

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, D.C. 20515

September 20, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write to commend you and your administration for evacuating nearly 125,000 people from Afghanistan despite facing immensely challenging circumstances. As you correctly noted, this effort was one of the biggest airlifts in history, and one only the United States is capable of.

Despite these heroic efforts, many Afghans remain at risk inside the country. As we continue our efforts to get as many of these at-risk folks to safety as possible, we write to urge you to ensure that Afghan national United Nations (UN) employees who fear for their safety receive visas and authorization to leave the country with their families. While we support the United Nations maintaining a presence in Afghanistan to the extent possible, as well as delivering humanitarian assistance, this should not come at the expense of Afghan nationals who signed up to work under vastly different circumstances and now face grave threats to their security because of their previous work and other factors. For these members of the UN Afghan staff, we ask that the United States take the lead in working with allies and UN member states to ensure these at-risk Afghans are able to safely leave the country.

Although the United Nations has evacuated several hundred of its international staff from Afghanistan, thousands of Afghan nationals who worked for the UN remain in the country. Many of these Afghans are in hiding because they have credible threats to their security. The Taliban is reportedly targeting Afghans who worked with the U.S. and foreign governments; according to UN internal assessment, this includes Afghans who worked for the UN.<sup>1</sup> These unarmed civilian UN staff have worked for years to promote peace, democracy, and human rights only to find themselves and their families now targeted by the Taliban.

Although the Taliban claims to want a UN presence in Afghanistan, there are multiple signs that members of the UN's Afghan staff are under threat. Since the fall of Kabul, the Taliban have

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<sup>1</sup> Ned Parker and Parniyan Zemaryalai, Michelle Nichols, "Internal UN document says Taliban threatened, beat staff," Reuters, August 25, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/exclusive-internal-un-document-says-taliban-threatened-beat-staff-2021-08-25/>)

occupied and ransacked UN compounds,<sup>2</sup> blocked UN staff from entering UN compounds without the Taliban's permission,<sup>3</sup> threatened and searched the homes of Afghan UN staff,<sup>4</sup> and on at least one occasion, beaten an Afghan UN staff member after finding his UN identification.<sup>5</sup> Many of the UN's Afghan staff are now in hiding, and report feeling "alone and petrified."<sup>6</sup> Some have been shunned by their own communities out of fear that the Taliban will consider others "guilty" by association.

The international community, including all UN member states, have a sacred responsibility to protect Afghans who worked for the UN, as well as their family members. These people have selflessly served as the backbone of the international community's efforts to help the Afghan people. Many are outspoken professional women, symbols to their communities whose very existence is intolerable to the Taliban. It is simply unthinkable to leave them at the mercy of the Taliban.

The UN has said the primary obstacle to evacuating its staff members who are at risk has been member states' failure to issue visas for the staff.<sup>7</sup> We urge you to take the lead in solving this issue. The United States should start by leading by example and issuing visas to some members of the UN's Afghan staff. This should be complimented by urging other UN member states to do their part in issuing visas for Afghan nationals who worked for the UN and are now facing security threats. Finally, we urge you to help ensure the UN's Afghan staff who are at risk have all the guarantees, resources, and assistance needed to safely leave Afghanistan, whether by air or by land.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

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<sup>2</sup> Ned Parker and Michelle Nichols. "Taliban take over some U.N. premises, curb movement -U.N. report." *Reuters.com*, August 24, 2021 (<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-take-over-some-un-premises-curb-movement-un-report-2021-08-24/>)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Ned Parker and Parniyan Zemaryalai, Michelle Nichols, "Internal UN document says Taliban threatened, beat staff," *Reuters*, August 25, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/exclusive-internal-un-document-says-taliban-threatened-beat-staff-2021-08-25/>)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Fiona Shukri, "Afghans Who Work for the UN in Their Country Say They Fear for Their Lives," *PassBlue*, August 20, 2021 (<https://www.passblue.com/2021/08/20/afghans-who-work-for-the-un-in-their-country-say-they-fear-for-their-lives/>)

<sup>7</sup> Megha Rajagopalan, "Foreign UN Staffers Are Evacuating Afghanistan. Local Staffers Say They Have Been Left Behind." *BuzzFeedNews.com*, August 24, 2021 (<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/meghara/un-afghanistan-staffers-taliban>)



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