



Registration No. A0108620N

[Consumer Affairs Victoria](#) – Incorporated Association

Afghanistan: SUBMISSION to Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

Public Consultation on Australia's Autonomous Sanctions Framework

Submitted by - Women for Change Inc. **Date:** 21 October 2021

Women for Change - Charitable Objects

The Association is established solely to provide benevolent relief in accordance with the Charitable Objects. The Charitable Objects of the Association are to:

- (a) raise awareness in the community of the oppression of women in Afghanistan;
- (b) raise funds for girls' education programs in Afghanistan including, but not limited to, funds to pay teacher salaries, providing teaching aids and educational supplies and any other causes the Association considers to be of sufficient importance and relevance;
- (c) facilitate and assist in any way to provide girls education programs in Afghanistan;
- (d) provide empowerment and job training for vulnerable women in Australia and Afghanistan, including providing income generating training and resources such as wool for rug making, sheep as a base stock to provide wool, seeds for growth of valuable herbs and spices;
- (e) raise awareness in the community in regard to the Charitable Objects;
- (f) develop and utilise different methods of, and technologies for, raising funds to maximise funds raised for the Charitable Objects;
- (g) conduct events and collect funds and donations at events, to advance the respective Charitable Objects of the Association;
- (h) raise funds for the achievement of the above Charitable Objects in any lawful manner;
- (i) have regard to the public interest in its operations; and
- (j) undertake and or do all such things or activities which are necessary, incidental or conducive to the advancement of these Charitable Objects.

1. Introduction

[Women for Change](#) is a not-for-profit organisation supporting women and girls in Afghanistan who have been denied the right to education since the Taliban banned girls from attending school and university beyond the age of 12. We work directly with local schools across many Afghanistan regions, paying for teachers to provide ‘tutoring’ for girls and women to maintain access to education. We work directly with Afghan women, girls, and community leaders to provide education in exile, online learning opportunities, and emergency assistance to those most at risk.

Our activities from July 2024 to June 2025

Education programs for girls:

- at Asr Kaaj high school in Kabul
- at Subi Azadi high school in Kabul
- Computer Classes in Kabul
- at Health Institute in Kabul
- in Bamyan_ Waras
- in Urozgan
- Education programs for Street Working Children
- We are partners with Education Bridge for Afghanistan
- Bread distribution and meet for needy people.

For the previous financial year Women for Change have supported 26 staff members and 1295 students in Afghanistan. This is achieved through fundraising and donations.

We welcome the Australian Government’s commitment to strengthening the sanctions framework to better protect human rights and hold oppressive regimes to account. Particularly in relation to the human rights abuse and [gender apartheid](#) being experienced by women and girls.

2. Support for Expanded Sanctions Criteria

We strongly support the proposed expansion of the sanctions framework to include the following grounds:

- **Oppression of women and girls**
- **Oppression of minority groups**
- **Oppression of people, or groups of people**
- **Undermining good governance or the rule of law**

These changes align with Australia’s long-standing advocacy for gender equality, education, and the protection of human rights globally.

3. The Situation in Afghanistan

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, Afghanistan has become the only country in the world where girls are banned from education beyond primary school. Women have been excluded from most employment, banned from public life, and subjected to systemic discrimination and violence.

Women for Change continues to hear from women who have lost all means of livelihood and hope for their future. Many face imprisonment or physical punishment for attempting to educate themselves or others in secret. Being excluded from school, and with limited education and power, leaves young girls vulnerable to forced marriage at a very young age.

This systematic oppression constitutes **gender apartheid** — a form of persecution that should trigger targeted sanctions under the proposed framework.

4. Violations of International Human Rights Obligations

The Taliban's restrictions on women and girls directly contravene Afghanistan's obligations under multiple **United Nations human rights instruments**, including:

- **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** — Articles 1, 2, 7, 23, and 26 affirm the rights to equality, education, and participation in public life, regardless of gender.
- **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** — to which Afghanistan is a State Party — obliges governments to eliminate discrimination and ensure women's full participation in education, employment, and decision-making.
- **The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)** — guarantees equal rights for men and women to education, work, and freedom of expression.
- **The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** — upholds every child's right to education, development, and protection from harm.

The Taliban's actions represent a wholesale denial of these fundamental rights and amount to **institutionalised gender persecution**. By enforcing policies that exclude half the population from education and public life, the Taliban are in clear breach of international law and the UN Charter's principles of equality and human dignity.

5. Recommendations

We urge the Australian Government to:

1. **Maintain and strengthen targeted sanctions** against individuals and entities responsible for policies that oppress women and girls in Afghanistan.
2. **Coordinate with like-minded nations** (including the EU, UK, US, and Canada) to ensure consistent and collective pressure on the Taliban regime.
3. **Ensure humanitarian exemptions** remain in place so that sanctions do not inadvertently harm Afghan civilians or restrict access to education and humanitarian aid.
4. **Recognise gender apartheid** as a specific basis for sanctions within the category of “oppression of women and girls.”
5. **Engage directly with Afghan women’s organisations and diaspora-led groups** in designing and implementing Australia’s response.

6. Conclusion

The women and girls of Afghanistan have been stripped of their most basic human rights — to learn, to work, and to live freely. Australia’s leadership in expanding its sanctions framework can send a powerful message: that systematic gender oppression will not be tolerated, and that the international community stands with Afghan women and girls in their fight for freedom and equality.

We thank DFAT for the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation and welcome further discussion on how civil society can support the implementation of the new sanctions framework.

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