



**WITNESS
FOR JUSTICE**

A weekly commentary from the
United Church of Christ

Issue #1317 | July 16, 2026

Wake Up: The Dystopian Reality in Afghanistan

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Imagine your voice being banned outside of your home. Imagine being banned from attending school solely based on your gender. Imagine not being able to leave your home without a male chaperone. Imagine being told you can't board a plane to study abroad after winning a coveted scholarship for university. Imagine being banned from having a career. This is no dystopian novel; this is the reality for millions of Afghan women and girls.

It has been over two years since I researched and published blog articles on the gender inequality crisis in Afghanistan, and I'm devastated to say not much has changed since then. When I was in college, I took a human rights research class and had to choose one topic to research and produce a final research paper on. After much deliberation—because human rights issues are unfortunately plentiful—I chose gender apartheid in Afghanistan. As a young woman in tertiary education, I was struck by the ban on girls' education that has spanned years under the current de facto government.

Afghanistan is the only country in the world where girls are banned from attending school. An estimated 4.5 million Afghan girls are out of school right now. Once they finish primary education, they are forced to retreat back to their homes, in isolation. Women and girls are being erased from public life and society. In practice, this looks like most women not being allowed to work or seek higher education, most being unable to advocate for themselves due to violent backlash, and many facing declining physical and mental health due to their inability



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to leave their homes.

This is not just an issue of girls and women being oppressed. This is an issue of all Afghans being held back. [Studies](#) have shown that when women are educated, the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of a country rises. Women share their wealth of knowledge, teaching their surrounding communities and the next generation. This ban on education is not holding back only this current generation of Afghan girls and women, but future generations of all Afghans.

Gender apartheid, defined as segregation and discrimination based on gender instead of race, is not yet recognized as a crime against humanity under international law. A recognition of gender apartheid as a crime would allow international courts to prosecute those oppressing girls around the world. It would also eventually lead to girls' education being restored in Afghanistan.

But there is hope. Afghan women and girls are finding work-arounds and continuing their education online in secret. Groups like the Malala Fund are working on expanding online learning for girls, raising awareness of gender apartheid, and advocating for gender apartheid to be recognized as a crime under international law. Others are working to teach women and girls trades and to improve women and girls' mental health outcomes. And resilient Afghan women and girls are protesting in whatever ways they can: online, in the streets, and by continuing their learning. We cannot leave them to do this work alone.

The world needs to wake up to what is happening. Women and girls shouldn't have to endure all they have been experiencing. The silence of the international community is deafening. We must roar our outrage and work to get gender apartheid recognized as a crime and elevate Afghan women and girls' voices in ways that protect them and keep them safe. Are you awake yet?

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