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First UA: 35/33 Index: ASA 11/6656/2023 Afghanistan of April 6, 2023

## **AFGHANISTAN**

### **EDUCATION ACTIVIST, MATIULLA WESA, ARBITRARILY ARRESTED**

Matiullah Wesa was arbitrarily arrested by the Taliban's General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) on March 27, 2023. He was returning home from evening prayer at the mosque. Following the arrest, the GDI raided his house the next day and confiscated his personal mobile and laptop.

On March 29, the Taliban spokesperson confirmed his arrest, accusing him of illegal activities. His family have not been allowed to visit him and there has been no avenue to challenge the legality of his detention.

This arrest is a clear violation of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly under international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Afghanistan is a state party.

#### **Write to the Director of Intelligence urging him to:**

- Immediately and unconditionally release Matiullah Wesa.
- Respect the Convention against Discrimination in Education by immediately allowing girls of all ages to attend school and receive education on an equal basis with boys.
- Immediately stop abductions, arbitrary detentions, and torture of those who peacefully campaign for the right to education.

#### **Write to:**

Mr. Abdul Haq Wasiq  
Director of Intelligence  
General Directorate of Intelligence  
Chaharahi Zanbaq  
Kabul  
Afghanistan

#### **And send copies to:**

Foreign Minister  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Ghazian Street Malek Asghar Square,  
Kabul 1011, Afghanistan

His Excellency M. Hassan SOROOSH Y.  
Ambassador  
Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan  
240 Argyle Avenue  
Ottawa, ON K2P 1B9  
Tel: (613) 563-4223; 563-4265 Fax: (613) 563-4962  
Email: [consular@afghanembassy.ca](mailto:consular@afghanembassy.ca)

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Matiullah Wesa is an education activist, founder, and head of PenPath, a collective of 3000 volunteers who campaign in remote districts and provinces of Afghanistan on the importance of education, especially girls' education. PenPath implemented volunteer programs to advance human rights and girls' access to education.

At first, through PenPath Wesa and his colleagues worked with religious scholars and tribal elders to build community support for educating all children, setting up schools in villages where there was no government education, and sent mobile classrooms to the most remote areas.

After the Taliban took control of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021 and barred female education from secondary schools and later universities, Wesa led public campaigns and assemblies demanding the Taliban re-open education institutions for girls and women in Afghanistan. He has been a public figure, sharing progress of his campaigns and engagements, and photos and videos of protests publicly. His advocacy continued to address the importance of education for girls, the need for the immediate re-opening of girls' schools, and their right to an education under Islamic law.

Following his arbitrary arrest, the Taliban have not responded positively to the request for Wesa's release from community elders who have come from across Afghanistan to meet the Taliban.

It is feared that all PenPath members and volunteers that have been engaged in public campaigning on girls' education, peaceful protests and advocacy are at risk. As a result, they have gone into hiding, deleting their social media accounts and fearing their own arrest if Wesa is not released. Prior to Wesa's arrest, the Taliban's GDI have already arbitrarily arrested others including journalists, women activists and academics who had protested the Taliban's draconian policies and publicly criticized them. The fate of these arrested dissidents remains unknown.

In his second report to the UN Human Rights Council, Richard Bennett, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, has documented rapidly shrinking civic space, with human rights defenders, civil society organizations and journalists all facing tremendous pressure. His findings also include that the authorities have increased limitations and surveillance on human rights defenders, who have been subjected to intimidation, including by phone calls, visits to their homes, physical and verbal attacks and arbitrary arrest, creating a climate of fear and sense of desperation.

The Special Rapporteur has raised serious concerns about the safety and protection of human rights defenders who have been changing locations on a regular basis owing to fear of and threats from the

Taliban. He has also reported on the Taliban raiding the premises of several civil society organizations and demanding the names and contact details of the staff and associated individuals, and sometimes their family members.