

The Afghanistan report prepared by Special Rapporteur F. Sinirlioğlu and presented to the UN Security Council ignores *gender apartheid*

The Taliban regime, which came to power in Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, turned the country into a prison for women and girls within two years. Women were deprived of their most basic rights, from education to health, from work to travel.

On April 25, 2023, Feridun Sinirlioğlu was appointed by UN Secretary-General Guterres as Special Coordinator to prepare an independent report providing recommendations on the challenges experienced in Afghanistan. In the letter, we wrote to him, we stated that the Taliban administration deprives women and girls of their most basic human rights and that this discrimination and oppression amounts to *gender apartheid*, calling on UN member states to take decisions banning direct or indirect aid to the Taliban. ([You can access the letter dated August 15, 2023 here.](#))

As part of this process, within the scope of the campaign initiated by the global women's movement demanding that the Taliban administration's practices against women and girls be recognized as gender-based apartheid and as an international crime, a special session was held at the UN Security Council on September 26, 2023. Experts and activists attending the session stated that "Afghanistan's women and girls are trying to resist the gender-based apartheid regime," and requested a special session to be held in the UN General Assembly. ([You can find the news about the meeting here.](#))

Despite all this, the report prepared by Feridun Sinirlioğlu and his team and submitted to the UN Security Council does not even refer to the concept of gender apartheid and insists on using the term "de facto authorities" without naming the Taliban and obscuring the fact that it is the Taliban that is responsible for egregious violations of human rights. The "international engagement model" proposed in the report on how to establish relations with the Taliban administration carries the risk of legitimizing the Taliban's existing unlawful administration. The report paves the way for the fundamental rights of women and girls to be surrendered to the abstract wishes called "good faith measures" in Sinirlioğlu's report and for the most fundamental rights to remain secondary in discussions on "important political, humanitarian, security and economic issues."

Our letter to the UN Security Council

December 5, 2023

On November 28, 2023, the UN Security Council discussed, in a closed session, the final report submitted by Mr. Feridun Sinirlioğlu, the Special Coordinator of the Independent Assessment Mandated by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2679 (2023) on Afghanistan. As the Women's Platform for Equality, Türkiye, we are writing this open letter to share our concerns about the content and possible implications of that report. We are also sending this letter to relevant UN agencies.

We have been actively following the worsening situation in Afghanistan since August 2021. We organized several international meetings and social media campaigns in solidarity with Afghan girls and women whose most fundamental human rights have been violated since the Taliban came to power. On August 15, 2023 we sent a letter to Mr. Sinirlioğlu. As we stated in our letter:

“Women and LGBTI+ individuals are specially targeted and subjected to inhumane treatment and torture simply because of their existence and gender identities... While the UN promotes “women's equal participation in peace-building processes” as a fundamental principle for the establishment of lasting peace, the Taliban administration isolates women and girls, and systematically deprives them of their most basic rights —such as the rights to life, education, and work, as well as freedom of movement —virtually wiping them out of the public sphere. This gender-based persecution amounts to a regime of *gender apartheid*.”

Both in our letter and in our oral statements during the virtual consultation meeting Mr. Sinirlioğlu and his team held with Afghan civil society, we requested that the Special Coordinator pay particular attention to the global women's movement's ongoing campaign for the recognition of *gender apartheid* as a crime in international law. Reminding him of the international struggle against the racial *apartheid* practiced in the Republic of South Africa, where the concept of apartheid is historically grounded, we urged the Special Coordinator and the UN Member States to ban all aid that would directly or indirectly contribute to the maintenance of the Taliban regime. There were several other Afghans at that meeting who used the term *gender apartheid* to refer to Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

Contrary to our expectations, Mr. Sinirlioğlu's report, which is yet to be made public, makes no mention of the campaign to end *gender apartheid*. Nor does it refer to the concept itself – despite specific requests that this be included in the report. (1)

Mr. Sinirlioğlu's report states that “The restrictive bans on girls' secondary and higher education, and on women's right to work, among other restrictions, are not consistent with the fundamental values embodied in the UN Charter or under international law, nor are they conducive to Afghanistan's political and economic stability.” However, it fails to acknowledge the systematic nature of the *gender apartheid* regime that is the backbone of Taliban's governance. Furthermore, referring to the Taliban as “de facto authorities” (DFA) throughout, the report obscures the fact that it is the Taliban that is responsible for *gender apartheid* and many other egregious violations of human rights.

The report states that “The DFA have asked to be recognized as the governing authority for the State of Afghanistan. Doing so comes with acceptance of their obligations and commitments in international conventions, and good faith measures to comply with these through policy, legislation and in practice.” Indeed, the Taliban must comply with their international treaty obligations, including the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). However, the Taliban's compliance and their respect for women's human rights cannot be left to “good faith measures.”



“Proposals for a way forward and an engagement architecture to guide and bring more coherence to political, humanitarian and development activities...that will enable more effective negotiation and implementation of the priorities of Afghan and international stakeholders,” cannot leave women and girls behind even as they pay lip service to their rights.

While we understand the depth of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, women’s rights cannot take a backseat in discussions of “key security, regional and political issues.”

We fear that the report’s recommendations and proposed “engagement architecture” embolden the Taliban as it seeks recognition, legitimacy, and resources. Any engagement by the international community, and the UN Security Council in particular, must be done in a way that ensures women’s and girls’ fundamental human rights fully and without reservation.

We live in a tumultuous time marked by various kinds of reactionary movements and governments, rising militarism, multiple wars, and interlocking crises whose heaviest burdens are born by impoverished women in the Global South, including Afghan women. We need to be resolute that women’s rights will not take a back seat in discussions of “international security.” No religion, no culture, and no political ideology should be allowed to justify women’s subjugation to men, or gender-based discrimination or violence against anyone.

We call on the UN Security Council to issue a strong call for an immediate end to the Taliban's gender-based apartheid policies, and call on UN member states to adopt resolutions banning direct or indirect aid to the Taliban unless and until the latter takes clear and lasting steps to ensure basic human rights and the building of a democratic regime for all, including women.

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