

URGENT ACTION

EDUCATION ACTIVIST ARBITRARILY ARRESTED

Matiullah Wesa was arbitrarily arrested by the Taliban's General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) on 27 March 2023, while returning 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 29 March, 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.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

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

Dear Mr. Abdul Haq Wasiq,

I am writing to express my concern about the arbitrary arrest of education activist **Matiullah Wesa**. Founder and head of PenPath, a civil society movement of 3000 volunteers who have been promoting the right to education in Afghanistan, Wesa has been exercising his rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

As you may be aware, Wesa was arrested by members of the Taliban's General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) on 27 March 2023, while returning home from prayers in Kabul. I have been further alarmed to learn that the GDI raided Wesa's house the next day. In addition to confiscating his laptop and mobile, they detained his brothers for several hours for exposing Wesa's arrest to the media and reaching out to the international community.

Two days after his arrest, on 29 March, a Taliban spokesperson confirmed that Wesa had been arrested and was subject to an investigation. Accused of illegal activities, he has not been provided access to his family, nor has he been granted any 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.

I therefore call on you 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.**

Yours sincerely,

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 15 August 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 for 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.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Dari/Farsi/Pashto

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 1 June 2023

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Matiullah Wesa (He/him)