Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan

Oral statement to Third Committee of the UN General Assembly

30 October 2025

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Madam Chair, Excellencies,

Once again, I regret to report that the human rights situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate with few grounds for optimism, with the following exceptions.

First, the continuing courage and ingenuity of many Afghans, in particular women and girls who, despite the ongoing and escalating oppression by the Taliban, persist in demanding their human rights.

And second, some positive developments in the sphere of accountability, in particular the ICC's issuance of arrest warrants for two top Taliban leaders, and the recent establishment by the Human Rights Council of an Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan.

Regrettably, while I would like to report that the Taliban have reflected on the damage they are doing to their country and the suffering they are inflicting on their own compatriots, and have made necessary changes, I am unable to do so because not one of their harsh and often illegal measures have been rescinded.

Distinguished delegates,

As outlined in my report, we are witnessing intensified enforcement of gender persecution, a surge in corporal punishment, alarming reports of disappearances, ill-treatment and killings of former Republic officials – contrary to the Taliban's declaration of a "general amnesty", further restrictions on the media and civil society, discrimination and isolation of marginalized ethnic, religious and linguistic communities – including forced evictions affecting in particular the Hazara community, and a significant deterioration in education for all, among other highly concerning developments.

In addition, cuts to humanitarian aid and mass forced returns of Afghans especially from neighboring countries, exacerbate an already dire human rights situation.

Ameliorating the country's myriad human rights crises to create a lasting peace for all Afghans demands the international community's sustained, principled attention as well as coordinated, coherent leadership and action. However, even some of you, members of the General Assembly, have been telling me this week that this is currently absent.

Many Afghan women are denied their right to work. In September, the de facto authorities began preventing Afghan women who are working for the United Nations

from entering UN compounds. This is a serious breach of fundamental rights and the UN Charter's principles of equality and non-discrimination, and it undermines the UN's ability to deliver effectively, including in earthquake-affected areas of eastern Afghanistan. In the context of the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, surely it is time for the Secretary-General, who has championed women's rights, to take a strong stand on behalf of his female Afghan staff.

Despite this, some member states are moving closer to recognizing the Taliban or otherwise taking steps towards normalization of diplomatic relations. Pragmatism may be tempting but it will neither deliver stability, nor lay a foundation for a peaceful, just, and inclusive Afghanistan. Pragmatism will embolden the Taliban to continue to violate the rights of the people of Afghanistan, sending a message to misogynists everywhere that institutionalised gender discrimination has few consequences; pragmatism may also enable radicalization to ferment under conditions of poverty, unemployment, and hopelessness.

Many Member States have reduced funding to humanitarian aid and civil society programs, stripping away the last vestiges of protection and support for an already imperiled population. States must recommit to properly targeted and monitored long-term, sustained humanitarian funding, including for Afghan and women-led organizations.

Despite Afghan returnees facing persecution, torture and inhuman treatment, states have returned, often forcibly, more than 2.6 million Afghans just this year. All states must respect the absolute principle of *non-refoulement*. While most returns have come from neighboring states, some Afghans are being forcibly returned from Europe, while resettlement programmes have reduced.

Distinguished delegates,

Has international solidarity evaporated?

The Taliban's institutionalized system of gender discrimination, segregation, and oppression that amounts to gender persecution and is the most extreme and systematic assault on gender equality of our time. In February, I published a study on the so-called law on the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice which highlights the oppression and climate of fear the Taliban has created.

In September, the Taliban shut down the internet and other telecommunications across the country for two days, placing everyone in Afghanistan in an information blackhole. UNAMA has recently reported on the drastic impacts across many sectors. These actions clearly violate a host of rights and have a disproportionate impact on women and girls. They must not be repeated.

Colleagues,

Let me be clear: Afghanistan is not a lost cause. The progress in the international accountability sphere is an essential part of building a future for Afghanistan rooted in justice, equality, and the rule of law. Earlier this month, the Human Rights Council established an ongoing independent investigative mechanism to collect, consolidate, preserve, and analyse evidence of serious crimes and violations, and prepare case files to facilitate future criminal proceedings. This decisive step will complement my mandate and other justice mechanisms like the International Criminal Court.

While these are no small feats, the road to peace with justice for the people of Afghanistan remains long. And we need to use every tool at our disposal. This "all tools" approach includes international accountability, sustained and principled international pressure, incentives for improvements, strengthened support for civil society, expanded humanitarian assistance, codification of the crime of gender apartheid, and challenges to the Taliban's version of Sharia by religious scholars and Muslim-majority countries. Underpinning all of this must an inclusive approach in all processes concerning Afghanistan's future, with women's rights, voices, and agency at the core.

I appeal to you, the community of nations, for principled engagement that avoids normalization of Taliban rule unless and until there are demonstrated, measurable and independently verified improvements in the human rights situation, particularly for women and girls.

I thank you.