Afghan girls endure 1,000 days without school under Taliban rule

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The Taliban's ban on educating girls over the age of 12 in Afghanistan reached 1,000 days Thursday amid global outrage and demands for the immediate resumption of children's learning.

The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, denounced it as a "sad and sobering milestone" and noted that "1,000 days out-of-school amounts to 3 billion learning hours lost."

The statement quoted Catherine Russell, UNICEF executive director, as warning the male-only Taliban government that no country can progress if half of its population is left behind.

"For 1.5 million girls, this systematic exclusion is not only a blatant violation of their right to education but also results in dwindling opportunities and deteriorating mental health," Russell said.

"As we mark this grim milestone, I urge the de facto authorities to allow all children to resume learning immediately," she added.

**Women banned from many public places**

The fundamentalist Taliban have prohibited girls from attending school beyond sixth grade since retaking control of Afghanistan in August 2021. The ban was later extended to universities, blocking female students from finishing their advanced education.

Women also are not allowed to show their faces on television or visit public places such as parks, beauty parlors, or gyms, and they are barred from undertaking road trips unless accompanied by a male relative.

"Afghanistan will never fully recover from these 1,000 days," said Heather Barr, women's rights associate director at Human Rights Watch.

"The potential loss in this time — the artists, doctors, poets, and engineers who will never get to lend their country their skills — cannot be replaced," said Barr. "Every additional day, more dreams die."

**UN officials calls for accountability**

Meanwhile, in his latest report issued this week, the U.N. special rapporteur on Afghan human rights has called for the Taliban to be held accountable for their crimes against women and girls.

Richard Bennett alleged that de facto Afghan leaders have established and enforced "an institutionalized system of discrimination, segregation, disrespect for human dignity and exclusion of women and girls."

He will present and discuss the report at the U.N. Human Rights Council meeting scheduled for June 18.

The Taliban reject criticism of their government and policies, saying they are aligned with local culture and Islam. Their reclusive supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, has denounced calls to reform his policies as interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

The impoverished country is reeling from years of war and repeated natural disasters. U.N. agencies estimate that more than half of the population in Afghanistan — 23.7 million people, including 9.2 million children — need relief assistance.

"Education doesn't just provide opportunities. It protects girls from early marriage, malnutrition, and other health problems and bolsters their resilience to disasters like the floods, drought, and earthquakes that frequently plague Afghanistan," UNICEF executive director Russell said.