

Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan:

JANUARY – MARCH 2025 UPDATE

About this update

This update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, covering the period from January to March 2025,¹ is based on monitoring by UNAMA's Human Rights Service conducted in accordance with its mandate from the UN Security Council.²

Rights of women and girls

Education

On 20 March, the new academic year commenced, marking the fourth year since the *de facto* authorities banned girls from participating in education beyond grade six.³ There has been no announcement made by the *de facto* authorities regarding the reopening of high schools and universities to girls and women.

Freedom of movement

UNAMA continued to receive reports of *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors instructing health clinics, shops, markets, government offices and taxi drivers to deny services to women not accompanied by a mahram as well as preventing women from accessing other public spaces. For example:

- From late January, in Ghazni province, *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors verbally instructed *de facto* line departments to prevent women unaccompanied by a mahram and/or not wearing the proper hijab from entering *de facto* government offices or accessing public services.
- On 17 January, in Herat province, Karkh district, Pashdan Dam, *de facto*

Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors barred women from visiting the area, telling families that only male members were allowed access.

- On 18 January, in Badakhshan province, Khahan district, *de facto* border police and *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors prohibited women from entering the Afghan-Tajik cross-border market to avoid the intermingling of women and men.⁴
- In February in Kandahar province,⁵ *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors visited a clinic and ordered the clinic's guards and leadership to prohibit women personnel and female patients from entering the facility without a *mahram*.
- On 6 February, in Farah city, taxi terminus, four women were refused transportation by taxi drivers because they were not accompanied by *mahrams*.
- On 18 February, during the day, in Herat city, *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors stopped several rickshaws and warned drivers against transporting women unaccompanied by a *mahram*.
- On 22 February, in Kandahar province, Dand district, *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors conducted an inspection of the district bazaar and instructed shopkeepers to report women without a *mahram* and to prevent them from entering their shops.
- On 3 March⁶, *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice personnel conducted an unannounced inspection at a hospital and made several instructions to the hospital's personnel, including that

[1] All dates referenced refer to 2025, unless otherwise specified.

[2] United Nations Security Council Resolution 2626 (2022), extended by Resolution 2777 (2025).

[3] Girls have been banned from attending school beyond grade six since September 2021 and women and girls have been banned from attending higher education since December 2022.

[4] Women who were ill and needed to buy medicines in the market were reportedly allowed to enter, provided they had a letter from the *de facto* District Governor.

[5] Location withheld for protection reasons.

[6] Location withheld for protection reasons.

they ensure that female staff were accompanied by a *mahram*. They also ordered that female patients without a mahram should not receive health services.

Work

The *de facto* authorities continue to impair women's enjoyment of their right to work, including by preventing them from running beauty salons, in line with a previously announced decree, and from working in the media.

- On 23 February, in Sar-e-Pul, *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors conducted a house-to-house search to destroy and confiscate women's beauty products from beauty salons established by women in their homes. The searches were reportedly conducted without a warrant or prior notification, and were carried out by male *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors, even in household where there were no male family members present.
- UNAMA received reports of women's radio stations in various provinces being told that they are not allowed to operate unless they have a license registered to a man.

Gender-based violence against women and girls

On 8 March, International Women's Day, the *de facto* authorities' Spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, claimed that "All manifestations of violence and mistreatment against women have been effectively curtailed" and that Afghan women's "fundamental rights... have been safeguarded in strict accordance with

Islamic Sharia law, as well as the cultural and traditional frameworks of Afghan society."⁷ He further stated that "It is incumbent upon the judicial bodies of the Islamic Emirate...to exert their utmost efforts in the protection of women's rights, guarantee their autonomy in marital decisions, uphold their entitlements to dowry and inheritance, and ensure comprehensive oversight of their legal protections."

The *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue continues to make announcements on its efforts to protect women's rights, including rights protected under the 3 December 2021 women's rights decree⁸. On 22 March, for example, it announced⁹ that during the previous month (period from 19 February to 19 March), its inspectors in Kabul and other provinces handled 84 women related cases, including inheritance and forced marriage cases.

Instances of *de facto* officials intervening to prevent violence and forced marriages were recorded during the period. UNAMA did, however, also document cases of gender-based violence against women and girls, including an instance where *de facto* authority officials attempted to enforce a forced marriage and another where they encouraged a victim to stay in a marriage where she was being physically abused as the perpetrator was her husband.

International Criminal Court

On 23 January the ICC Prosecutor announced that his office had filed two applications for warrants of arrest against the Taliban Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada and Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani.¹⁰ In the announcement, he stated that evidence collected provides reasonable grounds to believe that the Taliban

[7] https://x.com/Zabehulah_M33/status/1898287707945603237

[8] On 3 December 2021, the Taliban leader issued a 10-article decree on women's rights. Amongst other rights, the decree granted "an adult woman" the right to consent to marriage". See *Special Decree issued by the Taliban Leader on Women's Rights*, Decree Number 395, available at: https://twitter.com/Zabehulah_M33/status/1466662484375326720.

[9] <https://x.com/MOPVPE1/status/1903416186823385296>

[10] International Criminal Court, *Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC: Applications for arrest warrants in the situation in Afghanistan*, 23 January 2025. Available at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-aa-khan-kc-applications-arrest-warrants-situation-afghanistan>

Leader and the *de facto* Chief Justice bear criminal responsibility for the crime against humanity of persecution on gender grounds under the Rome Statute.

On 24 January, the *de facto* Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement “condemning the accusations” by the ICC prosecutor stating that they “lack...just legal basis” and that the ICC, “...should not attempt to impose same interpretation of human rights on all and should not disregard the religious and national values of other people in the world.”¹¹

On 19 February, the Spokesperson of Afghanistan's *de facto* authorities issued a statement declaring that the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan...does not recognize any legal obligation under the Rome Statute and deems the previous administration's accession to this statute to be devoid of legal validity.” The statement notes that “rather than adhering to the principles of justice and impartiality, [the International Criminal Court] has consistently operated in accordance with political considerations”. Further, since “many of the world’s major powers are not signatories to this “court””, it would be “unwarranted for a nation such as Afghanistan which has historically endured foreign occupation and colonial subjugation to be bound by its jurisdiction.”¹²

Civilian harm

Between 1 January and 31 March, civilians were harmed due to attacks, some of which were claimed by ISKP, Afghanistan Freedom Front and other armed groups:

- On 15 January, in the evening, in Balkh province, Mazar city, PD2, at the Morghfroschi Intersection, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated against a *de facto* Police vehicle. One civilian (a boy) was killed and 19 wounded (one girl, eight boys and ten men). Four *de facto* security

personnel were also wounded. Most of those killed and wounded were fruit and vegetable sellers who were working at their stalls at the time of the incident. There was no claim of responsibility.

- On 18 January, in the evening, in Baghlan province, Pul-e-Khumri city, in the main square, a hand grenade was thrown at a *de facto* Police check post. One man was killed and 18 other individuals were wounded (including one child and one woman). The Afghanistan Freedom Front claimed responsibility for the attack.¹³
- On 21 January, in the evening, in Takhar province, Khawja Bahauddin district, Katikjar area, armed men shot and killed a Chinese citizen. At the time of incident, the victim was reportedly traveling from Taloqan city to Nooraba gold mine located in Chah Ab district. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan Province (ISKP) claimed responsibility for the attack.
- On 11 February, in the morning, in Kunduz province, Kunduz city, a suicide attacker detonated his vest in front of Kabul Bank as a group of *de facto* Military personnel were queuing to receive their salaries. Four civilians and 15 *de facto* authority members were killed in the incident. The exact number of wounded is unknown. ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack.
- On 13 February, in the morning, inside the *de facto* Ministry of Urban Development and Housing in Kabul, a suicide bomber detonated his vest, killing three men and wounding 10 others, all employees of the *de facto* Ministry. ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack.

[11] https://x.com/MoFA_Afg/status/1882730914255708577?t=0gwBN-eyJpXui11hxqiyjQ&s=19

[12] <https://x.com/FitratHamd/status/1892452095237804273>

[13] <https://x.com/AfgFreedomAFF/status/1880953193263206713>

Explosive remnants of war also continue to cause civilian harm, with children making up the majority of victims. UNAMA recorded 42 casualties (four girls, 30 boys, eight men) due to explosive remnants of war.

Cross-border incidents

Cross-border incidents in Paktika and Nangarhar provinces resulted in civilian casualties in Afghanistan:

- On 1 February, in the early morning, in Paktika province, Niamat Abad district, Sher Ali village, an airstrike carried out by Pakistani military forces hit a mosque, killing three men – two polio vaccinators and one local resident. The polio vaccinators were reportedly in the area to carry out a vaccination campaign and were sleeping in the mosque. In response, the Embassy of Pakistan in Afghanistan informed UNAMA that: “No strike was conducted by Pakistan” in that area and said that “civilian casualties in the area have no linkage with any activity from the Pakistan side”.
- In the evening of 3 March/early morning of 4 March, in Nangarhar Province, Muhmand Dara district, Torkham area, Shinwari village, cross border firing by Pakistani military forces wounded a boy and a man.
- On 5 March, in Nangarhar Province, Mohmand Dara district, Torkham township, three reporters who were covering the cross-border armed clashes were wounded by shrapnel from a mortar shell fired by Pakistani military forces. In response to the abovementioned incidents occurring between 3 and 5 March, the Embassy of Pakistan in Afghanistan informed UNAMA that: “In the early hours of 3 March 2025, Afghan forces resorted to unprovoked and indiscriminate firing across the border at Torkham (Khyber District), with heavy weapons. The firing continued till 5 March 2025, resulting in several

casualties on the Pakistan side, including those of civilians; as a result of which, Pakistani forces were compelled to respond”.

- On 28 March, in Paktika province, Nyamat district, Sagai Hotel area, an airstrike carried out by Pakistani military forces hit a house, killing seven civilians (one adult male, one adult female, two boys and three girls).

Corporal punishment

The *de facto* authorities continue to implement judicial corporal punishment in public on a weekly basis, sometimes against large groups. For example:

- On 23 February in Khost city, 18 individuals (14 men and four women) were flogged inside the *de facto* Provincial Court. Four of the men had been convicted of engaging in homosexuality, while 14 others (including the 4 women) were convicted of engaging in extramarital affairs. The victims received 30-39 lashes each and were sentenced to one to five years in prison. The punishment was attended by *de facto* provincial officials, *de facto* primary court judges, and local residents.
- On 25 February, in Jawzjan province, Shirbirgan city sports stadium, 13 individuals (nine men and four women) were publicly flogged. They been convicted of a range of crimes, including adultery, pederasty and running away from home. Each person was flogged between 29 and 39 times. The punishment was attended by various *de facto* officials and a large number of local residents.

Between 1 January and 31 March, UNAMA Human Rights documented judicial corporal punishment against at least 180 individuals (142 men, 35 women, and three girls).

Former government officials and Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) members

Between 1 January and 31 March, UNAMA Human Rights documented at least 23 instances of arbitrary arrest and detention and at least five instances of torture and ill-treatment of former government officials and former ANDSF members, in addition to at least six killings of former ANDSF members.

A number of these arrests took place in Panjshir and Kabul and pertained to individuals affiliated with the former government of Afghanistan being arrested on allegations of affiliation with the National Resistance Front.

Fundamental freedoms

Media freedom

The *de facto* authorities continue to interfere in media operations. On 13 February, the *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture verbally instructed media outlets that the broadcast of political talk shows is suspended until further notice. On 1 March, during a media interview,¹⁴ the Deputy Minister of Publication Muhajir Farahi of *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture confirmed that political programs have been suspended due to complaints from some *de facto* ministries. He also stated that political shows will resume in future under a new format.¹⁵

The *de facto* authorities' prohibition on journalists cooperating with diaspora media operating outside of Afghanistan has been strictly enforced.¹⁶ For example, on 4 February, personnel from the *de facto* General

Directorate of Intelligence and the *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture raided the premises of Radio Begum. Two male staff of the radio station were arrested and remained in detention as of the release of this update. According to the *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture, Radio Begum was suspended after "several violations", including "unauthorized provision of content and programming to a foreign-based television channel."¹⁷ Since 2024, a number of journalists accused of working with diaspora media outlets have been arbitrarily arrested, in some instances receiving prison sentences.

Freedom of religion

Between 17 January and 3 February, in Badakhshan province, at least 50 male members of the Ismaili community have been forced to convert to the Sunni faith by *de facto* local authorities including inspectors of the *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. The men were taken from their houses at night to be questioned on religious topics. Those who refused to convert were subject to physical assaults, coercion and death threats. In addition, the *de facto* authorities have established several religious madrassas in Ismaili-populated areas in the province and required Ismaili children to enroll and receive religious education based on the Sunni faith.

De facto Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice inspectors continued to implement the Law on Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. Between 1-29 March, localized measures were taken to ensure the performance of congregational prayers in the mosque and other rules relating to Ramadan. This included *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice inspectors

[14] <https://shamshadnews.com/2025/03/01/%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%8A-%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%88-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%AB%D9%88%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%86%DA%89%DB%90-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF%DB%90/>

[15] There is also a pre-existing prohibition on the live broadcast of political talk shows. On 21 September 2024, media outlets were instructed that only pre-recorded political content approved by the *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture would be allowed and content deemed sensitive or against the *de facto* authorities would be removed prior to broadcast.

[16] According to the announcement/decision of the Media Violation Commission of the *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture, all journalists, experts, and analysts are prohibited from any cooperation with Afghanistan International (a diaspora media outlet). Available at: <https://x.com/moicafghanistan/status/1788226085768884290?s=46>.

[17] <https://www.moic.gov.af/index.php/en/begum-radio-transmissions-have-been-suspended>

reminding people to attend night (*Tarawih*) prayers at the mosque and asking businesses to close during prayer times. In some cases, businesses that remained open during prayer times were instructed to close. *De facto* Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice inspectors instructed local religious leaders to identify individuals who failed to attend prayers. Some individuals were detained or ill-treated by *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice inspectors for failing to attend prayers at the mosques (in at least Farah, Helmand, Zabul and Samangan provinces). On the other hand, in Badghis and Herat provinces, women were prevented from attending *Tarawih* prayers in certain mosques and were instructed to pray at home instead.

Administration of justice

On 11 January, the *de facto* Supreme Court published a series of circulars issued to all courts in volume No. 87 of its Mizan Gazette.¹⁸ It included the following:

- A circular¹⁹ instructing the creation of a series of committees to visit all places of detention to identify prisoners, detainees 'without fate' and those eligible for pardon or sentence reduction;
- A circular²⁰ on the handling of requests by complainants for courts to prohibit an individual from leaving Afghanistan where the complainant has a pending claim against that individual;
- A circular²¹ instructing on various issues, including:
 - Requiring provincial Ulema Councils to share all complaints they receive against courts with the *de facto* head of Appeal Court for the latter's response;

- Instructing priority processing of the cases of detainees deemed innocent by *de facto* security and other agencies. If a detainee is also found innocent by the court, courts are to issue a letter of acquittal and not open a case file;
 - Instructing a close review of any reliance on confessions in cases of *Hudud* and *Qisas*; and
 - Instructing courts handling cases of murder to ensure that any confession specifically mentions the intentional nature of the murder.
- A circular²² changing the jurisdiction for crimes relating to human trafficking from the Public Security Division to the *de facto* Military Courts.

On 12 January, the *de facto* Ministry of Justice announced via X that the third meeting of the High Commission of Defense Lawyers was held on 11 January. The *de facto* Minister of Justice said that defense lawyers obtain their licenses through a transparent process and stressed the need for judicial and security agencies need to cooperate with defence lawyers. The meeting concluded that relevant institutions must fully implement the Defense lawyers Integration Procedure.²³

On 22 January, the *de facto* Supreme Court issued volume No. 88 of the Mizan Gazette, which included a circular²⁴ instructing courts to ensure thorough investigations in cases where *mujahideen* were arrested for shooting smugglers in self defence during armed confrontations in Helmand and Nimroz Provinces, and to resolve matters according to Sharia.²⁵

On 22 January, in its annual report on the achievements of security and defense organs,

[18] https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af/status/1878078706159091865

[19] Circular No. 11 of 13 December 2024.

[20] Circular No. 12 of 16 December 2024.

[21] Circular No. 13 of 20 December 2024.

[22] Circular No. 14 of 30 December 2024.

[23] *De facto* Ministry of Justice, <https://x.com/MojAfghanistan/status/1878382608150560961>; <https://t.co/VGYmiN6rTj>

[24] Circular No. 15 of 6 January 2025.

[25] https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af/status/1882053693811630235<https://t.co/qm1wiE7rTT>

the *de facto* Ministry of National Defence's Commission for Security and Clearance Affairs reported that: structures for monitoring and overseeing decrees, and the special units of the security and defence organs, have "completely eradicated" illegal arrests, unlawful detention of suspects, and all forms of physical and psychological torture per the Taliban Leader's decrees; in rare instances where violations occurred, the violators were referred to special military courts and were punished accordingly; and claimed that significant achievements were made in removing individuals from their ranks, noting that "a significant number" of individuals involved in causing harm to citizens or engaging in various crimes, have been identified and removed from their positions.²⁶

On 22 January, RTA released an interview with the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice spokesperson, who explained that the *de facto* Ministry is responsible for accepting and addressing complaints from "civilians" against any *de facto* institution. Complaints may include delays in court processes, mistreatment by military personnel, and concerns regarding *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors. Individuals can submit their complaints in person at the *de facto* Ministry or its provincial offices, by calling 191, or via the website and email.²⁷

On 19 March, the *de facto* authorities published a new decree of the Taliban leader on "Prevention of Improper Customs during Weddings, Funeral Ceremonies, and upon Return from *Hajj* and *Umrah*".²⁸ The decree re-emphasized the importance of women's free consent to marriage, highlighting it is unlawful to compel a woman to marry. It states that perpetrators of unlawful acts against women such as "shooting, forcibly marrying, or violating a woman's rights" [to inheritance, dowry, independence] should be prosecuted in

the courts of the Islamic Emirate, and that courts are obliged to handle complaints per the 2 December 2021 decree on women rights. It also emphasized that the dowry given by the groom (*mahr*) in marriage belongs solely to the woman, and specifies other rules on dowry.

Since the start of January, the *de facto* Office of Prison Administration has announced via X the pardon and release of over 1700 prisoners, and sentence reductions for approximately another 2452 prisoners from the country's prisons. Separately, on 29 March, the *de facto* Supreme Court announced that, per the approval of the Taliban leader, 2,463 prisoners were released, and the sentences of another 3,152 others were reduced on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr.²⁹

[26] <https://rta.af/en/the-annual-report-of-the-central-commission-for-security-and-clearance-affairs/>

[27] <https://x.com/rtapashto/status/1881970783599382817>

[28] <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/decree-of-the-esteemed-amir-ul-momineen-may-allah-protect-him-regarding-prevention-of-improper-customs-during-weddings-calamities-and-upon-return-from-hajj-and-umrah/>

[29] https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af/status/1905856902120017969?t=CJ9077lqahBb1ISZTXktg&s=08