



THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE | TE TARI TOKO I TE TUMU WHAKAWĀ

## MEDIA STATEMENT

17 August 2021

Justice Susan Glazebrook, the President of the International Association of Women Judges, has called on the New Zealand Government to play a part in securing safe passage and refuge for Afghan women judges and their families who face grave danger now that the Taliban has taken control of Afghanistan.

There are 250 women judges in Afghanistan. While all members of the judiciary are at risk under the Taliban rule, women judges are a particular target, Justice Glazebrook said today.

“We know from the last time that the Taliban came to power in the 1990s that judges were targeted. We have no reason to be optimistic today. Women judges are particularly at risk of revenge attacks because the Taliban and their allies consider it unacceptable for women to sit in judgment over men.”

Justice Glazebrook, in her role as President of the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), has been in contact with women judges in Afghanistan over recent days. They were already facing great personal risk—in January two women judges were assassinated on their way to court—but she says that the events of the last week place them under immediate and ongoing threat.

“They are understandably frightened and the IAWJ is very concerned for their safety. Due to the nature of their work and the past rulings they have made in criminal, anti-corruption and family courts, the women judges and their families face real danger. We understand that the Taliban has already released prisoners, even from the high security prisons, and that judges are receiving calls with threats along the lines of ‘where will you hide now?’”

The IAWJ is calling on governments around the world to include Afghan women judges and their families in the special measures extended to

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interpreters, journalists and other personnel who provided essential service to the foreign military forces in Afghanistan, Justice Glazebrook said.

“Women judges have helped establish the rule of law in their country, an essential pillar of a democratic state. Allowing them to be at the mercy of the Taliban and insurgent groups, given what they have sacrificed, would be tragic indeed.”

Afghan women judges have forged strong connections with the New Zealand judiciary in recent years. In 2013, New Zealand hosted six judges from Afghanistan, who visited courts and pivotal organisations such as Women’s Refuge, following an IAWJ regional conference.

In May of this year, 37 Afghan women judges attended, remotely, the IAWJ conference hosted in Auckland, with two of their number speaking at the conference on the daily risks they faced going to work. This connection creates a responsibility to act, Justice Glazebrook said.

“The international community, including New Zealand, encouraged the women of Afghanistan to take up their studies and to take on positions of responsibility in the community. Members of our judiciary have been supporting these judges in their roles for many years. Now they need more than our support—they need us to act quickly to secure their safety. I call upon the government to offer some of these courageous women judges and their families safe passage and refuge here in Aotearoa New Zealand as part of the humanitarian response to this situation.”

### **Background information on the IAWJ**

The International Association of Women Judges is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation whose members represent all levels of the judiciary worldwide and share a commitment to equal justice for women and the rule of law. Created in 1991, the IAWJ has grown to a membership of over 6500 in 100 countries and territories.

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Justice Glazebrook was appointed as President of the IAWJ in May of this year at the IAWJ biennial conference which was held in Auckland and attended—in-person and online—by approximately 1000 women judges from around the world.

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