U.S. woman arrested in Afghanistan among 18 aid workers held for "promoting Christianity," local official says

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<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-us-woman-arrested-aid-workers-taliban-ghor-promoting-christianity/>

Almost 20 staff members of a charity organization operating in central Afghanistan, including one U.S. national, have been arrested by regional officials in the [Taliban-controlled nation](https://www.cbsnews.com/feature/afghanistan-the-way-forward/), a spokesman for the provincial government in Ghor province told CBS News. The 18 detained aid workers were arrested for "propagating and promoting Christianity," a violation of the Taliban's strict regulations on all non-governmental groups, according to Abdul Wahid Hamas, the spokesman for the regional administration in Ghor province.

Hamas told CBS News that all 18 individuals were transferred to the capital Kabul for further investigation. He said previously that one foreign national, an American woman, was among the detained NGO workers.

A local employee of The International Assistance Mission (IAM) in Ghor province also told CBS News, on the condition that he not be named, that the detained foreign employee was a U.S. woman who works at the office.

"At this time, out of respect for the family and our ongoing efforts to ensure their release, we

can't confirm the nationality of the detained foreign worker," IAM told CBS News in a statement.

The Taliban detained "three staff members —— two Afghan nationals and one international team  
member – working at IAM's office in Ghor province on Sunday, 3 September 2023, a further 15  
Afghan national staff members were taken from the same office on Wednesday, 13 September," the group said.

Taliban chief spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told CBS News on Monday that Afghanistan's central government was still gathering information about the detention of the IAM employees in Ghor, and he declined to provide any statement on their arrest or the status of the investigation being carried out by the country's intelligence services.

The IAM employee who spokes with CBS News said his colleagues were arrested by agents from the Taliban's intelligence agency, who carried with them a piece of paper bearing the names of those who were taken into detention.

"They arrested my coworkers whose names were with them and told the rest of us to go home," he said. "They might come back for us, too."

[IAM said](https://iam-afghanistan.org/iam-responds-to-detainment-of-staff-members-and-recent-developments-in-ghor/) it was unaware of the nature of the allegations against its staff but that the organization stood by the principle that, "aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint." It added that "all IAM staff agree to abide by the laws of Afghanistan."

"We are in a state of shock. We are accused of something I never imagined. We are just waiting to see what happens next and when they arrest us," the IAM employee told CBS News.

Since [taking control of Afghanistan more than two years ago](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-afghanistan-taliban-talks-doha-women-rights/) the Taliban have tightened restrictions on nonprofit organizations operating in the country, despite a dire humanitarian situation.

In December last year, the Taliban barred all NGOs, foreign and domestic, including humanitarian  
organizations, from employing women. Many organizations had long employed women to work within local communities, and they were all forced out of their jobs with the Taliban's decree, [severely complicating work to provide everything](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-taliban-ban-afghan-women-un-blow-to-rights-and-humanitarian-work/) from basic nutrition to education.

IAM said in its statement posted online that it has worked in Afghanistan since 1966, "changing lives and empowering communities throughout Afghanistan," and spending more than $40,000,000 in the last decade alone "on initiatives aimed at improving healthcare, education, and community development."