



By: TA | AP Brief

ICC issues arrest warrants for Taliban leaders



The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for the Taliban's supreme leader and the head of Afghanistan's Supreme Court on charges of persecuting women and girls since seizing power nearly four years ago.

The warrants also accuse the leaders of persecuting "other persons nonconforming with the Taliban's policy on gender, gender identity or expression; and on political grounds against persons perceived as 'allies of girls and women.'"

The warrants were issued against Taliban supreme leader Hibatullah Akhunzada and the head of the Supreme Court, Abdul Hakim Haqqani.

The court's prosecution office called the decision to issue warrants "an important vindication and acknowledgment of the rights of Afghan women and girls."

It added that the judges' ruling "also recognizes the rights and lived experiences of persons whom the Taliban perceived as not conforming with their ideological expectations of gender identity or expression, such as members of the LGBTQI+ community, and persons whom the Taliban perceived as allies of girls and women."

Zabihullah Mujahid, the chief spokesman for the Taliban government, rejected the court's authority.

He said in a statement that the court's decision reflected "open hostility and hatred toward the holy religion of Islam and Shariah law," and is "an insult to the beliefs of all Muslims."

The UN Resolution

The warrants came just hours after the United Nations adopted a **resolution** Monday over U.S. objections that called on the Taliban to reverse their worsening oppression of women and girls and eliminate all terrorist organizations.

They are the latest high-profile suspects named in arrest warrants issued by The Hague-

based court that also has sought the arrest of other leaders **including** Russian President Vladimir Putin and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Since returning to power in Afghanistan in 2021, the Taliban have imposed harsh **measures**, banning women from public places and girls from attending school beyond the sixth grade. Last week, Russia became the first country to formally **recognize** the Taliban's government.

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The court said in a statement that the Taliban have "severely deprived, through decrees and edicts, girls and women of the rights to education, privacy and family life and the freedoms of movement, expression, thought, conscience and religion."

The court's chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, sought the warrants in January, saying that they recognized that "Afghan women and girls as well as the LGBTQI+ community are facing an unprecedented, unconscionable and ongoing persecution by the Taliban."

Global advocacy group Human Rights Watch welcomed the decision, and urged the international community to help enforce the court's warrants.

"Senior Taliban leaders are now wanted men for their alleged persecution of women, girls, and gender-nonconforming people," Liz Evenson, the group's international justice director, said in a statement.

Domestic investigations

ICC judges approved a request in 2022 from the prosecutor to **reopen** an investigation into Afghanistan. The probe was shelved after

Kabul said it could handle the investigation.

Khan said he wanted to reopen the inquiry because under the Taliban, there was “no longer the prospect of genuine and effective domestic investigations” in Afghanistan.

Khan’s predecessor, Fatou Bensouda, got approval in 2020 to start looking at offenses allegedly committed by Afghan government forces, the Taliban, American troops and U.S. foreign intelligence operatives dating back to 2002.

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He said he would “deprioritize” other aspects of the investigation, such as crimes committed by Americans.

The warrants for Taliban leaders were issued while Khan has stepped down temporarily pending the outcome of an investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct.

Khan has categorically denied accusations that he tried for more than a year to coerce a female aide into a sexual relationship and groped her against her will.