

Afghan Women under the Taliban: Past and Present

By Donna Krstulovich



Afghan women reacted swiftly after the Taliban suddenly took control of Kabul on August 15, 2021. In a flurry of interviews and news articles, journalists wanted to hear their stories. Prominent Afghan women, teachers, students, and rights activists expressed their fears that Afghanistan would revert back to the time when the Taliban controlled the country from 1996-2001.

Roya Rahmani, former Afghanistan Ambassador to the United States, was born in Kabul in 1978, a year before the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. She grew up as a refugee in Pakistan. She says, “What we are hearing is that the sense of panic is growing exponentially, because there [are] multiple threats that the Afghans are facing, particularly Afghan women and Afghan girls. They are the ones that will be losing the most.”¹

Niloofer Rahmani, the first female Air Force pilot in Afghanistan’s history, warned that the Taliban will “hurt women the most.” She said, “Don’t believe Taliban propaganda about women’s rights ... The world will be the witness of the Taliban. They are going to stone a woman in a Kabul stadium again for nothing.”²

A female student said, “Fear has taken over my whole being and as the days pass, I can feel how hope fades away from within me. It gets replaced with frustration. All I can see is darkness, uncertainty, and a not so bright future. I will be killed certainly. I have reasons to be ... This is how it feels when the ones you are afraid of occupy the country.”³

A human rights activist who lives outside Kabul ran a women’s rights group teaching girls to read, providing shelter for women along with counseling and job training. She now fears retribution from their male relatives who have been freed from prisons.⁴

Islamic Law and Women

After taking control of Afghanistan, Senior Commander Waheedullah Hashimi told Reuters, “There will be no democratic system at all because it does not have any base in our country. ... We will not discuss what type of political system we should apply in Afghanistan because it is clear. It is Sharia law and that is it.” In the Taliban’s first news conference, spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid assured women their rights would be respected “within the framework of Islamic law,” and that women would have the right to education and work.⁵



Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

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“Yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.” (Luke 11:8-10)

Recently I met with a delegation from Central Asia. The discussion turned to the importance of consistent, fervent



intercession for the salvation of people who are bound in Islam. A Chinese Uyghur lady, who was born and raised as a Muslim and is now a follower of Jesus and involved in church planting and Bible distribution among the Uyghurs, quietly interjected, **“I may be the answer to your prayers!”**

Her comment captured our hearts as we realized we could be sitting in the presence of one of our answered prayers. Thousands of people consistently pray for the salvation of Muslim people but never see the results. This lady represented the fruit of intercession of many people. It validated the importance of intercession for the lost and spurs us on in prevailing prayer for the 1.9 billion Muslims who live around the world. The “persistence” of intercession will produce fruit as we continue to ask, seek, and knock for Muslims who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the original language, the word translated *persistence* means “*shameless audacity*” (Luke 11:8). It implies not giving up but persisting with a confident quality. It also points to the fact that the person to whom you make the request has the ability to fulfill the request. God is not offended by our shameless audacity to ask for something that is according to His will. It is the Lord’s will and His desire “that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

George Muller, in his narratives on *Answered Prayers*, gives five conditions to prevailing prayer:

1. Entire dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the only ground of any claim for answered prayer (John 14:13-14);
2. Separation from all known sin (Psalm 66:18);
3. Faith in God’s Word of promise as confirmed by His Word (Hebrews 11:6,13-20);
4. Asking with godly motives in accordance with His will (1 John 5:14; James 4:3);
5. Persistence in supplication—waiting on God and waiting for God (James 5:7; Luke 18:1-8).

Friends, do not become weary in interceding for lost Muslim people. One day, as we stand in the Lord’s presence, we will hear others say, **“I am the answer to your prayers!”**

Muslim World News



Iran: Death for Adultery

Iran's Supreme Court, in the capital of Tehran, upheld death sentences for adultery against a 27-year-old and his 33-year-old lover after the man's father-in-law denied them clemency. The man's wife, who presented police with video evidence of her husband's infidelity early this year, asked the courts to spare the pair the death penalty, according to the *Shargh Daily*.

Her father demanded that the death sentence be imposed and the court found in his favor, the paper added.

Iranian law provides that if a victim's family forgives the accused in a capital crime, the convict can be either pardoned or given a jail sentence. Under the interpretation of Islamic Sharia law in force since Iran's 1979 revolution, adultery is punishable by stoning.

However, Tehran changed the law in 2013 to allow judges to order an alternative method of execution, usually hanging. It is unclear what form of execution the court ordered in the latest case.—*Mail Online*

Canada: Islam Fastest Growing Religion

Islam is now the fastest-growing religion in the country, says Statistics Canada (StatsCan). The Muslim population, as a portion of the entire country, has more than tripled since 1996, but remains outnumbered 9 to 1 by Catholics. "The religious landscape in Canada has undergone significant changes," analysts described in a recent report.

Statistics Canada said the impact was far-reaching: "From a sociological standpoint, the study of the evolution of religion allows for a better understanding of some of the changes modern societies are facing. ...In addition, religion is important with respect to population change because it can

influence important demographic factors such as marriage, divorce and fertility."

From 1996 to 2019, figures on various religious groups' share of the total population indicated the proportion of Jewish Canadians declined from 1.1% to 1%; the Sikh population doubled from 0.7% to 1.4%; the Hindu population doubled from 0.5% to 1.7%; and the Muslim population tripled from 1.1% to 3.7%.

In a 2017 report, StatsCan predicted dramatic changes in the country's religious make-up by 2036. In the 1981 Census, Christians averaged 90 percent of the population. Currently, Christians comprise 63 percent of the population, but it is projected to fall to about 52 percent. Canadian religious groups in 2036 would number 12.9 million Catholics, 5.4 million Protestants, 2.8 million Muslims, 1.2 million Hindus and 1.1 million Sikhs, said the report.—*Western Standard*

Bangladesh: 100 Christians Kidnapped

A 17-year-old girl has been languishing in a juvenile correction center for an entire year because of a Facebook post that she allegedly made demeaning the Quran and hurting religious sentiment.

Exactly a year ago, Dipti Rani Das, a tenth grader from Dinajpur's Parbatipur region, was dragged off a train and charged under the Digital Security Act of 2018.

The minor girl was sued by Parbatipur police for what the first information report describes as "the crime of deteriorating the law and order situation by hurting religious sentiment using electronic means."

Since being booked, her bail was denied four times—the fourth in a decision by the highest court in the land.—*The Daily Star*

Afghan Women under the

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What Does “the Framework of Islamic Law” Mean?

Islamic law or Sharia is based on the teachings of the Quran, which represents the words of Allah, and the Hadith, which are thought to contain the words and deeds of Muhammad. It provides detailed direction regarding personal conduct, purity, worship, marriage, criminal offense, and commerce. By the tenth century, one Shia and four Sunni schools of law had been codified. However, **there is not one agreed upon Sharia law that all Muslims follow**. The Taliban interpretation of Sharia law follows the strict Deobandi (South Asian) strand of Sunni Hanafi Jurisprudence.

Sharia law directly impacts the lives of Muslim women. Elham Manea, associate professor at the University of Zurich, author of *Women and Shari'a Law* discusses the inequity of these laws as they relate to women:

One can discern two levels of statements in the Quran regarding women's status. The first treats women and men equal before God—that is in the afterlife. ... Quranic verses at the second level place women at a legal disadvantage. These are statements on issues of family and sexual relations, rules of marriage, divorce, custody, maintenance, inheritance and testimony.⁶

Manea does not believe, as the Islamists do, that it is God's law but rather sees it as man-made laws taken from between the seventh and tenth century that can be changed and replaced with modern civil laws that uphold human rights and dignity for women and children:

The fact remains that religious laws governing family affairs and the lives of women and children are rigid, conservative religious laws written by medieval jurists; they treat women as minors, they provide the legal basis for child and forced marriages, and polygamy, and they lead to violations of human rights.⁷

Manea opposes Sharia law and sees no place for it in Western democracies.

History of the Taliban Rule from 1996-2001

According to Walid Phares, author of *The War of Ideas*, “the most lethal implementation of jihadi doctrine on a female population was under the Taliban rule after 1996. ... Women were subjected to the most severe system of social conduct and the most inhuman punishments for any breach of it.”⁸ The Taliban imposed wearing the burka on all women



over twelve years of age, forbade them from working, traveling, or appearing in the presence of men without the covering of a burka or being in public without a male relative escorting them. They were not allowed to talk with a male or ask him a question. Phares likens this to gender apartheid.

After the capture of Kabul in 1996, the Religious Police announced decrees relating to women. Ahmed Rashid, in his 2001 book, *Taliban*, lists a sample of those decrees regarding clothing:

Women should not step outside their residence. ... In case women are required to go outside the residence for the purpose of education, social needs, or social services, they should cover themselves in accordance with Islamic Sharia regulation. If women are going outside with fashionable, ornamental, tight and charming clothes to show themselves, they will be

The Taliban: Past and Present

from page 1

cursed by Islamic Sharia and should never expect to go to heaven.⁹

The Taliban also forbade music and women's sports.

The Taliban's strict edicts do not occur in a vacuum but represent a literal, traditionalist interpretation and application of the Quran and Hadith emanating from the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan gives examples from the Quran and Hadith on the subject of *hijab* (veil) that reflect the Taliban's decrees:

1) The whole body, except for the exempted parts, should be covered (covering face and hands are exempted but encouraged); 2) But any veil which in itself becomes an attraction is to be avoided; 3) Garments should not be semi-transparent; 4) Dress should not be tight-fitting; 5) Garments should not be perfumed; 6) The form of dress should not in any way resemble that of men; 7) It should not resemble that of non-believers; 8) Garments should not reflect worldly honor.¹⁰

In a *60 Minutes* archive from October 20, 2001, five young women describe their lives under the rule of the Taliban. They speak of persecution as well as loss of life and freedom. Women were forbidden to leave the house without a male relative. They could not attend work or school and could not laugh out loud. If they wore nail polish, they could have their nails pulled out. The Taliban ordered people who had young girls in the home to put a white flag on their roof so they could be protected, but instead they came to take the girls to marry them. Executions occurred at the stadium with people being stoned to death for hidden love affairs. They would bury the people alive up to their necks and then stone them to death. Women did not have the freedom to get an education, go shopping, wear fingernail polish, or even pray openly in a mosque.¹¹

Concerns of Afghan Women, Questions for the Future

With this history, it is no surprise that Afghan women are concerned for the future. Journalist Sakina Amiri interviewed the Taliban soon after they took control of Kabul. They said, "We don't approve of what you are wearing. You need to fully cover yourself" (She wore pants, a long coat, and a scarf with a bit of hair showing). They said this is not how a Muslim woman should dress. She should fully cover with a chador and her face should not be seen. Amiri said the Taliban would not tell her what it will be like now.

She declared: "We Afghans are all worried about what will happen next. I will personally resist them. I am not willing to dress as they want me to dress. I don't want to fully cover myself."¹²

Pashtana Durrani, an Afghan teacher and rights activist, says that what the Taliban say on women's rights and what they're doing in practice are two different things. She asks, "What type of 'rights' are the Taliban talking about—mobility rights, socializing rights, political rights, voting rights, women's representation, educational rights?" According to Durrani, "Afghan women will not be silent. Today it is my education, tomorrow it is my daughter's education. ... Today it is my political rights, tomorrow it is going to be my daughters. ... I have to put up a fight today, so the next generation does not have to put up with all this conflict."¹³ Questions remain about the status of women and girls under Taliban rule:

1. Will girls go to school?
2. Will women be allowed to work?
3. Will female journalists appear on TV?
4. What clothing will women have to wear?
5. Will women have freedom of movement?
6. Will women and girls be forced into marriages?¹⁴

Afghan female mayor, Zarifa Ghafari, received death threats from the Taliban and the Islamic State. She determined that the only way forward is to talk with the Taliban and see what Sharia law they want to implement. She is ready to negotiate and fight for women's rights in Afghanistan.¹⁵

Twenty-six female judges were evacuated to Greece. Asma, one of the judges, says, "The women of Afghanistan are not the women of twenty years ago. ... Look at those women who protested on the first days when the Taliban arrived; asking for their rights, asking for an education. ... Even getting to this stage has not been easy. But today every daughter of our country is on her feet."¹⁶ Sana, another of the judges, says, "Right now, women are stuck in their houses and the criminals I put away are free." She vowed she would continue to fight that injustice, even from abroad, and "support every Afghan woman." "Afghanistan does not belong to the Taliban or any one specific group," she said. "It belongs to every Afghan."¹⁷

Conclusion

One encouraging theme that stands out in all the interviews with Afghan women is their strength and resolve to

continued on page 6

Afghan Women under the Taliban

continued from page 5

stand against the forces that threaten to silence them, even in the midst of uncertainty and fear of reprisal. They are fighting back because they have the most to lose.

Prayer Points for Afghans

- Pray for the Afghan people, whom Jesus dearly loves and died for, who are grieving and suffering deprivation. Pray they will turn to the Lord Jesus Christ for help, protection, provision, strength, and true freedom.
- Pray for Afghan Christian women who remain in hiding in the country, are experiencing intense persecution for their faith, and are targets for the Taliban.
- Pray for Afghan women who are fearful, discouraged, and despairing of hope for the future. Pray that they will have courage to stand up under the restrictions of life under the Taliban.
- Pray for the Taliban who sincerely believe that they are doing the will of Allah. Pray they would encounter the living Christ as Saul did on the road to Damascus.
- Pray for Afghan refugees who have left their country through traumatic evacuations and are moving into the unknown, scattered among many nations. Pray they will meet Christians who will share the life-giving message of the gospel with them.

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Prayer Profile: *Turks of Bulgaria*

Population: 546,000

Religion: 99% Muslim



Rumelian Turks are descendants of the Ottoman Turks who migrated from Central Asia during the thirteenth century. Over the years, the large Turkish minority in Bulgaria has created significant strains between local Bulgarians and the "resented Turks." Most Rumelian Turks in Bulgaria are Hanafite Muslims. The Muslim community has received significant financial support from Turkey and Saudi Arabia in order to build Islamic schools and finance the training of Muslim teachers. Although the Bible is available in the Turkish language, a high illiteracy rate (especially among women) hinders the opportunity to reach the Turks with the Scriptures. Pray that:

- God will grant favor to missions agencies focusing on Rumelian Turks.
- A great anointing will rest on radio programs that are geared toward them.
- "Willing" prayer teams will be raised up to faithfully intercede for them.
- The Jesus Film will be effectively distributed to them.
- Bulgarian Christians will have softened hearts toward Rumelian Turks.

¹⁵ Kersten Knipp, "Tacit Approval for the Taliban? How Islamic Scholars see Afghanistan's New-Old Rulers," BBC World Service, posted October 9, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/tacit-approval-for-the-taliban-how-islamic-scholars-see-afghanistans-new-old-rulers/a-59145237>.

¹⁶ Knipp, "Tacit Approval for the Taliban?"

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Friday, January 7, 2022. Please pray for

...*protection for Afghan Christians from a Muslim background* who have chosen to remain in their country. Some “new” Christians are hiding in the mountains and caves, afraid to return to their homes.

...*the ministry of Brother Hamid, a former Muslim in Iran*. He states: “Pray for us. We have never had this amount of people coming to Christ!”

...*Holy Spirit protection and anointing* on 4,000 copies of the Urdu “Jesus Booklet” recently distributed in Islamabad, Pakistan. Of Pakistan’s population of 224 million, 98% are Muslim.

Friday, January 14, 2022. Please pray for

...*Farouk, a Christian convert from Islam* in Saudi Arabia facing charges of trying to convert Muslims to Christianity.

...*distribution efforts of Dari and Pashto New Testaments* among Afghan refugees who are scattered throughout the world.

...*Christians in Mauritania*. A worker says, “A number of Muslims in Mauritania have recently committed their lives to the Lord. During the COVID scourge, we helped many needy Muslim families, which softened their hearts toward Jesus.”

Friday, January 21, 2022. Please pray for

...*Vahid’s taxi ministry in Iran*. He says, “Though I am a nurse in one of the hospitals in Tehran, I drive a taxi a few hours every day in order to speak to Muslims and evangelize them for the Lord.”

...*Ahmad’s ministry in Turkey*. He says, “So many Muslims are coming to our meetings. We limit our group meetings to 15 people, but it easily turns into 30. We are running out of space.”

...*strong anointing on “evangelism teams”* reaching out by radio and online ministries to 276 million Indonesians.

Friday, January 28, 2022. Please pray for

...*Brother Daniel and his team in France*, who are working to bring Muslim refugees to faith and to protect new converts from persecution from other (Muslim) refugees. Of France’s population of 65 million, 9% are Muslims.

...*two missionary families in Spain* who are engaged in “spiritual warfare” as they focus on helping Muslim North African migrants. They state, “We constantly run into unexpected spiritual warfare issues; such as demonic oppression, etc.”

...*the Lord to continue revealing himself through dreams and visions* to the Muslims in Yemen. A worker there reports, “Hundreds of Yemenis from a Muslim background are coming to faith in Christ each year.”



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Friday, February 4, 2022. Please pray for

...*the country of Azerbaijan*. Of its population of 9 million, 84% are Muslim. Overall there are 10 million Azerbaijanis people, living in 19 countries. Less than 1% of all Azerbaijanis call themselves Christians.

...*Dawud, a worker in a secret printing house* in a “closed” North African country. He says, “Pray that God will blind the opposition so they will not find out our location and the thousands of Bibles in our storage.”

...*outreach ministries to Muslims in Bangladesh*. Freedom for Christians to practice their faith is decreasing as the country grows increasingly Islamic. Of Bangladesh’s population of 165 million, 87% are Muslim.

Friday, February 11, 2022. Please pray for

...*Akmal, a Muslim man in Morocco*. After watching the “Jesus” film online, Akmal contacted a follow-up team in Morocco and wants to meet “to talk about Jesus.” Of Morocco’s population of 37 million, 99.6% are Muslim.

...*Christian outreach ministries to Muslims in Chechnya*, a strongly Islamic Russian republic. Many Chechnyan’s follow Sufism, a mystical type of Islam. Of Chechnya’s population of 1.3 million, 99% are Muslim.

...*Saima, a Pakistani woman who left Islam* to follow Jesus and faces family opposition. She says, “Even after reading the Bible through, the feeling is intense that I should keep learning scriptures from the Bible...because it sets my soul free.”

Friday, February 18, 2022. Please pray for

...*efforts to deliver Uighur Bibles* into the Xinjiang Province of China. 99.9% of all Uighurs (12.8 million) are Muslim.

...*the “Far North” region of Mozambique*. Islamist militants have launched at least 831 attacks since 2017, killing 2,658 people, including Christians and moderate Muslims.

...*Tatarstan, a republic in the Russian Federation*. 53% of its 3.8 million people are Muslim. Islam in Tatarstan has a strong militant strain, yet evangelical churches are lovingly reaching many Muslim children.

Friday, February 25, 2022. Please pray for

...*Christians from a Muslim background in Turkmenistan*. In mid-2021, authorities closed five of their meeting places. Recently, they miraculously received permission to reopen. Of Turkmenistan’s population of 6 million, 94% are Muslim.

...*falsely accused Eritrean Christians* who have been released from prison. Most are physically weakened due to spending years in a cell. Approximately 129 Christians are still in prison. Of Eritrea’s population of 3.5 million, 46% are Muslim.

...*Amankan, a former Muslim lady in Kyrgyzstan*, who is determined to follow Jesus. Her brother and the local imam have threatened to kill her. Of Kyrgyzstan’s population of 6.5 million, 94% are Muslim.

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