

## Gender Persecution in Afghanistan Accountability Working Group (GPWG)

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### **ICC Prosecutors Seek Warrants Against Taliban for Gender Persecution Afghan Human Rights Advocates Call for Governments to Support Justice for Victims**

Afghan human rights advocates with the Gender Persecution in Afghanistan Accountability Working Group (GPWG) welcome today's announcement that International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutors requested arrest warrants for Taliban leaders Haibatullah Akhundzada, and Abdul Hakim Haqqani, for gender persecution against women, girls and—for the first time in ICC history—LGBTQI+ people. Since seizing power in August 2021, the Taliban have, on the basis of gender, deprived Afghans' fundamental rights, including to education, political participation, work, movement, expression and assembly. They also eliminated services for gender violence.

Women, girls and those who support their rights have been subject to arbitrary arrest, sexual violence and other torture for protesting discrimination. Taliban enforcers stop those they believe don't adhere to their gendered appearance and behavior restrictions and subject them to similar violence, with women, girls and LGBTQI+ people especially vulnerable. They publicly announce floggings of people on charges of "homosexuality" and of women for acts like "running away from home" or "adultery". These acts build on decades of grave crimes committed by all sides to war and conflict in Afghanistan.

"This application for warrants sends a message that the world rejects gender persecution," said Zahra Mousawy, Director of Afghanistan Women's Studies Academy and member of GPWG. "Those the Taliban directly torture are victims, as are women and girls denied fundamental rights to education, movement, work, and more, and LGBTQI+ people forced into hiding. The international community is obligated to ensure these victims have a meaningful role in discussions on Afghanistan's future." She added, "The international community should also expand on these warrants to ensure all perpetrators of grave crimes in Afghanistan, including prior to 2021, are held accountable."

GPWG is a dedicated platform towards achieving justice, visibility and accountability for gender-based crimes in Afghanistan.

"We are witnessing an increase in Afghan girls expressing suicidal thoughts because they feel they have no future. This application for arrest warrants tells them what they already know: depriving their rights to education, movement and work is a crime," said Wazhma Frogh, human rights lawyer and GPWG member.

No one has ever been held accountable for the crime against humanity of gender persecution. This application for warrants represents a significant step towards justice. This is also the first time the ICC has sought to prosecute someone for targeting LGBTQI+ people.

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“For the first time in history we are seeing an official recognition by the ICC of crimes committed against people because they are LGBTQI+,” said Artemis Akbary, GPWG member Director of ALO: Afghan LGBTQI+ organization. “LGBTQI+ people in Afghanistan need our solidarity now more than ever.”

“Crimes committed on the basis of gender have been documented in Afghanistan for years,” said David Osborn, Afghan Witness Project Director and GPWG member. “This announcement underscores the need for greater support for the work of the ICC and other mechanisms, including via creating an independent international investigative mechanism to collect and preserve evidence of rights violations and crimes, including gender persecution.”

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*The Gender Persecution in Afghanistan Accountability Working Group (GPWG) is a dedicated platform towards achieving justice, visibility and accountability for gender-based crimes in Afghanistan. Members serve in their individual capacity.*