

UN Human Rights Council 50: UK statement during the Urgent Debate on Afghanistan

Thank you Mr President,

Let me begin by expressing my condolences to the victims of the earthquake in Afghanistan.

And let me thank the High Commissioner, Special Rapporteur and Ms Fawzia Koofi for their powerful interventions this morning.

It is almost one year since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

Tragically, our worst fears have come true when it comes to girls' education.

Many secondary schools continue to be closed to girls, despite Taliban commitments that secondary education would be open to all by 23 March. Afghanistan is the only country where girls cannot attend secondary school. As the father of three girls myself, I find that heartbreaking.

An entire generation of girls are missing out on equal access to opportunities, their hopes and dreams shattered, the gains of the last decades squandered.

But education isn't the only way women's and girls' rights have been cruelly curtailed. Women and girls face increasing restrictions on their ability to work and to travel. Women cannot leave their homes without a mahram. Some remain trapped in their homes, facing domestic violence with no way out.

This suffering is, of course, not limited to women and girls. In August, the Taliban announced an amnesty for all Afghans yet we continue to receive credible reports of former security force members, being tortured or killed. Many Afghans, including religious and ethnic minorities, LGBT+ persons, and civil society activists, continue to face discrimination, harassment, and death threats.

The UK remains committed to supporting the Afghan people. We delivered £286m of aid to Afghanistan in the last financial year and we will do the same this year. We are allocating at least 50% of that aid to women and girls and recognise the urgent need for funding to women's organisations, to ensure vital services are delivered to women across Afghanistan.

Mr President,

We call on the Taliban to uphold women's and girls' rights. And we stand with the women and girls of Afghanistan and commend their extraordinary bravery.

Thank you.