

SRMO



SAFETY AND RISK MITIGATION ORGANIZATION

Safety and Risk Mitigation Organization

Civic Space Quarterly Report

January – March 2023

SRMO Afghanistan Civic Space Quarterly Report January to March 2023

Context and summary

During the first quarter of 2023, the Taliban targeted members of civil society with systematic human rights abuses. During this period, eight Women’s Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) were detained for peaceful protest activity, while local media workers experienced arrests, beatings and harassment for trying to do their jobs. Ordinary civilians were detained for posting even mild criticism of the Taliban on social media. The de facto authorities also continued to use arbitrary detention, torture and extra judicial killings against other sources of perceived opposition; these include people accused of involvement in resistance activities, officials from the former government, and people who worked for the police, intelligence and security forces before the Taliban takeover.

From January to March 2023, SRMO’s database logged:

- 42 reported abuses (2 killings, 30 detentions, 2 kidnappings and 8 beatings) targeting members of civil society and their relatives - this includes civil society activists, local media workers, university lecturers, NGO workers and civilians arrested for posting criticism of the Taliban on social media.
- A total of 85 floggings (20 of which were women), and 103 reported detentions for so-called ‘moral crimes’.
- 27 former members of the security forces were killed and a further 55 detained. The equivalent numbers for Oct-Dec 22 were 16 killed and 24 detained; the numbers for Jul-Sep 22 were 12 killed and 11 detained. This represents a disturbing trend of ever increasing violence against suspected opponents.
- 6 people were reportedly killed by the Taliban in extrajudicial killings after being arrested for alleged involvement in or links to armed resistance against the de facto authorities; a further 118 people were detained for allegedly having links to resistance actors.

Early 2023 saw a flurry of diplomatic activity from international stakeholders attempting to reverse the Taliban’s December 2022 ban on women working for NGOs and attending universities. Various high level international officials met with representatives from the de facto authorities, but the impact was limited.¹ The new school year began in March with girls still banned from secondary schools and universities.² Local level agreements have been reached by some humanitarian agencies to allow women to work in certain roles³, but the de facto authorities continue to obstruct many female humanitarian professionals from carrying out their essential work.⁴

¹ <https://afghanistan.un.org/en/216250-high-level-un-delegation-led-deputy-secretary-general-calls-afghanistan%E2%80%99s-de-facto-taliban>

² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/23/afghanistan-school-year-starts-without-teenage-girls>

³ See for example <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/save-children-resumes-some-activities-female-staff-afghanistan>

⁴ <https://www.unocha.org/story/afghanistan-%E2%80%9Cwe-need-see-women-aid-workers-back-work%E2%80%9D>

The humanitarian situation remains dire. Many people don't have sufficient access to food or basic services, leading to deaths from cold and malnourishment.⁵ There were warnings in March that international aid – which was already insufficient compared to the level of need - would be reduced further.⁶

I. Legal and governance framework

The Taliban rules by decree. Senior officials have in recent months voiced differing views over key policy areas, but ultimate decision making power continues to reside with supreme leader Haibatullah Akhundzada.⁷ Taliban officials' standard response to questions about the legal framework is that it is based on sharia.⁸ The fact that the latter is not codified and is open to widely diverse interpretations means that in practice, legal judgements are ad hoc and vary considerably depending on local officials' personal interpretations of Islamic law.⁹

Occasional statements from the de facto authorities suggest that some debate is occurring over the reorganization of the legal system, but for the time being there is no clarity over procedures, standards of evidence, or appropriate punishments.¹⁰ The supreme leader in March reportedly issued a verbal decree ordering that the Attorney General's Office be re-tasked as the "General Directorate for Monitoring and Follow-up of decrees and directives". Local human rights organization Rawadari expressed concern at the move, explaining that: "this latest decision to formally and intentionally abolish the key responsibilities of the AGO and grant unlimited power to courts, further weakens access to justice, especially as the constitution has been dissolved and other relevant laws such as the Penal Code have been suspended. These steps are a clear indication that the de facto authorities do not have the will to establish a fair and accessible justice system in the country."¹¹

People detained by the de facto authorities' intelligence agencies - notably departments 40 and 90 of the General Directorate for Intelligence (GDI) - face particularly egregious human rights abuses. Afghans in GDI custody are routinely held incommunicado, with families unable to access information about their whereabouts, the nature of any charges, or what kind of legal process if any they are being subjected to. Former detainees describe systematic beatings, torture - including the use of electric shocks -, intimidation and threats to family members as a means of extracting 'confessions' or information about opposition activities.¹² Local Taliban police are often unable to provide information about detainees held by the GDI and traditional negotiation mechanisms involving local elders are less likely to be effective with GDI prisoners, though this varies depending on the location.

⁵ <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-cold-weather-deaths/32243751.html>

⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/aid-funding-shortfall-could-push-afghans-into-famine-wfp-2023-03-20/>

⁷ <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-leader-akhundzada-oppression-isolation/32234403.html>

⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2023/afghanistan-taliban-islamic-law-rights/>

⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/ijudiciary/statements/2023-01-17/202301-stm-sr-ijl-sr-afghanistan-day-endangered-lawyer.pdf>

¹⁰ See for example <https://rawadari.org/250320231387.htm/>; <https://www.jurist.org/news/2022/08/afghanistan-dispatch-attorney-generals-office-no-longer-investigating-and-prosecuting-crime/>

¹¹ <https://rawadari.org/250320231387.htm/>

¹² See for example <https://cpi.org/2022/12/taliban-intelligence-beat-interrogate-journalist-zabihullah-noori/>; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/20/afghanistan-women-protesters-detail-taliban-abuse>; <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/south-asia/afghanistan-taliban-prison-kabul-b2284259.html>

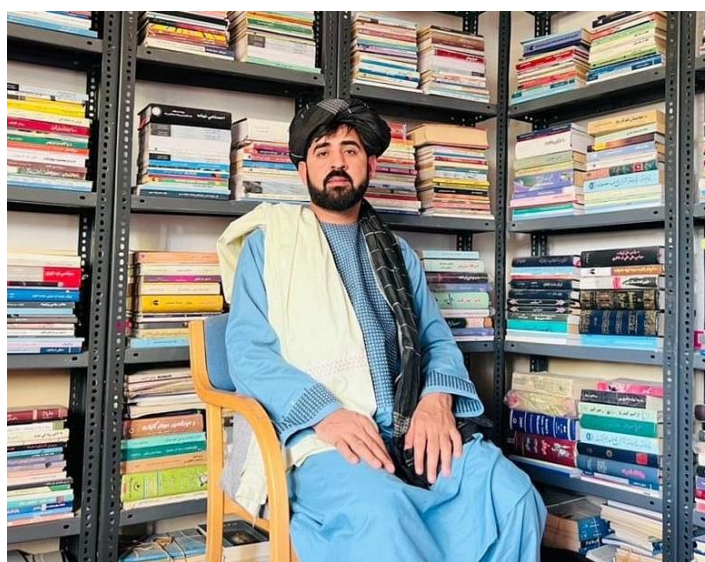
Meanwhile, people who held positions in the previous legal system continue to be at high risk of retaliation for their previous work. In one recent example, a former government judge from Helmand province was detained on 8 February by the Taliban and died while in their custody.¹³

Selection of Taliban decrees during the quarter:

- 18 March: Supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada forbids Taliban officials from appointing relatives in government positions.¹⁴
- 25 March: Supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada issues verbal decree to re-task the Attorney General’s Office as the “General Directorate for Monitoring and Follow-up of decrees and directives”. This curtails AGO’s jurisprudence of ensuring justice and fighting crime. ¹⁵
- 30 March: Supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada issues order to civil courts to re-examine and invalidate thousands of criminal and legal cases that had been settled by the previous government that did not comply with Sharia.¹⁶

II. Operating environment for civil society

Civil society has been decimated by the evacuation of many experienced activists since August 2021 and by the Taliban clampdown over the last year and a half. The de facto authorities’ closure of civic space has been almost total, with Afghanistan now rated as ‘closed’ on the CIVICUS monitor.¹⁷ The de facto authorities systematically obstruct Afghans’ fundamental rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly.



Matiullah Wesa. Source: the Quint World

The vast majority of human rights and civil society organisations have been forced to close or go into hiding. Civil society activists who do continue to operate face immense risks, with a constant threat of detention and torture.¹⁸ The arrest of highly respected and well-known education activist Matiullah Wesa on 27 March illustrated the risk; despite an international outcry following his arrest, Wesa remained in detention at the time of writing.

¹³ SRMO database

¹⁴ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/top-afghan-taliban-leader-issues-decree-nepotism-97980764>

¹⁵ <https://rawadari.org/250320231387.htm/>

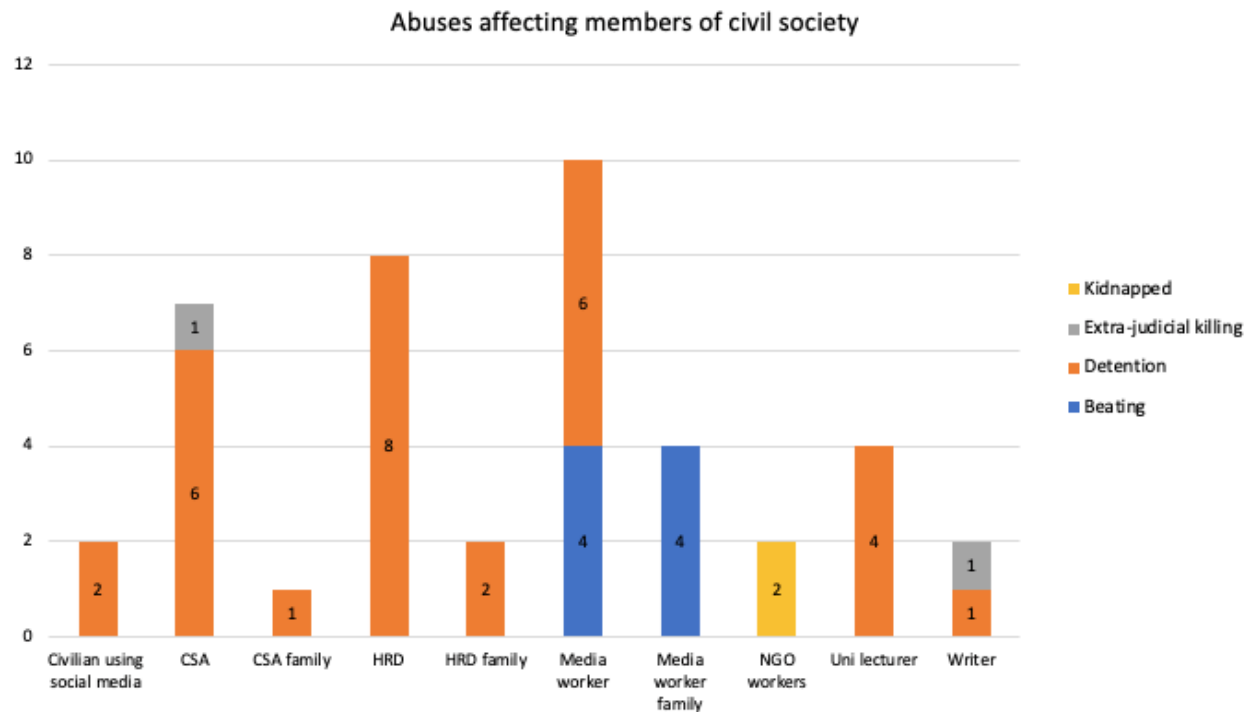
¹⁶ <https://8am.media/eng/taliban-leader-orders-re-evaluation-of-court-cases-under-new-regulations/>

¹⁷ <https://monitor.civicus.org/country-rating-changes/afghanistan/>

¹⁸ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/A_HRC_52_84_01.03.23-English.docx

Between January and March 2023, SRMO documented 42 cases of human rights abuses affecting members of civil society and their relatives (further details about all of these cases are provided in the Database Summary below). These cases included:

- 1 killing of a writer
- 1 killing of a Civil Society Activist (CSA)
- 8 detentions of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs, along with 2 family members)
- 6 detentions of CSAs
- 1 detention of CSA family
- 4 detentions of university lecturers/former university lecturers
- 6 detentions of media workers
- 4 beatings of media workers
- 4 family members of media workers beaten as a means of intimidating journalists
- 2 civilians detained in relation to social media posts critical of the Taliban
- 1 detention of a writer
- 2 detentions of NGO workers



III. Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly

At least eight WHRDs and two of their relatives were arrested between January and March 2023. These women were detained because of their involvement in organizing or participating in peaceful protests against the de facto authorities' policies with regard to women's education and employment.

Referring to the treatment of recently detained Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Afghanistan Richard Bennett stated in his recent report to the UN Human Rights Council: "The intention is clearly not only to punish them for protesting, but also to deter others from protesting."¹⁹

Cases documented by SRMO in the first quarter of 2023 include:

- 11 February, Takhar province: Parisa Mobarez - a prominent WHRD and founder of Takhar Women's Protest Movement - and her brother were arrested by the Taliban at their home.²⁰ They were released the next day with signs of beatings and torture. Taliban interrogators demanded Parisa's phone password and used force to try to extract it.²¹ Testimonies from former detainees suggest that Taliban security forces routinely use violence to access prisoners' phones to identify collaborators.
- 11 February, Kabul province: Narges Sadat, WHRD, was arrested by the Taliban at a checkpoint. She had been reportedly organizing protest activity against the Taliban.²² She remains detained.
- 15 February, Kabul province: Zarifa Rahmat was reportedly arrested in a night raid for providing education to girls at her house.²³
- 8 March, Ghor Province: Habiba Sharifi, WHRD, and her father were arrested after she protested outside the provincial governor's office for International Women's Day, demanding human rights for women.²⁴
- 20 March, Kabul province: Waheeda Mahrami, WHRD, was arrested for four days.²⁵ She was arrested for referring to Taliban policies as "gender apartheid" on 8 March, and for protesting the closure of secondary schools for girls.
- 26 March, Kabul Province: three WHRDs were arrested and finally released during a rally that called for women's education and girls right to secondary school. Some of the protesters were also injured when they were surrounded by the Taliban.



Narges Sadat was arrested by the Taliban on 10 February. She is being held in an unknown location. Source: Afghanistan International.

¹⁹ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/A_HRC_52_84_01.03.23-English.docx

²⁰ <https://rukshana.com/parisa-mobarez-and-her-brother-were-released-from-taliban-custody>

²¹ <https://kabulnow.com/2023/02/taliban-arrest-a-women-rights-activist-narges-sadat-in-kabul/>

²² <https://www.afghanwitness.org/reports/female-protesters-detained-in-kabul-and-takhar>

²³ <https://8am.media/eng/afghanistan-where-girls-education-is-a-crime/>

²⁴ [HTTPS://AMU.TV/EN/39595/](https://AMU.TV/EN/39595/)

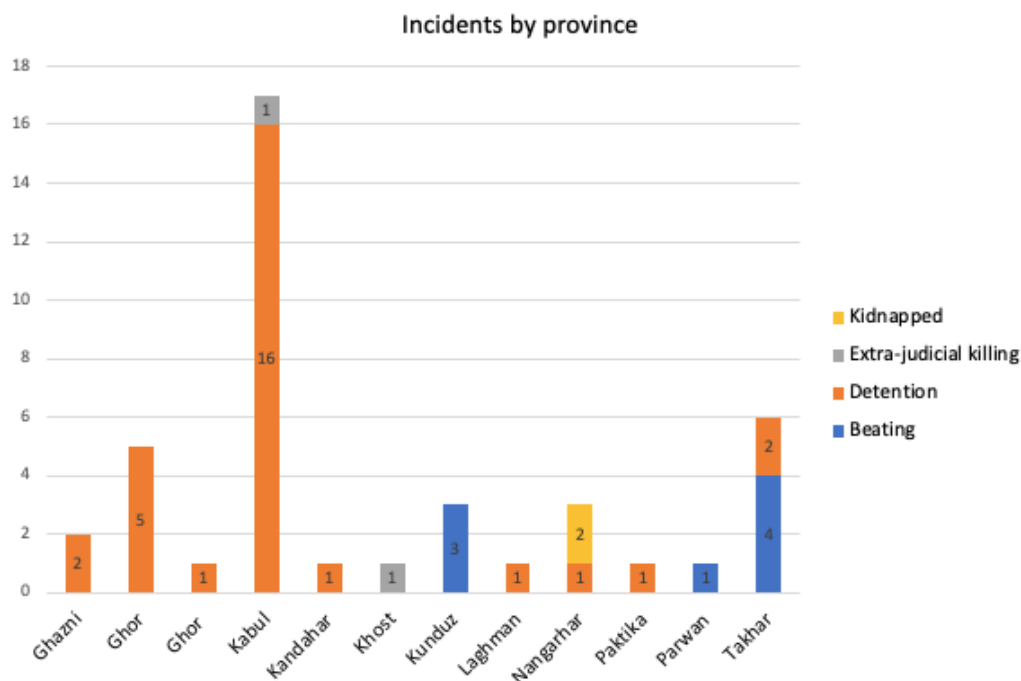
²⁵ <https://www.khaama.com/protesting-afghan-woman-activist-released-after-temporary-arrest/>

In addition to WHRDs, one civil society activist (CSA) was killed and seven civil society activists were detained during the reporting period. A psychologist and social activist was detained in Kabul on 5 February for unknown reasons; Taliban security forces then handed his dead body to his family three days later. In cases such as this, it is often unclear whether the victims died from injuries sustained during torture or if the Taliban deliberately killed them. Besides that case, 7 other CSAs or their family members were detained: 4 in Kabul, 1 in Laghman, 1 in Paktika and 1 in Ghazni.



Rasoul Abdi Parsi, university lecturer, was arrested by Taliban on 01 March. Source: Kabul Now.

In addition to these activists, three university lecturers and a former university lecturer were detained. The specific reasons for the arrests are not known, but one of the lecturers had famously ripped up his educational certificates on national television in protest at the Taliban’s December 2022 university ban for female students. He was reportedly arrested while handing out free books to women and girls in Kabul. One of the other detained lecturers had recently written a book about an anti-Taliban commander.



IV. Freedom of Expression

Acting Minister for Higher Education Neda Mohammad Nadim stated on 11 March that anyone who criticizes the de facto authorities should be executed.²⁶ While his comments do not represent current official policy, the inclusion of individuals with such extreme views within the Taliban’s de facto cabinet

²⁶ <https://twitter.com/ObaidullaBaheer/status/1634987022812164097?s=20>

points to the level of threat to members of the media as well as regular civilians. Documentation by SRMO and other human rights organisations shows that journalists and media workers are frequently detained, beaten, harassed and intimidated by the Taliban.

Between January and March 2023, SRMO documented 6 detentions and 4 beatings of media workers by Taliban security forces. In addition, 4 relatives of media workers were beaten and there were numerous incidents of harassment and intimidation.

Media arrests

In early January a recent journalism graduate was detained in Kabul and held for more than a month by Taliban intelligence. He was eventually released on 9 February and was tortured during his incarceration. Three journalists working for a local television station were arrested on 6 January in Ghor province; two male staff were sentenced to 18 days in prison and a female staff member was sentenced to three months. The following month a journalist working for Tolo news was detained on 16 February in Kandahar. He was released several days later, and was reportedly beaten and tortured while in custody.

Foreign journalists have also been detained and harassed by Taliban officials. International media rights group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in February issued a statement calling for the release of French-Afghan reporter Mortaza Bahboudi who had been detained the previous month while awaiting his press accreditation paperwork.²⁷

Beatings of media workers' relatives

The Taliban do not only detain and harass media workers themselves, but also intimidate family members to pressure journalists into complying with Taliban directives. In one recent example on 11 March, around ten armed men beat a radio journalists' father in Parwan province at night time. They also stole various items from the house. In January, the wife and two children of a television presenter were reportedly beaten in Kunduz province.

Other intimidation, harassment and interference with media

There were also numerous cases of media personnel being harassed into stopping work, pressured into providing favourable coverage or being punished for raising concerns about local Taliban officials' behaviour. Recent examples include:

- Journalism students in Khost reported in early February that their educational radio broadcasts have been stopped under the pretext of electricity shortages.
- Taliban security forces reportedly raided a private television station in Kabul on 14 February, mistreated and threatened the station's employees and stole two of the station's vehicles.
- Four television journalists were reportedly fired in February in Takhar province after they complained about alleged corruption by a Taliban official who had recently been given a job in their department. Taliban personnel also reportedly visited the homes of the journalists and beat them in front of their families.
- Taliban officials in February ordered local media workers in Parwan to only broadcast content after it had been approved by Taliban personnel.

²⁷ <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-and-14-media-outlets-call-release-french-afghan-journalist-mortaza-behboudi-held-afghanistan>

- Media workers in Helmand province were informed on 21 February that they were not permitted to take photographs or videos. The provincial governor and representatives from the provincial office of the Ministry for the prevention of vice and the promotion of virtue have reportedly decided that visual reports or interviews with journalists are now banned.
- A local Taliban official in Takhar in February warned local journalists that they will face consequences if they do not write or broadcast articles that show the Taliban in a positive light.
- A women’s radio station in Badakhshan was forced to close in late March after Taliban officials accused it of playing music during Ramadan.

Media workers also face threats from other violent extremist groups, notably ISIS’s local chapter – ISIS Khorasan Province or ISKP. Four people, including three journalists, were killed in a bomb attack on a cultural centre on 11 March that appeared to target a gathering of journalists. A further 30 people including 15 journalists were reportedly injured in the incident.

Social Media

The clampdown has not only affected people involved in organized civil society activities; individuals expressing frustrations with the current circumstances in Afghanistan on social media have also faced incommunicado detention and other abuses. In one recent example, a young man was detained in Ghor province on 3 January after posting a comment about women’s education on Facebook. In a similar case the following month, a young man was detained for spreading ‘propaganda against the Taliban’; the man, who was arrested in Ghazni province on 27 February, had reportedly criticized the Taliban on Facebook.



Journalist Hussain Naderi was killed in a bomb attack targeting media workers in Mazar-e Sharif

In another case this quarter, a man was detained for critical comments his brother – a civil society activist who previously fled Afghanistan - had posted on social media from outside the country. The brother who remains inside Afghanistan was reportedly detained in Paktika province on 21 January; it is unclear if he remains in detention.

This attempt to silence Afghans living in exile by threatening their relatives who remain inside the country is part of a pattern; Taliban officials in Kabul in February reportedly called for security forces to find relatives of media workers criticizing Taliban rule from overseas and pressure them to influence their family members to stay quiet.

V. Violence against women

Violence against women continued in many different forms during the first quarter of 2023. During the reporting period, SRMO registered reports of 8 murders of women. In one case a Taliban fighter reportedly shot and killed his wife on 21 January in Nimroz province. In another, a former female MP was shot dead on 15 January in her home in Kabul; her bodyguard was also killed and her brother was injured in the attack. Unconfirmed reports suggest she had been propositioned for marriage by a senior Taliban official on multiple occasions but had refused.

In addition 5 sexual assaults were logged in the database, all of which were blamed on Taliban members. In one case a woman and her two daughters claimed they had been gang raped by Taliban who attacked them in their home; the incident reportedly took place in Sar-e pol province in early March. Another case was reported in mid-January; a woman claimed she had been attacked by Taliban security forces in her home in Kabul and raped. In a third incident, a policewoman working in Samangan province was reportedly raped by a Taliban official inside a local police station.

SRMO also documented reports of women being kidnapped by Taliban soldiers and/or pressured into forced marriages. For example, a woman and her two children were reportedly kidnapped by a Taliban fighter on 16 February in Helmand province. Meanwhile, a midwife in Panjshir was reportedly threatened with forced marriage in March by a local Taliban official, who also threatened her family with harm if they did not permit the marriage.

A further 21 women and girls reportedly died from suicide, several of which took place after women or girls had been or were just about to be subjected to forced marriage. As with all the numbers in this report, the cases logged here represent just a sample and the true numbers of cases are likely to be far higher. Mechanisms established during the former government to provide protection, refuge and legal remedies to women victims of domestic violence have been dismantled.²⁸ This total absence of institutional support likely also contributed to the high number of suicides.

VI. Morality arrests /corporal punishment

The Supreme Leader’s order in November 2022 that judges start imposing sharia punishments resulted in a surge in reports of corporal punishment, particularly floggings. The practice continued in the first quarter of 2023, with SRMO’s database recording a total of 85 floggings (20 of which were women) between January and March. Many floggings took place in public and were attended by large crowds, though local media was in many cases prevented from taking photos or videos of the events.

Floggings were carried out as punishment for a range of alleged crimes, including theft and kidnapping, but a large proportion were handed down for so-called ‘moral’ crimes, such as wearing the wrong clothing, talking on the phone with someone of the opposite sex, extra marital relationships and drinking alcohol. During the reporting period, 103 people were detained for these types of crimes.

There were also numerous reports of local Taliban security forces hanging up corpses in public spaces of people they had killed in security operations against alleged criminals.²⁹ In one recent example, the bodies of two men were hung from their feet at a traffic intersection in Herat province on 22 February; Taliban officials said the men had been killed “after being accused of robbery”. According to a recent media investigation, at least 46 bodies have been publicly displayed since the Taliban takeover in 2021; cases have been reported in Herat, Baghlan, Balkh and Samangan provinces.³⁰

²⁸ <https://www.jurist.org/news/2023/03/afghanistan-dispatch-womens-ability-to-access-the-court-system-has-been-completely-wrecked/>

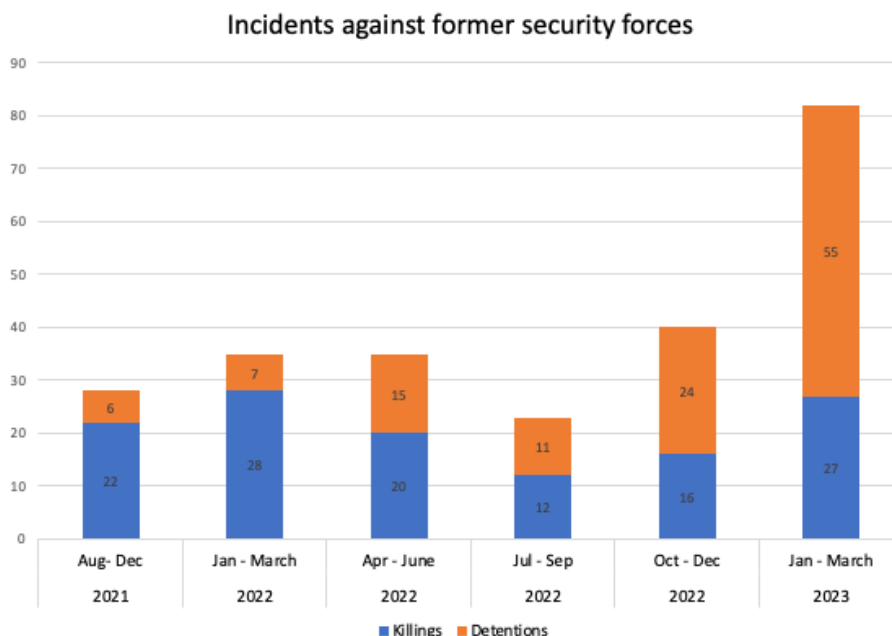
²⁹ <https://rukshana.com/en/the-talibans-public-displays-of-brutality-and-dead-people-is-deliberate-and-psychologically-destructive>

³⁰ <https://rukshana.com/en/the-talibans-public-displays-of-brutality-and-dead-people-is-deliberate-and-psychologically-destructive>

VII. Abuses targeting former security forces and police

Attacks on people who worked for the army, intelligence services and various police forces that were set up under the previous government continued over the last quarter. 27 killings of former security force personnel or their close relatives by the Taliban were logged in SRMO’s database between January and March (up from 16 during the previous reporting period). A further 55 former security force personnel were detained (more than double the 24 detentions reported between October and December), making a mockery of the Taliban’s supposed ‘general amnesty’ for people who worked under the former government. Many of those detained are effectively disappeared, with relatives having no idea where they are being held or if they are still alive. Many families only get news of their loved ones when their bodies are returned to them, often with signs of brutal torture.

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 and the table below illustrates how the numbers have surged over the last 6 months.



VIII. Abuses linked to resistance activities

There was a relative lull in attacks on the Taliban by the National Resistance Front (NRF) and other resistance groups over the winter months. Nevertheless, Taliban security forces continued to kill and detain civilians who they suspected of involvement in resistance activities.

Reported cases logged in the SRMO database during this period include 6 alleged extra judicial killings and 118 detentions. Extensive restrictions on both local and international media in affected areas such as

Panjshir mean that many of these developments are taking place in an information blackout. Recent incidents reported via local networks include:

- Two tribal elders were reportedly killed on 12 January in Khost district, Baghlan province. They were reportedly arrested from their homes at night and then shot dead. The Taliban reportedly believed they had collaborated with the NRF.
- Four days after that incident, a man reportedly died in a hospital in the Omarz district of Panjshir province. He had been detained two weeks before on charges of having connections with the NRF and had reportedly been tortured.
- A young man from Panjshir province was murdered on 21 January by ‘unknown gunmen’ in Kabul city. The victim’s relatives believe he had been detained by the Taliban and died under torture.
- Taliban intelligence reportedly shot dead a 25 year old man in Kapisa province. They accused him of having links to resistance forces.
- A student from Panjshir was reportedly kidnapped on 15 March and killed by unknown attackers. Some local reports suggested he had links to the resistance and had been killed by the Taliban.

IX. Plight of Afghan civil society in limbo in neighbouring countries

Many members of Afghan civil society have been forced to flee Afghanistan because of serious threats to life from the de facto authorities. While some have been able to travel on to safe countries, many others remain stuck in limbo in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Iran. Visa allocations for Afghans from Afghanistan’s main international partners have been disappointingly low, meaning that many have been unable to find safe onward pathways.

Afghan refugees living in Pakistan have held a series of recent protests outside the offices of SHARP, UNHCR’s partner organization in Pakistan in an attempt to draw attention to their plight.³¹ They complain that SHARP processes move too slowly and that they do not receive sufficient assistance with living costs while they await the outcome of their applications. Many Afghans living in Pakistan, Iran and Turkey have faced harassment and deportation because of problems with visas and paperwork.

X. Annex

SRMO Database Summary: January to March 2023

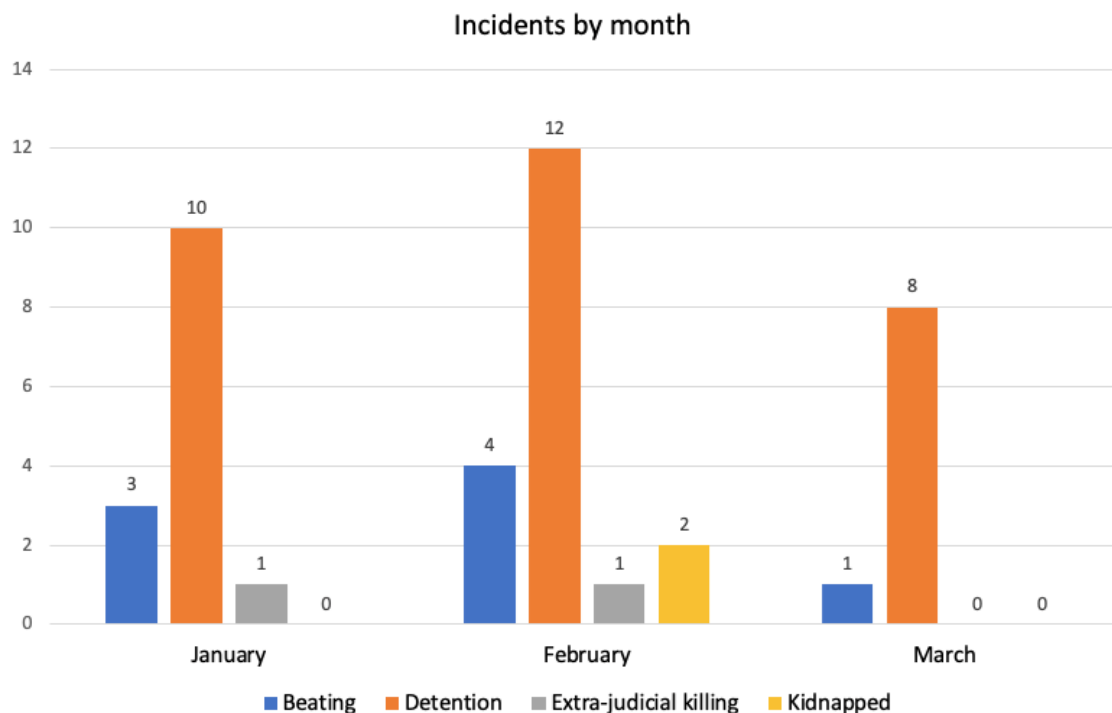
HR abuses targeting civil society	
<i>Incident Type</i>	<i>Cases³²</i>
Killings of HRDs, CSAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 08 February, Kabul, city, Kabul Province: Taliban killed social activist and psychologist Nasser Khalid for unknown reasons. After three days, Taliban handed over his body to his family.
Detentions of HRDs, CSAs and their relatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 07 January, Kabul city, Kabul Province: head of the Afghan Hope Organization and social activist Sultan Ali Ziaei was arrested by Taliban intelligence forces. • 21 January, Sharan city, Paktika Province: Ayaz Bacha was arrested by the Taliban’s intelligence forces after his brother (former activist Mohammad Muqtasad) criticized the Taliban on Facebook.

³¹ <https://www.khaama.com/afghan-refugees-protest-in-islamabad-against-unhcrs-failure-to-review-their-cases/>

³² Unless specified otherwise, these case details come from the SRMO database (see Methodology section below). See <https://srmo.org/> for further details about the organization.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 10 February 2023, Mehtarlam city, Laghman Province: local sources reported that Samiullah Ahmadi, a CSA, was arrested by Taliban intelligence last month and is still in prison, in bad condition due to torture. ● 11 February, Taloqan city, Takhar Province: local source reported that Taliban arrested Parisa Mubarez, a WHRDs and protester who is a member of the Takhar women's movement, alongside her brother, Rahmatullah. Reports say that she was beaten and tortured during her imprisonment. She was released after three days. ● 11 February, Kabul city, Kabul Province: report that Taliban arrested Narges Sadat, WHRD and protester. She was taken to an unknown location and is held incommunicado. ● 13 February, Kabul city, Kabul Province: report that Taliban arrested Fardin Fadaei, CSA, four days before. Directorate 90 of Taliban intelligence confirmed to his family that he had been arrested. ● 16 February, Kabul city, Kabul Province: report that Taliban intelligence forces arrested Zarifa Rahmat, WHRD, who was six months pregnant. According to the report Mrs. Zarifa Rahmat was running a private school for at least 15 girls in her home. ● 17 February 2023, Kabul city, Kabul Province: report that the Taliban arrested Imran Ahmadzai, CSA and Taliban critic, 5 days before. He was arrested for the crime of “propaganda” against the Taliban. ● 18 February, Kabul city, Kabul Province: report that Taliban intelligence arrested Mohammad Ismail Rahmani, a Pashto language writer and social media activist. The GDI transferred Ismail Rahmani to an unknown location. ● 08 March, Firoz Koh city, Ghor Province: report that Habiba Sharifi, prominent gender rights campaigner, and her father, were arrested at their home after protesting outside of the Provincial Governor’s office on 8 March. ● 23 March, Kabul city, Kabul Province: report that Taliban arrested Wahdeh Moharrami for protesting gender discrimination. ● 26 March, Kabul City, Kabul Province: report that a group of 30 women activists protesting bans on women’s education was forcefully dispersed by Taliban security forces. Some were injured. 3 women protesters named as Fatemeh Mohammadi, Malalai Hashemi, Ruqiya Saeed, were violently detained and taken away to an unknown location. ● 28 March, Kabul City, Kabul Province: report that Taliban intelligence forces arrested Matiullah Wesa, prominent education and women’s rights activist. His two brothers were detained for several hours, and his mother abused during a house raid.
Detentions of NGO workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 05 February, Jalalabad city, Nangarhar Province: report that two Afghan nationals working for Swedish Committee were kidnaped by unknown individuals.
Other civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 16 January, Ghazni city, Ghazni Province: arrest of a male student of a private university for writing a critical note about the ban on girls' education. ● 01 February, Kabul city, Kabul Province: reports that Taliban arrested Zakaria Osuli, a university lecturer, researcher and writer.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 02 February, Kabul city, Kabul Province: reports that Ismail Meshal, a university professor, has been detained by the Taliban. He has since been released. ● University lecturer Ismail Rahmani was arrested in mid-February by the Taliban because of his civic activities. He has since been released. ● 15 February: Jalalabad city, Nangarhar Province: reports that the Taliban arrested Haji Didan, a comic writer, for unknown reasons. ● 27 March, Kabul City, Kabul Province: reports that Taliban arrested Rasoul Abdi Parsi a Sharia faculty professor on 1 March. The professor is being detained at an unknown location. ● Khost Province: reports on the findings of a young man’s body. The man was identified as Sayed Wali, writer, and poet.
<p>Detentions of media workers by Taliban</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 06 January, Firoz Koh city, Ghor Province: reports that the Taliban court sentenced two Ghor National TV employees and a former host of the agency to prison on charges of forging documents. ● 09 February, Kabul city, Kabul Province: reports that recently detained journalist Aziz Mohammad Azizi was released from Taliban prison the previous Thursday. He had signs of torture. ● 16 February, Kandahar city, Kandahar Province: the Afghanistan Free Media Support Office (NEY) said the Taliban have arrested and tortured Yar Mohammad Majroh, local journalist working for TOLO News. ● February: International media rights group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) issued a statement calling for the release of French-Afghan reporter Mortaza Bahboudi.
<p>Detentions of civilians for social media posts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 03 January, Firoz Koh city, Ghor Province: reports that Engineer Majid Ahmadi was arrested for criticizing the Taliban's ban on women's education on social media. ● 27 February, Ghazni city, Ghazni Province: reports that a young man was arrested by the Taliban for posting critical comments about the Taliban on his Facebook page.



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 training 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 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 January and March 2023, 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.