PRAMUN 2026

Human Rights II

Topic #2- Protecting women's rights to education and healthcare in Afghanistan

I. Background information

Afghanistan is a totalitarian theocratic country located in central Asia. It has an estimated population of 40 to 50 million. Most of this population is Muslim, with the official state religion being Sunni Islam.

After the Second Anglo-Afghan War in 1878, the Anglo-Afghan treaty established British control over the Afghan territory. Afghanistan proclaims independence only before the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919. This is also the year when women's rights in Afghanistan took a great step forward, as women got the right to vote. Already two years later the first school for girls opened thanks to the support of Emir Amanullah Khan's wife.

In 1926, Emir Amanullah Khan proclaimed himself the King of the Kingdom of Afghanistan. He had plans to pass many socioeconomic reforms to modernize the country, such as the abolition of the burqa for women. This was one of the many reasons why the Afghan Civil war erupted, since not everyone agreed with his views. King Amanullah abdicated in 1929, and his cousin was crowned King, choosing to continue Amanullah's modernization of Afghanistan in a milder manner, however he was assassinated in 1933.

Mohammed Zahir Shan reigned as King until 1973. During this time, many reforms concerning women's rights were made. In 1950, the Purdah system was eliminated. This system put gendered segregation in place as well as compulsory veiling. In 1964, a new constitution was adopted. This constitution is widely regarded as a failure, since its main focus was for the monarchy not to lose control.

In 1973, Mohammed Daud organizes a coup and proclaims himself the president of the Republic of Afghanistan. This government was very swiftly recognized by the Soviet Union.

In 1978, the communist party took over the power in a bloody coup. The country faced a lot of infighting, making the government unable to move forward. In 1979, the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan and set up a communist government.

While in the years that followed, women got the right to education and employment, the communist regime is taken as a breaking point for the progress of women's rights in Afghanistan.

The opposition of the communist government, mainly the mujahideen groups, were supported by other countries such as the US, China, or Pakistan. These countries supplied them with weapons, making the communist era quite unstable and violent due to infighting.

The communist regime collapsed only in 1992 after a civil war erupted in Afghanistan. This civil war has had lasting impact on the country, since many military groups were created during this time and have stayed around.

In 1994, the Taliban emerged and managed to drive out the government and take over by 1996. This resulted in brutal treatment of women under the Sharia law.

Taliban stayed in power until the US invasion in 2001. The United States stayed in Afghanistan until 2021, trying to mediate the situation and stop another Taliban insurgency. A new constitution was adopted, ensuring equal women's rights. However, after the withdrawal of US troops, the Taliban took over once again. They have reinstalled their version of the Sharia law, which is now even stricter than it originally was. Women are no longer able to go outside without a male chaperone, speak publicly, go to school, work or access healthcare. Maternal mortality is rising as well as child marriages. Women are banned from showing any skin. On top of that, Afghanistan is facing a famine, and almost no humanitarian organizations are able to send any help inside the country.

II. UN involvement

During the US invasion of Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force was formed by the UN Security council in order to help the government meet the basic security needs. UNESCO coordinated a campaign to support girls education and managed to provide access to school for over 2.5 million girls between 2001 and 2021. After the Taliban takeover, UNESCO managed to train certain Afghan media outlets to share educational content, however all of these media outlets have since been disbanded by the Taliban.

UN Women manages to stay on ground in Afghanistan offering support for women, however, most humanitarian and international organizations no longer have access to the country and have stopped their projects.

III. Bloc positions

The Kingdom of Afghanistan had good relations with the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union since its creation. The only point of conflict between the UK and Afghanistan were the Pashtun tribes on the Durand line, as the UK wanted to keep control of them and Afghanistan refused to let them go, stating that the Durand line is not the true border of the country

Afghanistan has had complicated relations with Pakistan for a very long time because of these territorial disputes, since Afghanistan wanted to spread its territory past the Durand line. Pakistan has also often supported different mujahideen groups during different Afghan wars.

The Soviet Union was the first country to recognize the Republic of Afghanistan as a sovereign state.

During the communist regime and after its fall, Afghanistan became the battlefield of a proxy war between the US, China, Pakistan and the Soviet Union. The mujahideen groups were often supported through weapons or military training by the US, Pakistan and China. Taliban was originally a Pakistani trained mujahideen group, meaning that the current Taliban government is supported by Pakistan.

IV. Questions to consider

- What is my country's relationship with Afghanistan?
- What is the situation of women's rights to education and healthcare in my country? How does it compare with Afghanistan?
- What are some measures my country has to secure women's rights to education and healthcare? Could they be applied in Afghanistan (considering the political situation / religious traditions…)

V. Sources

https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2025/08/afghanistan-ten-facts-about-the-worlds-most-severe-womens-rights-crisis Women's current situation in Afghanistan

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/womens-rights-afghanistan-history Overview of the history of women's rights in Afghanistan

https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/faqs/faqs-afghanistan Women's current situation in Afghanistan

https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-gives-voice-afghan-girls-and-women-and-calls-their-rights-be-restored Education for girls in Afghanistan

https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12024253 Quick historical overview of the past two centuries in Afghanistan