

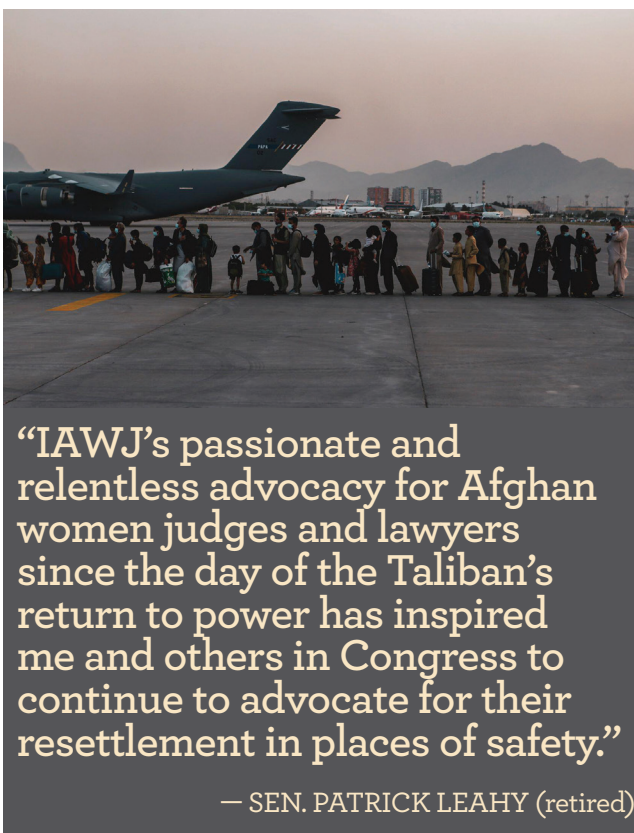
from THE BOLCH JUDICIAL INSTITUTE

## International Association of Women Judges to receive 2023 Bolch Prize for the Rule of Law

**The Bolch Judicial Institute has named the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) as the 2023 recipient of the Bolch Prize for the Rule of Law in recognition of its remarkable efforts to evacuate, support, and resettle Afghan women judges who have faced persecution and violence since the Taliban took control of the country in late 2021.**

The IAWJ includes over 6,500 members from all levels of the judiciary in more than 100 countries and territories around the world. It works to realize gender equality, respect for human rights, and inclusive justice systems by supporting and empowering its global network of women judges and supporters. Under the leadership of New Zealand Supreme Court Justice Susan Glazebrook, president of the IAWJ, and the association's Afghan Support Committee, the IAWJ mobilized member judges from around the world to assist Afghan women judges in the days leading up to and the months following the collapse of Afghanistan's democracy in August 2021. Recognizing the particular dangers Afghanistan's women judges face under Taliban rule, IAWJ members have worked — and continue to work — tirelessly to secure safe passage out of the country for the judges and their families and assist them in obtaining visas and relocating to countries where they can rebuild their lives and careers.

"The IAWJ has led an extraordinary rescue operation, bringing more than 100 Afghan women judges and many of



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— SEN. PATRICK LEAHY (retired)

their families to safety and continuing efforts to assist those who remain," said David F. Levi, director emeritus of the Bolch Judicial Institute. "The Bolch Prize for the Rule of Law recognizes both the heroism of the IAWJ's efforts to assist Afghanistan's women judges and the organization's long history of supporting and advancing women judges and addressing gender inequities in judicial and justice systems around the world. And in honoring the IAWJ, we also honor the incredible courage of Afghanistan's women judges, who broke barriers and risked personal safety to try to build a better future for their country and now call on the international community for help as they work to rebuild their lives."

The Susan and Carl Bolch Jr. Prize for the Rule of Law is awarded annually

by the Bolch Judicial Institute of Duke Law School to an individual or organization that has demonstrated extraordinary dedication to the rule of law and advancing rule of law principles around the world. By recognizing those who do this work, the Bolch Prize draws attention to the ideals of justice and judicial independence and to the constitutional structures and safeguards that undergird a free society.

"I can think of no more deserving and timely recipient of the Bolch Prize than the International Association of Women Judges," said recently retired Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, who has been instrumental in assisting the IAWJ with evacuation and relocation efforts. "IAWJ's passionate and relentless advocacy for Afghan

women judges and lawyers since the day of the Taliban's return to power has inspired me and others in Congress to continue to advocate for their resettlement in places of safety. IAWJ has made us proud by standing up for Afghans who rose to the top of a profession that has been historically closed to them and who risked their lives to establish the rule of law, in a country where doing so could mean death with impunity. They are remarkable role models for women and girls everywhere."

### SPANNING DECADES: THE IAWJ'S WORK IN AFGHANISTAN

In the early 2000s, after the Taliban's ouster in 2001 by international forces, women in Afghanistan leapt at the opportunity to pursue an education

and work outside the home. More than 250 women became judges at all levels of the judiciary as Afghanistan rebuilt its justice system. They endured discrimination and violence, including assassinations, as they pushed the boundaries of their country's traditional expectations for women's roles. For 20 years, they fought for and achieved positions that were once off limits to them, forging new paths for themselves and their country.

In 2003, the IAWJ launched a coordinated effort to assist Afghan women in developing leadership skills and deepening their legal and judicial training. Judge Patricia Whalen, a former Vermont family court judge and a judge of the War Crimes Tribunal for Bosnia and Herzegovina, worked in partnership with Afghan judges and IAWJ executive staff to create an education program that brought Afghan women to Vermont and Washington, D.C., to observe court proceedings, discuss legal issues with American judges, and meet women leaders in business, politics, and law. These exchanges expanded into conferences, educational programs, and friendships.

"The members of IAWJ have a long-standing relationship with their sister judges in Afghanistan, and even before the Taliban's takeover of the country, IAWJ predicted and prepared for the disaster that has ensued. The courage displayed by the women judges in Afghanistan is mirrored by that of IAWJ, and by its commitment to saving every single one of these judges," said Virginia Sloan, a member of the IAWJ Board of Managerial Trustees and founder of The Constitution Project.

### AN EMERGENCY RESCUE

When the Taliban began to reclaim power over the summer of 2021, the IAWJ was well aware of the risks to its

members in Afghanistan. The fact that these women were educated, held jobs, and had sat in judgment of men would make them especially vulnerable to retribution from the Taliban, which in many areas of the country has reimposed restrictions on women in public life, shut down girls' schools and universities, forbidden women from leaving their homes without a male chaperone, and forced women to wear full body and face coverings in public.

"On the 15th of August of 2021, after 20 years of democracy-building initiatives, the Taliban reclaimed Afghanistan's capital city, Kabul, placing the 250 Afghan women judges and their families in mortal danger not only of retribution from the Taliban but also of private revenge attacks from the criminals and terrorists the Taliban had released from prison," said Justice Glazebrook. "A small group from the International Association of Women Judges decided that we would not be true to our values and the values of the IAWJ if we did not try to help these courageous women judges who had already sacrificed so much to uphold the rule of law and gender equality. Over half are now safe in final destinations and starting to rebuild their lives, but we will not be satisfied until we can fulfill the promise we made to our Afghan colleagues and friends not to forget anyone."

### WORK STILL TO BE DONE

Though international troops have long since departed Kabul and global media attention has turned to other crises, the IAWJ continues to work with its valued partners to evacuate all who remain and wish to leave, as well as to assist the women judges who have safely evacuated but still seek permanent residency, new homes for their families, and new careers.

"It is unfortunate that we live in a time when so many forces are working to destroy democratic institutions and undermine the rule of law, when judges around the world face threats of violence and death simply for their efforts to do their jobs," said U.S. District Judge Paul Grimm of the District of Maryland and incoming director of the Bolch Judicial Institute. "The IAWJ has not only done the heroic work of rescuing those women judges whose lives are at immediate risk in Afghanistan, but it also has demonstrated the critical importance of a global community of colleagues who share the values of justice and the rule of law, who can educate the public about the important work that judges do, and who can sound the alarm when catastrophe strikes."

District of Columbia Court of Appeals Judge Vanessa Ruiz, immediate past president of the IAWJ, said that she hopes the Bolch Prize can remind the international legal community that the crisis in Afghanistan is not over.

"It is an honor for IAWJ to receive the Bolch Prize in recognition of our work to help Afghan women judges out of their perilous situation in Afghanistan," said Judge Ruiz. "I hope this will bring attention to their continuing need for support, both to escape from Afghanistan and to make the difficult transition for a positive future in the U.S. and other countries. Their bravery, dignity, and commitment to the rule of law deserve the respect and admiration this recognition will highlight."

— MELINDA MYERS VAUGHN

The IAWJ will be honored at a ceremony at Duke University on March 1. For details, see [judicialstudies.duke.edu](https://judicialstudies.duke.edu) or email [bolchjudicialinstitute@law.duke.edu](mailto:bolchjudicialinstitute@law.duke.edu).