**The Taliban has silenced Afghanistan’s women**

and the world watched it happen

The nation’s ultra-conservative rulers have been showing us who they are since the mid-Nineties and somehow, we still don’t quite believe it

We have watched in utter despair the videos of the [women of Afghanistan singing in the shrouds](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/08/27/watch-afghan-women-defy-taliban-by-singing-in-public/) they are forced to wear. They are singing in defiance of an ever-more zealous set of restrictions that the Taliban have decreed. Women’s voices are to be seen as instruments of vice. They must no longer speak in public. They cannot sing or read aloud, even in their own homes.

This dystopian scenario, rightly characterised as gender apartheid, is shocking but this is the Taliban so what did we expect? As the famous Maya Angelou quote goes: “When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time.”

Since 2021, bit by bit and despite some wishful thinking that this is the Taliban 2.0, the basic rights of women have been dismantled. And the world has stood by and watched. Some have even gone along with it. Putin sees the Taliban as [an ally in fighting terror](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/07/04/taliban-trusted-ally-against-terrorists-putin/), former Pakistani PM Imran Khan has talked about this treatment of women being some kind of cultural norm (even though other Islamic countries like Turkey and Saudi Arabia have strongly condemned the ban on women attending university).

Meanwhile, the UN and vacuous NGOs sent out contradictory messages. Amnesty was much derided for its statement that the Taliban were discriminating against women for the “‘crime’ of identifying as a girl” when, of course, women are oppressed not because of their “gender identity” but because they are actually female.

It is no coincidence that vacuous gender ideology has infiltrated these institutions who now seem so completely powerless as women’s rights are decimated in front of them. The UN has placed sanctions on Taliban leaders, banning them from travelling, but they still do. Some live in Doha in luxury while [their own daughters go to school](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/taliban-sends-daughters-school-despite-closing-classrooms-female/). Many critics say that they were emboldened by being included in a UN conference in Doha earlier this year, when the UN agreed to exclude women or civil society groups in exchange for the Taliban’s participation.

Security issues, it appears, are more important to Western countries than women’s rights. What matters is that the region is more stable, and opium production is down.

This, though, is another insane situation. We pay Turkey to grow poppies. Where do you think codeine and diamorphine come from? It is possible to move from illicit to legal trade and without it Afghanistan will remain cripplingly poor. The other people who see the openings here, of course, are the Chinese who have built roads into the country and want to mine [the lithium there](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2021/08/21/afghanistans-fall-leaves-taliban-sitting-1-trillion-valuable/).

Meanwhile, girls live as ghosts with every hope taken away. Are we to believe now that nothing can be done? That these women’s voices can never be heard?

We cannot be silent. We must listen to their voices of resistance and treat the Taliban as pariahs, not grant them concessions. Giving them any kind of legitimacy comes at a price, and that price is the erasure of women as human beings. It is not religious practice; it is barbarism. Those of us with voices must raise them.