

Human Rights Now Condemns the Taliban's Decision to Ban Women from Working for NGOs

Human Rights Now (HRN) protests the recent decision of the Taliban to ban women in Afghanistan from working at NGOs. The decision is a serious violation of Afghanistan's international human rights obligations, including under CEDAW Article 11 and ICESCR Article 6, two treaties it has ratified.

It is one of the latest efforts by the Taliban to completely erase the presence of women in all public and civic spaces. It follows many other senseless and cruel restrictions on girls and women which are designed to make them disappear and are violently enforced, such as strict restrictions on women's appearance in public, a ban on women travelling outside without a male guardian, bans on girls attending high school and college, a ban on women obtaining SIM cards, bans on most types of work for women, such as the closing of women-run bakeries, and other restrictions.

The decision to ban women from NGO work is particularly harmful. Given Afghanistan's collapsed economy since the Taliban takeover, for tens of thousands of women NGO workers, they are the main and stable income source allowing them to feed and care for their families. At the same time, humanitarian NGOs are often the only institutions in Afghanistan able and willing to provide essential humanitarian aid to the public. It is estimated that 28 million Afghans will need humanitarian assistance in 2023, including 13 million children.¹ Female staff are particularly essential to ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches women and children, among the most vulnerable demographics in need, as male staff would not be allowed to see them, much less find out their needs and provide them with aid.

Many NGOs, such as Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, CARE International,² and International Rescue Committee have stated that the decision forces them to suspend operations altogether as it crosses a humanitarian red line and because the NGOs cannot function without their female staff, which can amount to 100s or 1000s of staff for large NGOs. Their absence will have catastrophic consequences for Afghanistan's people as millions will be left without life-saving humanitarian aid, exacerbating the humanitarian disaster Afghanistan is already facing. The timing of the Taliban decision displays particular cruelty, just as Afghanistan's harsh winter is setting in and the need for humanitarian aid to combat widespread hunger and sickness is at its greatest. Women and their supporters who have protested the Taliban's draconian restrictions have also been met with severe crackdowns, such as the use of a water cannon to disperse women in Harat protesting the university ban, and many reports of beatings, torture, arrests, and disappearances of protestors.³

HRN condemns the severe restrictions of the Taliban against women, including the ban on NGO work, designed to erase them completely from public life in Afghanistan. We call on the international community to stand with women in Afghanistan and take strong measures against Taliban authorities until girl's and women's freedoms are fully restored.

¹ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/asia-and-pacific/afghanistan_en

² <https://www.nrc.no/news/2022/december/afghanistan-nrc-appalled-by-the-closing-of-universities-for-women/ngos-condemn-afghan-de-facto-authorities-ban-on-women-ngo-workers/>

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-27/afghanistan-women-university-protests-against-the-taliban/101808806>