

# Afghan women to be banned from playing sport, Taliban say

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## **National cricket team included in prohibition, as interim government containing no women starts work**

Afghan women, including the country's women's cricket team, will be banned from playing sport under the new [Taliban](#) government, according to an official in the hardline Islamist group.

In an interview with the Australian broadcaster SBS, the deputy head of the Taliban's cultural commission, Ahmadullah Wasiq, said women's sport was considered neither appropriate nor necessary.

"I don't think women will be allowed to play cricket because it is not necessary that women should play cricket," Wasiq said. "In cricket, they might face a situation where their face and body will not be covered. Islam does not allow women to be seen like this.

"It is the media era, and there will be photos and videos, and then people watch it. Islam and the Islamic Emirate [Afghanistan] do not allow women to play cricket or play the kind of sports where they get exposed."

A new Taliban interim government drawn exclusively from loyalist ranks formally began work on Wednesday, with [established hardliners in all key posts](#) and no women - despite previous promises to form an inclusive administration.

The US state department expressed concern that the new cabinet included only Taliban, no women, and personalities with troubling track records, but said the new administration would be judged by its actions.

The carefully worded statement noted the cabinet was interim, but said the Taliban would be held to their promise to give safe passage to foreign nationals and Afghans, with proper travel documents, and ensure Afghan soil would not be used as a base to harm another state.

"The world is watching closely," the statement said.

The EU also condemned the new government for its lack of inclusion, saying it failed to honour vows from the new rulers to include different groups.

"Upon initial analysis of the names announced, it does not look like the inclusive and representative formation in terms of the rich ethnic and religious diversity of Afghanistan we hoped to see and that the Taliban were promising over the past weeks," an EU spokesperson said.

Germany, China and Japan also offered a lukewarm reception on Wednesday to the Taliban's provisional government in Afghanistan, after the Islamist militants' lightning seizure of Kabul last

month.

The German foreign minister, Heiko Maas, added that the composition encouraged little optimism that the Taliban had changed. "The announcement of a transitional government without the participation of other groups and yesterday's violence against demonstrators and journalists in Kabul are not signals that give cause for optimism," he said.

The [issue of women's rights](#) is likely to dominate how the regime is judged by the international community, with the stance on women's sport and the all-male government being ominous warning signs.

While a policy statement released to accompany the announcement of the new cabinet sought to allay fears of Afghanistan's neighbours and the rest of the world, women - unlike minorities - were not mentioned once in its three pages.

While officials at the Afghanistan cricket board say they have not been informed officially of the fate of women's cricket, the board's programme for girls has already been suspended.

Sportswomen, including cricketers, have been in hiding in Afghanistan since the Taliban swept to power amid a precipitate US-led withdrawal of foreign forces last month, with some women reporting threats of violence from Taliban fighters if they are caught playing.

The ban on playing sport comes amid mounting evidence that the Taliban's attitude towards women has barely moderated since they were last in power, despite claims to the contrary.

As the Taliban have transitioned from militant force to governing power, they are facing opposition to their rule, with scattered protests - many with women at the forefront - breaking out in cities across the country.

A small rally in the capital, Kabul, on Wednesday was quickly dispersed by armed Taliban security, while Afghan media reported that a protest in the north-eastern city of Faizabad was also broken up. Hundreds protested on Tuesday, both in the capital and in the city of Herat, where two people were shot dead.

Notorious for their brutal and oppressive rule from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban had promised a more inclusive government this time. However, all the top positions were handed to key leaders from the movement and the Haqqani network - the most violent faction of the Taliban, known for devastating attacks.

Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund - a senior minister during the Taliban's reign in the 1990s - was appointed interim prime minister, the group's chief spokesperson said at a press conference in Kabul.

Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, the son of the Taliban founder and late supreme leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, was named defence minister, while the position of interior minister was given to Sirajuddin Haqqani, the leader of the Haqqani network.

The Taliban co-founder Abdul Ghani Baradar, who oversaw the signing of the US withdrawal agreement in 2020, was appointed deputy prime minister.

"We will try to take people from other parts of the country," the spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, said, adding that it was an interim government.

Hibatullah Akhundzada, the secretive supreme leader of the Taliban, released a statement saying the new government would “work hard towards upholding Islamic rules and sharia law”.

The Taliban had made repeated pledges in recent days to rule with greater moderation than they had in their last stint in power.

“The new Taliban is virtually the same as the old Taliban,” [tweeted](#) Bill Roggio, the managing editor of the US-based Long War Journal.

“It’s not at all inclusive, and that’s no surprise whatsoever,” said Michael Kugelman, a south Asia expert at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

**Peter Beaumont**

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**P.S.**

• The Guardian. TWed 8 Sep 2021 11.32 BST:

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