

Afghan Women marching in rare protest in Kabul face violence from the Taliban

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KABUL, Afghanistan – Taliban security forces opened fire over the heads of women who staged a rare protest in Kabul on Saturday — a violent crackdown coming just two days ahead of the one-year anniversary of the group sweeping to power in Afghanistan.

There were no immediate reports of injuries.

About two dozen women marched down a main street of Kabul chanting "bread, work, freedom," "we want political participation" and "no to enslavement."

The protesters unfurled a large banner announcing the anniversary of the Taliban's resumption of power as a day of solidarity with Afghan women. They also demanded the international community step up to help them.

"It was important because it's nearly the first anniversary of the Taliban rule and we wanted to say that we don't consent to this government," said one young woman who spoke to NPR after the protest. She requested anonymity so she couldn't be identified by Taliban authorities.

"After a year of this government, there is no change in the situation. We are showing that we won't stay silent," she said. "It's important to show the world that Afghans don't accept this. We will stand against injustice."

Protesters in Kabul Saturday marked the anniversary of the Taliban's resumption of power as a day of solidarity with Afghan women. The protesters also demanded the international community step up to help them.

As the women marched, Taliban security forces began grabbing the phones and cameras of Afghan journalists and male international correspondents. They grabbed the phone of a boy on a bicycle who tried to take a photo.

Then, in what appeared to be a coordinated move, they opened fire in the air above the protesters, quickly dispersing them. Taliban security forces have used live fire to disperse protests in the past. But the fire this time was unusually intense: Multiple gunmen fired rapidly in the air, leaving bullet casings strewn across the street.

Several reporters were detained, and at least three remain in custody.

The return of the Taliban to power ended four decades of conflict and has largely made the country secure. But they have dramatically curbed women's rights, preventing most girls from attending secondary school, banning women from traveling alone and making it difficult for them to work.

They've also cracked down on those criticizing their rule, which has chiefly been women demanding their equal rights.

Meanwhile, sanctions have paralysed the economy and plunged the country into a major humanitarian crisis with many Afghans going hungry. Major aid groups and human rights

organizations have pleaded with the international community not to forget the plight of ordinary Afghans, and to allow commerce and trade to continue.

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