Afghanistan: Grave risks for jurists, particularly women, and threats to Afghanistan’s independent legal profession

Mr. President,

This is a joint statement of several lawyers’ organizations. We are alarmed by the demise of the rule of law in Afghanistan since the Taliban’s unlawful armed takeover of the country in August 2021 and its forcible takeover of the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association in November 2021.¹

The High Commissioner’s previous oral report in March 2022 noted that the safety of “Afghan judges, prosecutors and lawyers…, particularly women legal professionals,” is a matter of “acute concern.”² The newly-appointed Special Rapporteur for Afghanistan expressed similar concerns after his May 2022 country visit.³

Women jurists are at particular risk as the Taliban intensifies its restrictions on women’s and girls’ rights and attempts to erase⁴ women from public life. Many women jurists have escaped Afghanistan and await resettlement as refugees; many others await assistance to flee the country. Many are in hiding.⁵ Women legal professionals from the Hazara community face added discrimination based on their ethnicity and religion.

We urge this Council to hold an urgent debate at this session to refocus global attention on the worsening human rights crisis in Afghanistan. We also urge all States to redouble efforts to protect Afghan legal professionals, particularly women, both resettling refugees and protecting those at risk within Afghanistan.

Thank you, Mr. President.