



October 23, 2023

The Honorable Joseph Biden  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington DC, 20510

Dear President Biden,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our deep and urgent concern for the safety of Afghan women at high-risk of persecution and violence in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, coupled with the unexpected speed in which the Taliban took control, left Afghan women who worked on behalf of human rights at immediate risk. Many of them were forced to flee to Pakistan. While the situation facing these women has been increasingly unstable and unsafe for years, the recent announcement from the Pakistani government to deport all unregistered immigrants beginning November 1st, has created a pending human and women's rights disaster.

Since the fall of Afghanistan to Taliban control in August 2021, Taliban leadership has systematically oppressed and erased Afghan women and girls, resulting in the loss of their most basic human rights. Despite decades of progress toward equality for Afghan women over the past 20 years—a U.S. foreign policy priority—Afghanistan now ranks [170th](#) out of 170 countries on the Women, Peace, and Security Index.

We applaud the success of Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) in relocating tens of thousands of Afghans to the United States in a relatively short period of time. However, U.S. efforts to evacuate and relocate vulnerable Afghans generally overlooked Afghan women who worked for equal opportunity, peace, democracy, and human rights in Afghanistan for over two decades. OAW prioritized Afghans eligible for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs). While undoubtedly deserving of U.S. protection and relocation, only a small percentage of SIV principal applicants have been women. As of September 2022 the number was just [6 to 14 percent](#). This inequity means countless women have unacceptably been left behind and at risk.

There are alarmingly few pathways to safety for Afghan women. Indeed, relocation and resettlement have largely been out of reach even for women actively targeted by the Taliban for their former roles as political leaders, activists, human rights defenders, educators, and others who worked to build a just and inclusive Afghanistan. These women have feared for their lives for more than two years. The United States needs to swiftly address the backlog of cases and prioritize these women for relocation and case processing through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

Afghans who fled to Pakistan to seek safety are currently in an extremely precarious situation. For more than 15 years the Pakistani government has not registered any newly arriving Afghan refugees. This leaves them without rights, vulnerable to exploitation, and with effectively no options to obtain employment, healthcare, education, or safe housing. Women and girls in these circumstances are at high risk for sexual and gender-based violence. Additionally, women who have fled Afghanistan due to their previous history of political leadership or activism are still vulnerable to Taliban persecution and violence given the Taliban's presence in Pakistan.

As an example, Mina's List is currently supporting a former woman political leader in Pakistan who was the target of an assassination attempt in Afghanistan in 2020. She survived the attack but remains at high risk. While she waits in Pakistan for her USRAP case to be processed, the Pakistani government has denied an extension of her visa. If she, and many other women in similar circumstances, are forcibly returned to Afghanistan, their lives will be in imminent danger.

We ask that the U.S. Departments of State and Homeland Security urgently:

- Prioritize high-risk Afghan women in relocation efforts through whatever means possible— focusing on P-1 and P-2 cases in Pakistan and Afghanistan;
- Surge resources to efficiently vet high-risk Afghan women with P-1 and P-2 case referrals and address the massive backlog in the pipeline of Afghan resettlement cases;
- Ensure that P-1 and P-2 cases referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) from Pakistan and Afghanistan be transferred to Camp As Sayliyah in Doha, Qatar, or another U.S. platform for processing;
- Engage diplomatically with Pakistani officials, urging them to reassess and discontinue their plans to forcibly return Afghan refugees, especially women and girls;
- Ensure a gender lens is applied to all Afghan relocation efforts, taking the particular challenges faced by Afghan women are into account when creating and implementing programs including new pathways for Afghan women;
- Conduct a thorough gender analysis of the P-1 and P-2 programs, ensuring that data is disaggregated by gender and includes information about the number of women whose cases have been rejected, are awaiting processing, and have been successfully resettled.

A stated intention of U.S. foreign policy is to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and protection especially in conflict-affected environments. Within months of taking office, you signed a noteworthy [executive order](#) promoting women's rights. Your Administration's meaningful [National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#) commits the U.S. government to "ensure gender equity in humanitarian relief and refugee resettlement efforts." Women's rights and security are being threatened around the world. We recognize that the United States cannot solve every crisis everywhere, but the U.S. bears a unique responsibility to protect Afghan women and girls at risk of persecution and to prioritize them for resettlement.

Given the urgency of the situation in Pakistan particularly, we request to meet with relevant members of the National Security Council to discuss this matter in further detail.

Sincerely,

Afghan American Foundation  
Afghans for a Better Tomorrow  
Alliance for Peacebuilding  
Allied Shepard  
Anethum Global  
Freedom House  
Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security  
Human Rights First  
Human Rights Watch  
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)  
MADRE  
Mina's List  
Paloonkey  
React DC  
Refugees International  
Task Force Nyx  
Too Young To Wed  
Uplift Afghanistan  
Veterans for American Ideals  
Vital Voices  
Women for Afghan Women  
Women's Refugee Commission  
Women's Regional Network

CC: Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor  
Jennifer Klein, Director, White House Gender Policy Council  
Antony Blinken, Secretary of State  
Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security