

Organization: Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
Item: Urgent Debate on the situation of the human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan
Date: 1 July 2022
Speaker: Shukria Barakzai

Oral Statement to the 50th Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), NGO in special consultative status

In-person Statement to the 50th Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Shukria Barakzai, women's rights defenders/feminists and politician

Afghanistan: Establish an independent international investigative mechanism to ensure accountability for human rights violations and atrocity crimes

Mr. President,

I, Shukria Barakzai, an Afghan women's and human rights advocate, thank the Council for convening this crucial urgent debate as urged by Afghan women's human rights defenders. Jurists and defenders, especially women, face increasingly grave dangers¹ in Afghanistan since the Taliban's unlawful takeover in August 2021. From the outset, the de facto authorities showed no intention of fulfilling Afghanistan's obligations to uphold international human rights law – their promises to uphold rights, particularly the rights of women and girls, have been consistently hedged with illegitimate provisos that rights will be subjected to their interpretations of national values.² Women and girls face systematic erasure from public life, including workplaces and schools.³

Dangers to women defenders continue, with reports of enforced disappearance, raids of offices and homes, threats, and torture. Many are in hiding. Women defenders from Hazara, Tajik, Pashtun, Uzbek, and other minority communities face even greater risks. We are alarmed by increasing reports of appalling atrocity crimes.

We urge this Council to facilitate accountability through the International Criminal Court or competent national courts exercising universal jurisdiction by urgently establishing an adequately-resourced investigative mechanism to gather, consolidate, preserve, and analyze evidence, and to prepare files on violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Afghanistan.

Thank you.

¹ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Interactive dialogue on the High Commissioner's report on Afghanistan, 7 March 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/03/interactive-dialogue-high-commissioners-report-afghanistan>; Statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights, Richard Bennett, following his visit to Afghanistan from 15-26 May 2022, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/26052022-Afghan-SR-visit_press-statement.docx.

² On 17 August, a Taliban leader promised to “honor women’s rights within the norms of Islamic law.” Reuters, 17 August 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-1d4b052ccef113adc8dc94f965ff23c7>.

³ Humaira Rasuli, "I will never stop fighting for Afghan women," WUBR, June 13, 2022, <https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2022/06/13/afghanistan-women-taliban-human-rights-humaira-rasuli>; Kate Clark and Sayeda Rahimi, “‘We need to breathe too’: Women across Afghanistan navigate the Taleban’s hijab ruling,” Afghanistan Analysis Network, 1 June 2022, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/rights-freedom/we-need-to-breathe-too-women-across-afghanistan-navigate-the-talebans-hijab-ruling%ef%bf%bc/>