



## Recommended calls for Members and Associates regarding the situation in Afghanistan

### Background Context:

The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, following the withdrawal of international troops, has triggered a humanitarian crisis. This presents a dire threat to many of the fundamental values of our humanist movement – freedom of thought, speech, and choice; the human rights of women, LGBTI+ people, and children; knowledge, rationality; human empathy.

The Taliban - a militant Islamist group designated a terrorist group by the UN Security Council - imposed a repressive regime over the country from the mid-1990s to late 2001. During this time, women and girls in Afghanistan suffered severe human rights violations and discrimination, including forced marriages, kidnapping, rape and torture. The Taliban's strict interpretation of *Shari'a* forbids women to work outside the home, attend school, or leave their homes unless accompanied by a male family member. The Taliban imposed strict Islamic sanctions for common crimes and regularly carried out flogging and executions (including by beheading or stoning).<sup>1</sup>

According to UN experts, the majority of women in areas under control of the Taliban today, are again experiencing the same rights violations as those of 20 years ago. These include the forced wearing of a Burka, forced marriage, restrictions on freedom of movement and required use of a *mahram*, prohibition on working and restricted access to health care, education and more. Notably, some 80 percent of the Afghans who have been forced to flee since the end of May 2021 are women and children.<sup>2</sup>

Progressive activists, humanists, human rights defenders, journalists, writers, academics, civil servants, interpreters and former security personnel are all targets of the Taliban, as a result of their work defending human rights and democracy over the last 20 years. Minority religious and

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Health\\_TalibanWarWomen\\_PHR\\_1998\\_0.pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Health_TalibanWarWomen_PHR_1998_0.pdf);  
<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/176000/asa110031995en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27384&LangID=E>

belief groups and ethnic minorities (such as Hazaras, who are mostly Shia Muslims) are also at risk. There is evidence of extensive human rights abuses against these people by the Taliban, including the beheadings and extrajudicial killings. Many are hiding in fear or are seeking to flee the country.

In light of the worsening humanitarian crisis, the UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) has issued a non-return advisory for Afghanistan, calling for a bar on forced returns of Afghan nationals, including asylum seekers who have had their claims rejected. It has advised that this moratorium on the return of Afghan asylum seekers should remain in place as a minimum standard, until the human rights situation significantly improves.<sup>3</sup>

### **What you can ask your governments to do:**

- Check what your government's current position is on deporting Afghan refugees. Urge your government to keep their borders open to receive asylum seekers from Afghanistan, and refrain from deporting any undocumented Afghans living in your country, in accordance with the UNHCR non-return advisory. All countries should publicly recognize that Afghans fleeing Afghanistan should be given meaningful opportunities to seek asylum, with particular attention paid to those feared to be at particular risk - such as Humanists, LGBTI+ people, minority belief groups, those who have worked to promote human rights, democracy, and education; academics, writers, journalists, and other media workers; and people who have done work for foreign countries. States have a legal and moral responsibility to allow those fleeing Afghanistan to seek safety, and to not forcibly return refugees.
- Protect the human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan by increasing funding and support for non-governmental programs vital for local NGOs that promote women's rights, including in education, reproductive rights and equality before the law.
- Support NGOs and human rights defenders by increasing support for non-governmental groups inside and outside of Afghanistan that promote human rights, women's rights, children's rights, education, health care, and other vital needs.
- Call for accountability and sanctions against actors and governments directly or indirectly supporting the Taliban, including through funding, training and the provision of arms.<sup>4</sup>
- Call for governments with capacity to provide safe passage and evacuation for those fleeing Afghanistan on humanitarian grounds.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/611a4c5c4.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/exclusive-taliban-s-expanding-financial-power-could-make-it-impervious-to-pressure-secret-nato-report-warns/30842570.html>

## What governments need to call on the UN to do:

The UN Security Council should adopt a resolution which:

- Demands all parties to the Afghan conflict abide by international human rights standards and international humanitarian law.
- Reiterates that the International Criminal Court, to which Afghanistan is a party, can prosecute war crimes and other atrocities.
- Calls on all parties to ensure that all civilians, including internally displaced people, have full and free access to humanitarian assistance from UN agencies and humanitarian groups.
- To apply to the fullest extent and consistent with international law, the international sanctions on designated terrorist organizations, including the obligations of all States to suppress and prevent terrorist acts.

The UN Human Rights Council should hold an emergency session addressing the obligations of all States to advance the promotion and protection of human rights including:<sup>5</sup>

- By establishing a fact-finding mission to be deployed urgently to Afghanistan so as to assess the situation on the ground and report back to the Council on human rights violations and responsibilities.
- By supporting the High Commissioner for Human Rights in her efforts to prevent the further commission of systematic human rights violations and create a mechanism of international accountability for these systemic human rights violations.
- By engaging UN Special Procedure mandates to support fact-finding and accountability on the serious human rights violations occurring in Afghanistan.
- By paying particular attention to the protection of the most vulnerable in Afghanistan including children, women and girls, belief minorities, human rights defenders, journalists and the media, educators, and the disabled, using the full capacity of the Council's diplomatic and political capacity to engage with all stakeholders to protect and support these groups.

## Also, we ask you to:

- Urgently contact us at [casework@humanists.international](mailto:casework@humanists.international) or [casework.hi@protonmail.com](mailto:casework.hi@protonmail.com) if you have or receive information about Afghan humanists or those defending humanist values requiring our support.
- If you have time to, keep the Advocacy team informed of the outcome of your government lobbying and any significant changes in policy.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27384&LangID=E>