

June 4, 2021

Joseph R. Biden Jr.

President of the United States

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We, the undersigned 70 community-based organizations, human rights groups, and civil society organizations, write to urge you and your administration to immediately implement plans to evacuate vulnerable U.S.-affiliated Afghans out of Afghanistan in conjunction with the ongoing withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, and to authorize as many Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) that are necessary. The Afghan SIV program was created to provide a pathway to protection to those who face danger because of their service to the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. It is our moral imperative to keep our promise to those we pledged to protect.

The United States has a duty to protect those who have protected us. The way we leave Afghanistan will be an enduring mark on our nation's history. As we draw an end to America's longest war, we must remember that our departure from Afghanistan will put our allies there, who have saved so many American lives, at grave risk. They include local translators, engineers, security guards, embassy clerks, logisticians, cultural advisors, and soldiers. As we prepare to withdraw, we cannot abandon them, especially as that service to us puts them in danger; we must bring them to safety in the United States.

Afghans whose lives are in danger because of their service with American armed forces, work with U.S.-based NGOs or media, or on projects funded by USAID, must be evacuated to American territory, where their visas can be safely vetted and processed. This evacuation could follow the model the U.S. adopted in previous evacuations, whereby vulnerable Afghans and their families could be airlifted from Afghanistan to U.S. territory, where U.S. government officials could process their visa applications or other humanitarian protection before flying applicants to their final destination for resettlement in the U.S.

Honoring our commitments in Afghanistan will rightly be seen as part of a history of American actions to protect individuals facing violence and persecution as a result of assisting the United States. The U.S. has successfully undertaken such efforts before. In 1975, the Ford administration evacuated 130,000 Vietnamese to Guam where these refugees went through initial screenings before they were flown to bases and reception centers in the continental U.S. In 1996, the Clinton administration airlifted thousands of Iraqis who had assisted American efforts in Northern Iraq to Guam, where they completed security screening and immigration processing. In 1999, after Serbian forces attacked Pristina in Kosovo, the Clinton administration airlifted 20,000 Kosovar Albanians to Fort Dix, NJ, where they were processed and received refugee status.

The SIV program has brought thousands of Iraqis and Afghans to safety in the U.S. But the program has been plagued with dangerous delays for applicants and unnecessary bureaucratic complications, exacerbated by challenges with in-country processing. There is very limited refugee processing in the region - made more difficult by the deteriorating security situation. Given the short window of time available to us before U.S. troops withdraw from Afghanistan, the completion of SIV and humanitarian processing should be incorporated into the framework of an evacuation. Our allies must be brought to safety before it is too late, and rapidly processed for protection while being treated as guests and not detainees within the United States.

We also urge Congress to authorize as many additional visas as may be necessary to cover all who qualify, and extend the program until U.S. forces have left Afghanistan and the program is no longer needed. There is currently a deficit of at least 7,500 visas, but thousands more are likely needed. As we demand that the U.S. organize an immediate evacuation of U.S.-affiliated Afghans in need of protection, we recognize that this includes around 17,000 Afghans who have a pending application for an SIV as well as their family members, who are already at risk because of the support they have provided to our troops and government, and face a heightened risk as the U.S. withdraws from Afghanistan.

This is urgent. Given the impending September 11 deadline, there is no moment to lose to protect those who helped us as we carried out our mission in Afghanistan. At this moment, the future of a generation of Afghans who believed and worked with us on our mission is at risk. As the U.S. prepares to depart Afghanistan, we must commit to providing refuge to those Afghans who committed themselves to our efforts.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers In Action

Alianza Americas

America's Voice

American Muslim Empowerment Network (AMEN)

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Asian Services In Action (ASIA)

Association of Wartime Allies

Boat People SOS

Cameroon American Council

Canopy NWA

Catholic Family Center

Center for Gender & Refugee Studies

Center for Security, Race and Rights

Church World Service
Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam
Congregation B'nai Yisrael
Counterparts Veterans Association
CRIS - Community Refugee & Immigration Services
ELCA (Lutheran)
Engage Action
Exodus Refugee Immigration Inc.
Haitian Bridge Alliance
Hearts & Homes for Refugees
Hearts and Homes for Refugees
HIAS
Human Rights First ICNA Council for Social Justice
IIV - International Institute for Vietnam
Immigration Hub
impl. project
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
Keeping Our Promise Inc.
LA RED JURÍDICA INTERNACIONAL
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Maine Business Immigration Coalition
Mary's Place Refugee Outreach
Military Veterans in Journalism
Mississippi Center for Justice
National Immigration Forum
National Immigration Law Center
National Network for Immigrant & Refugee Rights
Neighbors for Refugees
New American Pathways

Nguyen Van Ly Foundation

Niskanen Center

Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans (PANA)

Pax Christi USA

Pittsburgh LCLAA

RAICES

Refugee Congress

Refugees Helping Refugees

Refugees International

Rivertowns for Refugees Inc.

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

The Episcopal Church

Transformations CDC

Truman Center for National Policy

Truman National Security Project

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

UndocuBlack Network

United Stateless

Veterans for American Ideals

Vietnam Coalition Against Torture (VN-CAT) Voice for Refugee Action Fund

Westchester Jewish Coalition for Immigration

Win Without War

Witness at the Border

Women for Afghan Women

Women's Action for New Directions

World Relief