

# *'Bread and Roses' spotlights Taliban's treatment of women*

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There is a beautiful line in Ken Loach's 2000 film "Bread and Roses" when, at a strike by immigrant janitors in Los Angeles demanding better wages, they scream, "We want bread, but we also want roses."

Afghan helmer Sahra Mani's 2023 Cannes Film Festival entry "Bread and Roses" has reminders of Loach's flick, not least in its title. Mani's hard-hitting documentary is also about a protest, this time by three women - Zahra, Taranom, and Sharifa - crushed at seeing their lives crash when the Taliban took over Kabul in 2021.

In 2018, Mani directed "A

Thousand Girls Like Me" that followed the story of a young Afghan woman out to expose the cruelty she suffered within the confines of her home and family. It also touched upon the country's unfair judicial system.

In her latest movie, produced by Hollywood star Jennifer Lawrence, Mani illustrates the horrific experiences of women under the Taliban's rule.

Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, the country has become the most repressive in the world for women and girls, deprived of many of their basic rights, the United Nations said in March.

In a statement released on International Women's Day, the

Text



**A scene from Afghan helmer Sahra Mani's Cannes entry 'Bread and Roses.'** Supplied

UN mission said that Afghanistan's new rulers have shown an almost "singular focus on imposing rules that leave most women and girls effectively trapped in their homes."

The film also exposes the absence of wider protests across

the globe that could have reined in the Taliban to an extent, and viewers are left with the feeling that Afghanistan was, in any case, a society dominated by a system of patriarchy in recent history. Nevertheless, the world community

looked the other way as the Taliban targeted women.

The work benefits from the lack of a narrator as the director trusts her audience to grapple with the reality of what is happening, illustrated by her up close-and-personal style of filming.

The documentary also explores how women have recently stepped up their fight against the iron-fisted Taliban regime with an on-the-ground perspective that is justifiably angry in tone.

The most heart-breaking part of the film comes when young school-girls scream that they want the Taliban out. They realise that until something changes, their lives will be almost impossibly difficult.