

## [Statement] Afghanistan: Immediately release arrested Hazara women human rights defenders

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) strongly condemns the arrests of three Hazara women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in Afghanistan. The arrests happened amidst the Taliban's ongoing gender apartheid and persecution of ethnic and religious minorities.

On 28 March 2024, the Taliban [arrested](#) and detained WHRDs Azada Rezaei, Nadia Rezaei, and Elaha Rezaei alongside their brother, Yahya Rezaei. Two of the sisters are minors. In 2022, their sister [Tamana](#) was also detained for 29 days.

The Rezaeis' whereabouts are currently unknown. Taliban representatives have [denied](#) involvement, while the Kabul police have failed to provide any information.

FORUM-ASIA calls for the immediate release of the Rezaei siblings. [We also call for the safe return of WHRD Manizha Sediqqi](#), whose health conditions have been deteriorating under detention.

### The Taliban's persecution of human rights defenders

The Rezaei sisters are members of the Afghan Women's Justice Movement, a women-led initiative that fearlessly challenges the Taliban's discriminatory policies. The Rezaeis belong to the Shia Hazara community, a persecuted ethnic and religious minority in Afghanistan that has endured a ['slow genocide'](#) under the Taliban.

Under Taliban custody, [human rights defenders](#) experience torture and ill-treatment, impacting not only their physical health but also their mental well-being. The threats and harassment also extend to their families, including intimidation, house searches, revenge killing, and enforced marriages.

WHRDs are at the forefront of resisting the Taliban's oppressive regime.

Since the Taliban's illegitimate takeover in 2021, several protest movements have been courageously and peacefully led by WHRDs despite the country's shrinking civic space. However, in the absence of accountability, human rights defenders—within Afghanistan and those in exile—face numerous obstacles as they advocate for the protection and promotion of people's fundamental rights and freedoms.

### Call to Action

FORUM-ASIA calls for the immediate release of the Rezaei siblings alongside all other defenders who have been unjustly detained for their legitimate human rights work.

FORUM-ASIA urges the international community to hold the Taliban accountable for all its atrocious crimes, demanding them to fully respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people of Afghanistan as protected under the country's international human rights commitments. The international community must help in providing hassle-free humanitarian visas and in establishing safe resettlement schemes for human rights

defenders from Afghanistan. Members of vulnerable ethnic and religious groups—such as the Hazaras—should be prioritised in these resettlement processes,’ said Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

We are also calling for greater support for Afghanistan's civil society organisations and activists, including those in exile, to enable them to resume their invaluable advocacy work. Lastly, we demand the establishment of an international investigative accountability mechanism, which is capable of collecting, preserving, and analysing evidence related to all human rights violations in Afghanistan.

**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](http://www.forum-asia.org)

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