



TITLE: Women Judges are at High Risk in Afghanistan — How the IAWJ and NAWJ can help

SESSION DATE: October 8, 2021

SESSION TIME: 3:15 PM – 4:30 PM

SESSION DESCRIPTION:

Afghan women judges have performed courageously and with integrity in their judicial duties in the face of amazing odds to uphold the rule of law and hold criminals to account for corruption, drug crimes, and violence against women. In January two women judges were assassinated as they were on their way to work at the Supreme Court. Since then, the Taliban have taken control of Afghanistan and US and allied troops left the country on August 31. The Afghan women judges' future as judges has been erased overnight. Just imagine. Everything a women judge stands for is anathema to the Taliban: the rule of law, a woman holding public authority, a woman sitting in judgment of men. The prisons have been opened, and Taliban members the judges sentenced are on the loose and some are looking for revenge. Taliban members they ruled against in family cases are also threatening them and looking for payback. The women judges are terrified for themselves and their families, in hiding, moving from place to place. Their situation is deteriorating by the day with no compensation, bank accounts frozen, unable to go out for basic necessities or medical care. Education is denied to their daughters.

The IAWJ and NAWJ issued public statements condemning the violence and threats to women judges and asking governments they be protected. The Afghan Women Judges Committee (AWJ Committee) of the IAWJ has also brought the issue to public attention in the media in the US and other countries. We have presented the case to our governments. However, to date, there has been no official recognition that Afghan women judges as a group are uniquely threatened and deserve to be safely evacuated and offered legal status in countries where they can have a future with their families.

The AWJ Committee is assisting women judges and their families as best we can with evacuations and with measures to stay safe while waiting for evacuation assistance. Although 30 families have been brought to safety as of this writing, the great majority, almost 200 families, still remain at risk in Afghanistan. Our resources and capabilities are limited.

Many of you have reached out and asked how you individually and through NAWJ can help our sister judges in such dire need. Many have links to the US and have attended NAWJ and IAWJ conferences. Their association with us has marked them as targets.

Join us for an update on the situation and Q & A.

SPEAKERS:



Hon. Vanessa Ruiz, IAWJ Immediate Past President, District of Columbia Court of Appeals

Vanessa Ruiz is a Senior Judge of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, the highest court of the District of Columbia (Washington DC). Appointed by the U.S. President in 1994, she is the longest serving woman judge on the court. Prior to her judicial appointment, she was the Chief Legal Officer for the District of Columbia (the Attorney General) and engaged in the private practice of law for twenty years.

Judge Ruiz is the Immediate Past President of the International Association of Women Judges and a member of the Advisory Board of the Global Judicial Integrity Network. She chaired the Advisory Committee on Judicial Conduct, charged with the revision and adoption of the Code of Judicial Conduct for the District of Columbia, that also serves as a resource for judges issuing opinions on issues of judicial ethics. She is a Commissioner of the D.C. Access to Justice Commission and has sought to enhance access for vulnerable populations in the judicial system, including those who lack legal representation. She led the effort of the American Bar Association to establish national standards for language services in courts and developed a curriculum for judges to address obstacles for immigrants in courts. Judge Ruiz speaks nationally and internationally on access to justice, judicial independence and ethics and on the indispensable leadership role of women judges. She is a Past President of the (U.S.) National Association of Women Judges, former Trustee of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a member of the American Law Institute. She is a graduate of Georgetown University Law Center (Juris Doctor) and of Wellesley College (Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy), and was awarded a Juris Doctor degree *honoris causa* by the Washington College of Law, American University.



Hon. Patricia Whalen, former International Judge War Crimes Chamber and retired member of Vermont judiciary

Hon. Patricia Whalen has been a judge for more than 20 years, having presided over proceedings in the Vermont and serving for 5 years (2007 - 2012) as an international judge in the War Crimes Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this capacity she served on both the First Instance and Appellate Court. She is a founding member of the Afghan Women Judicial Education Program, a joint project with the International Association of

Women Judges, facilitating cross-cultural judicial learning in both the U.S. and Afghanistan. She served as an official expert representative of the International Association of Women Judges at The Hague Conference on Private International Law (2002-2008). Judge Whalen served as a Special Advisor to the Court in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2012-2014), focusing on judicial education in international law, trial management and judicial trial skills particularly in regards to war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity and gender-based violence. She is currently an advisor to the Center for Peacebuilding in Sanski Most, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Keene, New Hampshire and the War Crimes Research Center in Washington, D.C.