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**TREBALL DE FI DE GRAU**

**RESUM EXECUTIU**

**THE TALIBAN REGIME AND THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

**Women's Journeys amongst Adversity**

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**Grau:** Relacions Internacionals

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The resurgence of the Taliban and the role of the United Nations (UN) in dealing with this conflict have become a topic of special awareness. However, does the UN's action in Afghanistan suffice to address the challenges faced by Afghan women?

This analysis aims to examine the Taliban's impact on women's rights, analyze the UN's responses aimed at safeguarding these rights from 1990s until nowadays, and provide several recommendations to enhance UN's role in fostering gender equality.

The research will be based on three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that specifically focus on women; SDG 3: *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*; emphasizing *the women access to health services*. SDG 4: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. SDG 5: *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*; emphasizing *the participation in public and political life* (UN Women, 2016: 8, 10, 12, 17). Moreover, there will be a fourth variable to fulfil the analysis: *Freedom of Movement*. Besides, a qualitative research method will be employed.

Since the 1996 seizure of power, the Taliban's impact has been severe, particularly regarding women's rights. Women could only leave their homes if accompanied by a male family member (Economic and Social Council, 2000) and their access to health care was limited (Physicians for Human Rights, 1998: 31). They were excluded from public and political life, and by the end of this period, fewer than one million Afghan children were in school, with none being girls (UN Women, 2023a).

However, the Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 positively contributed to increasing women's participation in decision-making levels. Regarding education, UN agencies ceased supporting school education programs where governmental decrees prohibited girls' access to school. Besides, the Economic and Social Council condemned restrictions on women's access to health care, education and freedom of movement (Economic and Social Council, 2000).

From 2001 to 2021, significant progress was made regarding women's rights. The 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan incorporated gender equality principles (Rahimi, 2022), with 27% of parliamentary seats reserved for women (UN Women, 2023a). The UN advocated for women's full participation in political decision-making, and the Karzai government provided a legal framework to protect and empower women (Drumbl, 2004: 359, 360). During this period, the 9 left SCR on Women, Peace and Security were published, and the vast majority mention, still in a modest way, the analysed SDGs (UN Security Council, 2008: 2).

Since 2021, significant Human Rights violations and developments have shaped gender policies in Afghanistan. The Taliban suspended the 2004 Constitution, dissolved the specialized courts for women and introduced 54 decrees which deteriorate women's rights; including mandates on hijab, limited access to education and health services and restrictions on movement (UN Women, 2023a). Additionally, women's influence in decision-making has shrunk dramatically at all levels (UN News, 2024).

Several responses have emerged, including: a partnership between UN Women and UN Office on Drugs and Crime, to address women's fears in prison and improve access to basic services and employment (United Nations: UNODC Afghanistan, n.d.); the SCR 2681 denouncing the Taliban's ban on Afghan women working for the UN in Afghanistan (UN, 2023c); the extension of UNAMA's mandate until March 2025 (UNAMA, 2024); and cash assistance for women (UN Women, 2024a). Moreover, several sanctions on the Taliban have been imposed, although they have stated they will tolerate severe punishments (Thomas, 2021: 33, 34).

Nevertheless, several UN missed opportunities profoundly impacted Afghan women's rights. Notable examples include; the exclusion of the Taliban from the 2001 Bonn Conference; Pakistan's support for the Taliban and its lack of involvement in the peace process (Kumar, 2022); the omission of any reference to women's rights in the negotiations for the Doha Agreement (UN Women, 2023b); and the misallocation of aid money, which ended up in the hands of local politicians rather than its intended purposes (University of Nottingham, 2021: 5).

Developing a prospective vision, a future concern would be of whether bringing the Taliban regime into the UN system or not, however accepting them would suggest a collateral acceptance of undisputed HHRR violations (University of Nottingham, 2021: 19).

In view of the analysis, some recommendations, both general and specific for each SDG, are proposed to the UN. For instance, encourage a more moderate implementation of Sharia throughout the country (University of Nottingham, 2021: 35), while providing technical assistance and training to Afghan officials on HHRR and principles of Sharia which could improve gender equality; and ensure that the aid provided does not fall in the Taliban's hands or any similar group, and hence it is used in a manner that does not violate women's rights, while keeping under surveillance the destination of the allocated funds with the establishment of monitoring mechanisms and engaging directly with women's civil organizations (UN Women, 2022: 7), among many others.

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