

## **UNGA- SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND CULTURAL COMMITTEE (SOCHUM)**

*Human Rights in Afghanistan- Impact of Sharia Law on Gender, Religion, and Child Soldiers after the  
US Withdrawal.*

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## **LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

Esteemed Members of the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM), it is our honour to welcome you to NYMUN 2025. This guide has been curated to serve as a starting point for research and provides an overview of the agenda at hand. We hope that the Study Guide will help you throughout the course of your preparation for the conference from now on. However, the guide only provides a bird's eye perspective of the relevant topics of discussion. We strongly encourage you all to delve deeper into the complexities of the agenda, not letting the guide limit the scope of your research.

This guide will provide you with a background that will form the basis for your research. Apart from the topics covered, delegates must understand the perspective of the allotted country and weave their research based on both- the given agenda and foreign policy. We will firmly seek active participation from all of you in the debate and the committee work. Do not feel overwhelmed by the process of researching and feel free to contact us for anything you may need on our end.

We look forward to a fruitful discussion and a wholesome exchange of ideas during the proceedings in the upcoming meeting of this Committee, with a strong emphasis on decorum and diplomatic etiquette. We are certain that these proceedings shall prove to be successful in determining the path to be taken to solve issues that prove to be a great challenge to the global status quo.

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## COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

The General Assembly allocates to the Third Committee, that is SOCHUM, agenda items relating to a range of social, humanitarian affairs and human rights issues that affect people all over the world. SOCHUM was founded in 1945 in reaction to the establishment of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The Third Committee promotes and enforces basic freedoms and ideals meant to be enjoyed by the entire international community such as the right to life, the expression of cultures, the freedom of political participation, the protection of children's rights, and the promotion of social development, among many others.

An important part of the work of the Committee focuses on the examination of human rights questions, including reports of the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. The Committee also interacts with special rapporteurs, independent experts, and chairs of treaty bodies and working groups as mandated by the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. The Committee discusses questions relating to the advancement of women, the protection of children, indigenous issues, the treatment of refugees, the promotion of fundamental freedoms through the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, and the right to self-determination. The Committee also addresses important social development questions such as issues related to youth, family, aging, persons with disabilities, crime prevention, criminal justice, and international drug control.<sup>1</sup>

SOCHUM provides a platform for member states to exchange ideas, share best practices, and develop effective strategies for addressing these critical issues. It also plays an important role in raising public awareness of these issues and advocating for change at the national and international levels. SOCHUM is a committee that derives its authority from the United Nations Charter and aims to develop peaceful resolutions for various social, cultural, and humanitarian issues that arise in the global community.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/ga/third/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite two decades of international intervention and efforts to promote human rights, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 precipitated a rapid return to Taliban rule, resulting in a severe regression of fundamental rights and freedoms across the country. Under the *de facto* Taliban authorities, Afghanistan has witnessed a dramatic escalation in human rights violations, particularly affecting gender equality, religious freedom, the use of child soldiers, and the broader impact of the Taliban's strict interpretation of Sharia law.

Women and girls have faced systematic exclusion from secondary and higher education, most forms of employment, and public life, amounting to what international observers have described as gender persecution and potentially gender apartheid. Religious and ethnic minorities, especially the Shia-Hazara community, have been subjected to targeted violence and discrimination, with little recourse to justice or protection. The recruitment and use of child soldiers by armed groups, including the Taliban, has persisted, exposing children to grave risks and violating international norms.

The dismantling of legal and institutional protections-such as the abolition of the **Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission** and the elimination of laws safeguarding women and minorities-has further entrenched impunity and left victims without avenues for redress. These developments have unfolded amid a deepening humanitarian crisis, widespread poverty, and ongoing armed conflict, compounding the vulnerability of Afghanistan's population. The purpose of this agenda is examine the human rights crisis in Afghanistan post-U.S. withdrawal, focusing on

- (a) The impact of Taliban rule on gender rights, including access to education, employment, and protection from violence.<sup>3</sup>
- (b) The status and treatment of religious and ethnic minorities under the current regime.<sup>4</sup>
- (c) The prevalence and consequences of child soldier recruitment and use by armed actors.<sup>5</sup>
- (d) The effects of the re-imposition of Sharia law on civil liberties, legal protections, and access to justice for all Afghans.

The central research problem is to analyse how the Taliban's governance since 2021 has affected the realisation of human rights and its socio-cultural manifestations in Afghanistan, specifically regarding gender, religion, child soldiers, and legal protections.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia/afghanistan/report-afghanistan/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-afghanistan?utm\\_source=perplexity](https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-afghanistan?utm_source=perplexity)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/20/our-opportunity-end-talibans-use-child-soldiers>

## AGENDA OVERVIEW

After the U.S. and allied forces withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban quickly regained control of the country. This major change in leadership has led to significant challenges for human rights in Afghanistan. Many people, especially women, girls, children, and minority groups, have seen their rights and freedoms reduced.

### *1. Gender Rights and the Situation of Women and Girls*

Since the Taliban takeover, women and girls have faced strict new rules. Girls are not allowed to attend secondary school or university, and women have lost many jobs and are often not allowed to work outside the home. Since August 2021, the Taliban have issued over 70 decrees restricting women's rights, including banning girls from attending school beyond grade six and prohibiting women from most forms of employment and public life. Afghanistan is now the only country where girls are not allowed to attend secondary school, affecting at least 1.4–1.5 million girls<sup>6</sup>. This ban has reversed decades of progress: before 2021, millions of girls attended school and women held significant roles as teachers, doctors, and public servants. The Taliban justify these restrictions by claiming that current curricula do not align with their interpretation of Islamic values and Afghan culture, but the majority of Afghans oppose these bans. The consequences are severe–

- (a) Educational loss: Girls are denied critical years of learning and development, leading to long-term disadvantages.
- (b) Economic impact: Families lose potential income, and the country faces a shortage of educated professionals, especially women.
- (c) Mental health: Many women and girls report feeling like “prisoners,” experiencing depression and anxiety due to isolation and lack of opportunity.
- (d) Societal regression: Afghanistan now ranks last in global measures of women's inclusion and security<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/17/talibans-attack-girls-education-harming-afghanistans-future>

<sup>7</sup> [https://devpolicy.org/the-continuing-ban-on-girls-education-in-afghanistan-20250327/?utm\\_source=perple\\_xity](https://devpolicy.org/the-continuing-ban-on-girls-education-in-afghanistan-20250327/?utm_source=perple_xity)

## *2. Rights of Religious and Ethnic Minorities*

Afghanistan is home to many different religious and ethnic groups, including the Hazara, Tajik, Uzbek, and others. Since the Taliban returned to power, minorities-especially the Shia-Hazara community-have faced more discrimination, violence, and exclusion from society. Many have been targeted in attacks, and their ability to practice their religion or participate in public life has been limited. Religious and ethnic minorities face increased discrimination and violence under Taliban rule. They are often excluded from government positions, targeted in attacks, and denied access to essential services.

## *3. Child Soldiers and the Rights of Children*

Children in Afghanistan are at great risk. The Taliban and other armed groups have recruited children to serve as soldiers, messengers, or helpers. The Taliban have a long history of recruiting children, especially boys aged 13–17, often through religious schools (*madrassas*)<sup>8</sup>. Recruitment methods include coercion, promises of money, and exploiting poverty. Children are used as fighters, messengers, and in some cases, for planting explosives. Despite Afghan law prohibiting child recruitment, enforcement is weak, and thousands of children remain in Taliban ranks. The practice exposes children to violence, trauma, and loss of education, violating their fundamental rights and international law. Many children have also lost access to education and healthcare, making their situation even more difficult.

## *4. The Impact of Sharia Law*

The Taliban have enforced their strict interpretation of Sharia law, which has led to harsh punishments and limited freedoms for many people. For example, there have been reports of public floggings and other severe penalties for those who break the rules. Freedom of speech, the press, and the right to protest have been restricted, making it hard for people to express their opinions or seek justice. The Taliban enforce a strict interpretation of Sharia law, which has led to:

- (a) Harsh punishments: Public floggings and amputations have been reported.
- (b) Suppression of freedoms: Freedom of speech, press, and assembly are severely restricted.
- (c) Legal uncertainty: The dismantling of previous legal frameworks has left many without access to justice, especially women and minorities.

These laws create an environment of fear, limit personal freedoms, and prevent many Afghans from seeking help or expressing their opinions.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/18/afghanistan-taliban-child-soldier-recruitment-surges>

With the change in government, much international aid was cut off, and Afghanistan's economy has suffered. Many families do not have enough food, clean water, or access to healthcare. The humanitarian crisis has made life especially hard for women, children, and minorities, who are often the most vulnerable<sup>9</sup>. The United Nations and other international organizations are very concerned about the situation in Afghanistan. The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) is responsible for discussing these issues and finding ways to protect the rights of all Afghans, especially the most vulnerable. The current situation in Afghanistan is very serious. Many people have lost their basic rights and are living in fear and poverty. This agenda asks us to learn about these challenges, understand how different groups are affected, and think about what can be done to help protect human rights for everyone in Afghanistan.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

### *Early 20th Century: Beginnings of Reform*

1919–1929: King Amanullah Khan and Queen Soraya launch Afghanistan’s first major modernization efforts, including opening the first school for girls (1920), founding women’s organizations, and sending female students abroad. These reforms are met with backlash, leading to their ouster and a rollback of women’s rights, closure of girls’ schools, and re-imposition of conservative practices.

### *1970s–1990s: Conflict and Regression*

1979: Soviet invasion triggers decades of war, further destabilizing the country and severely impacting women’s rights and education. Many women are denied basic rights, and girls’ education is largely halted in conflict zones.

1996–2001: The Taliban’s first regime imposes one of the world’s harshest interpretations of Sharia law, banning women from work and education, enforcing strict dress codes, and excluding women from public life. By 2001, almost no girls were in school.

### *2001–2021: International Intervention and Progress*

2001: U.S.-led coalition ousts the Taliban. International aid and new laws (including the 2004 Constitution) support women’s rights, education, and public participation. By 2017, 39% of girls attend school (up from 6% in 2003), and a third of university students are women.

2001–2021: Afghanistan sees the return of women to schools, universities, and the workforce, though progress is uneven and often limited in rural areas due to persistent traditional barriers.

### *August 2021: Taliban Regain Power*

August 15, 2021: The Taliban seized Kabul as U.S. and NATO forces withdrew. The Afghan government collapses. The Taliban annul the constitution and begin issuing restrictive edicts.

### *2021–2025: Systematic Human Rights Violations.*

2021–2022: Taliban authorities ban girls from secondary and higher education, remove women from most jobs, and enforce strict dress codes. New “vice and virtue” laws restrict women’s movement, require male guardians, and ban women from public spaces and activities.

2023: Reports of widespread human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary detentions of former officials, journalists, and activists. The UN documents hundreds of such cases since the takeover.



2024: Taliban intensify crackdowns, including public floggings and stoning for “moral crimes.” Over 100 repressive edicts target women and girls, enforcing near-total exclusion from public life.

2021–2025: Religious and ethnic minorities, especially Shia-Hazara, face targeted attacks and exclusion from aid and public life. Armed groups, including ISIL-K, continue to perpetrate violence.

*Ongoing: Child recruitment by armed groups persists, with children being used as soldiers and in other roles, violating international law.*

2023–2025: Afghanistan faces one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises, with millions in need of aid, widespread poverty, and malnutrition. Women and girls are disproportionately affected due to discriminatory policies and loss of access to services.

Summary Table

Year/Period	Key Events & Shifts
1919–1929	Early reforms for women’s rights, followed by conservative backlash.
1979–2001	War, Taliban rise, and severe repression of women and minorities.
2001–2021	International support, legal reforms, and progress in women’s rights and education.
August 2021	Taliban regain control; collapse of Afghan government.
2021–2025	Systematic rollback of rights: bans on girls’ education, women’s employment, harsh Sharia laws.
2023–2025	Intensified crackdowns, extrajudicial killings, humanitarian crisis, continued targeting of minorities.

## RELEVANT DOCUMENTATIONS

Several key international documents form the legal and normative framework for the pertinent agenda. These documents, established under international law and through the United Nations, are essential for understanding the rights of the stakeholders and the responsibilities of states in respecting those rights. Below is an overview of the most relevant international documents for the given agenda-

### *1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948)*

The UDHR sets out fundamental human rights for all people, including the right to education, freedom of expression, and equality before the law. Violations in Afghanistan-such as restrictions on women's education, freedom of movement, and arbitrary detention-contradict these universal principles.<sup>10</sup>

### *2. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979)*

CEDAW obligates states to eliminate discrimination against women in all areas, including education, employment, and public life. The Taliban's bans on girls' education and women's work, as well as forced dress codes and movement restrictions, are direct violations of CEDAW. Several countries have initiated legal action against Afghanistan for these breaches.<sup>11</sup>

### *3. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989)*

The CRC protects children's rights to education, protection from violence, and freedom from exploitation, including recruitment as child soldiers. The Taliban's recruitment of children and bans on girls' education violate these protections.<sup>12</sup>

### *4. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966)*

The ICCPR guarantees rights such as freedom of expression, assembly, religion, and protection from arbitrary detention. Taliban crackdowns on journalists, activists, and minorities breach these commitments.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

### *5. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966)*

The ICESCR protects rights to education, health, work, and an adequate standard of living. The collapse of Afghanistan's healthcare and education systems, and bans on women's employment, violate these obligations.<sup>14</sup>

### *6. UN Security Council Resolutions*

- (a) S/RES/2681 (2023): Condemns the Taliban's decision to ban Afghan women from working for the UN and calls for the full and equal participation of women and girls in Afghan society. The resolution underscores that the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls is essential for Afghanistan's peace, stability, and development.<sup>15</sup>
- (b) S/RES/2593 (2021): Demands that Afghan territory not be used to threaten or attack any country, and calls for respect for human rights, including those of women, children, and minorities. It also stresses the importance of humanitarian access and upholding Afghanistan's international obligations.<sup>16</sup>
- (c) S/RES/2777 (2025): Extends the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) until March 2025, reaffirming the importance of monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation, especially the rights of women, girls, and minorities.<sup>17</sup>

### *7. Recent UN and Human Rights Council Reports*

- (a) Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan (A/HRC/58/80, Feb 2025): Provides a comprehensive overview of human rights in Afghanistan, focusing on the period from August to December 2024. It highlights severe restrictions on women and girls, shrinking civic space, and abuses against minorities. The report also references a separate study on the Taliban's law on the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, documenting its impact on daily life and freedoms.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup>

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

<sup>15</sup>

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/N2312149.pdf>

<sup>16</sup>

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s%20res%202593.pdf>

<sup>17</sup>

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n25/069/12/pdf/n2506912.pdf>

<sup>18</sup>

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5880-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-afghanistan>

(b) UNAMA Human Rights Reports (2024): Document widespread arbitrary detentions, torture, public floggings, and other abuses. These reports detail the institutionalized discrimination against women and girls, barriers to humanitarian aid, and the deteriorating situation for minorities and vulnerable groups.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> <https://unama.unmissions.org/human-rights>

## CONCLUSION

As the Executive Board, we expect this committee to engage in thoughtful, informed, and solution-oriented discussions. The situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021 represents one of the most urgent human rights crises in the world today. The systematic rollback of rights for women, girls, children, and minority groups has reversed decades of progress and left millions of Afghans facing discrimination, violence, and poverty. The enforcement of strict interpretations of Sharia law, bans on girls' education, exclusion of women from public life, recruitment of child soldiers, and the targeting of religious and ethnic minorities have all contributed to a climate of fear and repression.

International legal frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, provide clear standards that are being violated in Afghanistan. The United Nations Security Council, through its resolutions, and UN human rights bodies, through their reports and monitoring, have consistently highlighted these violations and called for action to protect the Afghan people.

As members of SOCHUM, it is essential to understand not only the scale of these challenges but also the interconnectedness of human rights, humanitarian needs, and long-term peace and development. Delegates are encouraged to think critically about the root causes of these issues, the obstacles to effective international action, and the potential solutions that respect Afghanistan's cultural context while upholding universal human rights. Ultimately, this committee has the responsibility to draft solutions that uphold the dignity and rights of the citizens of Afghanistan, while fostering peaceful and cooperative relations between all stakeholders involved. We look forward to seeing comprehensive, well-researched, and impactful contributions from all delegates.

*Kindly note that an online training session will be conducted for all delegates pertaining to the Rules of Procedure (RoP) and research methodologies, details of which will be conveyed shortly.*