

Madam President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Assembly of States Parties on behalf of the Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization, Afghanistan Transitional Justice Coordination Group, the Afghanistan Organization for Development of Human Rights, and Coalition for the Prevention of Hazara Genocide.

I am from Afghanistan, a country where women and girls are no longer treated as human beings, where ethnic and religious minorities face widespread discrimination and even Genocide, where Afghan citizens are subjected to political and cultural persecution, and where the mechanisms for domestic accountability are absent. In this vacuum of justice and accountability, the Afghan people turn to the international community, including this Assembly, as a beacon of hope to end impunity for the most egregious crimes committed against them.

*Gender Persecution and Gender Apartheid*

Most critically, we are witnessing blatant gender persecution in Afghanistan and what can only be described as gender apartheid. Since the Taliban's takeover in 2021, there has been a systematic and institutionalised campaign to violently oppress women and girls, with conditions rapidly deteriorating. Through a series of draconian decrees, the Taliban has stripped women of their rights and freedoms, effectively erasing them from public life and subjecting those who speak out to harsh punishment and inhumane treatment. Afghanistan has become the most repressive country in the world for women, and all this is happening before our eyes - unchallenged and unobstructed.

Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me to paint you a picture – a dark and harrowing picture – of what life has become for women and girls in Afghanistan.

Girls are no longer allowed to attend school beyond the sixth grade, and women are barred from secondary education and universities. Women have been effectively excluded from the workforce and completely removed from political and public decision-making roles, with female politicians, judges, and civil servants systematically ousted. Women are further forbidden from leaving their homes without a male guardian and, when permitted outside, must wear full-body coverings. They are also banned from accessing parks, gyms, and public baths and are even prohibited from singing or speaking publicly.

Women who protest against these restrictions face constant threats, arbitrary arrests, imprisonment, and in some cases, enforced disappearances – fueling fears of brutal reprisals for any form of dissent. There is credible evidence of women being subjected to arbitrary detention, beatings, floggings, targeting killings, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, with many human rights organizations holding that these acts may amount to crimes against humanity.

The Taliban remain defiant and show no intention of changing their behaviour, leaving women increasingly vulnerable and unprotected.

*Ethnic and Religious Minorities*

There has also been a persistent pattern of targeted and deliberate attacks against ethnic and religious minorities in Afghanistan, particularly the Shia-Hazara community. The Hazara community has long endured systematic and widespread discrimination, a painful history that has only deepened in recent years.

Under Taliban rule, the Hazara community has been excluded from decision-making roles in government institutions, banned from practising and teaching the Shia faith, subjected to excessive taxation, and exposed to acts of violence, among others. This violence is further exacerbated by the actions of the Islamic State for Khorasan Province (ISKP), which has perpetrated targeting killings and horrific attacks on Hazara educational institutions, places of worship, hospitals, and sports centres. Many human rights organisations have also expressed serious concerns that these acts may amount to the crime of genocide.

*Accountability*

Distinguished Delegates,

The situation in Afghanistan demands urgent and coordinated action by the State Parties. A culture of impunity has prevailed in Afghanistan for far too long, perpetuating cycles of violence and injustice, leaving victims without redress and emboldening perpetrators. In the absence of domestic accountability mechanisms in Afghanistan, the International Criminal Court (ICC) remains a vital avenue for addressing long-standing injustices.

We therefore leave you with the following recommendations:

**First**, we urge the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) to continue its investigation into the Situation in Afghanistan and ensure that its investigation addresses all relevant crimes committed by the implicated parties, including the Taliban, ISKP, and national and international forces.

**Second**, we urge State Parties to provide the cooperation and resources necessary for the OTP's investigation to ensure accountability for the crimes committed in Afghanistan. This includes facilitating the collection of evidence from Afghan refugees and diaspora communities, and prioritising the protection of witnesses by strengthening international mechanisms for witness protection and implementing other security measures for those at risk.

**Third**, we urge State Parties that have been militarily present in Afghanistan to ensure transparent and meaningful investigations into allegations of war crimes committed by their forces.

**Finally**, we urge State Parties to support an 'all-tools approach' to ensure justice and accountability in Afghanistan. This includes proceeding with a case against Afghanistan before the International Court of Justice for CEDAW violations, codifying gender apartheid in the upcoming crimes against humanity treaty, using universal jurisdiction, establishing an independent international accountability mechanism for Afghanistan, supporting the UN Special Rapporteur's mandate, and implementing his recommendations.

Thank you.