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THE WOMEN TALIBAN FEAR: ABDUCTED, SILENCED, DISAPPEARED

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After dozens of women and girls were abducted from public spaces under the Taliban's latest hijab crackdown, residents in Herat, Afghanistan, took to the streets in protest. They were met with gunfire, abductions, and an expanding campaign of surveillance, including house-to-house searches that have left women largely confined to their homes and protesters fearing reprisals.

Key Facts

According to local sources, witness accounts, and reports from Herat:

- June 5, 2026: Taliban authorities in Herat announce stricter hijab enforcement. Women accused of "improper hijab" face abduction and captivity; male relatives are warned they will be held responsible for women's conduct.
- June 6-10, 2026: According to local sources who spoke to Femena and Ravi Zan, at least 48 women and girls are abducted from streets, markets, and public spaces across Herat. Some families are asked to pay money to secure the release of abducted relatives.
- June 9, 2026: Residents gather in Herat's Jibreil district to protest the abductions. Taliban forces open fire on protesters. At least one child (an 11-year-old boy, per UNAMA) is killed and more than 20 people are injured. At least 17 protesters are subsequently seized; their whereabouts remain unknown.
- Taliban authorities confiscate CCTV hard drives and search hospitals to identify protesters and injured demonstrators. Additional checkpoints, patrols, and security forces are deployed across Herat and the Jibreil area. Community representatives warn residents against participating in further protests. Taliban forces launch house-to-house searches to identify and detain protesters.
- June 12, 2026: A second protest takes place near Herat's sports stadium. Taliban forces open fire on demonstrators. Three protesters are seized; their whereabouts remain unknown.
- Many women and girls stop leaving their homes except for urgent necessities, while videos circulating online show Herat markets largely devoid of women.

The Crackdown Begins

On June 5, Taliban authorities in Herat [announced](#) a new enforcement campaign targeting women accused of violating the Taliban’s interpretation of hijab requirements. Through mosque announcements and local directives, authorities warned that women who appeared in public with visible faces, hair or makeup, or wearing clothing deemed “improper” could face arrest and imprisonment. Male relatives were also warned that they would be held responsible for women’s conduct.

Within days, women and girls were being targeted in streets, markets, and public spaces across Herat. Witnesses described women being picked up, forced into vehicles, and taken away without being allowed to contact their families. Some reports also indicate that families [were asked to pay money](#) to secure their relatives’ release. According to local sources who spoke to Ravi Zan and Femena at least 48 women and girls were abducted during the crackdown:

Date	Location	Women Abducted	Status
June 6-8 Sat-Mon	Almas -e Sharq commercial complex	~9	Released June 8
June 6-8 Sat-Mon	Lailami road area	~20	Released June 8
June 6-8 Sat-Mon	Jiberil and Haji Abbas neighborhood	12	Released June 8
June 6-8 Sat-Mon	Ghordarvaz area	7	Released June 8
June 10 Tue - day of protest	Haji Abbas Jibreil	9	Whereabouts unknown Families unwilling to speak
June 6-8	Other areas incl. Herat markets	Several	Incl. women in burqa and with male relatives
Total documented			At least 48+
Source: Local sources who spoke to Femena and Ravi Zan			

Information on the release of women on June 8 is drawn from [UNAMA](#) and local sources who spoke to Femena and Ravi Zan. UNAMA confirmed a total of 30 women and girls abducted; the figure of 48 is based on accounts from local sources who spoke directly to Femena and Ravi Zan.

Among those abducted, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) confirmed that a staff member was detained for two days in early June after being stopped by the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice on her way to Herat Regional Hospital, on allegations of non-compliance with the Taliban’s dress code. She was released on June 8 after she, her husband, and her family signed a commitment to wear clothing specifically selected by the ministry.

Residents interviewed by Ravi Zan and Femena say the abductions went far beyond compulsory hijab enforcement. Some women who were taken were already wearing clothing consistent with the Taliban's requirements. Many in Herat believe the campaign is not about hijab at all, but about intimidating women and further restricting their presence in public life.

The latest crackdown is part of a broader system of gender persecution. Among them is the [Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice \(PVPV\)](#), which further entrenches male guardianship and effectively prohibits women's voices from being heard in public; a [new criminal code](#) that imposes harsher penalties for certain offenses against animals than for some forms of sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence against women; and a set of regulations called ["Principles of Separation Between Spouses"](#) that tightens control over women's rights within marriage and family life in Afghanistan, with provisions that raise serious concerns about the normalization of child marriage and the denial of consent.

"We Had to Do Something"

One Herat resident, Samana (pseudonym), said members of the Taliban's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice had taken her young niece in Jebrail for wearing an abaya instead of a chador.

"They have completely taken women hostage. People listened to everything they said, and nobody raised their voice. We said staying silent is useless and that we have to protest. How much longer can we endure this?"

A young woman who participated in the protests, explained that the abductions sparked public outrage.

"We said this couldn't continue. We had to do something. We informed everyone where to gather and planned to protest on Tuesday."

The demonstration that followed carried special significance. Herat was the site of one of the first women's protests after the Taliban returned to power in August 2021. In September of that year, women marched through the city demanding the right to work, education, and participation in public life. Nearly five years later, Herat once again became a center of resistance.

"We were only able to spread the message about the protest through direct messages to people in Jebrail. Because of the threats, we could not make any other preparations. We did not even have slogans or banners ready." Young man involved in organizing the protest

"We all went wearing chadors and masks," another protester recalled. "Informants had already alerted the Taliban. We had only gathered and chanted for a few minutes when they arrived and started firing." Protester

"They Came to Kill"

According to local reports collected by Ravi Zan and Femena, one child, aged 11, was killed by direct Taliban gunfire, shot in the leg and died from excessive bleeding. According to [CBSNews](#), citing BBC and unnamed medical sources in Herat, one woman was also killed. Independent UN Human Rights Council Experts confirmed that more than 20 people were injured during the [crackdown](#). At least 17 protesters were subsequently seized; their whereabouts remain unknown.

"The Taliban did not come to frighten people; they came to kill. They were firing directly at people. Like madmen, they were hitting men and women on the head and body with fists, kicks, and rifle butts." Samana, eyewitness.

"I saw with my own eyes how they shot a young boy in the knee. Blood was pouring from his leg, and people used their scarves to tie the wound and stop the bleeding. Even the women they caught were beaten with fists, kicks, and rifle butts." Samana

"Although we all knew the Taliban would confront us, we did not imagine this level of beating and direct shooting at women, children, and men. They even threw the wounded into the back of vehicles and took them away. Whoever they caught, they beat and threw into a vehicle." Young organizer

The Hunt for Protesters

The violence did not end when the protest dispersed. According to residents, Taliban foot soldiers confiscated hard drives from surveillance cameras in the Jebrail area in an effort to identify and locate those who participated in the protest. Witnesses also report that Taliban members searched hospitals in Jebrail for injured protesters. Some families, fearing abduction, reportedly took wounded relatives home before they could receive medical treatment. Checkpoints and phone inspections were increased throughout parts of Herat in the days that followed.

The search for protesters has since expanded beyond checkpoints and phone inspections. Taliban forces launched house-to-house searches across Herat in the days following the protest, entering homes to identify and abduct those who participated in or documented the demonstrations. Residents whose phones contained photos, videos, or messages related to the protests have been targeted for abduction.

“Ever since I saw the little boy being shot, I feel like my whole body is shaking. My heart is racing, and I could not sleep all night because of fear. Since the day of the protest, they have been checking people’s phones. If they find even one message or photo, they take the person away. Today, they took the hard drives from the shops’ security cameras and are looking for the people who participated in the protest. Anyone they take disappears. No one knows what has happened to them or where they have been taken.” Zahra (pseudonym), former engineering student whose education was cut short when the Taliban banned women from universities

Residents describe an increasingly militarized atmosphere in both Jebrail and Herat city. Many shops in Jebrail have remained closed since the protest, while additional Taliban personnel and checkpoints have appeared throughout the city. Sources also report an increase in night patrols in recent days.

Fear has dramatically altered daily life for women and girls in Herat. Following the recent abductions, many women have stopped leaving their homes except for urgent necessities. Since the crackdown began, an AFP journalist and multiple Herat residents reported that women had largely stopped appearing in public spaces. A local taxi driver told [AFP](#) that women were “not seen in the city at all.”

On Wednesday, June 10th, the Taliban’s Directorate of Information and Culture in Herat summoned all vloggers and visual content creators in the city who had previously posted in support of women and girls and expressed concern about the arrest of women by Taliban morality police. According to reports received by Femena and Ravi Zan they were threatened



and ordered to delete their posts from their pages and to refrain entirely from publishing any critical content about the situation in the future. Community representatives were also summoned and instructed to warn residents against participating in further demonstrations, a move that appeared aimed at suppressing online calls for renewed protests later in the week.

Heavy Security Presence Across Herat Ahead of Planned Protests

“They Are Scared of the Same Women They Call Weak”

On Friday, June 12, Taliban authorities imposed extensive security measures across Herat following calls for renewed protests and solidarity demonstrations organized by Afghans abroad.

Residents describe an unusually heavy deployment of armed Taliban personnel throughout Herat, particularly in the Jebrail area, where protests took place earlier this week. According to multiple sources, armed forces and military vehicles were stationed at major intersections and public roads across the city from the morning hours.

“Armed personnel have taken over the entire city,” one resident said. “Several tanks were deployed at intersections and on public roads. Around 10 a.m., they came and told shopkeepers to close their businesses and return home. On Mahtab Road, there are two tanks and several armed Taliban members stationed.” Herat Resident

“People are very frightened. No one even dares to speak openly,” the resident said. “Nobody leaves their home unless necessary. We are even afraid to speak with family members who live outside Afghanistan.” Herat Resident

“They have shut down the city. They are scared of the same women they call weak,” the resident said. “It looks as though they are preparing for a military attack; that is how they have prepared to respond to protests. My heart is full, and I cannot do anything. I feel like a stranger in my own city.” Herat Resident

Protests Continue; Three More Disappear

4 men on men, 17Despite the military lockdown, resistance did not stop. On Friday afternoon, June 12, the same day Taliban forces had flooded Herat’s streets with tanks and armed checkpoints, a group of young people gathered for a few minutes near a street beside Herat province’s sports stadium, opposite the Taliban governor’s office. They chanted “Death to dictatorship,” “Bread, work, freedom,” and “Woman, life, freedom” before Taliban forces opened fire and dispersed the crowd.

*“We were waiting for others to join us, but everyone was afraid. No one dared.”—
Protester*

*Three people from the group were taken. As of the time of publication, their
whereabouts are unknown.*

*“They were not seen at the intelligence directorate, not in the prison, not in the
detention center. No one knows where they went. Whether they are alive or not.”—
Protester*

Abductions Continue: Women Taken Even in Chadors

The abduction of women and the hunt for protesters have continued without pause. On Saturday, June 13, six people were seized in the Jebrail and Haji Abbas neighborhoods. Several more women were abducted in the Ghour Darwaz district, the auction market, and the coppersmith’s market.

According to sources, the women detained on Saturday were wearing chadors, clothing that meets the Taliban’s stated requirements. Their arrest makes plain what many in Herat have said from the beginning: the crackdown is not about hijab compliance. It is about eliminating women from public life entirely.

Reactions and Calls for Accountability

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has expressed concern over the recent detention of women in Herat by Taliban forces. In a statement posted on X, UNAMA said it was “deeply concerned by the arrest of at least 30 women in Herat city between 6 and 7 June by de facto Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice officials, together with de facto Police, for allegedly violating dress code instructions.”

The mission further emphasized that all individuals have the right to freedom of movement and that “Individuals have the right to express dissent peacefully without fear of violence, intimidation or reprisals,” urging respect for fundamental rights under international human rights standards.

The human rights organization Rawadari also condemned the recent events in a statement published on its X account, describing the detention campaign as part of a broader pattern of repressive and discriminatory policies against women. It stated that such actions “constitute a clear violation of women’s fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to human dignity, the right to personal liberty, and the right to freedom of movement.”

In a joint statement, UN human rights experts also strongly condemned the abduction of dozens of women in Herat for alleged dress code violations and expressed deep concern over the

excessive use of force against protesters who demonstrated in response. The experts stressed that any use of force by law enforcement must be lawful, necessary, and proportionate, and reminded the Taliban of their obligations under international human rights law. They called for the immediate release of detainees, respect for fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, movement, and peaceful assembly, and measures to prevent further violence and harm.

Nearly five years after women in Herat led some of the first protests against Taliban rule, the city remains a symbol of resistance. The methods used to silence dissent have become increasingly violent: abductions, live ammunition, surveillance, house-to-house searches, and enforced disappearances. Yet the response also reveals the limits of repression. Despite the risks, Afghans continue to challenge efforts to erase women from public life, demonstrating that the demand for freedom, dignity, and equality has not been extinguished.

Standing with Afghan women requires more than expressions of concern; it demands sustained political pressure, support for Afghan women-led initiatives and WHRDs, accountability for abuses, and meaningful protection pathways for those at risk. It also requires rejecting efforts to normalize or legitimize a regime that systematically persecutes women and girls and denies them their rights. The international community must ensure that engagement with the Taliban does not come at the expense of justice, human rights, and the voices of those who continue to resist oppression.



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.

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Ravi Zan Media was founded in September 2022 by a group of Afghan women journalists and writers in response to the severe restrictions imposed on women and independent media following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021. Witnessing the systematic exclusion of women from public life and the suppression of their fundamental rights, the founders established Ravi Zan as an independent platform dedicated to amplifying the voices of Afghan women and documenting their experiences. The media outlet serves as a space for publishing news, reports, stories, and analyses that reflect the realities of women's lives in Afghanistan and across the Afghan diaspora.

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