Taliban ban Afghan women from attending universities

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By AP

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<https://www.npr.org/2022/12/20/1144419844/taliban-bans-afghanistan-women-universities>

Female students have been banned from private and public universities in Afghanistan effective immediately and until further notice, a Taliban government spokesman said Tuesday in the latest edict cracking down on women's rights and freedoms.

Despite initially promising a more moderate rule respecting rights for women's and minorities, the Taliban have widely implemented their strict interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia.

They have [banned girls from middle school and high school](https://www.npr.org/2022/03/23/1088202759/taliban-afghanistan-girls-school), restricted women from most employment and ordered them [to wear head-to-toe clothing in public](https://www.npr.org/2022/05/07/1097382550/taliban-women-burqa-decree). Women are also [banned from parks and gyms](https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2022/11/16/womens-rights-afghanistan).

The Taliban were ousted in 2001 by a U.S.-led coalition for harboring al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and returned to power after America's chaotic departure last year.

The decision was announced after a government meeting. A letter shared by the spokesman for the Ministry of Higher Education, Ziaullah Hashmi, told private and public universities to implement the ban as soon as possible and to inform the ministry once the ban is in place.

Hashmi tweeted the letter and confirmed its contents in a message to The Associated Press without giving further details.

The decision is certain to hurt efforts by the Taliban to win recognition from potential international donors at a time when the country is mired in a worsening humanitarian crisis. The international community has urged Taliban leaders to reopen schools and give women their right to public space.

The university ban comes weeks after Afghan girls took their high school graduation exams, even though they have been banned from classrooms since the Taliban took over the country last year.

"I can't fulfill my dreams, my hopes. Everything is disappearing before my eyes and I can't do anything about it," said a third-year journalism and communication student at Nangarhar University. She did not want to be identified for fear of reprisals.

"Is being a girl a crime? If that's the case, I wish I wasn't a girl," she added. "My father had dreams for me, that his daughter would become a talented journalist in the future. That is now destroyed. So, you tell me, how will a person feel in this situation?"

She added that she had not lost all hope yet.

"God willing, I will continue my studies in any way. I'm starting online studies. And, if it doesn't work, I will have to leave the country and go to another country," she said.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the decision, calling it another "broken promise" from the Taliban and a "very troubling" move.

"It's difficult to imagine how a country can develop, can deal with all of the challenges that it has, without the active participation of women and the education," Guterres said.

Robert Wood, the deputy U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said the Taliban cannot expect to be a legitimate member of the international community until they respect the rights of all Afghans.

Afghanistan's U.N. seat is still held by the previous government led by former President Ashraf Ghani, despite the Taliban's request to represent the country at the United Nations, which was recently deferred again.

Afghanistan's charge d'affairs Naseer Ahmed Faiq said at the U.N. that the announcement "marks a new low in violation of most fundamental and universal human rights for all of humanity."