

Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan:

JANUARY – MARCH 2026 UPDATE

About this update

This update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, covering the period from January to March 2026,¹ is based on monitoring by the UNAMA Human Rights Service conducted in accordance with its mandate from the UN Security Council.²

Women's rights

Work

Since 7 September 2025, the *de facto* authorities have prevented Afghan women (including UN staff, contractors and visitors) from entering United Nations premises across the country. 31 March marked the 205th day Afghan women have been unable to access UN premises countrywide.

On 17 January 2026, media outlets reported that the *de facto* authorities had removed women from the civil service payroll, ending the reduced salaries previously paid to women government employees who were banned from attending their offices since August 2021.³ In some provinces, employers told women they had been dismissed from their positions and were no longer government employees, while in others they received no notification and only realised they had been dismissed when they did not receive their monthly salary payment.

Education

The new academic year commenced in March. With this, the *de facto* authorities' ban on girls and women accessing education beyond grade six enters its fifth consecutive year. According to UNESCO, 2.2 million Afghan girls

and women have been denied access to secondary and higher education since 2021.⁴

Restrictions on women's freedom of movement

Inspectors of the *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Herat continue to require women to wear *chadors* in public.⁵ UNAMA documented numerous instances of *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors ordering women in Herat to exit public transportation or briefly detaining them because they were not wearing *chadors*.⁶ For example:

- On 11 January, a woman was ordered out of a taxi in Herat city because she was not wearing a *chador*.
- On 12 February, two women were ordered off a bus in Herat city because they were not wearing *chadors*. The *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors ordered them to call their families to bring them *chadors*; once they had done so and put on the *chadors*, the women were allowed to leave the area.
- On 23 March, *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors stationed in different parts of Jibreil area of Herat city stopped women who were not wearing *chadors*. They detained them by the roadside until family members brought them a *chador*.

UNAMA documented other restrictions of women's freedom of movement. In Uruzgan, Paktya and Kandahar, inspectors of *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice instructed health centres not to treat women without a *mahram*, and that female healthcare

[1] All dates referenced refer to 2026, unless otherwise specified.

[2] United Nations Security Council Resolution 2626 (2022), extended by Resolution 2818 (2026).

[3] UNAMA/OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan: April – June 2024*, 30 July 2024. Source: https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/english_-_unama_hrs_-_update_hr_situation_afghanistan_april-june_2024.pdf.

[4] UNESCO, *Afghanistan: Four years on, 2.2 million girls still banned from school*, 14 August 2025. Source: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/afghanistan-four-years-22-million-girls-still-banned-school>.

[5] UNAMA/OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan: October – December 2025*, 8 February 2026. Source: <https://unama.unmissions.org/en/document-library/update-human-rights-situation-afghanistan-october-december-2025>.

[6] *Chador*: A full-body cloak that covers the head and body.

workers must also be accompanied by a *mahram* when travelling to and from work. In Uruzgan and Ghazni provinces, inspectors of *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice instructed shopkeepers not to sell goods to women unless they were accompanied by a *mahram* and had proper *hijab*. In one instance, *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors arrested a shopkeeper accused of selling goods to a woman not accompanied by a *mahram*. He was detained for one night, in the *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice offices. In Kandahar, *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors instructed real estate agents not to rent property to women without a *mahram*.

Cross-border incidents

Cross-border incidents resulting in civilian casualties during the period 1 January – 31 March 2026 are covered in the UNAMA paper “Cross-border civilian casualties in Afghanistan: January – March 2026”.

Corporal punishment

Between 1 January and 31 March, UNAMA Human Rights Service documented instances of the *de facto* authorities carrying out judicial corporal punishment against at least 312 individuals (269 men, 39 women, and four boys).

For example, on 5 February, in Parwan province, Bagram district, on the premises of Shafaq High School, *de facto* district primary court officials lashed five men and three women with 39 lashes each. The *de facto* district primary court had convicted the individuals of having “illicit relationships”. Two of the men and two of the women were sentenced to four years in prison; another two men and one woman were sentenced to two

years; and another man was sentenced to one year. The public lashing was carried out in the presence of the Head of the *de facto* Parwan Appeal Court, *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice and *de facto* General Directorate of Intelligence officials, and local residents.

Former government officials and former ANDSF members

Between 1 January and 31 March, UNAMA Human Rights Service documented at least 23 instances of arbitrary arrest and detention and at least nine instances of torture and ill-treatment of former government officials and former members of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), in addition to at least five killings of former ANDSF members.

Former government officials and former ANDSF members who are involuntarily returned to Afghanistan continue to be at risk of human rights violations after their return. During the reporting period, UNAMA documented eight cases of human rights violations⁷ against former ANDSF members and/or former government officials who had recently been involuntarily returned to Afghanistan (ranging from several hours to up to six months prior). On 7 January, in Jawzjan province, Khwaja Du Koh district, a former pro-government militia commander was shot and killed by unknown perpetrators who broke into his home. He had fled to Iran following the Taliban takeover and involuntarily returned to Afghanistan some five months prior to being killed.

Freedom of the media

On 26 January, the *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture stated via its X account that it had revoked the operating licences of all media support organizations, except for three organizations. The reasons

[7] These human rights violations include arbitrary arrest or detention, extrajudicial killing, torture, and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

given for the revocation were that these organizations were operating in an unprofessional manner and that some of them had been inactive.⁸

The *de facto* authorities suspended the operations of two media outlets during the reporting period:

- On 28 February, the spokesperson of the *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture announced on his X account that it had suspended the operations of Rah-e-Farda TV.⁹ The reason given was that the head of the network had publicly stated that Pakistan's military action against Afghan civilians was justified and that he condemned the retaliatory operations of the *de facto* authorities against Pakistan. The spokesperson for the *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture said that this action threatened the national unity of Afghanistan. Rah-e-Farda TV remained suspended as of the publication of this update.
- On 3 March, in Ghazni province, the provincial media violations committee suspended the operations of Khushal Private Radio. According to an X post by Radio Television of Afghanistan (RTA), the suspension was due to the radio station engaging in activities contrary to cultural and social values.¹⁰ Reportedly, this was because female students called in and spoke with a male host during a live broadcast. The radio station resumed broadcasting on 10 March, after a seven-day suspension.

There is no clear process by which media outlets can appeal suspensions.

On 18 March, journalist Mahdi Ansari was released following his arrest by the *de facto* General Directorate of Intelligence in October 2024. In January 2025, he was convicted of

propaganda against the *de facto* authorities, allegedly due to his connection to a diaspora media outlet, and sentenced to 18-months imprisonment. *De facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice and *de facto* General Directorate of Intelligence officials arrested three media workers of the Afghanistan Media Organization in July 2025 who remain in detention. While two of them were sentenced to prison terms in December 2025 (receiving sentences of two and a half years and three years respectively), the third media worker has not been sentenced. All three were accused of promoting women's education, spreading immorality and spying.¹¹

Propagation of virtue and prevention of vice

Between 1 January and 31 March 2026, UNAMA documented at least 336 arbitrary arrests and detentions and 59 incidents of ill-treatment of Afghan women and men carried out by *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice personnel, primarily related to trimmed beards/Western haircuts (for men), playing or listening to music, and alleged violations of the *hijab* instruction (for women).

Inspectors of the *de facto* Departments for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice carried out enforcement related to the celebration of various holidays, as well as the observance of Ramadan:

- On 14 February, inspectors from the *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice monitored flower shops to prevent people from purchasing flowers in celebration of Valentine's Day. UNAMA documented arrests in at least three provinces of individuals accused of

[8] X account of the *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture (<https://x.com/MolCAfghanistan/status/2015655081644007665>).

[9] X account of the spokesperson for the *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture (https://x.com/K_Ghufran_415/status/2027818729963196566).

[10] X account of RTA (Radio Television of Afghanistan) Ghazni: https://x.com/RTA_Ghazni/status/2029129649201250523.

[11] UNAMA/OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan: July – September 2025*, 28 October 2025. Source: <https://unama.unmissions.org/en/document-library/human-rights-situation-afghanistan-july-september-2025-update>.

selling or purchasing Valentine's Day gifts. The Spokesperson for the *de facto* Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, Saif-ul-Islam Khyber, expressed regret over the observance of Valentine's Day in Afghanistan, describing it as a Western practice rooted in moral decadence and imitation of foreign culture.¹²

- During Ramadan (17 February to 18 March), *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice inspectors monitored fasting compliance and attendance at congregational prayers, including ensuring shops were closed at prayer times. In some provinces, individuals who consumed food during the fasting period were ill-treated and detained and others who did not attend *Tarawih* prayer (night prayer during Ramadan) or failed to close their shop during prayer times were compelled to do so; some of them also faced ill-treatment.
- On 21 March, the Spokesperson for the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, via X, reminded people not to celebrate Nowruz (Persian New Year),¹³ which is prohibited by the Law on Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.

Freedom of religion

In at least eight provinces, representatives of the *de facto* authorities (including *de facto* police, *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, *de facto* General Directorate of Intelligence, *de facto* District Governor, *de facto* Department of Hajj and Religious Affairs) instructed Shia communities not to celebrate the first day of

Eid-ul-Fitr according to the Shia calendar, instead requiring them to observe the date designated by the *de facto* authorities.¹⁴ In one province, representatives of the *de facto* Department of Hajj and Religious Affairs detained a group of Shia clerics for refusing to agree to observe Eid-ul-Fitr on the date announced by the *de facto* authorities.

In Kabul, *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors prevented women from entering a shrine on the occasion of Nowruz although male visitors were allowed entry (despite the broader, abovementioned prohibition on the celebration of Nowruz). In Herat, in January, *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors instructed a Shia Mosque to prevent women from attending evening prayers in the mosque.

Administration of justice

Decree No. 12 on Criminal Rules of Courts

In a circular dated 7 January 2026, the *de facto* Supreme Court sent to all courts for implementation a newly endorsed Decree of the Taliban leader on "Criminal Rules of Courts". The Decree criminalises numerous acts and regulates the imposition of discretionary punishments.¹⁵ Of note:

- The Decree sets out offences to which the death penalty can be applied "on grounds of public expediency" and "with the authorization of the Taliban leader".¹⁶ These include: "persisting in or promoting corruption", being an apologist for, or "promoting false beliefs in opposition to Islam", sorcery, heresy

[12] Unofficial X account of the spokesperson for the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice: <https://x.com/SAiFKHAIbAR1718/status/2022740149998932416>.

[13] Official X account of the spokesperson for the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice: <https://x.com/SyFRsmy45330/status/2035200920662024402>.

[14] X account of the *de facto* Supreme Court declaring the first day of Eid-ul-Fitr as 19 March.

[15] X account of the *de facto* Supreme Court (https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af/status/2013584940881862848?s=20; <https://t.co/Wwq5AGiVlf>).

[16] To date, the *de facto* authorities have carried out 12 judicially sanctioned public executions, all against individuals convicted of murder.

(*zindiq*), blasphemy, sodomy, and theft.¹⁷

- The Decree prohibits “severe beatings” resulting in a “fracture, wound or bruising on the body”, by a husband against his wife, with a penalty of 15 days imprisonment.¹⁸
- The Decree provides that if a wife repeatedly goes to her father’s or other relatives home “without her husband’s permission” and/or “without a Sharia-based justification” and stays there, and her relatives fail to “hand her over to her husband” after a judge’s decision to this effect, both the woman and those who obstruct her return to her husband will be sentenced to three months’ imprisonment.¹⁹
- The Decree designates the Sunni faith as the dominant religious doctrine and considers other beliefs as “heretical” (*mubtadi*).
- The Decree criminalises criticism of the *de facto* authorities, their rules, policies and interpretation of Sharia, including:
 - intentional derision of or not acting in accordance with Sharia and Islamic rites (punishable by two years’ imprisonment).²⁰
 - insulting the *Imam* (punishable by 39 lashes and one year imprisonment).²¹
- insulting any leaders of the *de facto* authorities (punishable by six months prison and 20 lashes).²²
- individuals who disobey an order of the *Imam* regarding “Permissible Matters” in Islam (punishable by one month imprisonment).²³
- failure to report meetings of “opponents of the government” to the *de facto* authorities (punishable by two years’ imprisonment).²⁴
- providing shelter to “combatants, thieves, insurgents or other corruptors” (punishable by five years of imprisonment and 39 lashes).²⁵
- Under the Decree, “clerics” and “nobles” can receive punishments of warnings, court summons and admonishments under the Decree while “middle- and lower-class” persons can receive lashings and imprisonment.²⁶ Following dissemination of the Decree, the spokesperson for the *de facto* authorities publicly stated that the article’s intent is not to divide society by class, but rather for courts to consider an individual’s criminal history and rate of recidivism.²⁷

[17] Decree No. 12 on Criminal Rules of Courts, Articles 14, 16(1), 42(2) and 60.

[18] Decree No. 12, Article 32.

[19] Decree No. 12, Article 34.

[20] Decree No. 12, Article 17.

[21] Decree No. 12, Article 18.

[22] Decree No. 12, Article 23.

[23] Decree No. 12, Article 19.

[24] Decree No. 12, Article 24.

[25] Decree No. 12, Article 25.

[26] Decree No. 12, Article 9.

[27] Alemarah English, *Transcript of the Recent Interview of Zabihullah Mujahid, Spokesman of the IEA with BBC*, 30 January 2026. Source: <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/transcript-of-the-recent-interview-of-zabihullah-mujahid-spokesman-of-the-iea-with-bbc/> (“punishments in society differ because ... the purpose is deterrence, not merely punitive retribution. Some individuals are deterred from crime by just a warning, due to their high social standing and sense of honor. Others ... are repeat offenders and require more severe punishment. Sometimes a person will cease with a summons, while another will only be deterred by imprisonment.” Further, “[a] ‘low-ranking’ person, in this judicial context, refers to someone who is a repeat offender—for example, arrested multiple times for theft or who has committed numerous criminal acts and has not ceased despite warnings. In such a case, the judge is compelled to consider the person’s record and the extent of their corruption in society, which may necessitate imprisonment.”). See also Deutsche Welle (Dari), *Interview with de facto Spokesperson Zabiullah*, 31 January 2026.

Rights of detainees

In a circular published on 20 January, the *de facto* Supreme Court reiterated to all courts that individuals can only be detained for up to ten days in *de facto* Ministry of Interior or General Directorate of Intelligence custody. The circular states that courts may grant up to five additional days of detention if security institutions request an extension. If investigations are still required after the five-day extension, they should be conducted jointly with the court.²⁸

On 2 March, the *de facto* Office of Prison Administration announced it had signed an agreement with the *de facto* Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to introduce released male and female detainees who completed vocational programs while in detention to the *de facto* Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to find them job opportunities.²⁹

On 18 March, the *de facto* Supreme Court announced that 4,596 prisoners had been released from prisons, and 4,407 persons received sentence reductions for Eid al-Fitr. The review process was reportedly overseen by a committee led by the *de facto* Director General of Judicial Inspection of the Supreme Court and officially approved by the Taliban leader.³⁰

Announcements by the *de facto* authorities concerning the administration of justice

On 1 January, the deputy spokesperson for the *de facto* authorities announced that in 2025 *de facto* courts adjudicated approximately 241,799 criminal and civil cases, resolved about 54,956 cases through reconciliation [mediation], applied *Qisas* to six people in four provinces (Farah, Nimroz, Badghis, and Khost),

and applied discretionary punishment to 1,118 criminals and accused. The discretionary punishments related to buying and selling narcotics, drug use, theft, sodomy, adultery, counterfeiting currency, illicit relations, highway robbery, and other acts.³¹

On 1 January, the deputy spokesperson for the *de facto* authorities announced that since 21 March 2025, the *de facto* Ministry of Justice had processed 104 legislative documents including the Law on Mass Media, the Pasture Law, the Law on Regulation of Forest Affairs, the Environmental Law, the Police Law, and the Mining Law; and reviewed 12 legislative documents approved by the Taliban leader.³²

On 28 January, the *de facto* Ministry of Justice announced, via a statement on X, that opposing the laws of the Islamic Emirate is equivalent to objecting to Sharia and carries legal consequences. The statement emphasised that all laws are drafted and reviewed by committees of Afghan scholars (*Ulema*), the *de facto* Ministry of Justice, the *de facto* Supreme Court, and the office of the Taliban leader, that such laws are based on the Quran, the Sunnah, and Hanafi jurisprudence, and ratified by the Taliban leader. As such, any objections would lack scholarly basis and amount to an offense under Sharia leading to legal prosecution.³³

On 9 February, the *de facto* General Directorate of Intelligence stated on X that people were invited to submit their complaints about the performance of its personnel, with evidence, noting that the identity of complainants would remain confidential. It highlighted that its personnel are subject to Islamic law, violations would be investigated and complaints would be acted upon and resolved by the courts in accordance with Islamic Sharia.³⁴

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iNkDxH3rK0> ("It is not fair to claim that the code divides society into four classes, such as Ulema, upper class, middle class, and lower class", and explaining the same).

[28] X account of the *de facto* Supreme Court (https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af/status/2013584940881862848?s=20).

[29] X account of the *de facto* Office of Prison Administration (https://x.com/opa_af/status/2028391117939683626?s=20).

[30] X account of the *de facto* Supreme Court (https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af/status/2034200723441762505?s=20).

[31] X account of the deputy spokesperson for the *de facto* authorities (<https://x.com/FitratHamd/status/2006618777924907025?s=20>).

[32] X account of the deputy spokesperson for the *de facto* authorities (<https://x.com/FitratHamd/status/2006637266886861262?s=20>).

[33] X account of the *de facto* Ministry of Justice (<https://x.com/MojAfghanistan/status/2016395819105264104?s=20>).

[34] X account of the *de facto* General Directorate of Intelligence (<https://x.com/GDI1415/status/2020871534911328357?s=20>).

On 17 February, ToloNews reported that the Taliban leader had approved a new “Law on Preachers” (Decree No. 10, dated 4 December 2025), which places the regulation of religious preaching under the authority of the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.³⁵

During the reporting period, the *de facto* Supreme Court issued 29 announcements highlighting the *de facto* courts’ role in mediating 33 cases of killings in 17 provinces, including cases of murder potentially involving *Qisas* (the death penalty), and unintentional killings.³⁶

[35] X account of TOLONews (<https://x.com/TOLONews/status/2023773335432425625?s=20>). The Law was published in Official Gazette No. 1483 (website of the *de facto* Ministry of Justice: <http://laws.moj.gov.af/ShowLawPersian.aspx>).

[36] Various announcements on the X account of the *de facto* Supreme Court (https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af).