

[Statement] Afghanistan: Release human rights defenders unjustly detained by the Taliban in Afghanistan

(Bangkok, 29 September 2023) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is calling for the immediate release of human rights defenders detained by the Taliban in Afghanistan, namely, Zholia Parsi, Neda Parwani, Matiullah Wesa, Rasul Abdi Parsi, and Mortaza Behboodi.

On 27 September 2023, the Taliban reportedly arrested women's rights defender Zholia Parsi at her own home in Kabul. She is part of women-led movements protesting the Taliban's policies and restrictions against women and girls' rights and freedoms in Afghanistan. Her arrest follows the detention of another woman protestor, Neda Parwani, alongside her husband and four-year old son. Their whereabouts remain unknown. These arrests mark an alarming escalation of efforts to suppress the freedom of speech and peaceful assembly in the country.

Ever since their return to power, the Taliban's repression of human rights defenders has been escalating at an appalling rate. In January, the Taliban arrested Mortaza Behboodi, a [French-Afghan journalist](#), after he arrived in Kabul for an assignment. In March, the Taliban arbitrarily arrested [Matiullah Wesa](#), a well-known education rights activist. A day after his arrest, the Taliban raided his home and confiscated personal belongings. In the same month, the Taliban arrested [Rasul Abdi Parsi](#), a former Islamic studies scholar, for allegedly posting criticisms against the Taliban on social media. Up to this day, all three remain under the Taliban's illegal and unjust detention.

'The arrests and detentions of the defenders, whose whereabouts remain unknown, constitute multiple violations of civil and political rights. In a country where gross and systematic human rights violations are the order of the day, never before has the role of human rights defenders been more important. Thus, the victims have to be surfaced alive and released immediately without conditions,' said Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, FORUM-ASIA Executive Director.

The Taliban broke its own promises of amnesty and 'assurances of safety.' In fact, the Taliban have been systematically dismantling Afghanistan's civic space. They continue to attack, harass, arrest, torture, and murder civilians. Just between August and September, [at least 61 individuals have been killed and 129 have been detained](#) by the Taliban, the Etilaat Roz reported.

Under Taliban rule, Afghanistan has lost its legal system and human rights mechanisms, resulting in widespread abuses, impunity, injustice, and zero accountability.

Call to Action

FORUM-ASIA is concerned about the continuously regressing human rights situation in Afghanistan. We call on the international community to hold the Taliban to account. We urgently call for the following actions;

1. Immediately release Zholia Parsi, Neda Parwani, Matiullah Wesa, Rasul Abdi Parsi, and Mortaza Behboodi.
2. Immediately lift all restrictions on the rights and freedoms of the people of Afghanistan, especially that of women and girls as well as ethnic and religious minorities.
3. Ensure that the people of Afghanistan can freely and safely exercise their fundamental rights, including the right to peaceful protest and association, right to access information, and freedom of expression.
4. For the Taliban to fully respect and abide by Afghanistan's international obligations to uphold fundamental human rights and freedoms.

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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