



The Rt. Hon. Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

20 September 2021

Dear Liz,

The safety of women judges in Afghanistan

We are writing to you as Chairs of the International Relations and Defence Committee and Justice and Home Affairs Committee.

We are deeply concerned about the safety of legal professionals in Afghanistan. In particular, we are concerned for the safety of women judges, who are in a uniquely dangerous position. These women have played a vital role in upholding human rights and the rule of law in Afghanistan, and are now in grave danger due to the Taliban takeover.

Afghanistan has around 250 women judges, and most have been unable to leave the country. As you will know, the Taliban have released prisoners across Afghanistan, who are now free to exact revenge on those who imprisoned them. Women judges are particular targets due to the status of their gender under the Taliban regime. There have been reports of house-to-house searches and raids of women judges' houses, and many are now in hiding, fearful for their lives.

Your predecessor told the Foreign Affairs Committee on 1 September that the UK had been able to evacuate nine judges from Afghanistan. Two weeks later, the same figure was repeated by the then Justice Secretary to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, indicating that no further evacuations had taken place in the intervening period. While every evacuation is to be celebrated, there is much more work to be done to help the majority of judges who have been left behind, particularly those most in danger due to their gender.

We urge you to do all you can to expedite the evacuation of women judges and their families from Afghanistan, and to offer them a path to settlement in the UK. This is an urgent request; we are deeply concerned that any delay will result in deaths. We would be grateful if you could inform us of any plans you have to bring these women and their families to safety.

We are copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Justice.

Yours sincerely,

Baroness Anelay of St Johns
Chair, International Relations and Defence Committee

Baroness Hamwee
Chair, Justice and Home Affairs Committee