

CSW Statement on Afghanistan

On 15 August, the Afghan government collapsed as the Taliban took control of the country's capital, Kabul. In an official press conference on 17 August, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid [said](#) that the 'Islamic Emirate' would not seek revenge on anyone, while pledging that women's rights and press freedom, as recognised within its cultural framework, would be respected.

However, concerns are growing that the assurances made by the spokesperson during this press conference may not be entirely genuine, particularly after a report prepared for the United Nations (UN) by [RHIPTO Norwegian Center for Global Analyses](#) revealed the group was "intensifying the hunt-down of all individuals and collaborators with the former regime."

Disturbing and credible allegations of house-to-house searches, summary executions, forced marriages, enforced disappearances and the killings of members of ethnic minority communities have cast further doubts over these assurances. Some of the reported violations may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity. During his [address](#) to the Security Council on 16 August the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the UN warned that residents in Kabul were living in "absolute fear," echoing concerns [expressed](#) by the UN Secretary-General regarding violations against women and girls, who feared the return of the country to "the darkest days".

Additional concerns centre on the possibility of a renewed threat to regional and international peace and security, given the Taliban's previous history of providing a haven for terrorism and radicalisation.

CSW stands in solidarity with Afghanistan's internally displaced persons, religious and ethnic minorities, women and girls, and other vulnerable groups, whose prospects appear extremely uncertain.

We endorse the call of the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) for states "to create safe pathways for Afghan refugees and migrants, broaden asylum and resettlement programs and immediately halt the deportation of Afghans who seek protection," and we appeal for international support for all Afghans who require humanitarian assistance.

As the crisis continues to unfold, we urge the international community to formulate effective measures to hold the Taliban to its expressed commitments to inclusivity and non-retaliation, and to ensure it respects the dignity, rights and freedoms of all Afghan citizens, regardless of ethnicity, religion or belief, gender or occupation. These measures should include the establishment of [a UN mechanism](#) to closely monitor the human rights situation, with a focus on both prevention and accountability.

Finally, we urge the international community to continue supporting local efforts to advance human rights for all and strengthen the rule of law, including by ensuring that:

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Any violence against women and girls, and policies that discriminate and exclude them from society, are condemned and challenged. A key indicator of the Taliban's commitment to true inclusivity will be the degree to which the rights of women and girls are respected, protected and fulfilled, and they are included in discourse on the country's future. Uncertainty currently looms over the future of Afghan women and girls, despite the assurances by Taliban officials that their approach to the role of women in public life will be different. The group's harsh repression of their role in society in the past, including restrictions on education, employment, and the enforcement of religious dress codes, were criticised widely, including by several UN Mandate Holders. Social pressure regarding the use of head coverings, not out of religious conviction but out of fear of corporal punishment, is a serious concern. In addition, initial reports of forced marriages, restrictions on movement and the removal of two female anchors from government television news channels, among other issues, have prompted fears of impending restrictions on the fundamental rights and freedoms of women and girls, including on freedom of movement, the right to education, the right to work, equality before the law, participation in public life, and the right to consent to marriage.

Freedom of religion or belief and the religious and cultural heritage of minorities are respected and protected. A litmus test of the Taliban's commitment to inclusivity is the extent to which it will respect, protect, and fulfil the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief for all minority faith communities, guaranteeing freedom of worship, and protecting their religious and cultural heritage.

The Hazaras, one of Afghanistan's largest ethnic minority communities, have long faced violent persecution by the Taliban, primarily for being Shi'a Muslims. Nine Hazara men were reportedly murdered in Ghazni province in [July](#) during the Taliban's rapid advance. A group of around 285 Afghan Sikhs and Hindus from Ghazni, Jalalabad and Kabul, that includes two Sikh parliamentarians, are reportedly [sheltering](#) in a Sikh temple in Karte-Parwan and seeking relocation.

The Afghan Christian community is also vulnerable. A CSW source has reported that some Afghan Christians have already received threats and letters delivered to their homes stating: "We know who and where you are." The source added that at least two church members have been taken captive by the Taliban, raising fears that they may be tortured for information about the whereabouts of other Christians. Information has also been emerging of Christian families leaving their homes and crossing into neighbouring Pakistan, where they are living in temporary, crowded accommodation with few provisions and supplies. Exact numbers are difficult to verify at this time.

In Afghanistan, conversion from Islam is considered apostasy which, under some interpretations of Shari'a Law, is punishable by death. Consequently, those who no longer espouse a religious belief or who may have converted from Sunni Islam to another religious belief are particularly vulnerable.

CSW has learnt that several Sikh, Hindu, Christian and Hazara families were recently evacuated. However, an unknown number of families from minority faith communities remain in hiding, and are in an extremely vulnerable situation, as options for leaving the country are fading.

The protection and rescue of individuals and families from minority religious and belief communities must be prioritised.

The safety and independence of journalists, human rights defenders, educators, and other members of civil society are guaranteed. A key benchmark for the Taliban will be whether it facilitates the unimpeded functioning of civil society, including journalists and media outlets, and respects the work of the country's Independent Human Rights Commission. Worrying reports of the [killing of a relative](#) of an Afghan journalist working for German media, while another relative was injured, have raised further questions about the veracity of the Taliban's assertions with regard to the media and other civil society actors.

International humanitarian law is upheld. A humanitarian crisis is unfolding, "[aggravated](#) by sustained drought [and] the COVID-19 pandemic". According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Afghanistan already had 3.5 million internally displaced persons prior to current events, and around [80%](#) of the 250,000 people displaced since the end of May 2021 are women and children. On 16 August the UN Security Council [stressed](#) that "the world body will not abandon the people of the war-torn country, and its personnel will stay and continue to deliver critical services." Such services must not be hindered and must be distributed to all who are in need, regardless of ethnicity, religion or belief. Moreover, the security and wellbeing of humanitarian workers must be guaranteed.

The right to leave one's country is respected.

Another, and perhaps the most immediate benchmark for whether the Taliban has truly embraced inclusivity and non-retaliation will be whether and how it facilitates the unhindered evacuation of nationals and non-nationals who wish to leave, extending the evacuation period if this proves necessary, and refraining from reprisals against family members or associates who remain in the country.