



Plenary sitting

B9-0202/2022

5.4.2022

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on the situation in Afghanistan, in particular the situation of women's rights (2022/2571(RSP))

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on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

European Parliament resolution on the situation in Afghanistan, in particular the situation of women's rights (2022/2571(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Afghanistan, including that of 16 September 2021¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 19 May 2021 on human rights protection and the EU external migration policy²,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 15 September 2021 on Afghanistan, which outlined five benchmarks for EU engagement with the Taliban-led de facto authorities,
- having regard to the statements by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on Afghanistan, including that of 28 March 2021 on calling for the immediate re-opening of secondary schools for girls,
- having regard to the UN Security Council resolutions on Afghanistan, including Resolution 2593(2021),
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- having regard to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979,
- having regard to the UN Human Rights Council's resolutions on Afghanistan,
- having regard to the report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights of 4 March 2022 on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan,
- having regard to the UN Refugee Convention of 1951,
- having regard to the UN Global Compact on Refugees,
- having regard to the EU thematic guidelines on human rights defenders, on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, and on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them,
- having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the Taliban took control of Afghanistan following a rapid military offensive at

¹ OJ C 117, 11.3.2022, p. 133.

² OJ C 15, 12.1.2022, p. 70

the end of August 2021, which precipitated the withdrawal of international military forces from the country, as well as the evacuation of over 125 000 persons and most of the international presence in the country;

- B. whereas the caretaker Taliban government and the key administrative positions at national and provincial level have been filled by male and predominantly Pashtun members, and therefore lack representation of Afghanistan's diverse gender, ethnic, religious, political and geographic groups; whereas women have been excluded from the Taliban administration;
- C. whereas according to the UN, while there has been a significant reduction in civilian casualties since the Taliban takeover, the protection of civilians remains a cause for concern, notably due to continued terrorist attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant - Khorasan Province and explosive remnants of war;
- D. whereas the socioeconomic situation, which was already precarious prior to the Taliban takeover, has dramatically deteriorated under the de facto administration and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, severe droughts and a harsh winter, and has been further exacerbated by the international sanctions against the Taliban and the suspension of non-humanitarian aid to the country by the international community;
- E. whereas the US decision to freeze the foreign currency reserves of the Afghan Central Bank has blocked the country's access to the international financial system, thereby leading to a massive liquidity crisis; whereas these measures and the upholding of the pre-existing UN Security Council sanctions against senior Taliban leadership have, in effect, dramatically undermined the capacity of legitimate commercial and humanitarian activities in the country, as well as the possibility for Afghans to receive an income and access their savings;
- F. whereas the increase of world wheat prices due to the Russian war in Ukraine is expected to have a severe impact on Afghanistan, which is largely dependent on wheat imports;
- G. whereas despite the large scale military evacuation operation by the international community, a number of (former) Afghan staff of EU missions, projects and embassies of Member States were left behind after the western departure, as well as hundreds of human rights defenders, security personnel and their relatives;
- H. whereas more than half of the population of Afghanistan is facing an acute level of food insecurity; whereas an estimated 24.4 million Afghans are currently in need of humanitarian aid and 97 % of the population is at risk of falling into poverty this year;
- I. whereas the humanitarian crisis is disproportionately affecting women and girls, notably in terms of access to food, housing, healthcare and education; whereas UNICEF has observed an increase in child labour, child marriage and the sale of children as a result of the economic crisis, which has disproportionately affected girls;
- J. whereas humanitarian access challenges have risen nearly two-fold since 2020, in large part due to a deterioration in the security environment, levy requests and interferences in humanitarian programming by the de facto authorities;

- K. whereas 5.6 million Afghans are currently displaced in neighbouring countries; whereas Iran and Pakistan, in particular, host a large share of Afghan refugees, together accounting for 2.2 million registered Afghan refugees;
- L. whereas Afghans, including human rights defenders, who have relocated to third countries are in urgent need of shelter, services and assurance against forced return;
- M. whereas human rights violations are being reported daily, including arrest, detention, abduction, torture, threats, extortion, killings, and attacks on human rights defenders and their family members; whereas there continues to be a complete lack of accountability for such violations; whereas women human rights defenders have been especially impacted; whereas the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission has seen its premises occupied by the de facto authorities and has thus been unable to carry out its activities;
- N. whereas there have been numerous extrajudicial killings attributed to the de facto authorities in spite of the announced general amnesty for former government officials and members of the Afghan security forces;
- O. whereas the UN has reported that although gender inequality, discrimination and gender-based violence were already deeply entrenched in the country even prior to 15 August 2021, women had been active in all branches of government and many sectors of society, including sports and cultural life, prior to the Taliban takeover; whereas since that date, however, Afghan women have been excluded from political life, as well as the workforce more broadly;
- P. whereas UN human rights experts have denounced a ‘wave of measures’, such as barring women from returning to their jobs, requiring a male relative (mahram) to accompany them in public spaces, prohibiting women from using public transport on their own, as well as imposing a strict dress code on women and girl which constitutes ‘a collective punishment of women and girls, grounded on gender-based bias and harmful practices’;
- Q. whereas the significant advances made in education, especially for girls, over the past two decades have been reversed since the Taliban takeover; whereas in spite of their public assurances that girls’ education would continue, the Taliban authorities have imposed strict gender segregation at universities and have decided to deny secondary-level education to over one million Afghan girls until further notice;
- R. whereas the space for independent media and civil society, which had been dynamic albeit subjected to violence, threats and other forms of violence prior to 15 August, has drastically shrunk under the Taliban, notably after the issuing of strict guidelines on media operations and the detentions and killings of journalists and individuals for their peaceful expression of opinion or dissent; whereas peaceful protests, notably in the defence of women’s rights, have been met with violence or intimidation;
- S. whereas the Council has defined five benchmarks for policies and actions under the Taliban appointed government that will serve as guiding principles for future EU engagement; whereas these benchmarks include respect for human rights, in particular the full enjoyment of rights by women and girls;

- T. whereas the Taliban have pledged safe passage for foreign and Afghan nationals who wish to leave the country; whereas, in practice, faulty technical equipment for issuing appropriate travel documents, repeated closures of passport offices and travel restrictions imposed on women seeking to travel long distances without mahram effectively impede travel out of the country, which poses a particular challenge for human rights defenders, who find themselves at greater risk;
- U. whereas challenges for Afghan evacuees within the EU persist; whereas swift family reunification, the issuing of a long-term protection status, tailored integration support and adequate reception conditions, such as access to medical care and mental health support, would allow the principles of the best interests of the child and of family unity to be met and would guarantee a dignified standard of living;
- V. whereas UN Secretary-General António Guterres launched a High-Level Pledging event on 31 March, reminding the international community to fully engage with the UN-coordinated relief operation by providing unconditional and flexible funding to combat the dire humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan;
1. Is deeply concerned about the humanitarian and human rights crisis that has been unfolding in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover; reiterates its unwavering solidarity with and commitment towards the people of Afghanistan;
 2. Reiterates its conviction that the safe, peaceful and democratic future of Afghanistan requires an inclusive negotiated political settlement; reaffirms its commitment to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and post-conflict reconstruction as the only credible path to inclusive, long-term peace, security and development;
 3. Expresses its alarm at the unprecedented level of food insecurity in the country and calls for all international actors, in particular the EU and its Member States, to scale up their humanitarian operations in order to help meet immediate basic needs, restore international mechanisms for wage support for essential workers and food programmes and suspend the rules and conditions that restrict humanitarian operations;
 4. Expresses its deepest concern at the socioeconomic impact of certain international sanctions, notably on the provision of essential public services; calls on the international community, notably the USA and the EU Member States, to ensure that such sanctions do not undermine the Afghan people's enjoyment of economic and social rights, especially for the very poor and female-headed households; encourages, in particular, the EU and its Member States to undertake sanctions reviews, adjust current measures accordingly and issue new licences and guidance to facilitate liquidity and the availability of paper currency to address the humanitarian crisis; calls for the EU to work with its international partners towards an agreement that would allow the Afghanistan Central Bank access to the international banking system to pay its World Bank dues, purchase banknotes to hold commercial auctions for private banks in Afghanistan and process or settle incoming dollar deposits from legitimate private depositors, such as UNICEF, the UN Development Programme, remittance banks and other legitimate actors;
 5. Insists on maintaining a strict conditional engagement with the Taliban in accordance with the five benchmarks set by the Council for engagement with the de facto

authorities, including in relation to women's rights; calls on international delegations to continuously strive for gender-balanced international delegations, including by sending senior women officials to meetings with the Taliban;

6. Urges the Taliban to ensure free and principled access for humanitarian aid and the safety of humanitarian aid personnel, including for women, and to refrain from interfering in humanitarian programming; stresses that the EU humanitarian aid budget for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries should follow a gender-sensitive approach and be substantially increased to support and protect vulnerable Afghans and their families, including internally displaced people and refugees, and align with the UN's objectives, as set out at the High-Level Pledging Event on Afghanistan; asks that the EU continue to avoid channelling its assistance through structures or systems controlled by the Taliban;
7. Denounces the sharp deterioration of the human rights situation under the Taliban, including the targeting of human rights defenders, women's rights activists and other civil society actors, as well as the repression of peaceful protest and expressions of dissent across the country; strongly condemns the Taliban's decree that women must be accompanied by a male relative to go to work or access public life or services; urges the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Member States not to accept such restrictions on women's freedom of movement and to use all levers at their disposal to urge the Taliban to end these practices and comply with Afghanistan's obligations under international human rights law;
8. Praises and supports all human rights defenders in Afghanistan who are still carrying out their legitimate and peaceful human rights work;
9. Highlights the invaluable work done by Afghan women in defending and promoting human rights, especially women's rights, in the country and recognises their key role as agents of change; stresses that Afghan women and women's rights cannot be traded away nor instrumentalised in any future process; emphasises the importance of hearing and working towards amplifying the voices of Afghan feminists and women, without discrimination regarding their ethnic, religious or political affiliation;
10. Denounces the particular situation of women and girls who are disproportionately affected by the humanitarian crisis and face increased hardship, notably in terms of access to food, healthcare and education, as a direct result of the Taliban's retrograde policies;
11. Strongly condemns the ongoing backlash against gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights; calls for the rights of women to be strictly upheld, including in relation to their active participation in all aspects of civic, economic, political and public life; calls on the Taliban to guarantee the protection of their life and property and their freedom of movement; recognises the critical importance of Afghan women civil society organisation leaders and staff, representing different professions and provinces across the country, in the effective design and delivery of aid, given their knowledge, access and expertise; insists that the EU prioritise women human rights defenders and ensure that they are heard in all responses to the human rights and humanitarian crises facing Afghanistan, as well as issues pertaining to gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights;

12. Urges the EU to ensure that local women-led civil society organisations active in community aid, development and peace and security are able to operate, move freely and safely throughout the country, and receive funds to provide for the health, education, livelihoods, and security of Afghan communities, and urges the EU to sustain the work of these organisations; condemns the exclusion of the majority of girls from secondary schools, which is in direct violation of their universal right to education; insists on the need to ensure access to education for girls of all ages; stresses that no EU funding should finance educational options that exclude girls;
13. Urges the EU to step up its support to groups working to defend the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, including alternative education options for girls barred from schools, and calls for it to fund specific assistance and humanitarian protection programmes for Afghan women who are victims of or at risk of violence, as well as the relatives who support them;
14. Reiterates the importance of documenting and investigating all reports of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and of holding those responsible to account, including for violations committed in the course of the 20 years of armed conflict; underlines, in this context, the importance of independent UN monitoring on Afghanistan and welcomes and supports the work of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan;
15. Calls for the newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan to be provided with the sufficient funds, necessary expertise and diplomatic backing to fulfil his mandate; calls on the UN Human Rights Council to take necessary action to establish an independent, international investigative mechanism with a multi-year mandate and adequate resources to document and regularly report on violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law committed by all parties; calls for this mission to have a gender-balanced composition and include gender equality experts;
16. Calls on the EEAS, EU Delegation to Afghanistan and Member State embassies to enhance their support to Afghan human rights defenders in and outside the country, make use of all tools at their disposal in a flexible manner, and fully implement the EU Guidelines on human rights defenders, including ensuring accountability for violations through private and public advocacy on individual cases and patterns of violations, providing internal protection mechanisms, services and support for those in the country, ensuring safe evacuation paths and specific measures to protect those in transit in third countries and coordinating on granting visas to those seeking to leave the country;
17. Calls for the EU and its Member States to use every diplomatic avenue available to press neighbouring countries to ensure that their borders are open to those at risk who are seeking refuge and asylum from Afghanistan, including those from marginalised communities; calls on the EU Member States to substantially increase the number of resettlements and the granting of humanitarian visas;
18. Urges the Member States, the Commission and the EEAS to prioritise helping those in need of protection to depart Afghanistan, especially human rights defenders, women, girls, LGBTI+ people, religious and ethnic minorities, journalists, writers, academics

and artists; calls on the EU Member States to guarantee safe passage for people leaving the country; regrets a lack of capacity in Member State embassies in neighbouring countries for the processing of visa and resettlement procedures; calls on the Member States to increase their capacity in this respect; calls on neighbouring countries to lift 'exit procedures' for Afghan nationals in order to facilitate their timely resettlement;

19. Urges the EEAS and Member States to identify, in a coordinated manner, how many (former) local staff of EU and national embassies, missions and projects and their family members are still left behind in the country and urges them to develop an evacuation plan for these people; expects the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to keep Parliament regularly updated on progress on this matter;
20. Reiterates that the right to asylum is a fundamental right accorded under international and EU law to all those fleeing war or persecution, irrespective of their nationality or status; stresses that the current arrival of refugees in the EU following the Russian aggression in Ukraine should not restrict access to asylum procedures, effective remedies or other fundamental rights for Afghans seeking international protection in EU Member States; urges the Member States to facilitate family reunification for Afghans with relatives already in the EU;
21. Urges the EU to promote effective access to protection for Afghan refugees in third countries; strongly emphasises that it does not consider countries where there is no guarantee of effective protection for (Afghan) refugees as safe countries for them to return to; calls for a monitoring mechanism to ensure Afghan refugees are not subjected to human rights violations in countries receiving EU aid;
22. Strongly emphasises that, in the current circumstances, any forced return to Afghanistan constitutes refoulement, as minimum standards and protection cannot be guaranteed upon return; calls on the Commission to urge the Member States to grant access to protection for Afghan nationals, including those whose claims have previously been rejected; calls for close monitoring of Afghan nationals who have already been returned, in particular children; welcomes the suspension of the Joint Declaration on Migration Cooperation;
23. Notes with concern the serious allegations of fundamental rights violations, including numerous pushbacks of Afghan nationals by many EU border countries; urges the Member States concerned to uphold their commitments under EU and international law to individually assess the claims of those seeking protection, including at EU external borders, and ensure effective access to protection;
24. Expresses its concern with regard to the situation of Afghan refugees in Turkey, in particular for vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors and LGBTIQ+ persons; strongly deplores the lack of access to asylum procedures and allegations of refoulement towards Afghanistan; strongly condemns the decision by the Greek authorities to declare Turkey a safe third country for Afghans and calls for an urgent revision of this decision, in line with EU law;
25. Reiterates its call on the Commission to swiftly launch an investigation pursuant to

Article 19(1)(a) of the GSP Regulation³ with a view to suspending the trade preferences that Afghanistan has under the Everything But Arms scheme;

26. Welcomes the work of the EU Delegation to Afghanistan and its partial return to the country; stresses the importance of a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, within the limits of the current security and political constraints; calls upon the EU Delegation to prioritise the promotion of human rights, in particular women's rights and the rights of vulnerable groups, as well as the negotiation of unhindered access to the country for humanitarian organisations, including their female staff members;
27. Calls on the EEAS and the Commission to carry out an in-depth review of the process of withdrawal and evacuations from Afghanistan; believes that this should include a critical reflection on the timing and management of the withdrawal with regard to the process of evacuations for and protection of Afghans, notably local staff of EU institutions, including contracted staff and implementing partners of EU-funded projects, and on the lack of EU coordination, despite the fact that Parliament had already called for visas and repatriation of local staff in its resolution of 10 June 2021; expects the EEAS and the Commission to present this critical evaluation, including a definition of 'local staff' under existing protection schemes and outlining what protection measures are envisaged for EU local staff and reform plans, drawing on the experience in Afghanistan, to Parliament during the first half of this year, and to implement these lessons learnt in current and future common security and defence policy activities;
28. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Special Envoy to Afghanistan and the national parliaments of the Member States.

³ OJ L 303, 31.10.2012, p. 1.