

Resolution #1, 2026

CANADIAN RESPONSE TO THE EDUCATION CRISIS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AFGHANISTAN

Proposed by CFUW-Ottawa

RESOLVED, That CFUW urge Canadians and governments at all levels to strengthen strategic partnerships with networks both within and beyond Afghanistan, amplifying voices in support of regular post-primary education for Afghan women and girls.

RESOLVED, That CFUW urge the government of Canada, in collaboration with other national governments, to increase support for international justice mechanisms such as United Nations conventions to hold the *de facto* authorities in Afghanistan accountable for their violations of human rights, in particular the right to education for women and girls.

RESOLVED, That CFUW urge Canadian governments at all levels to increase their support for the women and girls of Afghanistan:

- by funding or continuing to fund virtual learning and teacher-training programs; and
- by removing barriers, such as denial of study permits, to their pursuit of education in Canada.

BACKGROUND

The right to quality education (Sustainable Development Goal 4) and gender equality (Sustainable Development Goal 5) are fundamental. (UN Economic and Social Affairs, n/d). Education was formally recognized as a human right by the United Nations on December 10, 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted. Article 26 of this document declares that everyone has the right to education.

Afghanistan is the only country in the world that has codified legislation prohibiting girls beyond Year 6 from attending schools other than *madrassas*: religious schools that teach fundamentalist beliefs. In August 2021 Taliban forces reinstated the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, imposing harsh “morality” laws, severely restricting the rights of women and girls. The fact that nearly 2.2 million girls are now barred from attending school (UNESCO, 2025) has triggered an acute mental health crisis among women and girls, who report rising levels of anxiety, hopelessness and despair. (UN Women, 2025).

The Taliban’s prohibition of learning or professional training for women and girls, and their persecution of those who resist, has dire consequences for all of society.

The introduction of the “Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Law” (PVPV) in mid-2024 brought the control over the lives of women and girls to an unprecedented level, creating fear among women not only for themselves but also for their families. (Femena, 2025). In January 2026, the *de facto* government formally enacted a new penal or criminal code that dramatically weakens legal protections against violence toward women, including domestic violence by husbands. This and the requirement to be accompanied by a male

chaperone to any destination results in profound psychological distress; women are vulnerable to exploitation, financial insecurity and social isolation.

Muslim-majority countries have called the *de facto* régime un-Islamic in its unique interpretation of the Koran. Islamic scholars affirm that women possess the same rights as their male counterparts to education at any age, level, or field of study. (Muslim World League Jan. 11-12, 2025 “Girls Education in Muslim Communities: Challenges and Opportunities”, Islamic Scholars Section.)

In December 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UN Women, 2000-2009). By ratifying the Convention, as Canada did in 1981, member states condemn discrimination against women in all its forms and commit to combatting discrimination against women in public and private spheres. In 1989 Afghanistan also signed the CEDAW convention, and completed ratification, “without reservations” in 2003. (UN CEDAW, 2025)

Afghan Human Rights and Democracy (AHRDO) is one of the many organizations documenting the Taliban’s crimes against humanity. UN Women, AHRDO and other groups report over 100 unrepealed restrictions on Afghan women since 2021. The lack of schooling for young women is a glaring example of the loss of human rights in general.

Arrest warrants have been issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for Taliban leaders for their “alleged persecution of women, girls, and gender nonconforming people”. (Human Rights Watch, July 2025)

In September 2024, Canada and 25 other nations announced a joint statement regarding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, holding Afghanistan accountable under CEDAW for systematic discrimination and violations of women’s rights (Global Affairs Canada, 2024). Continued international advocacy and civil society engagement is part of the process of building a legal case under the treaty that could ultimately lead to a case before the International Court of Justice.

Elizabeth May, Member of Parliament for the riding of Saanich-Gulf Islands, presented a petition to the House of Commons (House of Commons, June 2025) calling on the Government of Canada to support recognition of the systemic discrimination against women and girls under Taliban rule as a crime against humanity.

The petition was responded to on August 20th, 2025, by Rob Oliphant, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The government’s response affirmed concern and action on rights violations but stopped short of endorsing formal criminalization of “Gender Apartheid” under international law because that concept has not yet been legally codified.

However, since late 2024, formal negotiations by member states of the United Nations have begun to create the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Humanity, a new multilateral treaty. The process is expected to take several years. If adopted, there would be obligations for member states to prevent those crimes, criminalize them domestically, and cooperate in extradition and prosecution. Gender Apartheid could be included and recognized as one of those distinct crimes against humanity.

Such international legal actions are important, but the timeline for their completion is a long way off, and the women and girls of Afghanistan continue to suffer tragically.

Despite the severe trampling of their human rights, and the dramatic worsening of their personal circumstances, countless women and girls in Afghanistan continue to pursue online courses, in the hope that some day, the Taliban will no longer rule their lives.

What Canada should do

- 1) Canada must increase its efforts with international partners to enforce sanctions against individual members of the Taliban leadership, especially their right to unfettered travel, to emphasize disapproval of their treatment of women and girls. For example, a coalition of Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, Germany and other nations is presently working with the International Court of Justice to have human rights abuses in Afghanistan investigated.
- 2) Where Afghanistan is concerned, Canada should also support hybrid courts and tribunals, international courts for state responsibility, universal jurisdiction, truth and reconciliation commissions, reparations and compensation mechanisms, sanctions and international enforcement measures.
- 3) The Canadian government should open the doors to young Afghan women who are offered scholarships in Canada; the denial of study visas condemns these students to a life of oppression and frustration.
- 4) Provinces and territories should continue to collaborate with the federal government on decisions about the acceptance of Afghan students in Canadian institutions.
- 5) Global Affairs Canada should continue to contribute funding for alternative education for Afghan women and girls, and should support NGOs offering virtual teacher training, digital literacy, and access to online learning platforms such as the Darakht-e Danesh Classroom (darakhtdanesh.org/classroom) that provides a combined Afghan and Canadian curriculum and an internationally recognized diploma upon graduation.
- 6) In their transfer payments to the provinces for post-secondary education, the Canadian government should earmark funds for colleges and universities to create and maintain online educational programs for students in Afghanistan.

Relevance of this resolution to CFUW

CFUW's national advocacy priorities are Education, Equity and Social Justice and Safe and Healthy Communities. This applies worldwide; in 2003 CFUW adopted the resolution proposed by its International Relations Committee entitled "Women: Essential to Peace", resolving that "the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) urge the Government of Canada to continue to support Canada's implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Women, Peace and Security, and to provide sufficient funding to further its work and facilitate regular meetings and consultations towards fully implementing UN Resolution 1325 in Canada, and encouraging and assisting implementation in other countries and protecting women and girls from gender-based violence".

"Education is a basic human right and is a stepping stone to other fundamental human rights." (UNESCO, n/d). In 2015 CFUW adopted a resolution to advocate for the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 4 is "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all."

CFUW's motto is "Realizing potential for All Women" and CFUW's vision is that "Women and girls are educated and empowered to make transformative change in the world". CFUW's mission is "To achieve educational and economic equality and social justice through continuous learning and empowerment". The motto, vision and mission particularly apply to Afghan women, Afghanistan being the only place in the world where education is currently denied on the basis of gender. This policy and the removal of women from important positions in their communities has had a devastating effect on the economic and social fabric of Afghanistan.

CFUW has long been concerned with the education, equality, and well-being of women and girls worldwide, as witnessed by its yearly statements to the UN Commission on the Status of Women on issues of gender equality. At CSW69, one of CFUW's recommendations to the UN was to increase investments in education in crisis zones and fragile states, with a focus on innovative and technology-enabled approaches to education.

Through CFUW-Ottawa's UWHAW group, in partnership with Right to Learn Afghanistan, CFUW members are already assisting with remote, "technology-enabled approaches to education" for young Afghan women.

In January 2025, CFUW sent a letter to Immigration Minister Marc Miller protesting about the denial of permits for Afghan women to study in Canada (CFUW 2025). In April 2026, CFUW also sent a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister, urging them to endorse a United Nations draft treaty on Crimes Against Humanity that would recognize gender apartheid as one such crime.

IMPLEMENTATION

CFUW clubs could:

- Raise awareness in each CFUW community of the lack of education available for girls in Afghanistan and the edicts/abuses of the Taliban through letter-writing campaigns, engagement with elected officials, public awareness initiatives, and collaboration with partner organizations and local media;
- Locate and provide support for families in Canada who have relatives in Afghanistan
- Encourage Afghan women in Canada to speak at CFUW meetings and keep in touch with them;
- Demonstrate with Afghan women on special occasions such as International Women's Day and International Human Rights Day;
- Start a study group to increase our awareness of the challenges faced by Afghan women and girls.
- Find resources to enhance understanding of the current situation in Afghanistan, such as the journal Zan Times and recent reports from UN Women and UNESCO;
- Establish connections with CFUW-Ottawa UWHAW and Right To Learn Afghanistan;
- Refer to the "Higher Education Toolkit" from Right To Learn Afghanistan (see <https://righttolearn.ca/higher-education>);
- Meet with elected officials and Senators to encourage them to support UN organizations providing humanitarian aid, education, and health care in Afghanistan
- Meet representatives of local universities and colleges to urge them to extend virtual educational programs to students in Afghanistan;
- Send requests to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) (www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship.html) to prioritize the applications of female Afghan refugees and students;
- Keep current with developments specific to Afghanistan at the UN Security Council (main.un.org/securitycouncil) and the International Criminal Court (www.icc-cpi.int).

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