

AFGHAN WOMEN IN TALIBAN PRISONS



INTRODUCTION

Since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, Afghanistan has been hit by one of the most severe and unprecedented human rights crises in the region, especially with respect to women's rights. The Taliban, who refer to their political regime as the "Islamic Emirate" and their leader as the "Caliph" or "Emir," have passed more than **134 decrees** targeting citizens' rights and freedoms. These restrictions disproportionately focus on women, depriving them of the right to formal education, employment, economic participation, and other fundamental human rights. In one of their most shocking moves aimed at marginalizing and dehumanizing women, the Taliban enacted the so-called "Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice Law." Banning women's voices by labeling it as "Awrat," or a sexual organ, nakedness, signifying weakness and defectiveness, this regressive law also requires that women be accompanied by a male family member (a "mahram") whenever they leave the house and mandates full coverage of their bodies from head to toe.

Taliban's legal and political framework considers Afghans as the "ummah" of an "Islamic caliphate" and those who oppose the regime's decrees, regardless of motive, are labeled "beghavat-gar" (rebel) against the Muslim caliph or Taliban leader. Therefore, any kind of civil or political activism is interpreted to be a criminal act, often punishable with harsh penalties under the Taliban's extreme interpretation of Islamic law. Meanwhile, in the Taliban's fundamentalist religious view, women are restricted to childbearing and managing household affairs – narrowly confined to the roles of "mother" and "wife." Any expression of femininity outside the confines of the home or in public spaces—especially in political or social contexts—is considered a violation of the Taliban's principles and social norms. Under this framework, independent femininity is regarded as inherently criminal.

Afghan women, including women human rights defenders, women's rights activists, civil servants, journalists, female politicians, and students, have openly protested against the Taliban regime's discriminatory laws and policies since they regained power. From the earliest days, women staged continuous and widespread demonstrations, bringing dozens of young women onto the streets. The extensive protests, occurring both on the streets and across online platforms, alarmed the Taliban. In response, the regime turned to violence and persecution to suppress dissent, arresting leaders and participants of women's protest groups on the streets, in private homes, and even in women's "safe houses" where protesters sought refuge. Consequently, dozens of women protesters, human rights defenders, and activists have been detained and

imprisoned. Testimonies from released detainees reveal the harsh conditions they endured, including severe physical and psychological torture inflicted on both the protesters and, in some cases, their accompanying children.

Through a series of audio interviews with twelve Afghan women human rights defenders, Femena has documented their experiences of detention and imprisonment in Taliban detention centers and prisons. The interviewees, aged between 25 and 40, represent diverse ethnic groups and come from different provinces across Afghanistan. They were arrested between 2021 and 2023 for their civil activism and protests against the Taliban regime's anti-women policies, primarily in Kabul. Each woman has endured varying lengths of detention and imprisonment. According to their accounts, the Taliban regime has employed its full capacity for violence to punish, intimidate, and torture these women in its detention centers and prisons.

This report, presented in seven parts, explores the detailed accounts of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) regarding their experiences of detention and imprisonment under the Taliban.

01

WHY AND HOW ARE WOMEN DETAINED?



Nearly three years ago, the Taliban, an Islamist militant group, came to power as a result of a flawed peace deal with the U.S., which excluded women, civil society, marginalized communities, and even the Afghan government. The Taliban's unexpected victory triggered widespread confusion, panic, and protests across the country. Following the fall of Kabul, many prominent politicians, journalists, human rights defenders, and women's rights activists fled Afghanistan. However, a significant number of women with backgrounds in civil society, human rights organizations, and activism – along with students, working women and other new and emerging activists – organized protests in several provinces to oppose the Taliban's return.

Chanting the slogan "Bread, Work, Freedom," these women demanded fundamental rights, including access to education, the right to work, and personal and social freedoms such as the right to choose their own way of dress (voluntary hijab) and political participation. Instead of addressing these legitimate demands, the Taliban responded with violent crackdowns. These WHRDs were arrested in groups and transferred to detention centers and prisons, where they were subjected to torture, and some endured horrific acts of gang rape during their imprisonment.

Although some WHRDs have been released from Taliban prisons and have left Afghanistan, women's resistance and protests remain undeterred. Under the Taliban's authoritarian rule, women continue to seize every opportunity to oppose the regime's misogynistic laws, which represent a blatant example of gender apartheid in the country. Groups of protesting women have burned hijabs in private or undisclosed locations and shared videos of women singing online as acts of defiance. The publication of protest declarations and messages condemning the Taliban's restrictive decrees continues. These ongoing acts of resistance have led to the identification, persecution, and arrest of many women.

Most of the women human rights defenders interviewed by Femena reported that their arrests were primarily due to their participation in demonstrations and protests against the Taliban's discriminatory policies and laws. These women were detained from various locations, including protest sites, their homes, on the streets, and women's "safe houses", operated by both foreign and domestic NGOs.

Karima, a 30-year-old activist, was arrested during a protest meeting of women's groups and spent 47 days in solitary confinement. She recounted:

“The main reason for my arrest was advocating for women’s rights and protesting the Taliban’s restrictive decrees against women.”

Zohra, 35, a woman human rights defender from Balkh province, fled to Kabul to avoid arrest. She recounted:

“I had taken refuge in a safe house with a group of protesting women and girls, along with their children. One night, the Taliban terrorist group quietly entered the building where we were staying, surrounded us, and arrested us.”

Some protesting women endured days and weeks of being pursued before eventually being captured. Gisou, 30, shared her experience:

“I was chased for a month and a half, changing locations more than seven times. I was finally arrested at a safe house.”

Opposition to the mandatory hijab and Taliban-mandated clothing has been another reason for the arrest of several WHRDs. During women’s marches in Kabul, a group of protesting girls burned several burqas in the street to oppose the Taliban-mandated hijab, which consists of a “chador” or “burqa” that covers women from head to toe, leaving only their eyes visible. This act of defiance enraged the Taliban and led to the arrest of several women.

“In our last street demonstration, held on January 18, 2022, a group of girls burned burqas or chadors, and the Taliban became extremely sensitive to this issue,” says Zohal, 28. “They arrested several of the girls and actively sought to arrest and imprison all who had participated in the march that day.”

Several interviewees reported being arrested simply for leaving their homes without a mahram or a male family member accompanying them. Zahra, 39, described her arrest, which involved severe physical abuse.

“I was arrested for leaving the house alone and without a mahram. A small group of the Taliban saw me in a rickshaw at a checkpoint. They asked why I wasn’t accompanied by a mahram. Without listening to my explanation, they surrounded me, grabbed my hand,

and beat me with the butt and barrel of a rifle before forcing me into a car. I cried and screamed a lot, but no one came to my aid."

According to interviewees, Taliban officers do not present warrants or provide reasons for arrests. They first confiscate all personal and communication devices from those detained and prohibit any contact with their families or friends. Arrests are conducted by male officers and are frequently accompanied by verbal abuse, such as obscene sexual insults as well as physical violence, including beatings with rods and rifle butts, whippings, and the use of plastic bags over detainees' heads and faces during their transfer to detention centers. Lalah, 29, who spent 66 days in Taliban custody, recounted her arrest:

"I was in a taxi and asked the driver to turn into the alley. Suddenly, the Taliban approached and said, 'Stop!' They ordered me to get out. When I asked why, they replied, 'You know better!' They forced me into their car. One Talib sat on my left and another on my right. Following their own rules, I protested, 'You are not my mahram. Why are you sitting next to me?' They told me, 'Keep your head down.' One of them put a black plastic bag over my head. I protested again, and he hit me hard on the shoulder with the butt of his gun."

Nasrin, 35, was arrested among other women protesters following a mass raid by the Taliban on a "safe house." She described the experience as terrifying, emphasizing the armed Taliban soldiers' brutal demeanor and their disregard for any legal or humanitarian principles, which left her feeling helpless and scared.

"When they came to me," Nasrin recounted, "they first demanded my mobile phone. It was full of documents and videos of the protests, so I refused to give it to them. Five armed Taliban surrounded me, and one of them hit me in the face with a walkie-talkie, ordering me to hand over my phone. At that moment, out of sheer fear, I lost control of my bladder."

A hard slap from a Taliban member during her arrest left Golsoum, 30, with lasting hearing problems. Golsoum, who has been arrested twice during street protests, described the ordeal:

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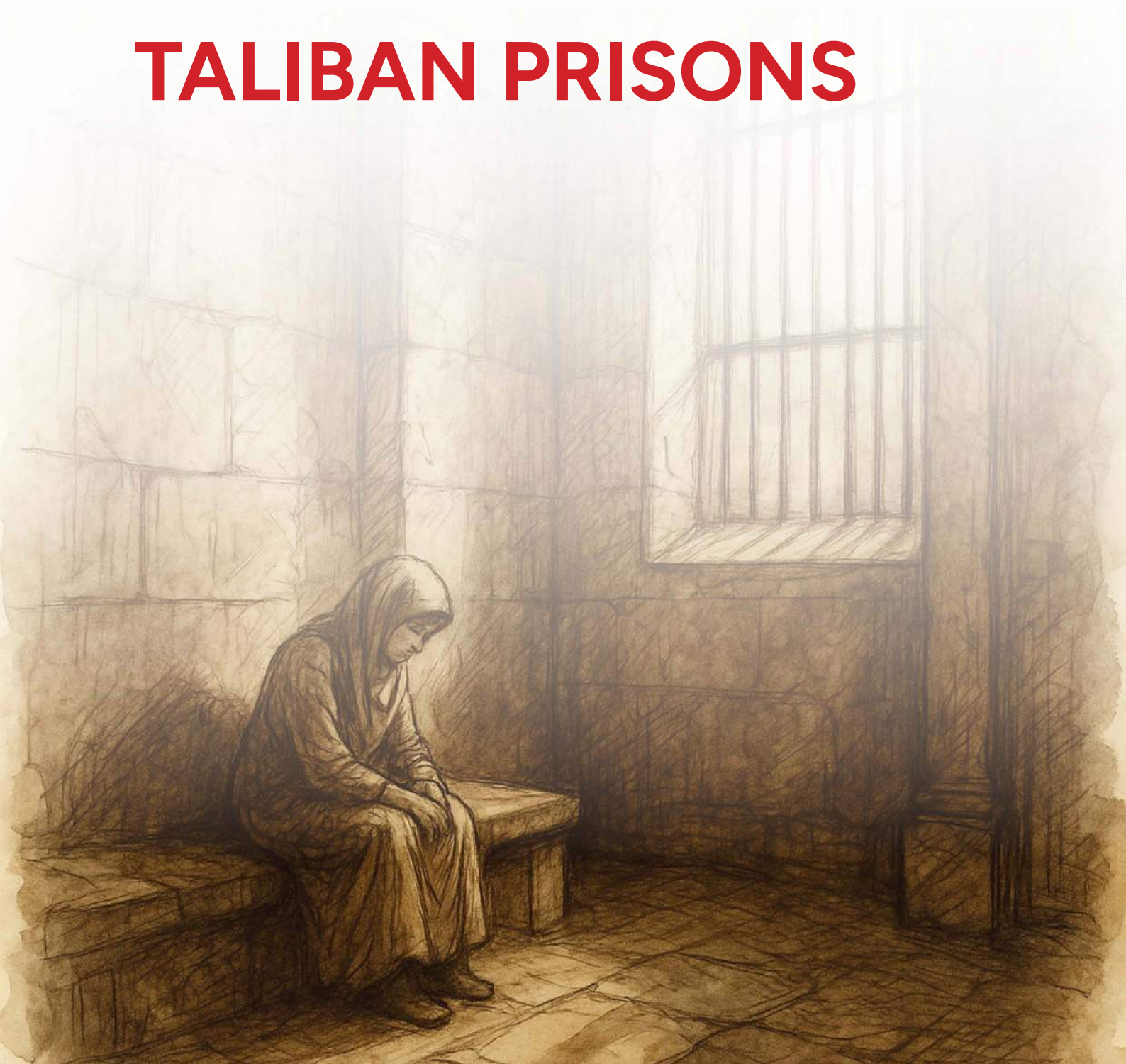
“When the Taliban cars surrounded me, I resisted and refused to get in, even though I was terrified. One of them grabbed me by the hair, and another slapped me hard on the ear. It felt like my eardrum had ruptured. For a few moments, my vision went black, and my ears started ringing. Since that day, I’ve suffered from persistent earaches and hearing problems.”



(Marcus Yam / Los Angeles Times)

02

TORTURE AND VIOLENCE IN TALIBAN PRISONS



All WHRDs interviewed for this report endured various forms of torture and sexual and gender-based violence after being transferred to Taliban detention centers and prisons. According to the testimonies of these women, officers and officials at these facilities employed brutal interrogation methods, as well as psychological and physical torture, to intimidate and coerce them into providing information.

Five women who experienced solitary confinement described being held in wet, cold, and dark rooms for days at a time, and being blindfolded when escorted to and from the bathroom. Karima, who spent 47 days in solitary confinement, recounted her experience: “With each interrogation by the Taliban, it felt as though I was dying and coming back to life. They interrogated me twelve times, and during each session, they tortured me with electric shocks. They beat me, humiliated me, insulted me, and called me obscene and vulgar names. The room I was held in was damp, and they poured water on the carpet to ensure I couldn’t rest, intensifying my suffering.”

During the relentless and grueling interrogations, often conducted in the middle of the night, women prisoners were subjected to severe torture and physical violence. Interrogators beat, punched, kicked, and slapped them on the head and face, threw sharp objects at them, poured tea or hot water on their heads and faces, and struck them with rods and rifle butts. Nasrin described her ordeal:

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“I was interrogated continuously for more than five days and nights. They tracked our cell phone calls and transferred all the information from our phones to their computers. This went on morning, midnight, day, and night, with different groups coming in for interrogation. They repeatedly demanded to know how much money we had received and from which country [to protest against the Taliban]. The interrogators accused us of spying for the United States and European countries.”

Six female prisoners reported being repeatedly tortured with electric shocks. Lalah shared her experience:

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“I protested the conditions of my detention, but I was told to remain silent. The interrogator used electrical shocks on my legs, causing me to collapse to the ground. They then placed me back on a chair. One of them asked me which province I was from. When I replied, ‘Kandahar’ [a Pashtun province], the interrogator threw a cup of hot tea at me, hitting my head and face. I covered my eyes with my hand and screamed, ‘You’ve blinded me!’”

According to the interviewees, being a member of the Hazara ethnic group and practicing the Shia religion often intensified the torture and insults they endured. Zohal shared her experience:

“I personally faced extremely harsh treatment from the Taliban because of my mobile phone and my identity as a Hazara. My phone contained videos and photos of the protests, including messages coordinating a protest plan in my group chats. The Taliban believed I was the leader of the women protesters. For this, I suffered very severe physical and mental torture.”

Zohal also recounted another instance:

“interrogators would ask questions in Pashto to Persian-speaking female prisoners. If a prisoner could not understand Pashto or respond in Pashto, she was subjected to more severe forms of torture.”

Nafisa, 30, spent only one day in a Taliban prison, but she was not spared from physical and psychological torture. She recounted:

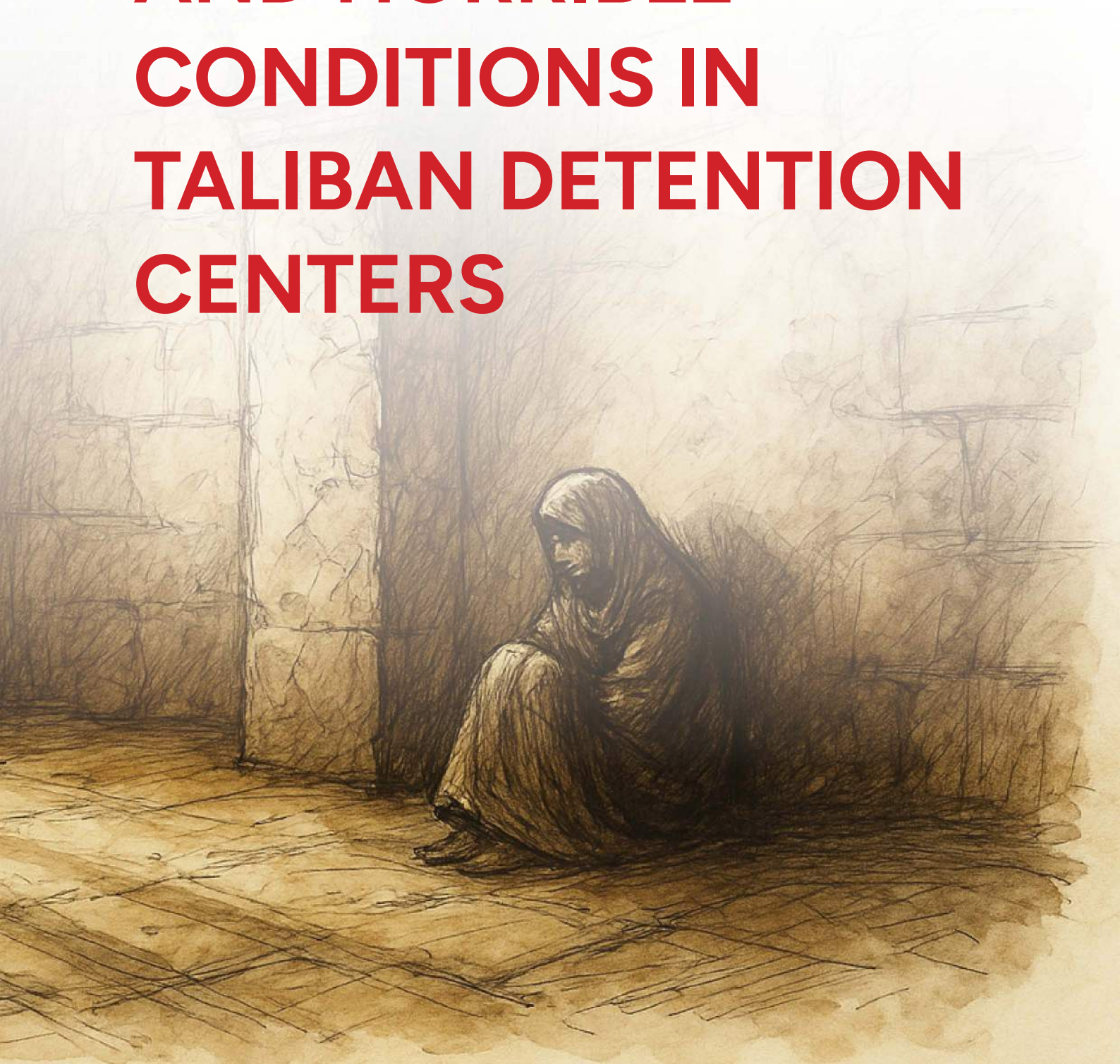
“They gave me electric shocks, pulled out my hair, cursed me, and humiliated me because I am Hazara. That one day felt like an entire year.”

All the women interviewed reported being subjected to verbal abuse during their detention, frequently being called “prostitutes” and “foreign spies” by Taliban agents. This verbal assault instilled a deep fear of being charged with serious crimes such as “fornication” or “rebellion,” both of which could carry heavy sentences. Nasrin recounted:

“The interrogators did not see us as human beings during the investigations. They repeatedly called us prostitutes. In Afghanistan, prostitution is a crime punishable by death under the Taliban. I met a woman in prison who had been sentenced to stoning for prostitution.” Additionally, interrogators mocked the political and social identities of the protesting women during interrogations. They also forced the detainees to pray and perform Islamic rituals and religious practices while in prison.

03

**INHUMANE
AND HORRIBLE
CONDITIONS IN
TALIBAN DETENTION
CENTERS**



According to the testimonies and eyewitness accounts of detained women protesters, many Taliban detention centers and prisons are repurposed government buildings, offices, or even former kindergartens. The Taliban have converted these spaces into detention facilities by completely covering the windows and doors with iron bars, locking and chaining them. These rooms lack adequate lighting and ventilation and are equipped with minimal sanitary facilities.

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“Inside the building,” says Gisou, “the official branches and offices were converted into prison cells. They removed the computers and desks and turned the space into a prison. There are many prisoners being held there. This temporary prison is near the Ministry of Interior, in the city center, and is guarded by the Badri Squad, a special and trained Taliban military unit.”

In several instances, women were transported in large groups using containers and trucks and then confined in small rooms.

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“They kept us with 40 to 50 prisoners in rooms measuring just three by four square meters,” recalls Sara, 30.

Eleven of the women interviewed described the harsh and unsanitary conditions in Taliban prisons and detention centers. According to them, the cells or rooms were filthy, damp, foul-smelling, and infested with rats and biting insects.

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“They transferred us at night to a place that looked like it had been abandoned for a long time,” says Zohra. “It was full of rat droppings, with rats and insects scurrying from one corner to another. My leg was broken during the protests due to a beating by the Taliban, and the pain was severe, but there was no medicine or doctor. I didn’t dare complain.”

Most of the women emphasized that during their detention and imprisonment, they lacked access to basic hygiene materials and facilities, such as adequate water, showers, and baths. Shampoo, soap, and toothbrushes were provided only occasionally, and only after persistent protests and repeated requests from the prisoners.

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“The environment was cramped and dark, and I didn’t see the sun or any light,” says Golsoum. “I was alone in a room. When I needed to use the bathroom, I would knock on the door for hours

before someone came to open it. Then they would take me to the bathroom with my eyes blindfolded.”

In another case, Gisou recounted that after 15 days of protesting and insisting, the prisoners were finally allowed to bathe and clean the clothes that had been stuck to their bodies because of the dirt.

For a group of women detained after a raid on a safe house, the lack of hygiene facilities was particularly distressing. The severe shock and stress caused most of them to get their periods, but they had no access to sanitary pads or tampons. Instead, they were forced to use dirty clothes or their own clothing as sanitary pads. Zohra, who was imprisoned with her child, recounted:

“Where I was held, there were no sanitary facilities. There wasn’t even water to wash our hands or face. There was no shampoo, no soap, and no clean clothes. I didn’t have sanitary pads for a very long time until they finally brought us broughtour belongings from the safe house. Due to the stress and fear, we all got our periods, but there were no facilities. We had to use dirty sheets”

According to the interviewees, the food situation in Taliban prisons is as dire as the unsanitary conditions. Prisoners have limited access to drinking water, and meals are irregular – sometimes provided once a day, sometimes once every three days, and occasionally twice a day. The menu lacks meat, vegetables, and dairy products, and the food is of extremely poor quality. Meals often contain fingernails, hair, and other dirty objects. Women detained from the Hazara and Shia communities reported being deliberately kept hungry and thirsty for extended periods. Gisou shared her experience: “

At first, there was no water or food, especially during the first five days of interrogation. One of their methods to pressure us was to starve and dehydrate us – and our children – to force confessions. When the children became weak and sick from the lack of water and food, and on the urging of doctors, they eventually brought us some food. But the food often had nails, hair, and garbage in it. They gave us leftover food from the soldiers and brought drinking water in garbage cans or filthy barrels. Meals were completely irregular – they brought food whenever they felt like it, sometimes two meals a day, sometimes one.”

Meanwhile, despite the prevalence of seasonal infectious diseases, psychological trauma, physical injuries from torture, and chronic illnesses among the women and their children, the Taliban assigned only one doctor and one nurse to care for the sick. According to the interviewees, prisoners were only treated when their health had reached a critical condition.



WANA (West Asia News Agency) via REUTERS

04

THE HARSH CONDITION OF CHILDREN DETAINED WITH WHRDS



WHRDs in Afghanistan were relentlessly pursued by Taliban intelligence forces during and after street protests. Many women were forced to flee their homes and known locations, often taking their children with them to seek refuge in safer places. In several instances, children witnessed the violent arrests of their mothers. In one raid, the Taliban arrested a group of women protesters along with their children from a safe house and transferred them to prison. Mothers recounted that when armed Taliban men rushed to arrest them, they clung to their children, trembling with fear that their children may be struck, the mother tried to shield their children from the terror of the situation.

Zohra, one of these mothers, recounted:

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“When the Taliban came to arrest us, my son cried so much that it felt like his heart was coming out of his mouth. I held him tightly with both hands, praying that nothing bad would happen to him. My roommate, trembling with fear, said she was going to throw herself out of the window. At that moment, apart from my terrified child, my greatest fear was that the Taliban might gang-rape us. When my roommate approached the window, she saw that armed Taliban soldiers had their rifles aimed at the building. We were paralyzed with fear and didn’t know what to do. I wasn’t afraid of death for myself, but I spoke with my roommate, explaining that I had a young child and that we needed to open the door. We came to an understanding. I spoke to the armed Taliban behind the closed door and told them we would open it on the condition that they didn’t shoot us because we had a young child with us. We opened the door. It’s better not to say anything about what happened afterward or how that night unfolded. We tasted death.”

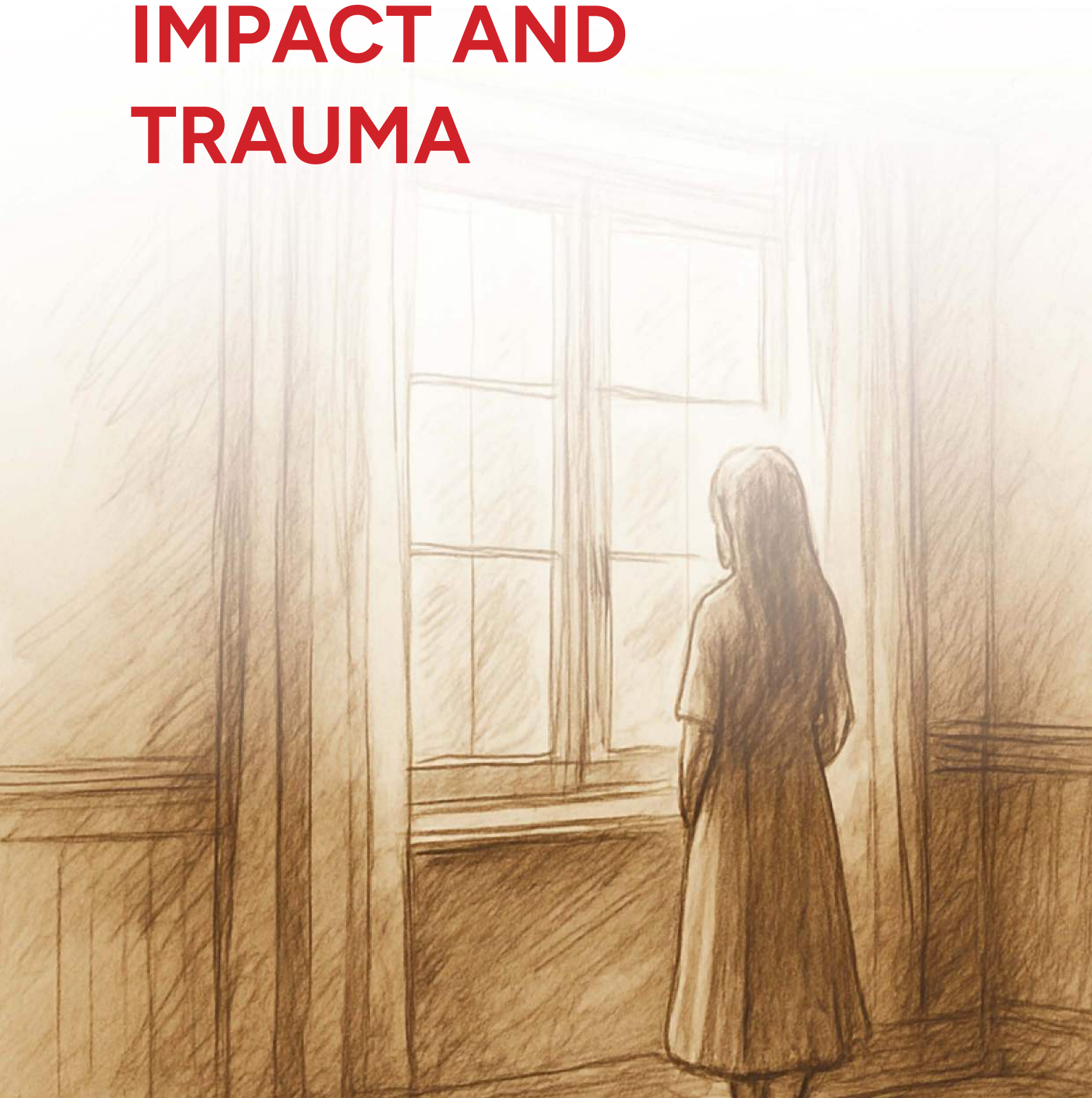
Gisou, who was detained with her three children, shared a similar experience:

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“It was heartbreaking to see our children, their hearts racing with fear. Every time the prison door opened, they couldn’t control their bladder. At night, while sleeping in the stifling room, they gasped for air, their eyes wide with terror. In a word, throughout the escape, the arrest, the time in prison, and even upon our release, I was just a mother.”

05

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT AND TRAUMA



The Taliban are treated at the international level as a de facto (unofficial) government, and there is little expectation for them to adhere to international human rights values or legal norms. However, the people of Afghanistan have not remained silent in the face of this notorious and unlawful group's ignorance and oppression. Many Afghans especially women human rights defenders and protesting women are engaging in civil advocacy, both nationally and internationally, to pressure international institutions and governments involved in Afghan affairs to hold the Taliban accountable, in any possible way, for their discriminatory and violent actions and policies.

Undoubtedly, the path to freedom and justice for the people of Afghanistan, especially its women, is fraught with immense challenges. The ongoing struggle requires the unwavering efforts of all those resisting the Taliban rule and dissenting, particularly WHRDs.

Unfortunately, the psychological toll of torture, violence, and dehumanization during detention has profoundly affected many human rights and women's rights defenders who have experience detention and prison under the Taliban. In some cases, these traumatic experiences have led to their withdrawal from activism. Moreover, Afghan society's stigmatization of women who have been detained and imprisoned has created additional barriers, preventing some from resuming their social and political activities or even living normal lives. Several interviewed women shared their ongoing struggles with the psychological and physical trauma inflicted on them during their imprisonment – pain and suffering that continue to haunt them months after their release.

The women reported severe psychological distress caused by prolonged interrogations, torture, assaults, rape, and sexual and gender-based violence. Many suffer from nervous breakdowns, depression, isolation, withdrawal, and a pervasive sense of hopelessness. Zahra described her ordeal:



“Unfortunately, my mental state is not good at all. I don’t feel well. Sometimes I experience panic attacks. I have been under the care of a psychologist for six months. My husband and family are worried about me and try to help me forget the incident, but I have become isolated and withdrawn. I am afraid to leave the house.”

Sara, who spent over a month in Taliban detention, explained how her imprisonment changed her life:

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“I saw and experienced many horrors. I am no longer the person I used to be. I lost my health, my sanity, and my honor and dignity. Now I am alone in my house, unable to go out, and people do not accept me. This is a gradual death in itself.”

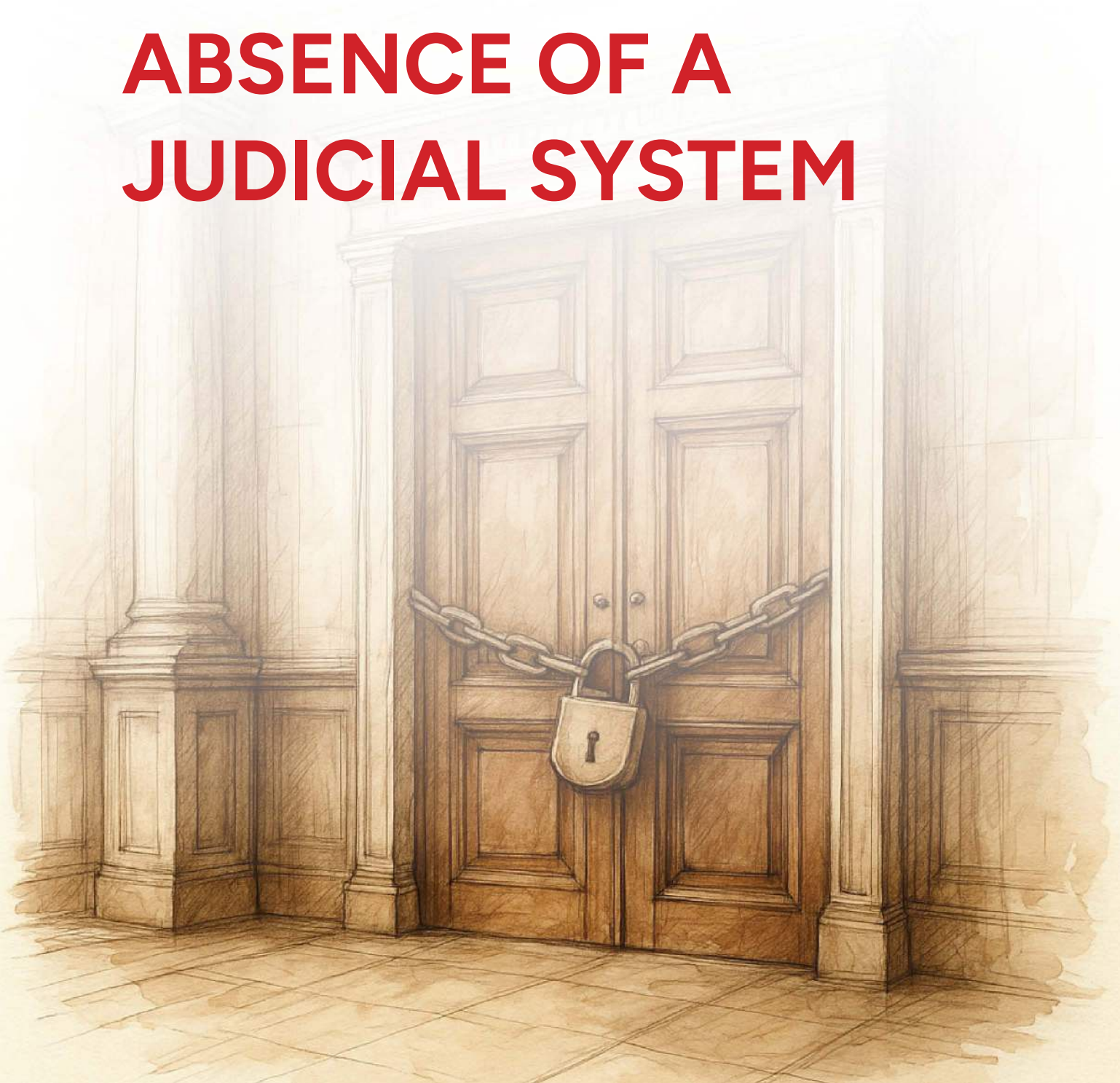
Karima, who was tortured with electric shocks while in solitary confinement and forced to endure long days on a wet carpet in a damp cell, now suffers from severe joint and bone pain, along with persistent physical discomfort.



Ahmad Sahel Arman/AFP/Getty Images

06

THE STATE OF JUSTICE IN THE ABSENCE OF A JUDICIAL SYSTEM



What is certain today in Afghanistan is that civil activism and protest against the Taliban regime's policies and laws are considered crimes. By suppressing freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, the Taliban have adopted a repressive and brutal stance toward protesters and critics. An examination of the conditions faced by WHRDs and women protesters in prison reveals unimaginable levels of violence, torture, and lawlessness in Taliban detention centers. In the early days of their return to power, the Taliban declared Afghanistan's Constitution and its civil and criminal laws invalid, effectively abolishing the legal framework that had governed the country. Judicial institutions are now administered according to the Taliban's extremist interpretations of Sharia law and Hanafi jurisprudence.

In the absence of a modern legal system and codified criminal and procedural laws, the treatment of defendants in Taliban prisons remains unchecked and arbitrary. None of the detained women had access to basic rights such as legal representation, a fair trial or even hygiene and healthcare services during their imprisonment. Without codified laws, the principle of legality of crime and punishment is disregarded, and arbitrary actions have replaced any semblance of lawful application. Physical and psychological torture is routinely practiced in Taliban prisons, despite explicit prohibitions in international law.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) prohibits torture and inhuman treatment. [Article 9](#) of the Covenant stipulates that no one may be arbitrarily arrested, that individuals must be informed of the reasons for their arrest, appear in court promptly, and have their charges heard in a fair process. However, ten of the women interviewed stated that they were never formally charged or informed in writing of the reasons for their arrest or detention. Seven of these women also reported that their families were kept in the dark for days and were not allowed to contact or visit them. Detained women had no access to lawyers, family support, or external aid. Families often had no option but to turn to the Taliban for information and, in some cases, rely on mediation by influential religious or ethnic figures to secure the release of women who were detained.

Marina, 25, described her experience:

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“There was no support. My uncle had to bring elders from the area and respected figures to the Taliban to mediate for our release. They worked to get us out as quickly as possible.” Shafiqah, 27, shared a similar account: “I had no access to any support or system of help. Only my father and our neighbor, who was a member of the Taliban, mediated for me. Eventually, I was released, but the Taliban made me promise to stay at home and not act against the Islamic Emirate.”

In cases where news of arrests reached human rights organizations and the media, these groups have worked to amplify the voices of women prisoners and prevent their torture and harassment from going unnoticed. According to the women prisoners, media coverage of their cases has played a significant role in reducing the severity of torture and the likelihood of harsh sentences.

The Taliban are internationally treated as a de facto state, yet they are not expected to adhere to or commit to international human rights standards or legal norms. Despite this, the people of Afghanistan, particularly WHRDs and women protesters, refuse to remain silent in the face of the oppression and ignorance imposed by this notorious and illegal regime. Many are actively seeking justice by exerting pressure on international institutions and governments through civil lawsuits, striving to hold the Taliban accountable for their discriminatory and violent behaviors and policies in any possible way.

7) Strategic Recommendations

While recognizing the resilience and activism of WHRDs and women protesters in Afghanistan, Femena has developed a set of recommendations for the international community, including the United Nations, Western and regional governments, international human rights organizations, and feminist networks and activists worldwide. Global support for Afghan women is vital to empowering them in their ongoing struggle for rights and justice.

Additionally, security recommendations informed by interviews and discussions with women who have endured Taliban imprisonment have been provided. These recommendations are directed toward WHRDs, especially those operating under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. The aim is to enhance awareness and preparedness for navigating difficult security conditions, as well as to promote individual and collective care, thereby increasing the resilience and sustainability of women protesters, activists, and their groups.

Recommendations to the International Community and Governments with Influence Over Afghanistan

- Recognize and address the needs and demands of impartial civil and social groups, especially Afghan women. Do not remain silent in the face of ongoing violence, torture, and repression in Afghanistan.
- Afghan women are oppressed under an authoritarian and repressive religious and ethnic dictatorship, deprived of any social and political voice or agency. Ensure representatives of this marginalized majority have opportunities to participate meaningfully and equitably in all national and international discussions on Afghanistan.
- Governments with influence over Afghan affairs must exert political and diplomatic pressure to compel the Taliban to adhere to international human rights standards. This includes respecting the rights of prisoners, particularly civil and political activists, and especially women, during arrests and imprisonment.
- Refrain from unconditionally negotiating or interacting with the Taliban, as their regime does not represent the pervasive political, social, or cultural reality of Afghanistan.
- Acknowledge the systematic exclusion and dehumanization of women in Afghanistan as clear examples of “gender apartheid.” Act to prevent this crime and further violation of women’s rights and dignity.

- Provide financial support to women-led civic groups and activists to amplify their voices and sustain their activities. Develop both short-term and long-term funding and investment plans for civil and human rights initiatives in Afghanistan.
- The Taliban continue to abduct, imprison, and torture women under any pretext. Hold them accountable for their oppressive and inhumane actions and treatment.
- Support legal mechanisms pursuing accountability for Taliban crimes, including proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and International Criminal Court (ICC).
- Urge the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to more rigorously monitor detainees' conditions and oversee Taliban prisons and detention centers. The Femena report, based on interviews with protesting women imprisoned in Taliban facilities, highlights widespread violations of prisoners' rights and numerous instances of torture.

Recommendations to International Human Rights Organizations, Feminist Networks, and Activists

- Ensure sustained financial assistance to Afghan WHRDs, grassroots organizations, and independent civil society groups working in exile or covertly inside Afghanistan. Support flexible funding mechanisms that allow women to continue their advocacy and resistance efforts safely.
- Actively pressure governments, international institutions, and decision-making bodies to recognize and respond to the gender apartheid in Afghanistan. Advocate for targeted sanctions against Taliban leaders and ensure Afghan women are represented in all discussions on Afghanistan's future.
- Use global platforms to highlight the voices and demands of Afghan women and activists. Support their participation in international forums, media campaigns, and feminist networks to keep the world's attention on their struggle.
- Build secure channels for Afghan WHRDs to connect with global human rights organizations, feminist allies, and legal experts. Ensure they have access to resources, legal aid, and mental health support.

Security Recommendations for WHRDs

- Conduct your activities and resistance as discreetly and covertly as possible. Consider changing your name and identity, using pseudonyms especially online. When attending public events and protests and when doing interviews or traveling for meetings and events, cover your face.

- In advance of protests, meetings and travel, develop a security plan in which you identify safe routes to and out of the location of the event/protest or meeting. Pair up with a colleague in advance of meetings/protests/events and designate a safe meeting space in cases of raids where you can meet up and ensure that you are both safe.
- Pack a safety bag, which includes water and first aid materials in case you or your colleagues are injured.
- Prioritize internet security; avoid using direct lines for communication. Make sure you use safe and secure communication technologies and messaging applications and use pseudonyms.
- Regularly update your devices and security software (anti-virus and anti-spyware).
- Use VPNs when accessing the internet to protect your identity and location.
- Regularly change your passwords and use two-factor authentication (2FA) wherever possible.
- Minimize your digital footprint and avoid publicly identifiable content, even indirectly linked to your identity or location.
- Consider separate mobile phones and SIM cards for activism and personal life, disposing or changing them regularly.
- Do not store videos, slogans, notes, or messages related to your activities on your mobile devices or personal laptops.
- Regularly clear communication applications (WhatsApp, Messenger, Telegram, Instagram, Signal) of any sensitive information, including people's names and activity details. Do not use a backup on these communications apps, so your messages are not stored in other locations on your phones and computers
- Inform your family and friends or trusted colleagues of your plans to participate in protests or meetings if you think there is a possibility that you may be arrested or abducted. Your trusted person should expect you at home or a predesignated location upon completion of your event. If you fail to show up, they will know that you have been detained or abducted and then can begin taking steps to inform your family and colleagues.
- Coordinate with your family and team members in advance so that, in the event of your arrest, if you are not released within two to three days and your family's efforts to secure your release through mediation with the Taliban fail, they will report your detention to the media and reputable human rights organizations to ensure the incident is publicized and followed up. The Taliban often reacts with caution and fear to publicly reported cases.

- If arrested, inform family or friends of your situation by any means available.
- Do not remain silent if detained or when being abducted by Taliban forces. Shouting or making noise can attract attention and help spread the news to the media.
- Do not trust individuals, interrogators, or guards while under pursuit, interrogation, or imprisonment.
- Expand your communication and support network to ensure you can seek justice if detained.



Femena supports women human rights defenders, their organizations and feminist movements in the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region. Femena's work is particularly focused on contexts where civic space is shrinking or closed, as well as contexts impacted by authoritarianism, conflict, extremism and fascism. Femena aims to raise awareness about the impact of these trends on women, feminist movements and civic organizing. Femena's country and regional reports provide analysis about trends in the region, especially those that pushback on women's rights and target feminist movements. These reports also provide recommendations on how to support women's rights, women human rights defenders at risk and protect civic space, while strengthening feminist movements.