



Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan

Since the takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, the Taliban has launched an extreme, systematic gender-based war, issuing and enforcing over 150 decrees that severely restrict the daily lives of women, girls, and gender diverse persons—systematically erasing them from public life and relegating them to child bearers, child rearers, and free domestic labor at home.

The Taliban has prohibited women and girls from:

- Speaking or showing their faces outside of their homes
- Leaving home without a mahran, or male guardian
- Attending school above the sixth grade
- Participating in sports
- Working in key sectors, including NGOs, civil service, beauty salons, and medical institutions
- Audibly singing or speaking in public

This treatment has a name: **GENDER APARTHEID**.

Mirroring the core elements of the crime of apartheid under international criminal law, the **End Gender Apartheid Campaign** defines gender apartheid 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.”

To date, 12 Member States from across the globe have expressed openness to gender apartheid codification in the crimes against humanity treaty.* Several UN experts and mandate-holders have also called on the international community to recognize the Taliban’s systematic and gender-based oppression as gender apartheid.** In 2026, UN Member States will have a critical opportunity to support the inclusion of gender apartheid in the Draft Crimes Against Humanity Convention (CAHC). Codification of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity would fill a critical accountability gap equipping the international community with a stronger accountability tool to tackle the totality of ongoing gender-based systematic oppression and domination.

*Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Chile, Iceland, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, The Philippines, Portugal, Spain

**UN Secretary General, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls, Special Rapporteur on freedom and peaceful assembly and of association, UN Women

About the End Gender Apartheid Campaign

In March 2023, a group of feminists, human rights defenders, and jurists from Afghanistan and Iran, together with international allies, launched the grassroots End Gender Apartheid Campaign. The Campaign builds on the longstanding activism of feminists, including the women of Afghanistan, who used the term “gender apartheid” during the first Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in the late 1990s, and international experts, including the UN Secretary-General and multiple UN experts, who have warned of the escalating gender apartheid in Afghanistan.

Gender apartheid regimes have one purpose: to dehumanize, repress, and erase women, girls, and others from public life, with the goal of entrenching and maintaining power. But gender apartheid has not been criminalized. This leaves a glaring impunity gap. The End Gender Apartheid Campaign is committed to dismantling and preventing gender apartheid regimes through the codification of gender apartheid as a crime under international and domestic law, including in the proposed crimes against humanity treaty, the first major UN treaty on core international crimes since the Rome Statute.

“Before the Taliban takeover, I worked in a governmental organization in the security department. I had an income, and with that, I supported my daughters, who were studying law and political science. But the fall of Afghanistan destroyed all our lives; the day the Taliban came to Afghanistan, our office was closed, and they messaged us that all the women should stay at home until further notice. We hadn't even received our salary for the month of August, but to this day, we are confined to our homes.

- Alina from Parwan Province

“The day I heard that the Taliban had closed the school gates to girls above the sixth grade, I was so overwhelmed with anxiety that I fainted and ended up in the hospital. My family told me that this decision was temporary and that girls' schools would reopen in the new year, but that never happened. Currently, my mental state is so severe that I have attempted suicide several times. I don't know how long this situation will continue. I can't speak for others, but believe me, I will go mad.

- Bahara from Bamyan Province

The Campaign undertakes an inclusive, intersectional approach to advocacy. Since its founding, the Campaign has convened a series of consultations with diverse actors, including survivors of apartheid, victim and survivors' groups, human rights defenders, anti-apartheid activists, international human rights lawyers, and international criminal lawyers.

For more information on the Campaign's proposal for codifying the crime against humanity of gender apartheid in the UN crimes against humanity treaty, including the joint letter and legal brief endorsed by over 100 leading jurists and public figures, please visit endgenderapartheid.today.