

54th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council**Item 2: Interactive Dialogue on OHCHR report on Afghanistan****Oral statement delivered by Hafizullah Saeedi****On behalf of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)****12 September 2023**

Mr. President,

We welcome the High Commissioner's report.

The people of Afghanistan under Taliban's brutal rule cannot breathe.

Taliban have taken millions of women and girls in hostage and introduced flogging, stoning, and public executions in the name of religion. *People of Afghanistan have been prohibited from exercising their fundamental freedoms including rights to freedom of religion or belief, expression, assembly and association.* They have completely shut down independent media and civil society and continue to violently crush any form of dissent. Taliban's interference in humanitarian aid delivery continues to worsen the humanitarian and economic crisis. *The continuing ban on education for women and girls has come with attempts to replace the secular curriculum with a strictly religious one, with serious long-term consequences for the future of the country.*

These widespread abuses are taking place in a context where the national legal system, rule of law mechanisms and the judiciary have been systematically dismantled, completely closing the door for accountability and legal recourse at the domestic level.

Increasing reports of suicide of women and forced child marriages illustrate the dire consequences of the Taliban's policies.

Despite this grim reality, two years after the takeover, the international community, including States that supported the rule of law and human rights in Afghanistan, appears to be rushing to engage with the illegitimate, and barbaric regime. To make matters worse, this so-called engagement is taking place behind closed doors with no participation of Afghan women, minorities or civil society and with no consideration of human rights.

Engagement with the Taliban amounts to the betrayal of the millions of women and girls living in conditions of gender apartheid, and ethnic and religious minorities such as Hazaras and Shias facing the prospect of genocide.

Instead of legitimizing the Taliban through engagement, the international community must prioritise accountability. The Council must heed the calls by many Afghan women and civil society organisations to establish an independent accountability mechanism *with resources and capacity to account for the full extent and gravity of violations and abuses that continue to be committed in the country.*

Thank you