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HRW – Human Rights Watch

Afghan Activists Exposing Child Abuse Detained

November 27, 2019 11:55AM EST Dispatches

Investigate Alleged Rapes by Teachers, Police

When allegations of widespread sexual abuse of children surface, it's supposed to be the perpetrators who get investigated and taken into custody. But not in Afghanistan.

Mohammad Musa Mahmudi and Ehsanullah Hamidi are two members of an advocacy group who reported that government officials in Logar province, including teachers at state schools, have sexually assaulted more than 500 boys (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/nov/25/afghanistan-launches-investigation-into-alleged-school-paedophile-ring>) in recent years. In response to a *Guardian* report (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/nov/13/afghanistan-paedophile-ring-that-abused-over-500-boys>) on their findings, the activists received threats on Facebook (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/afghanistan-release-hrds-now/>), some from local officials. A spokesman for the Logar police denied the accusations (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/25/world/asia/afghan-schools-rape.html>), calling them “rumors,” and the provincial governor threatened to punish the advocacy group for spreading false information.

On November 21, Mahmudi and Hamidi went missing (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/afghanistan-release-hrds-now/>), just hours after Mahmudi tweeted that (<https://twitter.com/amnesty/status/1199299881355108358?s=20>) he feared being arrested by the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Afghanistan's intelligence agency.

On November 26, the NDS said (<https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/ghani-orders-probe-logar-sex-abuse-allegations>) they had taken the men into “protective custody.” But the NDS has a long history of arbitrary detention and torture. They released a video (<https://twitter.com/AfghanistanTime/status/1199267946020982784?s=20>) of Mahmudi and Hamidi, clearly under duress, apologizing for their research, saying it was “incomplete” and “incorrect.”

Detaining human rights activists who expose government officials responsible for widespread sexual abuse of children is not just silencing the messenger, it's a crime. US Ambassador John Bass called (<https://twitter.com/USAmbKabul/status/1199368880596176897?s=20>) the apparently coerced confession a “Soviet-style tactic.”

President Ashraf Ghani said he “disagreed” (https://twitter.com/ARG_AFG/status/1199343337158823937?s=20) with the NDS and ordered the Ministry of Interior to provide protection to the two activists. Both were released today.

Successive Afghan governments have failed to seriously investigate cases of child sexual abuse by police and government officials. These abuses continue (<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/fr/pays/afghanistan/>) even though Afghanistan's new

penal code (<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/fr/pays/afghanistan/>), which came into force in 2018, criminalizes the sexual abuse of boys, known in Afghanistan as *bacha bazi*. Impunity for child rape thrives because very often the perpetrators are powerful men in the military, police, or other official institutions. Even though the practice is now criminal, the law is very seldom enforced.

It's the people who sexually abuse children who should fear arrest, not the activists who risk their lives exposing it.

ecoi.net summary:

Logar province: Detention of 2 activists who exposed child abuse by government officials and teachers

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Afghanistan

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