



NEWS RELEASE

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U.S. Leaders Urge Pakistan to Halt Deportation of Displaced Afghans

100+ Veterans, Nonprofits, Former Ambassadors Send Letter to Pakistan Leadership

Washington D.C. – More than 100 U.S. leaders sent a letter to Pakistan leadership today urging the nation to stop a plan to deport Afghans who entered the country following the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2021.

Signatories, including former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl, former Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) Anne C. Richard, and former U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo Philip Kosnett – all of whom are senior advisors to #AfghanEvac – as well as three former U.S. Chiefs of Mission to Afghanistan and former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan and Deputy U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Wendy Chamberlin, called the move by the Pakistani government **“both deeply troubling and concerning.”** The letter is addressed to the Pakistani Prime Minister, Ambassador to the U.S., and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

“We want Afghans to know that powerful people in the U.S. and Americans from across the nation stand with them,” said Shawn VanDiver, president and founder of #AfghanEvac. **“We appreciate Pakistan for providing refuge to our allies following America’s withdrawal from Afghanistan, but this decision would only cause chaos and make a bad situation worse. We urge Pakistan to work with us to resettle qualifying individuals in the U.S., not send them back to Afghanistan where they face certain doom.”**

Individuals impacted by this decision would include former interpreters, journalists, women leaders, and others who face significant risks if returned to Afghanistan.

“These deportations would not be consistent with Pakistan’s humanitarian tradition, and if pursued, would certainly adversely impact Pakistan’s relationship with the United States and could cause lasting damage to Pakistan’s reputation among the international community,” the letter states.



Many Afghans residing in Pakistan are in the late stages of exhaustive vetting processes and are awaiting U.S. visa or refugee status approval. Pakistan's decision would affect Special Immigration Visa (SIV) applicants, those with referrals to the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and Humanitarian Parole applicants, all of whom have a pending or approved pathway to legal U.S. immigration.

“To deport them back to an environment where their lives would be in jeopardy runs counter to humanitarian principles and international accords to which Pakistan is a signatory. Further, it is simply inhumane to treat these vulnerable neighbors in such a manner,” the U.S. leaders say in the letter.

The group requested:

- An immediate halt to the deportation of Afghans who have pending or approved visa applications for entry into the United States or accepted referrals into the USRAP.
- Streamlining the exit permit process to ensure that Afghans with immigration pathways to third countries and who are ready to depart, are able to leave without roadblocks.
- Immediate approval of International Organization for Migration's request to establish a Resettlement Support Center in Pakistan to assist Afghans in transition and verify their eligibility for resettlement.

“Time is of the essence, lives are at stake, and the international community is watching. We strongly urge you to act promptly and compassionately. AfghanEvac would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with officials of your government with an eye toward strengthening our cooperation,” they said.

Interested parties may still sign on to this letter at afghanevac.org/pak-letter. Below is the full letter and a list of signatories at time of transmission to Pakistani leaders.

October 17, 2023

Dear Esteemed Officials of Pakistan,

We are writing as individuals and organizations dedicated to Afghan relocation and resettlement efforts to express our deep concern over recent events in Pakistan which put the safety and security of vulnerable Afghans at great risk. Recent changes and decisions made by the Pakistani government not only impact the lives of those Afghan nationals, but also carry broader humanitarian and national, regional, and international security implications.

Pakistan was a staunch ally to the U.S. during the war in Afghanistan and has long been a sanctuary for millions of Afghan refugees. In addition, thanks to the generosity and hospitality of the people of Pakistan, the country has become home to millions more refugees from the region. While we understand and appreciate the challenges this poses, the recent government notification announcing a plan to deport Afghans is both deeply troubling and concerning. We are particularly concerned that this decision will impact Special Immigration Visa (SIV) applicants,



those with referrals to the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and Humanitarian Parole applicants, all of whom have a pending or approved pathway to legal U.S. immigration.

These individuals include, but are not limited to, former interpreters, journalists, women leaders, and other professionals who face significant risks if returned to Afghanistan. Many Afghans residing in Pakistan are in the late stages of exhaustive vetting processes and are awaiting U.S. visa or refugee status approval. To deport them back to an environment where their lives would be in jeopardy runs counter to humanitarian principles and international accords to which Pakistan is a signatory. Further, it is simply inhumane to treat these vulnerable neighbors in such a manner. At a minimum, we would hope to see an exemption from detention or deportation of Afghans who have pending or approved immigration applications to the United States.

We also write to express our deep concern over the unjust and frequently corrupt practices surrounding exit permits. This problematic process negatively affects everyone, but is disproportionately harmful to women and children, and is being administered in an illogical and unresolvable manner. Specifically, many children who originally entered Pakistan without being required to have a visa are now being denied exit permits on the basis of not having that very visa. Even newborns—who were born AFTER their family's arrival in Pakistan—are unjustly denied exit permits because they did not possess entry visas, an illogical and unfair situation that families are incapable of resolving. In fact, these practices run counter to the Pakistani government's effort to decrease the number of Afghans living in the country without immigration status to be there. If the exit permit process were administered fairly or waived entirely, and Afghans who are approved to immigrate to the United States and other nations could get exit visas for their families, the international community could better help Pakistan meet its goals.

Given the gravity of the situation, we respectfully request:

- An immediate halt to the deportation of Afghans who have pending or approved visa applications for entry into the United States or accepted referrals into the USRAP.
- Streamlining the exit permit process to ensure that Afghans with immigration pathways to third countries and who are ready to depart, are able to leave without roadblocks.
- Immediate approval of International Organization for Migration's request to establish a Resettlement Support Center in Pakistan to assist Afghans in transition and verify their eligibility for resettlement.

We urge you to consider that the deportation of these vulnerable individuals contravenes international obligations surrounding the humane treatment of refugees and asylees including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Pakistan is a signatory.

These deportations would not be consistent with Pakistan's humanitarian tradition, and if pursued, would certainly adversely impact Pakistan's relationship with the United States and could cause lasting damage to Pakistan's reputation among the international community.

Time is of the essence, lives are at stake, and the international community is watching. We strongly urge you to act promptly and compassionately. AfghanEvac would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with officials of your government with an eye toward strengthening our cooperation.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this critical issue.



Respectfully,
Shawn VanDiver
President, #AfghanEvac

Dr. Colin H. Kahl
Senior Advisor, #AfghanEvac

Anne C. Richard
Senior Advisor, #AfghanEvac & Freedom House

Ambassador (Ret.) Wendy J. Chamberlain
Former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, former U.N.
Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees

Ambassador (Ret) Ronald Neumann
Former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan

Ambassador (Ret.) Earl Anthony Wayne
Former U.S. Chief of Mission to Afghanistan

Ambassador (Ret.) Hugo Llorens
Former U.S. Chief of Mission to Afghanistan

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Senior Advisor, #AfghanEvac and Former U.S.
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