

TALIBAN'S BLUEPRINT FOR THE ULTIMATE FEMALE ERASURE

25 February 2026

August 2021 marked the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan. Since then, the nation has undergone a rapid, unprecedented, systemic collapse of civil liberties that onlookers in the upper echelons of wealthy nations have characterised as “gender apartheid”. Over the past five years, what originated as “temporary” suspensions of education became a mandatory, permanent ban on secondary and university education for 2.2 million Afghan girls. This escalated to legally silencing women in public spaces, limitations on access outside their homes without a male guardian known as a mahram. Seventy percent of the 10.3 million internally displaced Afghans are women. This was compounded further by a global setback in refugee protection. In 2025, Pakistan and Iran unlawfully expelled 1.56 million women and children, handing them back to Taliban territory. European nations including Germany and Austria have also hastened negotiations to organise forced returns. With an acutely dwindling mental health, thousands of documented cases of femicide, the world thought the situation could not get more dire than this - but we warned the worst was yet to come.

On 4 January 2026, the Taliban passed the Criminal Procedural Regulations that, among many other things, allows husbands to beat their wives “as long as there is no serious bodily harm”. The 90-page penal code signed by the Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada openly categorises women as slaves, creating a sort of caste system based on which punishments would be meted out, and dissenting from it in any form would also be deemed an offence subject to severe punishment.

The New Law

One of the most heinous provisions of the penal code doesn't just “allow” beating, as long as it is not “excessive”. Claiming to prohibit “broken bones, open wounds, or visible bruising”, the law treats absence of permanent physical deformity as “permissible discipline”. It codifies a presumed threshold of pain that the “slaves” are expected to endure as long as the “master” does not “depreciate the asset”. The new law does not criminalise sexual and psychological abuse - these forms of violence, according to the Taliban leaders, simply do not exist.

The new penal code also encourages any Muslim - whenever they see “sinners committing sins” - to carry out their own acts of punishment. This means a woman travelling alone, having her hair or face uncovered, a woman entering a park, speaking loudly or singing, or fleeing her abusive husband - the list of “sins” is bottomless - is a target of male violence, a priori, justified by the penal code.





The Impossibility Of Justice

The new law places the burden of justice on the victim while also denying them the means to achieve it. For the “master” or husband to be deemed criminal, women need to prove their abuse before a fundamentalist judge; however, earlier decrees dictate that she can’t travel without a mahram, who is often the abuser himself. To make matters worse, she has to “prove” her injuries before the court while being covered from head to toe. By making the process logistically and legally untenable, the Taliban have ensured that the punishment - a mere 15-day sentence for “excessive” beating - is never carried out. Given that sexual violence isn’t considered a crime, she is never going to be able to “prove” rape, or sexual assault of any kind. Criminalising Escape: Psychology 101

The women, while being subjected to an omnipresent surveillance, are prevented from seeking any outside support, because the law criminalises visiting relatives. This creates a total collapse of safe spaces. The family that dares to host the aggrieved woman also bears the burden of this law, making the woman a liability; she is left with a profound sense of internalised guilt. Given that in human psychology, isolation is the most potent tool of an abuser, the Taliban have planned this well enough, making any man on the street to act as an enforcer of the law.

This creates a potent atmosphere for the woman to ‘trauma bond’ with her abuser who she is reliant on for food, movement and legal status. This is textbook origins of Stockholm Syndrome because her abuser is the only one who can grant her mercy by choosing not to “excessively” beat her.

Lastly, by creating a 15-day cap on sentencing, she is forced to stop trying to escape her abuser despite repeated negative stimuli. So even when an opportunity arises, her will to escape is broken psychologically by a condition called learned helplessness.

By enforcing such social sequestration and fostering learned helplessness, the regime has guaranteed that her home becomes a site of total psychological battleground. The supposed protective walls of her home are torn down by the weight of the new law, causing complete dissociation from the society.

Systematic Abandonment By the “Developed” States

UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls Reem Alsalem posted on X: ‘The implications of this latest code for women and girls is simply terrifying. The Taliban however have understood, and understood correctly, that no one will stop them. Will the international community prove them wrong? And if so when?’

It is hard to ignore the deafening silence by the Global North that could have intervened in the crisis ages ago. Behind the superficial sloganeering of the West, the wealthy nations’ consulates quietly reopened in Kabul, the wealthy NGOs quietly resumed their operations, albeit, now under the vigilant eyes of the Virtue and Vice department of the Taliban government, ensuring that no money or support is directed towards women and girls.

The West - with its “enlightenment” and its “liberal democracies” - has conceded to participating, even if tacitly, in the erasure of Afghan women masterminded by a known terrorist group.

While unsurprising, Russia, who had negotiated with the Taliban well in advance of their takeover to maintain their dictatorial presence in the region, consequently delisting them as a terrorist group, the European complacency in this erasure was less predictable. Or were some of us simply naive enough to expect the Western states to speak out? After all, the erasure of women is not an exclusive prerogative of the “barbaric” nations: here in Europe, Canada, and many other Western democracies, women are being erased too, albeit in a much more sophisticated and “politically correct” way.

Whose Security Is Europe Protecting? Not Women’s

The so-called Penal Code the Taliban has issued is a legally permissible mass femicide of a historical scale, passed under the very noses of indifferent international civic actors. States (including former allies like the USA and EU) prioritise border security over the lives of women. A deep wound of betrayal comes in the shift from ‘universal rights’ to ‘cultural pragmatism’, for example: the UN’s exclusion of women from the Doha negotiations to appease the Taliban. Human rights, including women’s rights, were deliberately left out of discussion because the Taliban insisted on handling this “internally according to Islamic law” and the organisers did not challenge this, citing that they had to make an “impossible choice”. There was a token meeting of Afghan women and civil society, but it was rightly boycotted by activists; any exclusion of the primary affected party is an inherently compromised discussion.

Much like the past abandonment of the country by the USA over Realpolitik reasons, the EU is following suit. Its 2026 migration pact focuses on the “removal of connection criterion” making deporting migrants to “safe third countries” easier. Afghan women are now stranded and face mass expulsion back to their abusers. Though the EU allocated €126 million earlier this year, several critics contend this by calling it “conscience money”, whereby it funds basic survival needs, while remaining diplomatically impotent in reversing the law. This is despite the European Court of Justice ruling upholding refugee status for all Afghan women.



To add salt to the festering wound, in a letter recently sent to the European Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs Magnus Brunner, ministers of twenty EU states asked for deportation of Afghans, without any consideration that sending Afghan women back “home” amounts to both literal and metaphorical death for them. A letter that fails to mention women or girls even once is no different from the Taliban’s intent on wiping women out of existence. The signatories instead spoke of the importance of “regaining control over migration and security”.

Protection, Not Expulsion

For organisations like ours, the European Network of Migrant Women, doing our best to help women and children find a safe space in Europe, the burden is no longer sustainable. Given the magnitude of what we are up against, our intervention pales in comparison. That’s why we call on EU member states and the EU institutions with real power to intervene without making matters worse.

While we are faced with a deadlock situation, knowing fully well diplomacy with terrorists, the Taliban being only one of them, will never yield the results we need, the least we could do is to safeguard the women and children from deportation. To remain silent - while exacerbating the horrors of closed borders - amounts to partaking in the sex-based persecution and effective obliteration of the entire female Afghan population. As unclear as the light at the end of this tunnel seems, something has to change, and it has to change soon.