

## ***U.N. Votes to Appoint Human Rights Watchdog in Afghanistan***

The Human Rights Council in Geneva adopted a resolution to install a special rapporteur and a team of experts to monitor human rights under the Taliban.

**By Nick Cumming-Bruce**

Published Oct. 7, 2021 Updated Oct. 15, 2021

GENEVA — Spurred by mounting evidence of Taliban abuses since the group seized power two months ago, the United Nations top human rights body voted Thursday to appoint an independent expert backed by specialist advisers to investigate and report on abuses in Afghanistan.

The Human Rights Council in Geneva adopted a European Union-led resolution endorsed by 50 mainly European and Latin American countries that will install, by March of next year, a special rapporteur and a team of technical experts to monitor human rights there.

China condemned the initiative for overlooking the abuses by American forces and their allies over the past 20 years. Russia, challenging the “biased, imbalanced and destructive” resolution, also took aim at America’s “hasty and irresponsible withdrawal” without ensuring a smooth transition of power.

But the 47-member council, after discarding a series of hostile amendments proposed by China, voted 28 to 5 in favor of the resolution, with 14 members abstaining.

Taliban officials did not respond to a request for comment.

Afghanistan’s ambassador to the U.N., Nasir Andisha, appointed by the former government but still representing the country in Geneva, delivered a strongly worded condemnation of the new Taliban government, which includes only a few non-Pashtuns and no women at all, and which he accused of a “litany of human rights abuses,” including summary killings and ethnic cleansing carried out in the past two months.



Nasir Andisha during a special session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva in August. Denis Balibouse/Reuters

“Further violations are all but certain,” he said.

Human rights groups say they hope the council’s action may curb the harshest excesses of Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers, who are currently seeking international recognition and support to cope with a humanitarian crisis and a collapsing economy.

“It sends the Taliban a message that the world is watching, and their violations and abuses are being documented,” said John Fisher, Human Rights Watch’s director in Geneva.

Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. human rights commissioner, had called for a fact-finding mission at a special session of the Human Rights Council on Afghanistan in August, citing evidence of widespread abuses. But Pakistan and Organization of Islamic Cooperation members, who'd called that meeting, rejected moves to investigate actions by a Taliban government that was still taking shape.

Two months later, demands for oversight gained traction, after a Taliban government dominated by hard-liners had swiftly discarded earlier promises of amnesty for former members of security services; sharply restricted movement and education for women and girls; and cowed independent media through the detention and physical abuse of journalists.



Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, speaking at the Human Rights Council in Geneva last month. Fabrice Coffrini/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Targeted killings are “continuously happening,” and in some areas are a daily occurrence, Shaharзад Akbar, the head of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, said by phone from a location outside the country ahead of the council’s vote. Most victims are former army or police officers and their families, she said, but there are also reports of former prosecutors being killed.

The unlawful killing reported by Amnesty International this week of 13 members of Afghanistan’s Hazara minority, including a 17-year-old girl, has amplified fears for ethnic and religious minorities amid reports that the Taliban are evicting Hazaras from their homes. The Taliban have challenged these reports in the media as inaccurate.

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Human rights groups, including Amnesty International, criticized the European Union for limiting its initiative to the appointment of a special rapporteur instead of leveraging broad international support for more robust measures.

### Understand the Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan

**Who are the Taliban?** The Taliban arose in 1994 amid the turmoil that came after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989. They used brutal public punishments, including floggings, amputations and mass executions, to enforce their rules. Here’s more on their origin story and their record as rulers.

“Given the gravity of the human rights crisis enveloping Afghanistan, today’s resolution fell short of the robust response we had hoped to see from the Human Rights Council,” said Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International’s Secretary General, in a statement. “An independent, international investigative mechanism, with powers to document and gather evidence for future prosecutions, is critical to ensure justice, truth and reparation for the crimes under international law and human rights violations that are being committed.”



A damaged U.N. vehicle outside the Kabul airport in September. Jim Huylebroek for The New York Times

The United Nations has 55 unpaid independent experts working as special rapporteurs monitoring developments in crisis-hit countries and on human rights issues, but a lack of resources constrains many of them.

Still, the E.U. resolution provides for the United Nations to recruit additional experts specializing in forensics, legal analysis and issues such as torture and the rights of women and minorities.

The vote was also a contrast to one on independent international scrutiny of the seven-year conflict in Yemen. A group of experts have documented war crimes there in the past two years, but a resolution to extend their mandate for another two years failed after a fierce lobbying campaign by Saudi Arabia.

“Words cannot describe our disappointment in U.N. member states today,” Radhya Almutawakel, who leads Mwatana for Human Rights, an independent Yemeni organization, said in a statement.

By voting against the renewal of the experts’ mandate, “they have voted to abandon the Yemeni people,” she said.