SRMO Afghanistan Civic Space Quarterly Report
April to June 2022

Context and summary

The Taliban moved to further constrict civic space during the reporting period (1 April to 30 June). The de facto authorities issued decrees between April and June that placed additional restrictions on the Afghan population. Local media is heavily limited in what they are allowed to report, female television presenters are forced to wear face coverings, and journalists faced intimidation, harassment, beatings and detention for being seen to transgress Taliban rules. Several women-led civil society organisations had their directors removed by the Taliban, and most civil society activities are now impossible to conduct without fear of arrest or worse. Girls remain banned from school from grade 6 and above, and women’s right to employment continues to be severely curtailed. By doubling down on the crackdown on civic freedoms described in our previous quarterly report, the Taliban has confirmed they will not tolerate any critical voices, however peaceful or constructive.

During the reporting period, SRMO’s database logged at least 40 specific incidents affecting civil society activists, local media and NGOs. These incidents included 13 arrests of media workers by the Taliban, one attack on a media worker by unknown assailants, the killing of an NGO worker who was also a former government employee, 15 detentions of civil society activists, and the injury of at least five protesters after Taliban soldiers fired on a peaceful protest.

In addition to these incidents, at least 4 directors of women-led civil society organisations had their women directors removed from their posts. Many women were detained at women’s rights protests, for example on 10 May in Kabul, but exact numbers not known because of limitations on media coverage. Several attacks on health workers were also reported, some of which are linked to draconian restrictions on professional women that are exacerbating the humanitarian and healthcare crisis in the country; in one alarming case, a female midwife was brutally murdered because she was travelling with a male colleague without a mahram (chaperone).

SRMO’s key focus is on human rights defenders and civil society organisations. However, given the current context, the organization also monitors and documents the human rights situation more broadly. Current trends include the continuation of attacks on former government officials and former security forces; despite the Taliban’s promises of a general amnesty, 20 former security forces personnel and their relatives were killed during the reporting period. A further 17 were detained. The cases logged in SRMO’s database represent those verified by our network and are only a fraction of the total number across the country.

This reporting period has seen a significant escalation in abuses taking place in the context of the Taliban’s crackdown on growing resistance operations against them. SRMO has documented dozens of arrests, extra judicial killings and forced evictions of people accused of sympathizing with armed resistance against Taliban rule; these abuses have been most concentrated in the provinces of Panjshir, Baghlan (Andarab district), Sar-i-pul (Balkhab district) and Takhar, though smaller scale abuses against alleged opposition supporters are reported countrywide.
Legal and governance framework

The framework within which Afghanistan’s formerly vibrant civil society operated has been dismantled, but the Taliban is yet to articulate a new system. The 2004 Constitution has been effectively suspended and various government bodies that worked closely with or provided a level of protection to civil society have been shuttered. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) was officially dissolved in May, although it had not functioned since the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August and many of its key staff had been forced to flee abroad for fear of retaliatory attacks. The de facto authorities are operating in a legal and governance vacuum in which local Taliban leaders rule based on their own interpretation of sharia or Islamic law. Sharia is not codified and is open to widely varying interpretations. There is no accountability for crimes committed by Taliban troops and there are anecdotal reports of growing crime and lawlessness.

A gathering of 3,000 religious scholars held in Kabul at the end of June did nothing to clarify the governance or legal situation. It merely served to highlight the lack of inclusive governance or debate over the future direction of the country. Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi rejected criticism that not a single woman was present, saying that “the women are our mothers, sisters, we respect them a lot, when their sons are in the gathering it means they are also involved, in a way.”

Operating environment for civil society: Freedom of expression and association severely curtailed

Against this backdrop, the Taliban are denying Afghans their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association; the de facto authorities use violence and intimidation to silence their critics and deny them the opportunity to meet, organize or disseminate their views. (Women) human rights defenders (W)HRDs and Civil Society Activists (CSAs) are slowly disappearing from society. Most activists who remain in Afghanistan are living in fear, many are in hiding and all are self-censoring to avoid drawing unwanted attention from the Taliban.

Many (W)HRDs are unable to continue with their human rights activities. Women’s protests continue to be reported periodically, but detentions, beatings, threats to family members and disappearances of women taking part in peaceful protests have had a strong deterrent effect. Many women’s rights activists who have been detained during anti-Taliban protests have had their passports and IDs confiscated, making it very difficult for them to escape Afghanistan; if they do manage to leave the country, their lack of proper documentation makes finding an onward path to a country of asylum even harder.

The Taliban continued to use arrests and beatings to intimidate journalists into complying with restrictions on broadcasters and print media. In addition, several Afghans were detained during the reporting period for posts on social media. In April a journalist and two civil society activists were arrested for posting criticism on Facebook and charged to one and two years by a military court in Herat; the ruling noted that the men have no right to appeal their sentences. In another social media case, an

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influencer and his three colleagues were arrested on 7 June for ‘insulting Islamic sacred values’ in one of their videos on YouTube. They were paraded on television ‘confessing’ to the alleged crime, even though they had already apologized for the comments.³

Women and girls in public life

No progress was made during the reporting period over the Taliban’s national level policy towards women’s rights to employment and girls’ right to education – both rights that the Taliban agreed they would respect prior to seizing power the second time.⁴ Being denied schooling on the basis of their gender is particularly aggravating for Afghan girls because they are aware that many of the Taliban leadership’s girl children of similar age are going to school in other countries.⁵ There is genuine disagreement within the Taliban leadership over whether girls should have access to secondary education, but the issue has also become a bargaining chip between the Taliban and international stakeholders, making a resolution more complicated.

Women’s right to employment continues to be blocked, with very few exceptions such as in the fields of primary education and healthcare. Even those women who are allowed to work by the Taliban face an additional barrier in that it is increasingly difficult for women to take even short journeys to work without a mahram. Some professional women are having to walk long distances to work or are unable to get to work at all because bus and taxi drivers have been told they are not allowed to pick up single women; this is despite the fact that the decree outlining the mahram policy said a chaperone was needed for journeys above 45 miles.⁶

The Acting Minister for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice Khaled Hanafi in May issued new rules ordering women to wear the hijab in public; he added that the best way to observe hijab was to stay at home.⁷ The decree says that the burqa or niqab are the ‘preferred’ forms of hijab rather than making them compulsory, but anecdotal reports indicate that Taliban soldiers in many urban areas are enforcing the ‘preferred’ clothing as if it is the only acceptable kind. In one of many examples, Taliban soldiers on 23 June arrested several female teachers in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province, for not being dressed in a way the Taliban found acceptable. In May, women were denied access to a university campus in Mazar-e Sharif because their clothing was ‘too colourful’ and they were using mobile phones. On 23 May, The Taliban published a further decree ordering female television presenters to cover their faces while on air.⁸

Violence against women

Recent cases of violence against women can be divided into two main categories – violence committed by the Taliban in the name of enforcing their interpretation of Islamic rule, and killings of women by

⁴ Restrictions on women and girls are not uniform across the country and some local level agreements mean women are able to work and study
⁷ https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/05/how-talibans-hijab-decree-defies-islam
acquaintances or family members, who now feel emboldened to conduct so-called honour killings because they are condoned by the de facto authorities. In the former category SRMO recorded several cases during the reporting period. These included:

- A female student was detained and badly beaten in April at the Islam Qala border crossing in Herat Province. Taliban officials stopped her while she was on her way to her university in Iran because she was travelling without a chaperone.

- In May 2022, Taliban forces in Taloqan city, Takhar province, flogged several girls who were travelling in taxis and rickshaws without a chaperone.

- In late May a 19-year old girl was reportedly stoned to death by the Taliban in the Ghaleen area of Ghor province. The reason for the punishment was unclear.

- The Taliban in late May arrested a man and woman on charges of adultery in Sar-i pol city, Sar-i pol province. The woman was lashed and later died of her wounds in prison.

Another disturbing pattern is that of killings of women in unclear circumstances covered in our previous reports continue to be reported with alarming frequency; at least 5 were logged in the SRMO database between April and June, likely representing a fraction of the true number of incidents. Cases included the killing of a female teacher in Nimruz province whose body was found in north of Zaranj in Nimruz province. She was kidnapped on her way to school on 4 May and her body was found later that day, strangled by her own scarf. Another teacher was killed in Kunduz in mid-June; she had received an anonymous death threat several days before the attack, during which unidentified armed men reportedly broke into her house and beheaded her. Also during the reporting period, three bodies of unidentified women were found in Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat.

**Attacks on and arrests of healthcare workers**

Several attacks on healthcare workers were reported between April and June. In an incident in April in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province, a midwife and her colleague were killed by Taliban soldiers after being detained at a Taliban checkpoint because the midwife was travelling without a male family member. The midwife was brutally attacked and dismembered and her male colleague was also killed. A second midwife was killed in June in the Dehrawood District of Uruzgan province; her body was left abandoned by (an) unknown assailant(s).

In April a doctor was shot and killed in Jalalabad, Nangarhar province, though the motive for the attack is not known. Three doctors were arrested in April after being accused of having relations with resistance forces. One was arrested in the Andarab area of Baghlan province, which has seen intense unrest in recent months, while two more were detained in Kapisa.

**Abuses targeting former security forces and police**

20 killings of former security force personnel or their close relatives were logged in SRMO’s database between April and June. Of these, 17 were former security forces and 3 were family members who were either killed alongside their relatives or killed in place of their relatives. These were a mixture of extrajudicial executions – where security force personnel were typically shot dead at the time of
detention – and deaths in custody. In some cases it is not clear if victims died as a result of the beatings and torture that appear to be systematic in Taliban jails, or if they were intentionally killed.

The Taliban claim that ‘revenge’ killings of people who worked for the police or army under the previous government is not a centrally directed policy and is not being condoned by the Taliban leadership. However, while they have made some arrests of Taliban soldiers responsible for revenge attacks they have made no concerted effort to stamp out the practice. Killings of this type continue to be reported on a weekly basis.

A further 15 former security force personnel and relatives were detained during the reporting period. 12 of these were former police or army and 5 were family members detained alongside relatives or in place of relatives.

**Abuses linked to resistance activities**

Former members of the security forces are also under high suspicion for being sympathetic to the growing armed resistance to Taliban rule regardless of whether they actually are or not. Armed resistance against the Taliban is particularly intense on three major fronts - in the provinces of Panjshir, Baghlan (Andarab district) and of Sar-i-pul (Balkhab district) – though resistance activities are reported across Afghanistan. Many civilians with no military or police connection have also been caught up in sweeping arbitrary arrests of alleged resistance sympathizers by virtue of their ethnicity or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

During the reporting period, SRMO received credible reports of extra judicial killings, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances of civilians from Panjshir, Baghlan and Takhar provinces as well as beatings, torture and summary executions of combatants associated with the National Resistance Front (NRF). Cases logged in the SRMO database during this period include:

- 38 individual arrests of people accused of helping the resistance in Panjshir province or people of Panjshiri origin in other parts of the country
- Multiple reports of mass arbitrary arrests in Panjshir province and of Afghans of Panjshiri origin during Taliban search operations in urban areas. These include for example reports of approximately 60 people arrested in the Khair Khana district of Kabul on 24 June. Searches and mass arrests also took place in this neighbourhood on 18 June. In another example from April, 88 people were reportedly detained from Khenj district, Panjshir province; all the men and teenage boys living in the affected area were detained.
- 24 extrajudicial killings of civilians in Panjshir who were accused of involvement in resistance activities
- 3 National Resistance Front (NRF) combatants summarily executed after capture in Panjshir
- 7 civilians killed in Takhar after being accused of links with the resistance
- 13 civilians killed in Baghlan province after being accused of links to the resistance
- 11 civilians detained in Baghlan province including 1 medical doctor

Examples of these incidents during the reporting period include:

- **Summary executions of combatants**: Taliban soldiers on 5 June captured three members of the resistance forces in Bazarak district, Panjshir province. They tied their hands and later beheaded
them.

- **Extra-judicial executions:** Taliban forces on 10 May conducted a search operation in the Warsaj District of Takhar province during which they arrested 6 civilians. The detainees were later shot and killed in public on charges of having relations with resistance forces; local people said the victims were teachers and farmers and had no connection with resistance forces.

- **Summary executions and arbitrary arrests:** Taliban soldiers on 9 May reportedly killed 7 civilians and arrested 10 more during a ‘clean-up’ operations in the Andarab district of Baghlan province.

- **Mass arrests of civilians:** Taliban soldiers on 24 June conducted house to house searches in the Khair Khana area of Kabul. They reportedly arrested approximately 60 people of Panjshiri origin.

### Situation for HRDs living in neighboring countries

Many (W)HRDs and CSAs have fled Afghanistan, fearing arrest or worse for their human rights and civil society campaigning. While some have been able to move on to safe places, many more remain in limbo in neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan. Even for those with a potential onward path to Europe, North America or other reception countries, there are very long wait times for embassy interviews, and many face the prospect of their visas expiring before they can attend an interview. They are then faced with the choice of staying illegally where they are or returning to Afghanistan, where they are unsafe and where they don’t know if they will be able to leave the country when it is time for their visa interviews.

For those who do not have a visa path already in place, there is very limited support available from UNHCR or other refugee agencies. Afghans complain of incredibly long wait times for a UNHCR registration appointment and a lack of clarity over what happens next. Reports indicate that many women protesters have had their passports and national IDs confiscated by the Taliban after their arrests, making it incredibly difficult for them to leave the country via official routes. Some have managed to reach Pakistan or Iran but then have their onward options heavily restricted by the fact they have no paperwork.

### SRMO Database Summary: April to June 2022

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>HR Abuses targeting civil society</th>
<th>Cases</th>
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<td><strong>Incident Type</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cases</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assassination of CSA</td>
<td>A female NGO worker and former government employee was kidnapped on her way to work and killed by unknown assailants in Khost province. She had reportedly received threats prior to the attack in June.</td>
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9 Unless specified otherwise, case details come from the SRMO database (see Methodology section below). See [https://srmo.org/](https://srmo.org/) for further details about the organization.
Detentions of HRDs, CSAs

- The Taliban on 6 April arrested 11 women who had held a protest three days earlier during a Taliban-organized event at Bamyan University.
- An NGO worker was arrested in Kabul in May by a Taliban patrol while he was returning home from a family visit. He was taken to a jail, where he was subjected to torture and electric shocks. The Taliban were trying to force him to confess that he had relations with resistance fighters. He was eventually released after mediation with local elders.
- A civil society and youth activist was arrested on 9 April in Bazarak district, Panjshir Province. He was released after spending three day in Taliban detention.
- A journalist and two civil society activists were in April sentenced to one year and two years on charges of ‘posting views on Facebook.’ The decision was taken by the Taliban’s military court in Herat and noted in the ruling that the men do not have the right to appeal.

Group detentions of HRDs and CSAs[^10]

- A group of women protesters was detained during a women’s rally in May in Kabul city. They were held for several hours. The exact number of those detained is not known.

Use of violence against peaceful protests

- Five protesters were wounded on 22 April when Taliban soldiers opened fire on a peaceful protest in the Dasht-e-Barchi district of the capital. A group of Kabul residents had been holding the rally to protest against recent attacks on members of the Hazara ethnic group. More protesters were wounded when the Taliban beat them as they were dispersing the gathering.

Detentions of media workers by Taliban

- 13 media workers were arrested by the Taliban

Attacks on media workers by unknown assailants

- One media worker was attacked by unknown assailants

Intimidation and harassment

- Ongoing frequent reports of intrusive house and office searches that often include destruction of property, theft and beatings

**HR Abuses targeting former government officials**

**Extrajudicial killings of former government officials and their relatives**

- As mentioned above, a former government employee who was working for an NGO was kidnapped on her way to work and killed by unknown assailants in Khost province. She had reportedly...
received threats prior to the attack in June.

- Taliban fighters in Khogyani district, Nangarhar province, reportedly beheaded two cousins who had worked for the former government; the incident took place on 23 April.

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<tr>
<th>Arrest/disappearance of former government officials and their relatives</th>
<th>Taliban fighters on 12 April detained two sons of a former military general in Badakhshan province.</th>
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**HR Abuses targeting civilians**

### Cruel and inhuman punishments

- In June the Taliban arrested a young man in Panjshir and removed some of the skin from this hand because he had a tattoo.

- In May 2022, Taliban forces in Taloqan city, Takhar province, flogged several girls who were travelling in taxis and rickshaws without a chaperone.

- In late May a 19-year old girl was reportedly stoned to death by the Taliban in the Ghaleen area of Ghor province. The reason for the punishment was unclear.

- The Taliban in late May arrested a man and woman on charges of adultery in Sar-i pol city, Sar-i pol province. The woman was lashed and later died of her wounds in prison.

### Arbitrary killings of civilians by undisciplined Taliban soldiers

- A Taliban soldier shot and killed a civil servant from the Ministry of Public Works on 21 June in the city of Maimana, Faryab province. Taliban sources said that the victim was killed accidentally.

- Taliban fighters stationed at a checkpoint in Jalalabad, Nangarhar province, opened fire on a rickshaw after the driver failed to stop. As a result of the shooting on 24 April a young boy was killed and one of his relatives was wounded.

- Taliban soldiers on 18 April reportedly opened fire indiscriminately on a group of local citizens who were refusing to pay Usher and Zakat (Islamic donations) to the Taliban. Six people were killed and 13 others injured in the incident, which took place in the city of Kunduz.

- Taliban forces on 18 April shot and killed a young shopkeeper in the Mandawee market in Kabul. The reason behind the killing is not known.
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<th><strong>SRMO Quarterly Report Apr – Jun 2022</strong></th>
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- A Taliban ranger vehicle from the elite Badri battalion ran over and seriously injured a 10-year-old girl in Takhar province on 16 April.

- Civilian killed, 08 April 2022, Sultan Dam area, Ghazni Province, Taliban soldiers shot and killed a young engineer at the Sultan Dam resort in Ghazni province on 8 April. The Taliban reportedly opened fire on the victim after an argument.

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<th>Arbitrary killings and detentions</th>
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- 38 detentions of people in Panjshir province or people of Panjshiri origin in other parts of the country
- Mass arrests of Panjshiris during Taliban search operations in urban areas, including reports of approximately 60 people arrested in the Khair Khana district of Kabul on 24 June. Searches and mass arrests also took place in this neighbourhood on 18 June. In another example from April, 88 people were reportedly detained from Khenj district, Panjshir province; all the men and teenage boys living in the affected area were detained.
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<th>Forced recruitment</th>
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- The Taliban on 14 April reportedly detained several young boys from their homes in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province, and forced them to join Taliban forces fighting in the provinces of Baghlan and Panjshir.

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<th>HR Abuses targeting former security forces</th>
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<th>Extrajudicial killings of former security force personnel</th>
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- The Taliban in June arrested a woman who had worked as a police offer in Kandahar. She was later shot and killed. According to local reports, her dead body was found in a gutter in Kandahar City.
- A total of 20 killings of former security forces and their relatives were logged in SRMO’s database during the reporting period

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<tr>
<th>Detentions of former security force personnel</th>
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- 17 former members of the security forces and their relatives were detained
SRMO

The Safety and Risk Mitigation Organization (SRMO) is an Afghan-led NGO. It was established in May 2013 to provide protection and training for grassroots Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). SRMO’s main objective is to empower HRDs so they can safely continue their crucial work. SRMO has particularly focused its assistance on local and grassroots’ HRDs and WHRDs, recognizing their utmost vulnerability as being at the frontline of defending human rights.

SRMO monitors and tracks human rights abuses affecting human rights activists and civil society. The organization also provides regular trainings on Hostile Environment, Security, Digital and Cyber security, First aid and other topics. In addition, SRMO distributes regular and vital security information and mitigation advice to hundreds of HRDs and WHRDs in the provinces across Afghanistan. The organization also provides emergency assistance including emergency relocation and medical assistance for HRDs at risk. Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 SRMO has continued to provide support both to HRDs inside the country and to those who have fled and are now living in exile.

Methodology

This quarterly report is designed to provide a brief summary of the situation for human rights defenders in Afghanistan between April and June 2022, along with an overview of the broader human rights environment. It is based on information and cases gathered as part of SRMO’s ongoing human rights monitoring work. SRMO maintains a database of incidents and rights abuses affecting human rights activists, civil society more broadly, and Afghan civilians. Cases are only included in the SRMO database if they have been verified via SRMO’s networks inside Afghanistan.