

UN Comments on Gender Apartheid

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| UN Secretariat..... | 2 |
| Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights..... | 2 |
| Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights..... | 2 |
| Human Rights Treaty Bodies - Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women..... | 3 |
| Special Procedures - Richard Bennett, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan..... | 4 |
| Special Procedures - UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls..... | 6 |
| Special Procedures - Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, Special Rapporteur on freedom and peaceful assembly and of association..... | 7 |
| Special Procedures - Joint Statements..... | 8 |
| UN Women..... | 9 |
| Sima Bahous, Executive Director, UN Women..... | 9 |

| UN Comments on Gender Apartheid <i>as of January 2026</i> | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| UN Secretariat | António Guterres, UN Secretary General | The Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council on the Promotion and Strengthening of the Rule of Law in the Maintenance of International Peace and Security: The Rule of Law Among Nations – January 2023 | In Afghanistan, unprecedented, systemic attacks on women's and girls' rights and the flouting of international obligations are creating gender-based apartheid. This deliberately undermines the development of a country that desperately needs the contributions of all, in order to return to sustainable peace. |
| Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights | Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights | Türk urges ambition on the crimes against humanity treaty - January 2026 | He recalled his earlier support for the codification of the crime of gender apartheid and encouraged States to give this and other proposed additions to the definition serious consideration in the negotiations. "The delegates should make a future-proof Convention, one that addresses deep historical injustices that continue to affect our world today, but also one that takes into account contemporary forms of grave attack on our common humanity and looks to protecting a future of dignity and justice for our children and grandchildren." |
| | | "Build peace around human rights": HC Volker Türk's global update – March 2025 | In Afghanistan, State-sponsored gender apartheid has left women as virtual prisoners in their homes. While in Iran the Hijab Law has been temporarily suspended, the authorities should repeal it fully and permanently, along with other laws and practices that discriminate against women and girls. |
| | | "Turbulence and unpredictability" amid growing conflict and in divided societies, Türk tells Human Rights Council – March 2025 | In Afghanistan, women and girls are subject to State-sponsored gender apartheid that is unparalleled in today's world. Virtual prisoners within their homes, they are denied the most basic and fundamental freedoms essential to normal life, including movement, education and work. I am deeply concerned for the long-term future of a country that is self-harming on a national scale. |
| | | High Commissioner calls for Justice and Accountability for women of Afghanistan – November 2024 | I also welcome the discussion around the concept of Gender Apartheid and how this can enhance accountability for systemic gender-based persecution |
| | | Gender parity is a human rights (Launch of CEDAW GR 40) – October 2024 | It also means we must denounce, unequivocally, institutionalised regimes of systematic oppression and domination of women, increasingly characterised as amounting to gender apartheid for the |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| | | | extent and severity of their impacts. I would like to take this opportunity to express my own support for efforts to codify gender apartheid as a crime against humanity, to broaden individual accountability for the full range of gender-based violations we are witnessing today. |
| | | Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Launches General Recommendation 40 on the Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems – October 2024 | Achieving true gender parity meant the deeply entrenched patriarchal structures needed to be dismantled. This could involve Constitutional amendments, legal reforms, national action plans, and temporary special measures. Regimes which amounted to gender apartheid needed to be denounced. |
| | | Türk: “There should be a UN Human Rights Office everywhere.” – May 2023 | In Afghanistan, the Taliban continue, aggressively, to seek to erase half of the population from everyday life. Such a system of gender apartheid ruins the development potential of the country. I will never understand how anyone can trample so cruelly upon the spirit of girls and women, chipping away at their potential and driving one’s country deeper and deeper into abject poverty and despair. It is crucial – for the sake of the people of Afghanistan, the future of the country and the wider region – that repressive policies against women and girls are immediately overturned. |
| | Human Rights Treaty Bodies - Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women | Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Afghanistan - July 2025 | The Committee expresses grave concern at the lack of criminal accountability for crimes that may constitute gender persecution under international criminal law, noting that the Taliban's hierarchical structure enables command responsibility for such acts. It also notes with concern that these acts have resulted in the disappearance of women from public life in a system that may constitute gender apartheid, that more than ever requires recognition and codification under international criminal law. The Committee notes that six States have referred the situation in the State Party to the International Criminal Court's Office of the Prosecutor, urging prioritization of crimes against women of Afghanistan and girls, while four States, supported by twenty-two other States Parties, have announced that they would commence legal proceedings before the International Court of Justice under article 29 of the Convention. |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | The Committee calls upon the de facto authorities to dismantle the systematic pattern of gender persecution that has resulted in the "enforced disappearance" of women from public life, cease all practices that may constitute gender persecution under international criminal law, as well as gender apartheid, as described by the Committee in its General recommendation No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, and recognize that individuals within the hierarchical Taliban structure bear command responsibility and must be held accountable for crimes against women and girls. The Committee stresses that the de facto authorities should cooperate fully with international accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice, ensure that women survivors of GBVAW and gender persecution receive adequate remedies and reparations, and implement immediate and comprehensive reforms to prevent further violations. |
| | | General recommendation No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems – October 2024 | Patriarchy permeates all societies. At its most severe, it [patriarchy] takes the form of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination of women, committed with the intention of maintaining a regime that is increasingly referred to as “gender apartheid”. It is therefore crucial to codify the crime of “gender apartheid” to create full accountability for gender-based crimes. |
| | Special Procedures - Richard Bennett, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan | Side Event - Human Rights Council, 58th Session, From Call to Action: Designing an Effective Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan - June 2025 | There is a need for more pathways to accountability, including survivor-centered approaches [...] One such pathway—raised by civil society and fully supported by me—is the codification of the concept of gender apartheid. It is a term long used by Afghan women, and I support it completely. |
| | | Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett - February 2025 | There have been positive steps on accountability and I welcome the recent initiative of a group of Member States to hold Afghanistan accountable for its violations under CEDAW as well as the ICC Prosecutor's requests for arrest warrants for two Taliban leaders. Likewise, I welcome progress toward the crimes against humanity treaty, and urge the inclusion of gender apartheid as an international crime. |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| | | Third Committee, Seventy-ninth session, 38th plenary meeting - November 2024 | In his latest report, Mr. Bennett highlighted the dire state of human rights in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, including cases of sexual violence against women detained by the regime. Bennett characterized the Taliban's treatment of women and girls as a form of gender apartheid, advocating for discussions on recognizing gender apartheid as a crime against humanity. The human rights situation in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan has continued to deteriorate over the past three years, with widespread violations committed by the regime, particularly against women and ethnic minorities. |
| | | Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett - August 2024 | Afghans, in particular women, who meet with the Special Rapporteur consistently emphasize that the term "gender apartheid" most accurately describes the totality of the distinct and transgenerational harms committed against them. The Special Rapporteur also considers that the term encapsulates the institutionalized and ideological nature of the Taliban's abuses. He believes that the situation in Afghanistan should propel discussion on the codification of gender apartheid, defined in a gender-inclusive way, as a crime against humanity. |
| | | Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett - June 2024 | Gender apartheid, as a concept, draws from both international human rights and international criminal law. Across multiple consultations and written submissions, Afghans, notably Afghan women, emphasized that the term gender apartheid best captured the totality of the distinct and transgenerational harms committed against them, and called for its recognition as a crime against humanity. Efforts towards a draft convention on crimes against humanity could open a door to formal recognition of the crime, through an amendment to the definition of apartheid contained in article 7 (2) (h) of the Rome Statute, whereby gender apartheid would be understood as "inhumane acts committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one gender group over any other gender group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime". As the Special Rapporteur and Working Group on discrimination on women and girls stated in their joint report, this definition accurately describes the systematic discrimination against women and girls that lies at the heart of Taliban ideology and rule. |
| | | Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on | The Special Rapporteur said he had reported repeatedly about the systematic violation of women's and girls' human rights that limited |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| | | the situation of human rights in Afghanistan. Richard Bennett - September 2023 | every aspect of their lives, and recently, the Taliban had restricted women's activities even more. He called once more on the Taliban to reverse their draconian, misogynist policies and allow women to work and run businesses, and to re-open the doors of schools and universities with a curriculum that met international standards. The compounded impact of these restrictions and the dire socio-economic situation had impacted mental health since the Taliban takeover. The systematic, widespread, institutionalised discrimination that sought to exclude women from all facets of life necessitated an examination of the evolving phenomenon of gender apartheid. More than 3 million girls had been denied access to classroom education. |
| | Special Procedures - UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls | Report of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls – October 2024 | The backlash has become evident in extreme manifestations of gender inequality that fail to generate a proportionate response from the global community. A devastating expression of the rollback of gender equality is gender apartheid, understood as inhumane acts committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic discrimination, oppression and domination by one group against another group or groups, based on gender, and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime. ²³ The Working Group considers that the case of Afghanistan, and the predominantly muted State reaction, is a concerning example of gender backlash. The pattern of large-scale systematic violations of women's and girls' fundamental rights in Afghanistan by the discriminatory and misogynistic edicts, policies and harsh enforcement methods of the Taliban, all in the service of the political goals of an extremist regime, constitutes an institutionalized framework of apartheid based on gender, and merits an unequivocal response. |
| | | UN Third Committee, Seventy-ninth Session, 7th & 8th Meeting - October 2024 | "Despite some advancements, no country in the world has achieved gender equality," stressed Laura Nyirinkindi, Chair of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, presenting her report on the escalating backlash against gender equality (document A/79/153). Afghanistan is an extreme example of gender backlash, with the pattern of large-scale systematic violations of women's and girls' fundamental rights, imposed by discriminatory and misogynistic edicts. "These policies and harsh enforcement methods of the Taliban constitute an institutionalized framework of apartheid based on gender and merit an unequivocal response," she asserted, calling for the |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | inclusion of the crime of gender apartheid in a new treaty on the prevention and punishment of crimes against humanity. “The realization of substantive gender equality cannot be further delayed,” she asserted. |
| | | Interactive Dialogue with Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls – June 2024 | In closing remarks, Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, Chair of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, said discrimination against women and girls needed to be eliminated in all spheres of life. States needed to consider recognising gender apartheid as a grave human rights violation and an affront on humanity. They needed to incorporate a gender perspective when regulating business activities, promote and pursue international cooperation to strengthen women and girls’ rights, protect the rights of women journalists, ratify all international human rights instruments, and promote sexual and reproductive health rights. The world needed to work to break the glass ceiling and the class ceiling and ensure the rights of all, with women and girls at the centre, Ms. Estrada-Tanck concluded. |
| | | Draft articles on prevention and punishment of crimes against humanity. Recommendations from the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls – February 2024 | “Gender apartheid is not merely a theoretical possibility or legal construct, but a real threat and lived reality for millions of women and girls around the world – a reality that is currently not explicitly codified in international law,” the UN experts said. They stressed that the designation of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity would be a long overdue recognition by the international community. State laws, policies and practices that relegate women to conditions of extreme inequality and oppression, with the intent of effectively extinguishing their human rights, reflect the very core of apartheid systems,” the experts said. They warned that in Afghanistan, Taliban edicts, policies and practices constitute an institutionalised system of discrimination, oppression and domination of women and girls, amounting to gender apartheid. “The Taliban’s rule makes codifying gender apartheid in international law particularly urgent, as it would allow the international community to better identify and address the regime’s attacks on Afghan women and girls for what they are,” the experts said. |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | Special Procedures - Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, Special Rapporteur on freedom and peaceful assembly and of association | UN Third Committee, Seventy-eighth Session, 18th & 19th Meetings – October 2023 | The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, has described the situation in Afghanistan as “dire gender apartheid” imposed by the Taliban. Addressing a press conference in New York on Friday, Voule said there are too many examples that demonstrate how the suppression of rights and the failure to listen to the communities and social movements in the context of conflict prevention and peacebuilding led to failed peace processes. |
| | Special Procedures - Joint Statements | Treaty on crimes against humanity: States must give Afghan women a central voice and recognise gender apartheid. Experts say (6 Mandate Holders) – August 2025 | We call on all negotiating States and the UN to guarantee the inclusive and safe participation of women’s organisations, including through ensuring equal opportunities for participation of non-ECOSOC accredited organisations and individuals with the right to speak. States should support the codification of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity, and uphold gender-responsive provisions throughout the treaty. At the same time, we urge States to strengthen other modes of support for Afghan women, girls, and gender-diverse persons, including through actively preventing normalisation of the Taliban de facto regime, establishing safe, legal and long-term immigration pathways and providing sustained funding for women-led civil society. Naming gender apartheid is a necessary step toward dismantling it. |
| | | Press Release: Afghanistan: International community must reject Taliban’s violent and authoritarian rule, say UN experts (44 Mandate Holders) – August 2025 | The experts said that countering the Taliban’s increasing repression requires an “all-tools” approach. This approach should combine principled international advocacy and pressure with international accountability, including the establishment of an additional, complementary investigation mechanism with a comprehensive mandate. It should also include the codification of the crime of gender apartheid, strengthened support for civil society—especially women-led organisations—and increased funding for humanitarian assistance and realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals. |
| | | Press Release: New morality law affirms Taliban’s regressive agenda, experts call for concerted action (13 Mandate Holders) – August 2024 | The international community continues to call for full compliance with Afghanistan’s international human rights obligations and accountability for ongoing violations, with some members calling for the codification of gender apartheid. The experts urged all international actors, and in particular UN Member States, to develop a robust, principled, and coordinated strategy on Afghanistan which places human rights, including |

| | | | |
|----------|---|--|---|
| | | | women's human rights and gender equality, at the centre. They warned that engagement without such a strategy will only reinforce the Taliban's impunity and embolden further abuses. |
| | | Press Release: International community must not normalise Taliban rule in Afghanistan (36 Mandate Holders) – August 2024 | In the last year, the Taliban has further entrenched and intensified its system of institutionalised gender-oppression, introducing new discriminatory edicts and practices, and implementing them by harsh and violent means. Since taking power, the de facto authorities have issued more than 80 edicts, directives, and statements which specifically target and restrict the rights of women and girls. The Taliban's deliberate subjugation of women and girls is widespread and systematic, amounting to crimes against humanity, including the crime of gender persecution. The situation is so severe that many Afghans, especially women, say the situation can be best described as 'gender apartheid.' Despite this, Taliban officials have insisted the situation of women and girls is an 'internal' matter. |
| | | Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls (2 Mandate Holders) – June 2023 | "Women and girls in Afghanistan are experiencing severe discrimination that may amount to gender persecution – a crime against humanity – and be characterised as gender apartheid, as the de facto authorities appear to be governing by systemic discrimination with the intention to subject women and girls to total domination," the experts said. |
| | | Press Release: Afghanistan: UN expert warns of "cultural disaster", urges visas for the vulnerable (12 Mandate Holders) – August 2021 | It is deplorable that the world has abandoned Afghanistan to a fundamentalist group like the Taliban whose catastrophic human rights record, including practice of gender apartheid, use of cruel punishments and systematic destruction of cultural heritage, when in power, is well documented. |
| UN Women | Sima Bahous, Executive Director, UN Women | Statement to UN Security Council, 9421st Meeting – September 2023 | Further, she recommended that the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 convene a dedicated session on the role the Committee can play in responding to violations of women's rights in Afghanistan, including hearing from Afghan women and women's rights experts directly, updating the listing criteria and |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | <p>using all the tools at the committee’s disposal. The situation in Afghanistan is not purely a humanitarian crisis, but also an economic, mental health and development crisis, among others, she said, stressing that the underlying women’s rights crisis must be the primary lens through which the situation in the country is understood. She called for the Council’s full support for an intergovernmental process to explicitly codify gender apartheid in international law, stressing that the systematic and planned assault on women’s rights foundational to the Taliban’s vision of State and society must be named, defined and proscribed in global norms so that the international community can respond to it appropriately.</p> |
| | | <p>Statement on Afghanistan by UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous – August 2023</p> | <p>It is now two years since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, during which time it has imposed the most comprehensive, systematic, and unparalleled assault on the rights of women and girls. Through more than 50 edicts, orders, and restrictions, the Taliban have left no aspect of women’s lives untouched, no freedom spared. They have created a system founded on the mass oppression of women that is rightly and widely considered gender apartheid.</p> |