



FREEDOM NOW



Alliance for Human Rights in Afghanistan

Joint Statement

Afghanistan: Taliban de-facto authorities must end chilling crackdown on dissent

26 April 2023

We, the undersigned, express our deepest concern regarding the Taliban's systematic crackdown on dissent and deepening repression of human rights defenders in Afghanistan. This ongoing crackdown on critical voices has increased in scope and scale, sending a chilling effect that aims to stifle the exercise of the right to freedom of expression in the country. [Morteza Behboodi](#), a journalist arrested in January, [Sayed Mohammad Hosseini](#), the founder of the cultural-artistic foundation of the Voice of the Countryman arrested in March, and [Matiullah Wesa](#) a prominent education activist arrested in March, , [Kazem Amini](#) a writer and poet arrested in April, are still held in arbitrary detention at the time of publication of this statement. According to the media and Wesa's family members, they have not been allowed to visit the activist and there

have been no avenues to challenge the legality of his detention. Among those arbitrarily detained, the Taliban spokesperson has only confirmed Wesa's arrest alleging that he was involved in "illegal activities".

These recent arrests and detentions come in a context of widespread repression of and attacks against Afghan civil society. Since August 2021, the Taliban have repeatedly conducted raids on the offices of non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), arrested dozens of human rights defenders, arbitrarily detained peaceful protesters, subjected them to torture and other ill-treatment, banned women working in national and international NGOs as well as proceeded to shut down scores of media outlets. In the absence of a clear legal framework and functioning judiciary, those impacted are left with no means to defend their rights.

These recent arrests are a clear act of reprisal against those expressing dissenting views on social media, peacefully protesting the Taliban's draconian policies and practices, particularly those concerning women and girls' right to education, and engaging with the international community and United Nations human rights mechanisms, as well as those being active members of human rights organizations. Such systematic and unlawful actions to silence criticism of the Taliban's rule are exacerbating human rights violations in Afghanistan and must stop immediately.

Therefore, the members of the Alliance for Human Rights in Afghanistan call on the Taliban de-facto authorities in Afghanistan to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release all those arbitrarily detained solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association.
- Immediately disclose the whereabouts of detainees and ensure that persons arrested or detained are held in official places of detention, and their families and lawyers have access to them and are fully informed of their location at all times
- Guarantee that those arrested and detained are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, including prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement
- Ensure that all those detained are treated in line with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, including by allowing regular access to family visits and a lawyer of their choosing, as well as any medical care they may require

Background:

Since the Taliban's return to power on 15 August 2021, restrictions on women's rights, media freedom and freedom of expression increased exponentially. Institutions designed to support human rights were severely limited or shut down completely. Peaceful protesters have faced arbitrary arrests, torture and enforced disappearance. The Taliban continue to conduct, with impunity, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, torture, and unlawful detention of perceived opponents, creating an atmosphere of fear. Extreme poverty has increased, exacerbated by the loss of foreign aid, sanctions, drought and

other natural disasters. Public executions and floggings are used as punishment for crimes such as murder, theft, “illegitimate” relationships or perceived violations of social norms. Draconian policies continue being introduced to attack women’s rights. Afghanistan is the only country in the world where girls are banned from attending most formal education including secondary schools and universities. Almost all institutions set up to address gender-based violence under the former government have been shut down by the Taliban.

In response to the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, several human rights organisations came together in March 2022 to establish the [‘Alliance for Human rights in Afghanistan’](#) with an aim to collectively monitor the dire human rights situation in Afghanistan and advocate for the protection of human rights and accountability for all violations and abuses. Through this alliance, the member organisations collaborate on joint advocacy, research, awareness raising, and mobilisation, as well as on documentation and reporting of human rights violations and abuses in Afghanistan.

SIGNATORIES

Amnesty International

Front Line Defenders

Freedom House

Freedom Now

Human Rights Watch

MADRE

The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)