

**NAWJ and IAWJ Join Global Community Focusing on Afghanistan  
to Mark January 24 as “The International Day of the Endangered Lawyer”**

This year – for the first time ever – the NAWJ and the IAWJ joined the international community in observing January 24 as “the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer.” On January 24 of each year, the global community marks the “International Day” to cast a spotlight on the plight of at-risk lawyers in a particular “focus country.” The purpose of the occasion is to seek to improve the lawyers’ situation, by drawing it to the attention of government officials, international institutions, civil society, the media, and the general public. Afghanistan was chosen as the “focus country” for 2023 by the members of the informal international Coalition which each year coordinates the activities surrounding the International Day.

Historically, the activities of the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer have focused solely on lawyers at risk, to the exclusion of prosecutors and judges. However, the members of the Coalition recognized that Afghanistan is a special case, and decided to cover prosecutors and judges, in addition to lawyers, in 2023.

Each year, one of the Coalition’s major responsibilities in preparation for the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer is to research and draft a so-called “Basic Report” on the dangers confronting legal professionals in the focus country. Because the NAWJ and the IAWJ have had such a longstanding relationship with the women judges of Afghanistan, and because the NAWJ and the IAWJ have been extensively involved in efforts to evacuate and resettle Afghan women judges in the wake of the August 2021 Taliban takeover, the NAWJ and the IAWJ made major contributions to the research and drafting of the Basic Report on Afghanistan for the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer 2023, and the dire situation of the country’s women judges is documented in detail throughout the Report. Together with more than two dozen bar associations, law societies, and other NGOs, the NAWJ and the IAWJ “signed on” to the Report, which is available [here](#).

In addition, the NAWJ and the IAWJ participated in two well-attended and very warmly-received webinars presented on January 24, the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer. The NAWJ first presented “Escape From Kabul – and Those Left Behind: The Harrowing ‘Life-or-Death’ Saga of Afghan Women Judges and What You Can Do To Help.” Featured speakers included Immediate Past President of the IAWJ and Past President of the NAWJ Judge Vanessa Ruiz, and Judge Lida Kharooty who previously served on the Anticorruption Court in Afghanistan. The two made a joint presentation, together with former NAWJ President Lisa S. Walsh, International Director of the NAWJ and Director of the IAWJ, who served as Moderator of the program. Judge Delissa A. (“Lisa”) Ridgway – a member of the international Coalition for the Endangered Lawyer – introduced the program.

The speakers’ presentation sought to capture in broad strokes the experiences of Afghan women judges, beginning with the pre-2021 history of the 276 women judges and the courts on which they sat. Threats to the judges’ lives were an everyday fact. The situation became

increasingly tense beginning with the January 2021 murder of two women judges who worked at the Supreme Court. Tensions rose month by month, leading up to the August 2021 Taliban takeover. The speakers explained that the IAWJ had long had a very close relationship with the women judges in Afghanistan and had hosted a number of them in the U.S. in the past. IAWJ members began to receive increasingly urgent messages from the Afghan women judges, expressing concern for themselves and their families. As matters came to a head in mid-August 2021, a small cadre of IAWJ members around the globe mobilized and established a 24/7 Zoom call (which operated for several weeks), which was used to plot a strategy and muster resources to assist the women judges, and to directly counsel them on steps to take to allow the judges and their families to flee to safety. The speakers illustrated their remarks with gripping photos of the waist-deep raw sewage through which many Afghans had to wade to reach Kabul international airport, photos of armed forces atop the cement and barbed wire barricades surrounding the airport, and photos of Judge Ruiz's hand, which Judge Ruiz had marked with a Sharpie pen to show the Afghan women judges how to mark their own hands to signal their identities to the armed forces guarding the airport, so that the soldiers would recognize them and admit them through the gates and into the airport.

The speakers also summarized the IAWJ's continuing efforts to support the Afghan women judges, including the 55 women judges who remain in Afghanistan today, and the women judges who are now languishing in temporary locations (so-called "lily pad" countries), as well as those women judges who are being permanently resettled in the U.S. Judge Kharooty discussed her employment as a scholar with the College of William & Mary in the state of Virginia, as well as the experiences of many of her colleagues. Judge Walsh identified some of the numerous programs that offer some support for the Afghan women judges, including the IAWJ's ongoing rescue effort, the NAWJ's "Mentoring Teams" providing a support network of U.S. women judges for Afghan women judges in the U.S., and the American Bar Association's Pilot Project (which is designed to help Afghan women judges and other legal professionals find justice-sector-related employment, including, where appropriate, re-accrediting themselves in the U.S. through completion of an LL.M. program and the bar exam). Judge Walsh focused in particular on a November 2021 resolution adopted unanimously by the national Conference of Chief Justices, urging state courts throughout the U.S. to identify employment opportunities for Afghan refugees who worked in their country's justice system – a plea which led to New York State's establishment of its "J-CORP" ("Judges for Career Opportunities for Refugees") program, which offers eligible Afghans with justice-sector backgrounds full-time, paid employment as a "court analyst" in the New York state court system. Judge Walsh closed by listing various steps that program attendees can take to help support Afghan women judges, wherever they may be located.

Video of "Escape From Kabul" is available [here](#).

"Escape From Kabul" was immediately followed by "Afghan Lawyers and Judges: The Stark Realities – Then & Now," sponsored by three committees of the International Law Section of the American Bar Association ("ABA") – the International Human Rights Committee, the Middle East Committee, and the U.N. & International Organizations Committee. Symone and Hans

Gaasbeek of the Netherlands, the founders of the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer, opened the program, highlighting the background and history of the International Day, which began as a tiny germ of an idea and has now grown to an annual occasion that spans the globe. The second speaker was Professor Margaret (“Meg”) Satterthwaite of New York University School of Law, who took office as the new United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges & Lawyers just a few short months ago. Professor Satterthwaite surveyed international legal standards and principles governing the protection of judges and lawyers, including the U.N. Basic Principles, focusing particularly on their application to Afghanistan. In her remarks, the Professor referred to a statement that she issued on January 20, together with the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, which is available [here](#).

Judge Lisa Walsh followed Professor Satterthwaite. Judge Walsh focused her remarks on Afghan women judges, although she noted that Afghan male judges, as well as prosecutors and lawyers, both male and female, face many of the same challenges. Judge Walsh summarized the situation of Afghan women judges before the August 2021 Taliban takeover, then described the chaos of evacuation efforts and the IAWJ’s Herculean efforts to help Afghan women judges and their families flee the country for safety. In addition, Judge Walsh underscored the dangers to women judges remaining in Afghanistan, and updated viewers on the situation of Afghan women judges in temporary “lily pad” locations, as well as those who are being resettled in the United States. She emphasized that all have critical needs that are not being met and discussed ways that viewers can help. The final speaker was Henaa Salehi, an Afghan lawyer now employed with Hogan Lovells in the U.S., who “put a real-life face” on Afghan legal professionals, drawing on her own personal experiences in Afghanistan and in the U.S., as well as the experiences of her Afghan friends and colleagues. The webinar was moderated by the Director of the ABA’s Center for Human Rights, Michael Pates.

All in all, the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer was observed this year in a record 40 cities worldwide. The international community has taken notice of the NAWJ’s and IAWJ’s numerous significant contributions to the success of the 2023 observance; and the NAWJ and the IAWJ can be justifiably proud of their role in this latest chapter, educating the world about the desperate plight of Afghan women judges everywhere.