



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Ninety-first session

Summary record of the 2160th meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 24 June 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen (Vice-Chair)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 18 of the Convention *(continued)*

Fourth periodic report of Afghanistan (CEDAW/C/AFG/4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Afghanistan joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair**, welcoming the delegation of Afghanistan to the meeting, explained that additional members of the delegation would be participating via video link.
3. **A representative of Afghanistan**, introducing his country's fourth periodic report (CEDAW/C/AFG/4), which had been prepared by the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, said that, as a result of the actions of the Taliban, who were the de facto authorities, clouds of darkness overshadowed the lives of women and girls in Afghanistan. Since returning to power in August 2021, the Taliban had launched a systematic and widespread assault on every aspect of the lives of women and girls, seeking to completely dehumanize and erase them. The architecture of oppression had replaced the laws, policies and institutions that had previously been put in place to promote and protect women's rights, culminating in the imposition of the Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. Individuals who had engaged with the Committee in the context of the review of the country's previous periodic report in February 2020 had been removed from their jobs, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs had been closed and replaced with the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.
4. In preparing the report, the Permanent Mission had taken an inclusive and participatory approach, drawing on information from a range of sources including women human rights defenders, civil society organizations, the media, academic and policy institutions and the de facto authorities themselves. It had also conducted a survey of realities and perspectives on the ground, reaching women in all provinces of the country and in the diaspora and exile communities. Despite the palpable sense of defeat and despair that had permeated the survey responses, the process exemplified the resilience of Afghan women and girls. By engaging with the Committee, the aim of the Permanent Mission was to uphold the country's international commitments and demonstrate that Afghanistan took the international system very seriously, in contrast to the Taliban regime, which described the situation of women and girls as an "internal matter".
5. The female members of the delegation were at the forefront of the fight to uphold Afghan women's rights by filling the gaps in the absence of a legitimate rights protection system in the country and helping to retain the focus of the international community on the plight of women and girls in Afghanistan. Their resilience represented hope for the future of Afghanistan.
6. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that, as the former Chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, it was unusual for her to be supportive of the content of the report submitted to the Committee. Her organization, the Afghanistan Human Rights Centre, had submitted a shadow report that was aligned with the views expressed by the Permanent Mission.
7. During the first period of Taliban rule, women's rights activists had advocated for the use of the term "gender apartheid" to describe conditions in the country. With the Taliban's return to power and the subsequent erasure of women from public life, that term was more appropriate than ever. The de facto authorities took pride in restricting women's freedom and violating their rights with impunity. All the protection mechanisms that had been established in the two decades prior to the return of the Taliban, including the Constitution and legislation on eliminating violence against women, had now been abolished, and all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the area of women's rights had been closed.
8. The absence of strong condemnation by the international community of the Taliban's policies and human rights violations was dangerous and empowered the patriarchy in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Afghanistan was the only Muslim country that had ratified the Convention without entering any reservations. Although the full implementation of the

Convention had not been achieved in the country before the Taliban's return, great efforts had been made during that time. Now, however, there was no institution or mechanism in place to pursue that aim. The normalization of the human rights violations being committed in Afghanistan was frightening. She wished to urge the Committee to continue its efforts to raise awareness of the situation, which perpetuated conflict within the country. For as long as discrimination against women persisted, Afghanistan could not achieve peace.

9. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that, under the Taliban, women were systematically excluded from every sphere of public and political life, in direct violation of articles 7 and 8 of the Convention. All institutional mechanisms and safeguards that had previously enabled women's participation in governance and decision-making processes had been dismantled. The Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice used the police to suppress women's autonomy. Independent bodies, including those advocating for women's rights, had been dissolved. While previously there had been 69 women among the 249 members of the legislature, women were now entirely absent from government, the judiciary and the civil service. Female former judges, prosecutors and legal professionals were at risk from the convicted criminals who had been released from prison by the Taliban, many of whom wished to exact revenge.

10. The exclusion extended beyond the country's borders to international representation and diplomatic processes. The Taliban had forced the United Nations to exclude women and civil society representatives from international forums such as the third meeting of Special Envoys on Afghanistan, which had taken place in Doha on 30 June and 1 July 2024. Despite the concessions made by the United Nations and the international community on that occasion, the Taliban had been represented at the meeting only by spokespersons. Such unconditional engagement had emboldened the regime, which had issued the Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice just one month after the meeting had taken place.

11. The absence of women from all public spheres undermined the legitimacy and inclusivity of any international process that claimed to address peace, stability and development in Afghanistan, with multiple consequences. Radicalization was growing in the country: while girls over the age of 12 years were banned from school, they were permitted to attend religious schools (madrasas), 15,000 of which had been set up by the regime. In addition, people opposed to the Taliban regime were being driven to make harder choices, with some embracing military options that would lead to further conflict and endanger global security. Furthermore, the country was experiencing "brain drain", with many educated and professional women having fled, taking with them vital skills and leadership. With women banned from aid work and the delivery of essential services, the humanitarian crisis was worsening.

12. In September 2024, Australia, Canada, Germany and the Kingdom of the Netherlands had signalled their intention to file a case against Afghanistan with the International Court of Justice for violations of the Convention. To date, however, they had not followed through with doing so. Multilateralism and international accountability mechanisms intended to protect the voiceless were at serious risk. She urged the Committee to stand on the right side of history and hold the Taliban accountable for their violations of the Convention.

13. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that Afghan women were facing gender apartheid. The de facto authorities had removed women from education, work and public life and erased their legal identities, in clear violation of the Convention and international law. Afghan women were nevertheless demonstrating a powerful example of civilian resistance, embodying courage, resilience and solidarity. Their bravery must be recognized.

14. The United Nations system must mobilize and act with urgency and unity to support Afghan women both inside and outside the country, especially those at risk of forced return. Women outside Afghanistan were unable to obtain passports because embassies had been shut down, while those in neighbouring countries, Iran, for example, could not fully exercise their human rights. Inside the country, women were forbidden from leaving their homes unless accompanied by a *mahram*, or male chaperone; in a country where four decades of war had created many widows, finding such a chaperone could sometimes be problematic. A mechanism was required to reach and protect women who were vulnerable or at risk or who belonged to minority groups.

15. There could be no peace in Afghanistan while there was no Constitution. The Taliban must respect international agreements and conventions and fulfil their obligations thereunder. She urged the Committee to recognize gender apartheid in Afghanistan as a grave violation of the Convention and hold the de facto authorities accountable for systematic gender-based discrimination.

Articles 1–6

16. **Ms. Rana**, extending her profound appreciation to the civil society organizations involved in the preparation for the dialogue, said that, in the face of unspeakable persecution, the voices of the women and girls of Afghanistan continued to resonate across the world. Afghanistan was bound by the Convention irrespective of any shift in political authority. The situation in the State Party at the time of the previous review, in 2020, while troubling, had included signs of meaningful progress; the current reality was harrowing. Since the de facto authorities had assumed control, Afghan women and girls had suffered an unprecedented, systematic obliteration of their rights, in flagrant violation of the Convention's fundamental principles.

17. In preparation for the dialogue, the Committee had sought information from the de facto authorities through a comprehensive informal list of questions, transmitted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Despite the regrettable absence of a response, the Committee remained steadfast in its openness to future engagement.

18. She wished to emphasize – for the de facto authorities, countries with influence and the international community at large – that silence was complicity, not neutrality. The women and girls of Afghanistan were extraordinary agents of transformation, who continued to resist, bear witness and endure, and they must not be abandoned. Ensuring the accountability of all stakeholders and galvanizing a renewed and unified commitment to restore the inalienable human rights of Afghan women and girls would demand nothing less than a comprehensive approach, guided by unwavering legal and moral clarity and steadfast international solidarity.

19. Since the takeover in August 2021, the de facto authorities had issued a sweeping series of edicts and decrees that institutionalized gender-based discrimination, both in law and in practice, in direct violation of article 1 of the Convention. The discrimination was systemic and far-reaching, affecting every aspect of public, political, social, economic and cultural life. Women and girls were barred from secondary and tertiary education, excluded from most forms of employment, severely restricted in their freedom of movement and denied participation in political and public life. Additional restrictions on dress and public conduct further undermined their dignity and autonomy. The abolition of the Constitution of 2004 and the removal of key legislative protections, including the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, had left Afghan women and girls without any legal safeguards or avenues for redress, in grave violation of article 2 of the Convention. The ongoing review of pre-2021 laws for compliance with sharia had created a profound vacuum, even as the inconsistent and opaque application of religious and customary law was reinforcing patriarchal norms.

20. The Committee was deeply alarmed by the erosion of legal institutions and access to justice. The dissolution of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, closure of family courts and women's protection centres and cessation of legal aid services had dismantled essential accountability mechanisms for survivors of gender-based violence. Women now faced punitive consequences for reporting violence, in direct violation of article 2 (c) and (e) of the Convention.

21. The once vibrant civil society had faced relentless repression, with many NGOs being forced to cease operations, suspend activities or function underground and women human rights defenders being subjected to arbitrary detention, harassment and threats. The Committee echoed the urgent call by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan for Member States to provide robust, flexible and risk-sensitive support to civil society and women human rights defenders.

22. The country's foundational framework for women's participation in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and reconstruction, established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, had also been dismantled. Afghanistan currently ranked last on the Global Women, Peace, and Security Index. Some 80 per cent of the 23.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the country were women and children. The erasure of Afghan women from peace processes, public dialogue and national decision-making represented not only a breach of international norms, but a regression that undermined long-term stability and human rights.

23. The Committee urgently called upon the de facto authorities and the international community to intensify efforts to uphold the rights of Afghan women and girls, in compliance with the Convention.

24. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that the de facto authorities and, in some cases, neighbouring countries were attempting to mask the reality of Taliban practices in Afghanistan by invoking the country's cultural and religious specificities, even though the Organization of Islamic Cooperation had categorically rejected the Taliban's assertion that it was acting in accordance with sharia. It was clear, under international law, that neither religion nor culture could justify violations of human rights, which were universal, indivisible and inalienable, and that gender stereotypes could not justify discrimination. Moreover, a country's specificities did not diminish the duty to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

25. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that the de facto authorities had dismantled the country's legal and institutional framework, laying the ground for a broad interpretation of sharia regulations and the institutionalization of a system of discrimination, segregation, exclusion and disrespect for human dignity. Since August 2021, they had issued over a hundred decrees that had had the effect of segregating and oppressing women and girls based on misogynistic attitudes, practices and policies and destroying the relative progress towards gender equality achieved in the previous 20 years. In taking actions designed to establish and maintain gender apartheid, with generational impacts that, left unaddressed, would become more severe, the de facto authorities had breached every article of the Convention.

26. Therefore, he would respectfully urge the Committee to consider the following recommendations as a basis for its concluding observations: first, that the international community should refrain from any normalization or legitimization of the de facto authorities and their institutionalized system of oppression; second, that it should ensure that any engagement with the de facto authorities was contingent on respect for the human rights of all and was intended to facilitate the establishment of an inclusive and representative government, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and youth in decision-making positions; and, third, that it should recognize and codify gender apartheid as an international crime, take specific steps to end gender apartheid, including by ensuring that the systematic oppression of women was discussed and urgently acted upon in international, regional and national forums, and consider the global and regional implications of failing to protect the human rights of women in Afghanistan.

27. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that the arbitrary dismantling of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and its replacement with the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, whose raft of edicts deliberately erased women from public life and controlled every aspect of their lives, was a stunning repudiation of article 3 of the Convention. Since the announcement by the leader of the Taliban in March 2024 that public flogging and stoning to death would be enforced for women who violated the Taliban's fundamentalist interpretation of sharia, there had been at least a hundred known instances of the Taliban using such punishments against women. The lack of due process for women, their arbitrary detention and extrajudicial and arbitrary punishment for so-called moral crimes violated the rights to life, liberty and security of person enshrined in article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Taken in the aggregate, the edicts had in effect created a form of enforced disappearance of women, and the widespread and systematic persecution of and discrimination against women and girls might amount to crimes against humanity.

28. The impunity enjoyed by the Taliban eroded international law. At the urging of Afghan women, six States Parties to the Convention had referred the situation in Afghanistan

to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. Its subsequent application for arrest warrants represented the first time that the Office had brought stand-alone charges of gender-based persecution. The ban on girls' education and the subjection of women and girls to corporal punishment, rape, forced marriage, arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearance were violations of article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as the suspended Afghan Constitution of 2004. Moreover, the institutionalized regime of gender oppression might rise to the level of what was increasingly being recognized as a form of gender apartheid that must be codified in the draft convention on prevention and punishment of crimes against humanity. All States Parties were asked to amplify the voices of Afghan women, who must be at the heart of survivor-centred justice processes, from the documentation, collection and preservation of evidence to testimony before international tribunals. The stand taken on their behalf would define the future, not only of the women of Afghanistan but of women the world over.

29. **The Chair** said that the Committee was deeply concerned about the repeal of the temporary special measures that had been introduced between 2001 and 2021 to increase women's participation in public and political life, which, among other successes, had led to near gender parity in the membership of community development councils. Temporary special measures had still been lacking in areas such as credit and loans, health, education, employment, and peace and security, including for women and girls who faced multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. However, since taking power in 2021, instead of fulfilling their obligation under article 4 of the Convention to implement further measures, the de facto authorities had dismantled all measures and programmes aimed at eliminating gender-based prejudice and promoting equality. The Committee reiterated that temporary special measures were instrumental to ensuring the representation of women and allowing them to voice and address issues that affected them. Only through such representation could women truly thrive and thereby bring prosperity to the entire country. The Committee therefore urged the de facto authorities to reintroduce the abolished measures.

30. The Committee noted the recent ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union, according to which the systemic discrimination against women in Afghanistan amounted to persecution, thus making gender and nationality sufficient grounds for European Union countries to grant asylum to women from that country. The Committee also noted the recent approval, at a meeting of European Union and senior United Nations officials in Brussels, of a new European Union humanitarian aid package. The Committee called on all States to aid Afghan women and girls, including by putting in place special measures to deliver funding to local and international aid organizations, increasing quotas for the resettlement of Afghan women refugees and cooperating with countries neighbouring Afghanistan to ensure the safety of Afghan women in their territories.

31. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that the Taliban had contravened article 3 of the Convention with the issuance of edicts across all areas of life. As stated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the sum of the edicts targeting women and girls rose to the level of gender apartheid and was a rejection of their humanity. The Working Group on discrimination against women and girls had confirmed that gender apartheid was a lived reality, while the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan was firmly of the view that the term "gender apartheid" most fully encapsulated the institutionalized and ideological nature of the abuses committed against Afghan women and girls. The Taliban had repeatedly claimed that their policies were necessary to comply with sharia as the applicable legal framework in Afghanistan, but theirs was a self-interpretation.

32. In addition to abolishing institutions, mechanisms and projects that promoted gender equality, the Taliban had eliminated protections against gender-based violence, along with specialized victim support services. Specialized courts and family response units of the national police had likewise been dismantled, leaving women with no legal recourse against perpetrators. Furthermore, women judges had been removed and women lawyers had had their licences revoked, had fled or gone to ground or were banned from entering courtrooms. Women's lack of access to justice, particularly in rural areas, perpetuated the violence against them.

33. **Ms. Pia-Comella** said that incidents of gender-based violence against women and girls were reported to have increased substantially as a result of the restrictions imposed on

them by the de facto authorities, including restrictions on movement, denial of access to public spaces, confinement to the home and the requirement to be accompanied by a male chaperone outside the home.

34. The Committee was particularly alarmed by the latest information contained in the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2024/292) that, in Afghanistan, high levels of displacement, extreme poverty and food insecurity had exacerbated harmful coping mechanisms, including forced and child marriage. Such harmful practices not only violated article 5 of the Convention, but also constituted gross violations of international law as crimes of gender-based persecution and crimes against humanity, as specified in the Committee's general recommendation No. 30 (2013).

35. **Ms. Jarbussynova** said that Afghanistan continued to serve as a source, transit and destination country for victims of trafficking. Women and girls had been exploited both domestically and abroad and trafficked for domestic servitude and labour and sexual exploitation. Many had been coerced into prostitution – often by husbands or in-laws – or forced into marriage. The legal and institutional framework established in 2017 that had provided a foundation for combating trafficking in persons had now been completely abandoned. Furthermore, the de facto authorities hindered the work of NGOs, thereby making women and girls more vulnerable to trafficking and obstructing the protection of victims. Anti-trafficking efforts were not only inadequate; conditions were being created that made trafficking in persons inevitable.

36. Restrictions on the movement of women and girls had diminished access to employment and education significantly, increased their vulnerability to trafficking and drastically increased the risk of child and forced marriage. The ban on women attending medical institutes imposed in December 2024 had eliminated their last pathway to higher education, compounding an already desperate economic situation in which about 85 per cent of Afghans lived on less than \$1 a day.

37. Perhaps most disturbing was the criminalization of trafficking victims themselves. They faced punishments imposed by the de facto authorities for so-called moral crimes. For example, women and girls who were victims of trafficking or rape had reportedly been charged with engaging in extramarital relations (*zina*).

38. The decree issued by the de facto authorities aimed at preventing and punishing trafficking in persons represented a significant step back from the pre-2021 legal framework. Under the decree, the maximum penalty prescribed under the Criminal Code for trafficking in persons involving women and girls had been reduced to imprisonment for 1 to 3 years, instead of 10 to 16 years under the previous law. All victim support services had been eliminated, including shelters, legal aid and psychological assistance. Many women had been forced to return to their families after the de facto authorities had closed women's shelters throughout the country, and domestic violence continued to increase. Women were reluctant to seek help or escape from an abusive situation for fear of honour killings.

39. The Committee was particularly concerned about ethnic and religious minorities such as Hazara, Sikhs, Hindus and Christians. Lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women were among the most vulnerable groups in Afghanistan.

40. The de facto authorities had not reported any investigations, prosecutions or convictions with respect to trafficking crimes. They had reportedly prohibited lawyers from citing the Criminal Code enacted under the pre-August 2021 Government. There could be no effective anti-trafficking response without the full restoration of women's rights. The international community must recognize that silence in the face of systematic oppression amounted to complicity in the trafficking of women and girls.

41. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that Islam and sharia recognized and supported women's and girls' rights. The first verse of the Qur'an began with the command "Read", which highlighted the significance of education in Islam. However, the de facto authorities had weaponized their interpretation of culture and religion to undermine the agency of women and girls and limit space for them. The policies of the de facto authorities towards the citizens of Afghanistan were not a product of culture or religion; rather they were a form of gender apartheid and must be recognized as such.

42. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that the many ongoing crises facing Afghanistan had been made worse by the system of oppression of women and girls. Women and girls constituted the majority of victims of trafficking in persons both inside and outside Afghanistan. The de facto authorities had made no effort to stop those crimes. Women who were internally displaced, migrants, refugees, returnees and heads of household were particularly vulnerable. In 2025 alone, nearly 35,000 people had returned to Afghanistan. Mass deportations from neighbouring countries had placed many people, more than 50 per cent of whom were women and girls, in dangerous situations, exposing them to detention and abuse. Her delegation welcomed the recent ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union concerning asylum for Afghan women. It urged the Committee to recommend that the international community take strong action to protect all such women at risk.

43. **Ms. Rana** said that, while the de facto authorities had banned access to education and public life for women and girls, many Afghan women continued to resist through digital platforms, which had led to increased digital harassment, surveillance and online violence. There was a need to monitor and address digital forms of violence against Afghan women and girls, especially activists, journalists and women human rights defenders in exile. The Committee was also concerned at the dismantling of legal institutions and the lack of shelters, hotlines and women's protection units, which had left survivors of gender-based violence with no safe means to seek justice. It urged the international community to ensure accountability and protection, including through extra-territorial jurisdiction, universal jurisdiction laws and support to civil society.

44. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that he concurred with the expert that online abuse and cyberbullying had not received proper attention.

45. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis**, said that the now suspended Constitution of Afghanistan provided that Afghanistan was comprised of Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek and other tribes. Such an intersectional approach must be taken for every article of the Convention, as discrimination was compounded in the case of ethnic minorities. She wished to call upon States Parties to consider exercising universal jurisdiction for serious international crimes with respect to Afghanistan, where the rule of law had been significantly disrupted, so that perpetrators could be held to account.

Articles 7–9

46. **Ms. Mikko** said that, when the suspended Constitution had been adopted more than 20 years previously, the international community had witnessed the seeds of progress take root. Women had achieved meaningful representation, securing 27 per cent of seats in the Wolesi Jirga, the lower house of the parliament. In 2012, as a Member of Parliament in Estonia, she had engaged in earnest dialogue with female Afghan parliamentarians on a mission to the country. Afghan women had been active participants in local shuras and community development councils. Constitutional quotas had supported women candidates at provincial and district levels. By 2020, women had comprised approximately one fifth of civil servants, with the Government taking deliberate steps to expand women's representation in ministries and diplomatic posts.

47. Even during that period of progress, women in political life had faced relentless threats, intimidation, and violence, particularly in rural provinces. Since August 2021, however, there had been an unprecedented and systematic erasure of Afghan women from public and political life. The de facto authorities had dismantled every formal mechanism that had previously enabled women's participation in decision-making. She condemned the repeal of the constitutional provision guaranteeing 27 per cent women's representation in the parliament. She was alarmed that Afghan women were now categorically prohibited from holding any public office or participating in governance at any level. Those facts stood in stark contradiction with the Committee's general recommendation No. 40 (2024), which underscored the imperative of parity.

48. She was particularly concerned about the complete exclusion of women from the judiciary. All female judges, over 250 before the takeover, had been dismissed or driven into hiding. Women lawyers had had their professional licences revoked and the courts currently

operated under Taliban-aligned clerics lacking legal training. The diplomatic service, too, had been rendered a domain forbidden to women, and women were essentially excluded from peacebuilding processes.

49. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) Gender Index 2024 for Afghanistan, women were realizing merely one sixth of their full potential to make choices and take up opportunities. The international community must ensure that the systematic obliteration of their rights was neither normalized nor forgotten.

50. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** said that the Committee was deeply concerned about the ongoing and severe violations of Afghan women's right to nationality, in direct contravention of article 9 of the Convention. Women encountered significant barriers when attempting to exercise that fundamental right and had been effectively excluded from the legal system that was designed to guarantee it. Women were, moreover, unable to register the birth of their children without the intervention of a male and were denied the possibility of passing on their nationality to their descendants. In many cases, they were also prevented from having access to their own national identity card (*tazkira*). That had resulted in a significant lack of legal recognition, leaving women excluded from fundamental rights such as health, education and employment and deprived of access to their property, inheritance, justice and humanitarian assistance.

51. The situation was even more complicated for women who were at greater risk, such as female heads of household, widows, divorcees, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women, women with disabilities, internally displaced women and returnee women. In cases of migration and repatriation, the lack of civil documentation affected 85 per cent of women and 79 per cent of children, putting them at serious risk of becoming victims of trafficking and slavery, as they did not have visas and could not afford the costs associated with those documents. Barriers to documentation included the inability to travel to areas of origin to obtain the necessary certification, the absence of easily accessible documentation centres and the persistence of social norms that restricted women's movement. Furthermore, the lack of a functioning civil registration system prevented the regular issuance of identity documents.

52. Under those conditions, the Committee called on the international community to take coordinated and direct action. As the State Party was not a party to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, it was imperative for States, multilateral organizations, regional organizations, donors and humanitarian actors present on the ground to work in a coordinated manner to support gender-sensitive civil documentation programmes.

53. Technical and financial assistance was required to remove administrative and cultural barriers that prevented women from asserting their legal rights and those of their children. It was essential to promote awareness campaigns, targeting religious community leaders and the general population, on the importance of civil registration and access to individual and personal documentation, including passports and identity documents. Guaranteeing the right to nationality was not only a legal obligation but also an essential condition for women to be able to exercise all their other rights.

54. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that, while 2025 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), Afghan women had not been involved in the United Nations-led third meeting of Special Envoys on Afghanistan. She feared that the absence of female representatives at the discussions with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and Member States in Doha would pave the way for the normalization of the exclusion of women.

55. International organizations themselves had violated their commitment under the Grand Bargain of 2016 to set aside a minimum of 25 per cent of humanitarian financing for women. Because women were not included in the management of such financing, which had been infiltrated by the Taliban, it was impossible to know what percentage of the aid went to women. Now that the public space was completely closed to women, only international organizations and the United Nations were in a position to give them a voice. However, the United Nations was also under serious attack, with recent reports of female staff being detained by the Taliban. She wished to call on international organizations to fulfil their

commitment to including women in their policies, ensuring that women received the assistance they required and supporting women-led processes for a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. Furthermore, women should be urged to step into leadership roles, as they bore the main burden of the challenges facing Afghanistan.

56. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that he concurred with the expert concerning the difficulties women faced in obtaining passports and national identity cards and the consequences thereof.

57. **Ms. Rana** said that the Committee was deeply concerned about the continued exclusion of Afghan women from international discussions concerning the future of their country, in direct contravention of articles 7 and 8 of the Convention. In a public statement issued on the eve of the Doha meeting, the Committee had underscored that no discussion on the future of Afghanistan would be legitimate or sustainable without the full, equal and meaningful participation of Afghan women. The Committee called for all stakeholders to ensure the inclusion of Afghan women's voices in all future negotiations.

58. The Committee was concerned that women who fled Afghanistan experienced discrimination and marginalization in transit and host countries, where they were often excluded from labour markets, denied psychosocial support and subjected to threats, impairing their safety and dignity. It urged all States to ensure that Afghan women, including human rights defenders, had equal access to asylum, protection and services; to provide tailored support for their safety, mental health and professional reintegration; and to enable their full participation in society.

59. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she understood that the Taliban had approached the Credentials Committee of the General Assembly with a view to normalizing relations with the United Nations and thus legitimizing their rule in Afghanistan. The Credentials Committee had withheld recognition of the Taliban's representatives; such steps could increase political accountability for the Taliban's systematic oppression of women.

60. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that the fact that the Credentials Committee had not recognized the Taliban's representatives was very important for his delegation and other diplomatic officials appointed by the former Government. Although some countries were considering working with Taliban-appointed officials, it would be preferable for the task of running the country's embassies to be given to female diplomats in exile.

61. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that it had been discouraging to note that Norway had accepted the appointment of an embassy official by the de facto authorities. Such appointments raised important legal questions, such as whether an unrecognized government could be given control of a country's embassies and whether members of a regime responsible for human rights abuses and violations of women's rights should enjoy diplomatic immunity.

Articles 10–14

62. **Ms. Hacker** said that access to education was a prerequisite for securing women's and girls' right to equality. In the years preceding the return of the Taliban, Afghanistan had made important progress in improving access to education for women and girls. More than 3.5 million girls had been attending school, representing over one third of the student population. The national education strategic plan for the period 2017–2021 had emphasized curriculum reform, gender-sensitive infrastructure and the recruitment of female teachers. The Constitution and national laws had provided for the right to education without discrimination, and women had increasingly entered higher education and the teaching profession.

63. However, since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, there had been a systemic rollback of women's and girls' right to education. In March 2022, the de facto authorities had announced that girls' secondary schools would remain closed pending the development of a plan for their reopening in line with sharia and Afghan tradition and culture. The de facto authorities had given no indication of when that would be. Higher education for female students had been suspended until further notice. Afghanistan had thus become the only country in the world where girls were formally prohibited from receiving education

beyond the primary level. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 30 per cent of girls did not even receive primary education.

64. Girls who still had access to education were dependent on having a close male family member who was willing and available to accompany them to school. The de facto authorities had also banned women from working for NGOs, including those providing education, and had dismissed female teachers and university lecturers from their posts. In many areas, the absence of female educators had made it impossible for girls to receive even basic education, as they were not allowed to be taught by male teachers. It had been reported that boys and girls were being sent to religious schools at which the curricula were aligned with an extreme interpretation of Islam, that informal learning spaces and community-run education centres had been closed down and that activists and teachers who provided education for girls had been intimidated or arrested.

65. The exclusion of half the population from education formed part of the deliberate system of gender-based oppression that aimed to erase women and girls from public and intellectual life. The consequences had been catastrophic, with almost 80 per cent of young Afghan women not in education, employment or training. Broader social consequences included a rise in early marriage and child labour.

66. The Committee took the firm view that the de facto authorities must immediately reverse all education bans and allow Afghan women and girls to reclaim their fundamental human right to education. All international and national entities must exert pressure on the de facto authorities for that purpose and should make any engagement conditional upon tangible improvements in girls' and women's access to education. They should also support and fund efforts to provide alternative forms of learning, such as remote, home-based, digital and informal education. Education for Afghan girls who sought asylum and refuge in neighbouring States Parties, and scholarship and relocation programmes for Afghan women seeking education abroad, should also be provided.

67. The assault on women's and girls' education was one of the world's most severe situations of gender discrimination and a major pillar of the arguments of those who termed the situation in Afghanistan "gender apartheid". Without urgent intervention, millions of Afghan girls would be denied their future and Afghan society would be doomed to ignorance and extremism. The international community must act decisively to defend the fundamental right to education and support Afghan civil society in resisting oppression.

68. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that women's education had been at the forefront of the demands made by the international community. However, hopes that girls' secondary schools would be allowed to reopen had been repeatedly dashed. Meanwhile, the curriculum had been overhauled and the number of jihadi madrasas had increased. Given the scale of the problem, there was an urgent need for a massive internationally-led education programme, based on the previous curriculum, using information and communications technology to evade Taliban restrictions and reach all girls and boys in Afghanistan.

69. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that the introduction of a completely different curriculum for school and university students would deprive Afghan men, women and children of a modern education. The roll-out of a system of online education, while welcome, would face significant challenges such as the lack of Internet connectivity and the cost of electricity. Education was at the core of every society; without it, Afghanistan would remain in darkness.

70. **Ms. Rana** said that many Afghan refugees had reported challenges in gaining access to education in host countries, including inconsistent school enrolment policies, language barriers and lack of recognition of prior academic credentials. Host countries had an obligation under the Convention to ensure equal access to education for refugee girls.

71. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that the denial of women's right to education had also created a violation of the right to life, as the education ban included the training of midwives. It was clear that the intergenerational transmission of knowledge was being impeded. She wondered whether the de facto authorities might be persuaded to follow the example of countries such as Saudi Arabia, which applied sharia but did not prohibit women's education.

72. **Ms. Akizuki** said that, since August 2021, restrictive measures had excluded women from public life and economic participation. Female civil servants had been barred from returning to their jobs, with limited exceptions. In June 2024, the salaries of female civil servants had been cut to 5,000 afghanis per month. The requirement to be accompanied by a male chaperone prevented many women from travelling to work.

73. The situation amounted to a direct and systematic violation of international human rights law. It contravened article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articles 6 and 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and article 11 of the Convention. Many women had lost all income sources; others had turned to informal or precarious work. Humanitarian actors reported growing obstacles in reaching women. The exclusion of half the population from the workforce exacerbated poverty and food insecurity and undermined community resilience. A national humanitarian and development crisis was unfolding that required urgent international action. Afghan women must be recognized as agents of change essential to their nation's recovery and peace.

74. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that women who had once been journalists, media workers, civil servants, judges, lawyers, engineers, midwives, teachers and leaders had been reduced to unemployment and silence. They had also been prevented from pursuing professional training, reinforcing a deliberate architecture of discrimination and oppression. The ban on women working for NGOs had led to the loss of essential service infrastructure, including in the areas of humanitarian aid, healthcare, education, livelihood assistance, child protection, legal support and disability rehabilitation. Many of the services in question could only be provided by women, for women, and their loss had severely affected the country's most vulnerable and marginalized communities.

75. Even women attempting to work informally faced impossible barriers. The requirement to be accompanied to the workplace by a male relative had had a severe impact on unmarried and separated women, widows, female-headed households and female entrepreneurs. Afghan women's financial independence had been dismantled and their influence in decision-making diminished, with the result that they faced deepening economic hardship and increased vulnerability to domestic violence, exploitation, abuse and forced marriage.

76. If the restrictions were reversed, and women were allowed to fully participate in the workplace, the economy could experience significant growth, helping to lower poverty rates and reduce food insecurity. Unleashing women's potential was therefore crucial to the future of the country.

77. **A representative of Afghanistan** said that it had been estimated that the restrictions on women's participation in work cost the economy \$1 billion per year.

78. **Ms. Mu** said the Committee was concerned at the deteriorating health situation of women in Afghanistan. The systematic restrictions introduced by the de facto authorities had seriously hampered women's access to healthcare, exacerbating existing challenges such as the scarcity of resources and social and cultural norms that required women to be treated by a female health worker and prevented them from seeking medical advice, especially in the area of sexual and reproductive health. Afghanistan had one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates, at 620 deaths per 100,000 live births. Furthermore, the restrictions on women's access to public places, education and employment had taken a heavy toll on their mental health. In surveys, nearly 70 per cent of women described their mental health as bad or very bad, and women and girls accounted for approximately 80 per cent of reported suicide attempts. Other threats to women's health included a lack of access to adequate food and nutrition, and the scarcity and poor quality of water, which prevented women from enjoying a hygienic living environment and increased the risk of disease.

79. The Committee called on the de facto authorities to fulfil the State Party's obligations and lift the relevant restrictions in order to create an environment conducive to women's physical and mental health. It joined the calls of the international community for Afghanistan to rebuild its healthcare system and to resume the training of female professionals so as to safeguard and improve the health of Afghan women and children.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.