

Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan: From Kabul's Streets to the Global Digital Space

Concept Note

Introduction

Since the Taliban regained control in August 2021, Afghanistan has become the only country practicing institutionalized gender apartheid a term now formally discussed by UN experts as a crime against humanity. Over 80 decrees have systematically excluded women and girls from secondary and higher education, most forms of employment, and public spaces. At the same time, Afghan women activists, journalists, and human-rights defenders especially those in exile who remain the primary witnesses to these violations face coordinated online campaigns of threats, doxxing, hacking, and sexualized violence. These attacks are not random; they are orchestrated by Taliban-linked networks to silence the few voices still able to document and denounce gender apartheid. Online persecution is therefore the digital extension of the same regime that bans girls from education and public spaces.

Rationale

- UN bodies (2024 reports of the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls) have explicitly recognized “gender apartheid” in Afghanistan as a crime against humanity.
- Global campaigns against online violence rarely address state-backed, ideologically driven campaigns targeting specific communities, such as Afghan women.
- With internet access for women inside Afghanistan below 15%, most coordinated digital attacks target exiled activists – the Taliban’s strategic effort to eliminate public evidence of their policies.
- Linking physical and digital gender apartheid strengthens both the push for formal codification of the crime and the demand for platform accountability.

Objective:

- Create the concept that Gender Apartheid is not physical and is Online Gender Apartheid too.
- Establish that online attacks on Afghan women constitute state-supported gendered persecution, not generic cyberbullying.
- Urge major platforms (Meta, X, YouTube, Telegram) to treat Taliban-coordinated harassment as violations of policies on violent extremism and gendered disinformation.
- Demonstrate the transnational digital dimension of gender apartheid to bolster calls for its codification as a crime against humanity.
- Centre and amplify testimonies of Afghan women survivors of both physical and digital persecution.

Core Themes

- Global Campaign Alignment: UNITE to End Violence against Women and Girls (2025 theme: ending digital violence)
- Gender Apartheid 2.0: Exporting Systemic Misogyny Online
The continuum from school bans and mahram rules to coordinated digital threats; case studies of Taliban-linked networks; survivor testimonies.
- Platform Responsibility vs. Complicity
Failures of current moderation (language barriers, algorithm amplification); lessons from successful 2022–2024 accountability campaigns.
- From Awareness to Accountability
Pathways to codify gender apartheid; potential prosecution of digital violence within this



framework; launch of a Digital Witness Protection Framework.

Key Message:

The Taliban closed the education institutions and banned women from public. Now they hunt the voices that speak about it online. Gender apartheid does not stop at Afghanistan's borders – it lives on every screen where an Afghan woman is threatened or silenced. Online gendered apartheid violence against Afghan women is the digital continuation of an institutionalized crime against humanity.

Expected Outcomes

- Narrative shift: reputable media outlets explicitly link online violence against Afghan women to “Online gender apartheid.”
- Platform pressure: Open letter co-signed by Afghan women leaders and international organizations; commitment from at least two platforms to technical dialogue.
- Diplomatic momentum: Endorsement by relevant UN mandate holders; public use of “digital gender apartheid” by at least five States in UN statements.
- Protection & evidence: Launch of Digital Witness Protection Fund and a verified public database of documented cases managed by Afghan women.
- Amplification: global impressions under #GenderApartheidIsDigitalToo, with significant Farsi/Pashto participation.

Format

- Duration: 2 hours, including a keynote address, panel discussion, and Q&A session.
- Platform: Zoom, with live streaming on the Bareen Initiative for Development (BID)'s website and social media platforms.
- Moderation: Facilitated by experts from the Bareen Initiative for Development (BID) to ensure an inclusive and constructive dialogue.

Target Audience

- Experts and Researchers: Analysts of political, social, and human rights issues.
- Policymakers: Representatives of international organizations, governments, and diplomatic entities.
- Civil Society Activists: NGOs, women's rights advocates, and groups supporting migrants.
- Afghan Community: The Afghan diaspora, particularly youth and women, to engage in the discourse.
- General Public: Individuals interested in global issues and human rights.

Call to Action

The Bareen Initiative for Development (BID) invites stakeholders to join this critical dialogue to reflect on the past and chart a path toward a better future for Afghanistan and the region. Through collaboration and innovation, this seminar aims to contribute to safer and more cohesive communities.