



International Association of Women Judges

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IAWJ Statement on Afghanistan

The International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), has grave fears for the basic human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan as the Taliban advance and take control of large parts of the country. This includes the right of women to live and work in safety and security.

As an organization comprised of over 6500 women judges from more than 100 countries and territories worldwide, we want to draw particular attention to the situation of Afghan women judges, given the special role they have played and are still playing, in upholding the rule of law and human rights for all, and the particular dangers they face as a result. We honour their commitment and their courage.

Since 2003, the IAWJ has been supporting the women judges of Afghanistan in their work. Today, some 270 women serve as judges there. Over 100 of these judges are members of the Afghan Women Judges Association (AWJA), which is affiliated with the IAWJ. Some board members of the IAWJ spoke with a number of Afghan women judges in July at a virtual meeting of the AWJA.

The women judges present at the meeting gave an urgent and critical message to their international colleagues. One by one they spoke about the dangerous and difficult conditions in which they live and work. Some judges have lost their lives in terrorist attacks and several of the judges present had received threats. The judges stated that they love their country and do not wish to leave. They just ask that they be allowed to continue their vital work in their country's courts in safety and security. We have since had numerous follow up messages from our members outlining the deteriorating situation. Some have already been forced to flee their posts in the provinces with their families because it was too dangerous to remain.

The IAWJ urges those involved in any peace negotiations to ensure that the rights of women and girls are safeguarded. The IAWJ, however, remains very concerned that, due to the nature of their work and the past rulings they have made in criminal, anti corruption and family courts, many of the women judges and their families will be in particular danger if the Taliban reach Kabul. These dangers are exacerbated by their gender and the likelihood that persons they have sentenced will be released from prison.

The IAWJ urges governments to include the Afghan women judges and their families, who are in such a desperate and precarious position, in the special measures extended to interpreters, journalists and other personnel who provided essential service to the foreign military forces in Afghanistan. By serving as judges and helping develop the Afghan judicial branch, women judges have helped establish the rule of law in their country, an essential pillar of a democratic state. Allowing them to be at the mercy of the Taliban and insurgent groups, given what they have sacrificed, would be tragic indeed.

Justice Susan Glazebrook
President of the IAWJ