken into custody by the Taliban;
- F. whereas human rights violations are being reported daily, including arrests, detention, abduction, torture, threats, extortion, killings and attacks on human rights defenders and their family members; whereas there continues to be a complete lack of accountability for such violations; whereas the Taliban recently ordered judges to fully implement the Taliban interpretation of Sharia law, potentially leading to cruel and inhuman punishments and raising fears of further human rights violations;
- G. whereas the Taliban takeover has led to increasing attacks against minority groups, in particular Hazaras, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians; whereas, since the Taliban takeover, a large number of attacks have been carried out against the Hazara community, a predominantly Shiite minority, by the Islamic State Khorasan Province and other actors; whereas these attacks and the historical persecution of Hazaras could amount to crimes against humanity; whereas since August 2021, their places of worship and educational and medical centres have been systematically attacked and their members have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured, summarily executed, evicted, marginalised and, in some cases, forced to flee the country; whereas in 2021 and 2022, several educational centres were attacked in the predominantly Hazara district of Dasht-e Barchi, Kabul, in particular Sayed ul Shuhada, Abdul Rahman Shahid, Mumtaz and the Kaaj Educational Centre;

Thursday 24 November 2022

whereas the attacks left hundreds dead and wounded; whereas Taliban forces reportedly opened fire and used physical violence to break up demonstrations against the attacks;

- H. whereas the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is rapidly deteriorating and is disproportionately affecting women and girls; whereas the new policies introduced by the Taliban government have critically diminished the ability of women to work, including as aid workers, which has also negatively impacted women's ability to access humanitarian aid; whereas restricting women from participating in the work force has pushed women further into poverty and placed an estimated 850 000 girls at risk of economic and sexual exploitation, as well as child marriage; whereas fewer than one out of four women human rights defenders who remain in Afghanistan have reported they have access to any type of humanitarian aid or financial and legal assistance;
- I. whereas the UNAMA estimates that 59 % of the population was in need of humanitarian assistance as of July 2022, an increase of 6 million people compared with the beginning of 2021; whereas, in 2023, 28 million people are expected to require humanitarian assistance, out of which 13 million are children; whereas the World Food Programme estimates that 18,9 million Afghans are facing acute levels of food insecurity; whereas 4,3 million Afghans are internally displaced and 5,6 million have been displaced to neighbouring countries; whereas Iran and Pakistan host a large share of Afghan refugees, together accounting for 2,2 million registered Afghan refugees;
- J. whereas a devastating earthquake struck Eastern Afghanistan in June 2022, killing more than 1 000 and injuring over 6 000 people; whereas in August 2022, heavy rains fell in several parts of Afghanistan, causing floods, flash floods and landslides killing more than 180 and injuring over 250 people according to media reports; whereas earthquakes, floods, droughts, as well as the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic and rising commodity prices as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation;
- K. whereas the EU launched a EUR 1 billion humanitarian aid package for Afghanistan in October 2021 to support vulnerable Afghans who live in the country and the region; whereas as part of its new humanitarian aid package of EUR 210 million in food assistance for the most vulnerable worldwide, the G20 is planning to disburse EUR 75 million for Afghanistan to address the dramatic food security situation in the country;
- L. whereas the space for independent media and civil society has drastically shrunk under the Taliban; whereas regulations decreed by various Taliban bodies have massively restricted journalistic activity and led to an increase in arbitrary arrests of journalists;
1. Deeply deplores the continuing deterioration of the political, economic, humanitarian, human rights and security situation in Afghanistan, especially for women and girls, since the Taliban takeover of August 2021; reiterates its unwavering solidarity with and commitment to the people of Afghanistan;
 2. Condemns the staggering regression in women and girls' exercise of their rights under the Taliban, a situation that currently qualifies as a gender apartheid; condemns the additional restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women's freedom of movement; calls on the de facto authorities of Afghanistan to ensure that all gender-based restrictions on women are lifted and that they can again actively participate in public life in Afghanistan; stresses that this must be a key condition for any engagement of the international community with the Taliban;
 3. Denounces the egregious ban on secondary education for girls, in direct violation of their universal right to education; recalls the Taliban's promises that women's access to education would be restored; demands, therefore, that the Taliban now honour its own commitments, lift the ban and resume classes without delay and ensure achievement of UNESCO's educational goals; urges the EU to step up its support to Afghan groups working to defend the rights of women and girls, including alternative education options for girls, and to fund specific assistance and protection programmes, including by funding scholarships and ensuring expedited issuance of visas to Afghan students and academics who are awarded EU scholarships;

Thursday 24 November 2022

4. Denounces the relentless targeting of human rights defenders, journalists and other civil society actors, LGBTIQ+ people, dissidents and judges, as well as the brutal repression of peaceful protest and expressions of dissent throughout the country; condemns the arrest of women's and human rights defenders, including Zarifa Yaqobi and her colleagues, Farhat Popalzai, and Humaira Yusuf; and demands their immediate and unconditional release; urges the EU to step up its political and financial support for Afghan women's and human rights defenders and to guarantee their safety, as well as for women in exile, by providing quality educational and employment opportunities;
5. Is appalled by the increasing attacks on and marginalisation of minority groups, including the recent attack inside the Kaaj Educational Centre in Kabul; expresses its condolences to the families of the victims and its solidarity with the survivors; calls on the de facto authorities to bring to justice those responsible for these attacks and for them to be held accountable;
6. Expresses deep concern about the situation of the Hazara, Hindu, Sikh, Christian and other minorities since the Taliban takeover, and about the systematic attacks and broader discrimination against them, including arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, summary executions and enforced disappearances; recalls the responsibility of the de facto authorities to prohibit and prevent discrimination against all ethnic and religious communities and to safeguard their places of worship and educational and medical centres;
7. Deeply regrets that, since the Taliban takeover, access to information has become increasingly difficult, journalistic independence has been significantly curtailed, and civil society organisations have been subjected to increasing pressure by the de facto authorities; urges the Taliban to provide an enabling environment for journalists, the media and civil society organisations to carry out their activities without hindrance and fear of reprisals;
8. Reiterates its extreme concern at the deteriorating humanitarian situation; urges countries to step up and coordinate their humanitarian assistance with UN agencies and non-governmental organisations; calls on the de facto authorities to remove any restrictions and obstacles to the provision of humanitarian assistance and emphasises the need to allow proper access for organisations providing this; urges the EU and its Member States to address the economic factors behind the ongoing humanitarian crisis by making every effort to scale up humanitarian assistance, which should include a gender perspective;
9. Expresses its alarm at the devastating impact of climate change and environmental degradation in Afghanistan, which is ranked by the UN as the sixth country in the world most affected by climate-related threats; calls for urgent action by the international community to help Afghans address this dramatic situation, which disproportionately affects vulnerable groups such as women and girls;
10. Welcomes and supports the work of the UN Mission and the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, as it is essential to monitor and report on the human rights situation in the country; calls on the EU and the international community to boost political and financial support for their work;
11. Welcomes the resumption of the investigation by the International Criminal Court into crimes against humanity and war crimes in Afghanistan; calls on the EU to step up its support for information-sharing, research, monitoring and oversight for enhanced accountability;
12. Recalls that the EU has a solid position on any political engagement with the Taliban, guided by five thematic benchmarks for engagement based on the principles of adherence to human rights for all and the rule of law; highlights that, since 15 August 2021, there has only been a clear deterioration in all these benchmarks, which means that any legitimisation of the Taliban authorities cannot be justified; points out that the current benchmarks need to be updated with a view to establishing an EU long-term strategy on Afghanistan in light of the current situation and the failure of the Taliban to deliver on any of their initial promises;
13. Calls on the EU to seek the expansion of the list of targeted measures against the Taliban leadership responsible for the continued deterioration of the human rights situation;

Thursday 24 November 2022

14. Calls on the de facto authorities to take the necessary measures to combat violence against women and girls, including forced marriage and intimate partner violence, and to hold perpetrators accountable without delay; calls on the de facto authorities to reopen the nationwide support system for victims;
 15. Calls on the European External Action Service (EEAS), EU Delegations and Member State embassies to increase their support for Afghan human rights defenders and independent journalists, in the country and outside it, including by streamlining the resettlement of human rights defenders in line with the EU Guidelines on this matter;
 16. Calls for the establishment of a representative and elected government that involves women and minorities in the decision-making process at all levels;
 17. Calls for the UN Human Rights Council to establish a complementary ongoing accountability mechanism to investigate all alleged violations and abuses of human rights law amounting to crimes under international law, in particular, violence against women and girls;
 18. Notes that further international efforts are needed to support women-led intra-Afghan dialogues and Afghan women's networks both inside and outside the country; calls on the EEAS to further involve Parliament and the other EU institutions in the Afghan Women Leaders Forum; calls on the VP/HR, the Commission and the Member States to take action to ensure participation of Afghan women in policy dialogues on Afghanistan;
 19. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the EU Special Envoy to Afghanistan.
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