

# Afghanistan: One year of Taliban rule underlines 'bleak future' for the country - report



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One year on, the Taliban is dismantling 20 years of human rights

Ban on peaceful protests as well as revenge killings, executions of alleged resistance fighters and other crimes could amount to war crimes

'We must not just stand on the sidelines, watching as the human rights of a whole population collapses' - Yamini Mishra

Since seizing control of Afghanistan a year ago, the Taliban have mounted a sustained attack on human rights, persecuting minority groups, violently clamping down on peaceful protests, suppressing women's rights and using extrajudicial executions and disappearances to spread fear among Afghans, Amnesty International said in a new report published today.

The 24-page report - The Rule of Taliban: A Year of Violence, Impunity and False Promises - documents gross human rights violations under a year of Taliban rule. It reveals widespread impunity for crimes such as torture, revenge killings and forced evictions of opponents of the Taliban, who initially promised to uphold women's rights, press freedom and an amnesty for government officials.

"A year ago, the Taliban made public commitments to protect and promote human rights. Yet the speed with which they are dismantling 20 years of human rights gains is staggering. Any hopes of change have quickly evaporated as the Taliban seek

to govern through violent repression with full impunity. "Arbitrary detentions, torture, disappearances, summary executions have returned as the order of the day. Women and girls have been stripped of their rights and face a bleak future, deprived of education or the possibility of taking part in public life. "We must not just stand on the sidelines, watching as the human rights of a whole population collapses. "To prevent Afghanistan's human rights crisis from spiralling further, the international community must take meaningful action to hold the Taliban accountable for these crimes." Amnesty is calling on the Taliban to immediately stop committing gross human rights violations and crimes under international law. As Afghanistan's de facto authorities, the Taliban must urgently restore, protect and promote the rights of Afghan people.

Amnesty's research details the use of excessive force by the Taliban's security forces as they try to police a ban on peaceful protests. In several large cities, security forces dispelled peaceful protests by beating and shooting unarmed protesters.

One protester from Herat province told Amnesty of the injuries inflicted by security forces: "I saw one man lying in a pool of blood in a ditch in the street; I believe he had been killed... My hand was fractured but I didn't go to the hospital, fearing that I could be arrested for participating in the protests."

The Taliban's crackdown on freedom of expression has targeted human rights defenders and civil society activists, many of whom have been harassed, threatened, detained, and even killed as a direct result of their human rights work.

Press freedom has also come under attack. Last September, the Government Media and Information Centre (GMIC) issued an order containing vague wording that forbids journalists from publishing stories 'contrary to Islam' or 'insulting to national figures'.

In the past year, more than 80 journalists have been arrested and tortured for reporting on peaceful protests. One journalist told Amnesty: "I was beaten and whipped so hard on my legs

that I couldn't stand... My family signed [a] document, promising that I would not speak out about what happened to me after my release; if I did, the Taliban would have the right to arrest my entire family."

Since August last year, there have been widespread reports of Taliban soldiers beating and torturing Afghans deemed to have broken Taliban edicts or accused of working with the former government.

Hundreds of civilians have been unlawfully detained. Many are beaten with rifle butts or whipped during arrest. Sahiba\* (not her real name), a female protestor, told Amnesty her body was covered in bruises after the Taliban security forces detained her. Sahiba said:

Revenge killings, summary executions of alleged resistance fighters and other crimes reportedly committed since the Taliban takeover could amount to war crimes.

There have been hundreds of extra judicial killings, with bodies found with gunshot wounds or signs of torture. Dozens of people have been disappeared, their whereabouts still unknown, because of their work under the previous government or because they are suspected of being involved in resistance against the Taliban.

Torab Kakar, 34, told Amnesty, that despite securing a "pardon letter" from the Taliban, his friend Jalal, who had served in the Afghan National Defence Security Forces (ANDSF), was taken away to an undisclosed location by the Taliban. He said:

When Jalal's family looked for him, they were threatened by the local head of intelligence and warned to stop their search.

Within weeks of the Taliban taking power, reports emerged of non-Pashtun Afghans being forcibly evicted from their homes and farms, so that the Taliban could reward their followers with land taken from other groups, particularly Hazaras, Turkmen and Uzbeks.

Evictions were reported across the country, including in Balkh,

Helmand, Daikundi, Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces, contributing to already huge numbers of internally displaced people. By June this year, the UN estimated that the number of internally displaced Afghans had grown to more than 820,000.

On 30 August last year, the Taliban unlawfully killed 13 ethnics Hazaras, including a 17-year-old girl, in Daikundi province. According to eyewitness testimony gathered by Amnesty, the Taliban extrajudicially executed nine former members of the ANDSF who had surrendered -- killings that appear to be war crimes.

The Taliban have subjected women to increasing violence since they took power – at times as a means of punishing their family members.

Lida, the wife of a former member of the Afghan security forces, was shot and killed by two armed Taliban men on a motorbike. The 22-year-old, who was eight months pregnant, was killed along with her two children aged two and four years old.

Dozens of women have been arrested and tortured for holding peaceful protests demanding their rights, amid mounting restrictions that have stripped away their freedoms.

The Taliban has clamped down on the right to education, blighting the prospects for millions of Afghan girls. When secondary schools reopened on 17 September last year, the Taliban forbade girls above 11 years old to attend, claiming it was a temporary situation while they recruited more female teachers and ensured “appropriate” conditions were put in place for gender segregated education. To date, none of these plans have been implemented.

Meena (not her real name), a 29-year-old teacher from Kabul, told Amnesty of her despair for her daughter’s future:

So far, 10,000 Afghans have been relocated under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). In addition to ARAP, the government opened the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) in January this year, which is supposed to

allow up to 20,000 refugees to settle in the UK. There's not an up-to-date total for the number of Afghan refugees who have arrived in the UK under this scheme. Five thousand people were meant to be resettled in the first year, but the Government said that it would include many of the people brought to the UK during last year's emergency evacuation within that number.

The treatment of those who have arrived in the UK since August last year has also been appalling, with thousands of Afghan families still languishing in overcrowded hotel rooms, because of inadequate provision of suitable housing.

Call for sanctions by the UK government

Amnesty wants to see the UK Government identify and use forms of leverage that may influence the Taliban without harming the Afghan people – such as targeted sanctions or travel bans imposed through a UN Security Council resolution – in a coordinated and vigorous manner, to end the Taliban's violations of the rights of women and girls and make clear what policy steps are required for the lifting of such measures.

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