Religion, Ethnicity, and Gender: The Taliban's Intersectional Attack on Hazara Women

By Yalda Royan[1]

Since 15 August 2021, the Taliban have issued over 100 decrees[2] that systematically prohibit women in Afghanistan from accessing education, undertaking employment, and engaging in political roles. While these restrictions are producing wide-ranging negative consequences for women and girls from all of Afghanistan's communities, the specific impact on ethnic Hazara women has been particularly disproportionate and severe. This essay illuminates how Hazara women are repeatedly being marginalized under the Taliban regime, by contextualizing how intersectional factors like ethnicity, gender, and religion are distinctly shaping their lived experiences in the current circumstances. To do so, this essay examines two specific issues affecting Hazara women: **a)** the erosion of civil liberties; and **b)** security and safety implications.

To situate the treatment of ethnic Hazaras and Hazara women in the current and historical realities, the essay builds on secondary sources, supplemented with excerpts from five interviews with Hazara women living under Taliban rule, conducted in January 2024. Section 1 provides an overview of the historical, Republic-era (2001-2021), and post-August 2021 contexts. Section 2 discusses the erosion of Hazara women's civil rights and liberties under the Taliban regime. Section 3 examines the state of Hazara women's security and safety under Taliban rule. The concluding section summarizes the findings' big picture aspects and ends with three policy recommendations.

Contextual Overview

Constituting around 20% of the population, Hazaras are one of Afghanistan's

1. **Yalda Royan** is an Afghan human rights defender committed to advocating against the systematic oppression of women and the persecution of marginalized groups in Afghanistan, with a particular focus on the intersectional impact of the Taliban's atrocities on Hazara women.
2. United States Institute of Peace. (n.d.). *Tracking the Taliban's (Mis)Treatment of Women.* [online] Available at: https://www.usip.org/tracking-talibans-mistreatment-women.

main ethnic groups,[3] and most are adherents of Shia Islam. The Hazara community has been historically persecuted and was a frequent target of the Taliban's atrocities during the group's first regime (1995 to 2001) as well. For instance, in August 1998, the Taliban killed over 2,000 Hazaras within a few days' span,[4] and in 2001, shortly before the fall of the Taliban's regime, the United Nations (UN) discovered mass graves of those slain Hazaras in Bamiyan province.[5]

During the 20 years between the two Taliban regimes, Hazara women made significant strides with respect to civil liberties and security. Notably, between 2001 and 2021, they saw the appointment of the first minister of women's affairs,[6] the first female provincial governor,[7] one of the first female district governors,[8] and the first female mayor[9] in a traditionally male-dominated area of local governance. Hazara women also excelled in the security sector,[10] sports,[11] music,[12] and other spheres of society. At the same time, between 2014 and August 2021, ethnic Hazaras endured persistent persecution carried out by both the Taliban and the Islamic State 'Khorasan Province' (ISKP), including genocidal massacres, and multiple bombings

3. Youngs, T. (2005). *Afghanistan: the culmination of the Bonn process.* [online] House of Commons Library. Available at: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/RP05-72/RP05-72.pdf.
4. Akbari, F. (2022). The Risks Facing Hazaras in Taliban ruled Afghanistan. [online] Program on Extremism, George Washington University. Available at: https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/Risks-Facing-Hazaras-in-Taliban-ruled-Afghanistan_Akbari_March-2022.pdf.
5. Afghanistan: The Massacre in Mazar-i-Sharif. (1998). [online] Human Rights Watch. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports98/afghan/Afrepor0.htm. **Also see:** (Akbari, 2022)
6. Tavares, S. (2024). A conversation with Sima Samar: Afghanistan's first Minister of Women's Affairs. *Teens in Print*. [online] 20 Apr. Available at: https://teensinprint.com/a-conversation-with-sima-samar-afghanistans-first-minister-of-womens-affairs/.
7. Walsh, D. (2005). A first for Afghan women: the governor. *The Guardian*. [online] 26 Apr. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/26/afghanistan.declanwalsh.
8. Hassani, Z. and Huang, R. (2021). The Untold Story of How Female Afghan Governor Salima Mazari Escaped the Taliban. TIME. [online] 14 Sep. Available at: https://time.com/6097198/salima-mazari/.
9. Motevalli, G. (2013). Afghanistan's first female mayor proves critics wrong. *The Guardian*. [online] 24 Feb. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/24/afghanistan-first-female-mayor.
10. Jardine, M. (2021). The world must evacuate women police in Afghanistan. *The Interpreter.* [online] 23 Aug. Available at: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/world-must-evacuate-women-police-afghanistan.
11. Freedom Rides: Stories of Afghan Women Cyclists. (2024). *iProbono.* [online] Feb. Available at: https://i-probono.com/articles/afghanistan-women-cyclists-athletes-freedom-rides/.
12. Story, H. (2022). Zahra Elham, the first woman to win Afghan Star, resettles in Australia one year after the fall of Kabul. *ABC News*. [online] 31 Aug. Available at: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-09-01/zahra-elham-afghan-star-war-in-afghanistan-refugee-australia/101386168.

targeting their mosques, schools, and maternity clinics. Hazara mothers, babies, and school children were murdered in high volumes during several of these attacks.

More recently, as the Taliban steadily intensified their pursuit of power, leading to their outright takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, ethnic Hazaras were regular targets of the Taliban's insurgency.[13] The Taliban specifically attacked Hazara mosques, and cultural and educational centers in Kabul and other provinces, causing the loss of thousands of civilian Hazara lives. Between 2016 and 2020, over 40 attacks by individuals linked either to the Taliban or the ISKP repeatedly targeted ethnic Hazaras in schools, mosques, and workplaces,[14] leading to extensive casualties, including hundreds of extrajudicial targeted killings of Hazaras.[15] These attacks included what Doctors Without Borders termed a massacre at a maternity hospital in Kabul;[16] the May 2021 triple suicide attacks on the Sayed Ul Shahada Girls School in Kabul;[17] and the September 2020 attack on Kaaj Educational Center in Kabul.[18] These instances of violence specifically targeted Hazara women and girls.

Despite the Taliban's assertion that Afghanistan is now safer under their rule, the safety of ethnic minority communities is compromised. In the first nine months of the Taliban's August 2021 power capture, nine lethal bombings targeted Hazaras, accompanied by numerous individual targeted killings that

13. Hasrat, M.H. (2019). Over a Century of Persecution: Massive Human Rights Violations Against Hazaras in Afghanistan. [online] *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Racism/SR/Call/mhhasrat.pdf.
14. Afghanistan: ISIS Group Targets Religious Minorities. (2022). *Human Rights Watch.* [online] 6 Sep. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/06/afghanistan-isis-group-targets-religious-minorities.
15. Jafari, M.N. (2022). یزدمحا ینغ تمکوح رد اه هزاز ماع لتق تسیل ['List of Hazara massacres under Ghani Ahmadzai's rule']. *Kabul Press.* [online] 11 Mar. Available at: https://www.kabulpress.org/article240764.html.
16. Afghanistan: Massacre in a maternity ward. (2020). *Doctors Without Borders.* [online] 21 Aug. Available at: https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/afghanistan-massacre-maternity-ward.
17. Deaton, J. and McKenzie, S. (2021). Death toll rises to 85 in Afghanistan girls' school bomb attack. *CNN.* [online] 10 May. Available at: https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/09/asia/afghanistan-girls-school-attack-intl-hnk/index.html.
18. Kabul suicide bombing: Attack on school in Afghanistan's capital reportedly leaves dozens dead, mostly young women. (2022). *CBS News*. [online] 30 Sep. Available at: https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-school-suicide-bombing-attack-kabul-deaths-injuries.

claimed the lives of over 100 Hazaras.[19] According to a recent report by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 40 Hazaras were killed and 86 injured in a series of targeted attacks between October and December 2023.[20] Under the Taliban rule since August 2021, the Hazara community has also encountered instances of forced displacement and land expropriation.[21] Under the pretext of dispute resolution, the Taliban *de facto* authorities (DFA) have imposed significant financial burdens on Afghanistan's ethnic Hazaras, coercing them to make substantial payments to ethnic Kuchis on multiple occasions.[22]

The overview presented above encapsulates the current lived experiences and state of affairs of ethnic Hazaras in Afghanistan. Within this demographic, Hazara women emerge as the most vulnerable group because they encounter multifaceted discrimination based on their religion, ethnicity, and gender, among other factors.

Erosion of Hazara Women's Civil Liberties

Historically, Hazara women enjoyed certain social and political freedoms due to the community's relatively progressive position on women's and girl's education, employment, and participation in political and social spheres.[23] As Hazara women were highly accomplished in the realm of education, they played a strong role in the civil society and security sectors before the Taliban

19. Rouhani, W. (2022). ‘ناباطاط تیمکاح نارود رد اهرازه راتشک شخرچ رب یرورم ؛ ‘اهرازه یشکلسن [‘The Genocide of the Millennials’; An overview of the turn of killing Hazaras during the Taliban rule’]. *Etilaatroz.* [online] 7 Jun. Available at: https://www.etilaatroz.com/143912/the-genocide-of-the-hazaras-an-overview-of-the-turn-of-the-hazara-massacre-during-the-taliban-regime/.
20. Human rights situation in Afghanistan [October-December 2023 Update]. (2024). [online] United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Available at: https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/english_hr_update_22jan_2024.pdf.
21. Masumi, R. (2023). Taliban Confiscate Hazara Land. *Genocide Watch.* [online] 13 Oct. Available at: https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/statement-on-forcible-displacement-and-land-confiscation-of-hazaras-by-taliban.
22. Taliban orders Hazaras to pay penalty to Kuchis for lost livestock. (2023). *Kabul Now.* [online] 2 Sep. Available at: https://kabulnow.com/2023/09/taliban-orders-hazaras-to-pay-penalty-to-kuchis-for-lost-livestock/. For a background on the Kuchi community in Afghanistan, **see:** Minority Rights Group. (n.d.). Kuchis in Afghanistan. [online] Available at: https://minorityrights.org/communities/kuchis/.
23. (Akbari, 2022)

takeover in 2021.[24]

Despite their increased vulnerability arising from factors like gender, ethnic identity, and societal roles, fewer Hazara women were able to evacuate the country when the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, as compared to those from other communities. In fact, the chaotic evacuation process was monopolized by existing networks of power, which left many Hazaras behind.[25] While indeed the Taliban DFA subjugates all women and many civilians from all communities, multiple Taliban actions specifically target Hazaras. Moreover, Hazara women remain particularly affected as the Taliban DFA has severely decimated the rights of women in Afghanistan in virtually all areas of life.

The January 2024 UNAMA report on Afghanistan's human rights situation underscores the discernible concentration of Taliban arrests of both women and men in Dasht e-Barchi, a neighborhood of Kabul city that is predominantly inhabited by members of the Hazara community.[26] A majority of women who were arrested for a so-called "bad hijab" were detained for a brief period, and subsequently released, contingent upon their *mahrams*'[27] guarantee that these women would comply with hijab rules in the future. However, the Report cites troubling allegations of ill-treatment, including physical violence, extended detentions, and instances where release was contingent on monetary payments.[28]

The enforcement measures regarding alleged hijab rules violations, notably involving physical violence, pose significant and heightened risks to the safety and well-being of Afghan women and girls, particularly in localities like Dasht-e Barchi that feature large numbers of Hazara inhabitants. In instances where women were apprehended, the Taliban DFA implemented a coercive strategy by compelling their male family members to publicly

24. (Akbari, 2022)
25. (Akbari, 2022). **Also see:** Packer, G. (2022). The Betrayal. *The Atlantic.* [online] 31 Jan. Available at: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/03/biden-afghanistan-exit-american-allies-abandoned/621307/.
26. (Human rights situation in Afghanistan [October-December 2023 Update], 2024)
27. An 'eligible' close male relative chaperone.
28. (Human rights situation in Afghanistan [October-December 2023 Update], 2024)

endorse the arrests through street demonstrations, particularly concerning the perceived violation of the so-called "bad Hijab."[29]

According to a respondent interviewed for this essay, since 12 January 2024, when Hazara girls and women were detained on the pretext of being unveiled, the policies and conduct of the Taliban have resulted in families imposing restrictions on their daughters' attendance in educational institutions due to the palpable fear of reprisals by the Taliban. This heightened state of caution has significantly diminished the public presence of girls, contributing to an alarming increase in instances of suicide and depression among them.

The repercussions further extend to the coercion of girls into underage and/or forced marriages, and the distressing outcome, recently reported to researchers for this article, of numerous families being compelled to relinquish their native lands including their farms, crops, and other household belongings. The Taliban have been using intimidation tactics and following girls or using religious institutions to ascertain which families have unmarried girls or widows and are then targeting those homes.[30]

In highlighting the Taliban's "bad hijab" policy in September 2023, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, has recognized the disproportionate impact of enforcement measures against Hazara women.[31] Bennett specifically highlighted the use of ethnic slurs during Taliban enforcement operations in Hazara-populated areas.[32]

With the systematic enforcement of gender apartheid by the Taliban, Hazara women are at special risk due to the targeting that is rooted not only in their gender but also in their Hazara identity. The Taliban's violation of the right to freedom of expression and activism is evident in the arbitrary arrests of

29. (Human rights situation in Afghanistan [October-December 2023 Update], 2024)
30. Safi, M. (2024). *Reframing Security from the Perspective of Women Living Under the Taliban.* [Online] Available at: https://www.ned.org/events/livestream-reframing-security-from-the-perspective-of-women-living-under-the-taliban/.
31. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett. (2023). [online] UN General Assembly. Available at: https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n23/258/87/pdf/n2325887.pdf?token=SQHeE7mCTKLaaj6yHX&fe=true.
32. *(Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2023)*

women protesters, an infringement that extends to Hazara women. Their ordeal extends beyond physical assault and torture, involving the use of derogatory language and ethnic slurs. Alarmingly, there are reports[33] of Taliban soldiers categorizing all Hazaras as infidels, fostering an environment of discrimination and religious bias. These actions not only contravene fundamental human rights but also contribute to a societally hostile and divisive atmosphere.

In 2022, a disconcerting incident unfolded as 60 Hazara female students faced expulsion from both Kabul University and the associated dormitory.[34] This punitive action was purportedly taken in response to their alleged "intention to participate in the protest march" denouncing the suicide attack on the Kaaj Educational Training Center and protesting what the genocide against the Hazara community.[35] Notably, in October 2022, sources stated many of these female students had previously experienced deliberate food poisoning before engaging in the protest though the Taliban denied any food poisoning incidents.[36]

Upon seizing power in August 2021, the Taliban—vehement adherents of Sunni Islam—promised not to interfere with Shia Islamic worship. However, Hazaras face greater restrictions on how they are able to practice their religion, such as being able to prostrate publicly by praying with open hands.[37] In July 2023, the Taliban implemented measures to curtail the religious practices of Shia Hazaras, closing numerous places of worship and preventing them from observing mourning rituals during Muharram.[38] In response, the Afghanistan Shia Ulema Council, a group of influential Shia scholars and imams who

33. Mehran, M. (2023). Taliban's Opposition to Islamic Sects; Nadeem: 'All Afghans Are Followers of the Hanafi Denomination'. *Hasht-e-Sobh Daily.* [online] 18 Dec. Available at: https://8am.media/eng/talibans-opposition-to-islamic-sects-nadeem-all-afghans-are-followers-of-the-hanafi-denomination/.
34. Taliban Confirms Mass Expulsion of Hazara Female Students. (2022). *Afghanistan International.* [online] 14 Oct. Available at: https://www.afintl.com/en/202210144830.
35. (Taliban Confirms Mass Expulsion of Hazara Female Students, 2022)
36. (Taliban Confirms Mass Expulsion of Hazara Female Students, 2022)
37. *(Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2023).*
38. The Situation of the Hazaras During the Second Year of the Taliban Rule (August 15, 2022 - August 15, 2023). (2023). [online] Bolaq Analyst Network. Available at: https://www.bolaq.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Bolaq-Report-Situation-of-Hazaras-During-Second-Year-of-Taliban-Rule.pdf.

advised the former Afghan president on moral and legal issues, published a declaration to limit mourners' activities on Muharram, the first day of the Islamic calendar, specifically street processions during Ashura.[39]

Additionally, Hazara women faced prohibitions against participating in Muharram ceremonies in various provinces.[40] Prior to the Taliban takeover, Hazara Shias were able to observe Muharram with few restrictions and perform religious ceremonies.[41] Now, the Taliban has restricted the teaching of Shia jurisprudence to a few universities,[42] banned marriages between Shia and Sunni Muslims, and disallowed any babies to be born from a mix of Shia and Sunni parentage.[43] Furthermore, the Taliban compelled Hazaras to break their fast before time, in contravention to the decision of Shia religious authorities who had not yet announced Eid due to the incomplete month of Ramadan.[44]

Security Impacts on Hazara Women

During the initial nine months of the Taliban's rule, Hazara women experienced alarming incidents of violence. These included the April 2022 amputation and shooting of Nafisa Balkhi, a midwife in Balkh;[45] the January 2022 killing of Zainab Abdullahi at a checkpoint in Kabul while returning

39. Hasan, S. (2023). *Issue Update: Religious Freedom and Women's Rights in Afghanistan.* [online] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. Available at: https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2023%20Religious%20Freedom%20and%20Womens%20Rights%20in%20Afghanistan%20Issue%20Update_Final.pdf.

40. دندرک عنم ار یزنغ رد اروشاع یرادازع مسارم رد نانز روضح نابلاط ['The Taliban forbade the presence of women in the Ashura mourning ceremony in Ghazni']. (2023). *Hasht-e-Sobh Media.* [online] 24 Jul. Available at: https://8am.media/fa/the-taliban-forbade-the-presence-of-women-in-the-ashura-mourning-ceremony-in-ghazni/.

41. (دندرک عنم ار یزنغ رد اروشاع یرادازع مسارم رد نانز روضح نابلاط ['The Taliban forbade the presence of women in the Ashura mourning ceremony in Ghazni'], 2023)

42. Siddique, A. and Khosrow, M. (2023). Afghanistan's Shi'ite Minority Suffers 'Systematic Discrimination' Under Taliban Rule. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.* [online] 17 Jul. Available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-shiite-persecution-discrimination/32507042.html.

43. (Siddique and Khosrow, 2023).

44. The Situation of the Hazaras During the Second Year of the Taliban Rule (August 15, 2022 - August 15, 2023). (2023). [online] Bolaq Analyst Network. Available at: https://www.bolaq.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Bolaq-Report-Situation-of-Hazaras-During-Second-Year-of-Taliban-Rule.pdf

45. Royan, Y. (2022). *UN Security Council Briefing on Afghanistan by Yalda Royan.* [online] Available at: https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/resource/un-security-council-briefing-afghanistan-yalda-royan/#_ftn4.

from a wedding;[46] the October 2021 disappearance of Alia Azizi from Herat with no updates of her whereabouts since then;[47] the September 2021 killing of a pregnant police officer, Banu Negar, in Ghor province, by three armed Taliban militants;[48] and the discovery of six corpses of Hazara women on the streets of west Kabul.[49] The victims were subjected to sexual assault before they faced brutal killings, highlighting the severity of the violence directed at Hazara women based on their ethnicity.[50] Since the Taliban has increased its crackdown on the media, many of the killings of Hazara women are unlikely to be reported.[51]

Although the Taliban claim that Afghanistan is safer under their rule, safety for ethnic minority communities has been undermined. The Taliban fail to investigate systematic and targeted attacks on Hazara neighborhoods and have removed existing security measures to protect them. The Taliban's *de facto* Ministry of Interior promised to ensure security for religious minorities in October 2021 and has clearly failed to uphold that promise.[52] As 'N', a Hazara woman who lost her husband in 2023 to Taliban violence explained when interviewed for this essay, the security situation for Hazaras in Afghanistan is bleak: "[t]he Taliban claims to provide security, but Hazaras have no security. My husband was neither a policeman nor involved in any other work. We were just living our lives without any ulterior motives."

One aspect frequently overlooked in the context of the mass killings of Hazara individuals is the substantial number of widows left in their wake. In Afghanistan's deeply patriarchal society, the status of widowhood adds an

46.Taliban arrests fighter who shot dead Hazara woman at checkpoint. (2022). *Al Jazeera*. [online] 19 Jan. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/19/taliban-arrest-fighter-who-shot-dead-hazara-woman-at-checkpoint.

47. Afghanistan: Herat Women's Prison Head Missing 6 Months. (2022). *Human Rights Watch.* [online] 20 Apr. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/20/afghanistan-herat-womens-prison-head-missing-6-months.

48. Afghanistan: Taliban accused of killing pregnant police officer. (2021). BBC. [online] 5 Sep. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58455826.

49. (Rouhani, 2022)

50. (Rouhani, 2022)

51. (Afghanistan: ISIS Group Targets Religious Minorities, 2022)

52. (Afghanistan: ISIS Group Targets Religious Minorities, 2022)

extra layer of vulnerability, impacting women economically, socially, and mentally. 'S', a Hazara woman whose husband was killed in 2022 by Taliban violence, who was interviewed for this essay, said that the incident has affected her in several ways. On the one hand, there are economic problems, and on the other, there are negative opinions of widows—and together these aspects make life difficult. She said that the only reason she fights to survive is for her only son.

The realities of living under Taliban rule have created a mental health crisis for Afghan women. In December 2023, the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies released a policy brief on the mental health crisis among Afghan women and girls.[53] Those surveyed and interviewed struggled to pick which of the Taliban's restrictive edicts was most damaging to them, with researchers reporting that they created an "overwhelming sense of fear and psychological distress among Afghan women."[54]

Those who suffer from mental health challenges risk being beaten and have little hope of accessing mental health services, eviscerated by the Taliban,[55] and while the suicide rate is on the rise, statistics on suicides and suicide attempts are not being accurately recorded.[56] However, doctors have reported an increase in suicides and overall decreased mental health in women since the Taliban took over.

Conclusion

The examination of Hazara women's plight under Taliban rule reveals a distressing pattern of targeted violence, discrimination, and systemic marginalization. The documented incidents—ranging from mass killings

53. Safi, M. and Rivas, A.-M. (2023). *The mental health crisis among Afghan women and girls*. [online] ODI. Available at: https://dropsafghanistan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/The_mental_health_crisis_among_Afghan_women_and_girls_mh6O2uX.pdf.
54. (Safi and Rivas, 2023)
55. (Safi and Rivas, 2023)
56. Whiteman, H., Coren, A. and Bina, A.B. (2023). Oppressed by the Taliban, she swallowed acid. Now her siblings are trying to save her life. *CNN*. [online] 17 Dec. Available at: https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/17/asia/afghanistan-girl-acid-suicide-taliban-intl-hnk-dst/index.html.

and forced displacement to educational restrictions and economic vulnerabilities—underscore the profound challenges faced by Hazara women within the socio-political landscape of Afghanistan and under the Taliban's rule. While the Taliban have severely decreased the freedoms and rights of women in Afghanistan, the impact of the Taliban's rule on Hazara women is significantly distinct.

The prevalence of gender-based violence, coupled with the intersectionality of ethnicity, further compounds the adversity experienced by this specific demographic. The identified patterns underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and specifically tailored interventions aimed at safeguarding the rights, security, and well-being of Hazara women in the face of these multi-dimensional, systemic challenges.

Policy Recommendations

Call for International Recognition and Action: States around the world must recognize the Taliban's rule as a form of gender apartheid and acknowledge the systematic oppression and discriminatory policies targeting women. This should include supporting efforts to codify gender apartheid as an international crime under the draft Convention on Crimes Against Humanity, currently under consideration and international scrutiny. The international community must officially recognize the targeted attacks on Hazara communities as Hazara genocide. Mobilize diplomatic efforts to garner widespread support for these recognitions by emphasizing the urgency of addressing the specific challenges faced by Hazara women and communities. Recognition of the violence against Hazaras should prompt coordinated international action to prevent further human rights violations and implement protective measures for the affected populations.

- **Establish an Independent UN Investigation and Monitoring Mechanism:** The UN Human Rights Council should establish an independent investigative mechanism dedicated to documenting and monitoring the situation of Hazara communities, particularly focusing

on the challenges faced by Hazara women under Taliban rule. In collaboration with relevant international bodies, local organizations, and affected communities, to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness, the UN can gather evidence of human rights abuses, discrimination, and violence. The findings of this mechanism can serve as a basis for informed policy decisions, targeted interventions, and accountability measures, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the situation.

- **Establish Protective International Humanitarian Response:** The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) should create an international humanitarian response mechanism dedicated to addressing the immediate needs of Hazara women and communities affected by displacement, violence, and discrimination, with a focus on ensuring their safety, well-being, and access to necessary services. Displaced Hazara women should have essential services such as medical care, psychosocial support, and education. Work collaboratively with and fund humanitarian organizations to ensure swift and effective responses to emergencies, safeguarding the well-being and rights of Hazara women amidst challenging circumstances. Ultimately, this initiative should prioritize humanitarian aid delivery and support for Hazara communities facing systemic discrimination and violence.