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### **Afghanistan: Human Rights Defender Matiullah Wesa arrested by Taliban in Kabul**

On 27 March 2023, the Taliban arrested human rights defender and education rights campaigner **Matiullah Wesa** from the Khoshhal-Khan area in Kabul. Matiullah Wesa has been campaigning nationally and internationally against the worsening circumstances for women and girls' education in Afghanistan under the Taliban. The Taliban spokesperson has confirmed Matiullah Wesa's arrest stating that this was due to his 'illegal activities'.

[Matiullah Wesa](#) is a prominent human rights defender, advocating for girls' education rights for over 14 years, including prior to the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Matiullah Wesa is the head of PenPath, a local non-governmental organisation that champions education rights, especially girls' education. The human rights defender works to reach the remotest parts of Afghanistan by engaging and collaborating with community leaders to open schools and libraries and by bringing its mobile school and library to remote areas. After the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021, Matiullah Wesa has been a vocal advocate against the bans on girls' education and launched a door-to-door campaign on the issue. He is also actively advocating for those rights on social media.

On 27 March 2023, the human rights defender was reportedly beaten and forcibly abducted from outside a mosque in Kabul following evening prayers. Reports indicate that Taliban threatened Matiullah Wesa's family and seized their phones, documents and computers. Matiullah Wesa's brothers were also briefly detained but were later released with a warning.

The arrest of Matiullah Wesa has triggered widespread condemnation online, demanding the human rights defender's release. Matiullah Wesa's work for the rights of education for girls has been recognised also by the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Afghanistan. On 27 March 2023, the Special Rapporteur urged that the human rights defender's safety is paramount and his legal rights must be respected. On 28 March 2023, the UN Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) demanded the reasons of his arrest and whereabouts to be immediately communicated. Additionally, UNAMA demanded for access to legal representation and contact with family for the human rights defender.

Matiullah Wesa's arrest reflects the de-facto authorities' attempt to silence human rights defenders and those speaking out on women and girls rights. The human rights defender was active on Twitter hours before his arrest, expressing the irreversible and undeniable impact of the closure of schools and ban on girl's education.

Front Line Defenders believes that the arrest of Matiullah Wesa is directly related to his work in the defence of human rights, in particular, the right to education for girls in Afghanistan. Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned for the physical and psychological integrity of Matiullah Wesa.

#### **Front Line Defenders urges the de-facto authorities in Afghanistan to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Matiullah Wesa, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;

2. Ensure that the treatment of Matiullah Wesa, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Inform the family of Matiullah Wesa of the place of his detention, reason for detention, and allow them immediate and unfettered access to him;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Afghanistan and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.