



Reference: TIGO IOR 10/2021.2102

**Ms Ylva Johansson**

EU Commissioner for Home Affairs

**Mr Josep Borrell**

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/

Vice-President of the European Commission

1 October 2021

Dear Commissioner Johansson,

Dear High Representative Borrell,

## **HIGH LEVEL RESETTLEMENT FORUM: CALLS TO ENABLE THE SAFE PASSAGE AND PROTECTION OF AFGHANS AT RISK**

Ahead of the high-level Resettlement Forum which you have convened on 7 October, Amnesty International would like to share our assessment of the decisive actions that the EU and participating states need to take to enable the safe passage and evacuation of Afghans at risk from Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries. Whilst calling on you to do your utmost to secure pledges from participating states for much needed resettlement of refugees who come from Afghanistan and beyond, we urge you to ensure this event is a ground breaker for coordinated and sustained evacuations of Afghan nationals at heightened risk of retaliation by the Taliban.

A recent research briefing by Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation against Torture (OMCT) documents human rights violations that have taken place in Afghanistan since the takeover by the Taliban on 15 August.<sup>1</sup> The research documents incidents of repression of the rights of women and girls, intimidation faced by human rights defenders, crackdown on freedom of expression, reprisals on former government workers and possible violations of international humanitarian law as well as the challenges faced by those who wish to leave Afghanistan. There have been targeted killing of people who formerly worked for the government, reports of death threats to family members of those who have fled, and – despite the Taliban’s public statements to the contrary – women and girls are being denied access to education, work, and are being prevented from engaging in sport or politics.

While acknowledging the efforts already made by the EU and participating states to secure the evacuation of specific cases of Afghans at risk - along their own citizens and local staff and dependents - efforts must be stepped up to secure evacuation of other people who still face risks, particularly women activists, human rights defenders, civil society activists, academics, journalists, and marginalized groups, and others who are at heightened risk of retaliation from the Taliban. The lives of thousands of women and men who had worked to promote and defend

---

<sup>1</sup> *Afghanistan: The fate of thousands hanging on the balance: Afghanistan falls into the hand of the Taliban*, 21 September 2021 at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/4727/2021/en/>

human rights, gender equality, rule of law, and democratic freedoms in their country are now, more than ever, hanging by a thread.

Those at risk who wish to flee from Afghanistan face immense challenges in leaving the country, both through the airports and through land borders. Pakistan have closed their land borders with Afghanistan, except for people in need of medical treatment or with a proof of residency. Borders with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have also been closed. Taliban authorities currently do not issue passports and Afghan people are not allowed to cross border without passports.

Considering the challenges faced by Afghan people who wish to flee, the EU and countries participating in the Resettlement Forum must take decisive action to arrange or support safe passage and evacuations, particularly via land, for all those at risk of being targeted by the Taliban. To this end, urgent steps must be taken to:

- Issue all necessary documentation (e.g., visa waiver letters, letters exempting from the requirement to hold passports, emergency travel documents for Afghan people without a passport, etc) in local languages to ensure the Taliban allow those at risk to leave Afghanistan and enable onward movement from neighbouring countries.
- Scale up the capacity of embassies, consulates and delegations in neighbouring countries to issue humanitarian visas, or waive visas, to both Afghans in Afghanistan and Afghans in host countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan as well as Turkey.
- Apply flexible and expedited processing of visas to families to facilitate the reunion in Europe of separated members of extended families and use other complementary pathways to immediately bring Afghan people at risk to safety, including student and work visas and community sponsorships.
- Seek bilateral and multilateral agreements from neighbouring countries to establish land corridors and allow the safe transfer of people.
- Ensure Afghan nationals evacuated to relevant countries, or in transit as part of an evacuation effort, are given adequate reception and status.

Afghans who have been evacuated should not be counted within states' 2021 annual resettlement quota, as number of places committed to are already limited. In this regard, we reiterate the calls on the EU and states participating in the Forum to also agree to the following measures:<sup>2</sup>

- Significantly increase resettlement pledges to address ongoing crisis and displacement situations, in line with UNHCR identified priorities.
- In addition to increasing resettlement pledges to address global needs, set up a targeted resettlement and humanitarian admission scheme for vulnerable Afghan refugees in neighbouring and transit countries, which host the vast majority of displaced Afghans.
- Secure the necessary funding from relevant budgets to support resettlement and evacuations needs.

Finally, states participating in the Forum should firmly commit to uphold access to a fair and full asylum process for Afghan and other nationals in Europe and to formally suspend returns of all Afghan nationals, including to

---

<sup>2</sup> See also Joint statement - *The EU cannot shirk its responsibilities towards Afghans in need of international protection*, 16 September 2021

third countries where they may be at risk of being returned to Afghanistan or other countries where they would be at risk.

Thank you for giving your urgent attention to this matter. We stand ready to provide you with more information on the issue, should you require it.

Yours sincerely,

Eve Geddie,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eve Geddie".

Head of Office and Advocacy Director  
Amnesty International – European Institutions Office