

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## MARCH 1st DECLARED #AFGHANEVAC DAY IN SAN DIEGO

### RECOGNIZING SAN DIEGO LEADERSHIP AND HIGHLIGHTING WORK AHEAD

#### *Community Leaders Honor Volunteers and Welcome 2,800 Afghans to the Region Members of Congress to wear AfghanEvac Lapel pins to State of the Union*

SAN DIEGO – Today, February 26, California elected officials, community leaders, San Diego residents who were evacuated from Afghanistan last year, and members of the #AfghanEvac Coalition convened at Bahia Hotel to underscore the continued need to help displaced Afghans following the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2021. The coalition highlighted the immediate need for passage of the *Afghan Adjustment Act* to ensure those who arrived in the United States as part of the Operation Allies Welcome pipeline do not lose their legal immigration status.

**#AfghanEvac Founder and U.S. Navy veteran Shawn VanDiver said,** *“I have seen, over the past six months, a disregard for the divisions that keep us apart that I would not have believed could happen. We want to continue to see that, and the spirit of this effort, reflected by our representatives in Washington. If you’ve ever said that you stand with the troops, then you must stand with us on this.”*

**He continued,** *“I want to thank the Bahia Resort for their generous support in hosting this weekend’s event. And as always, donations to the Afghan Welcome Fund are appreciated and go directly to helping displaced Afghans start their new lives here in the US.”*

More than 40 veterans, Afghans, frontline civilians, elected officials, and other community leaders from San Diego and across the country participated in the press conference, which highlighted the work remaining to be done and thanked volunteers who have been carrying the load.

During the event, U.S. House Rep. Peters declared March 1st, 2022 as #AfghanEvac Day in the United States Congress. The State of California and County of San Diego declared #AfghanEvac day in their jurisdiction. Both the State of Michigan and City of San Diego are expected to follow suit this week. March 1st is the six-month anniversary of the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. President Biden will be delivering his first State of the Union Address that day and more than 40 Members of Congress will be wearing the #AfghanEvac Lapel Pin to show their continued support for the Afghans awaiting relocation and the volunteers working 24/7 to help them.

### **Quotes from speakers:**

**U.S. House Rep. Scott Peters (D-Calif. 52nd) said,** *“Here in San Diego, we’ve so far welcomed more than 2,000 Afghan refugees.”*

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*And, we've had extraordinary leadership from people like Shawn Van Diver and the many other dedicated and capable members of the Afghan Evac coalition who have continued working around the clock, despite overwhelming odds.*

*They are veterans, frontline civilians, wartime allies, and Americans of all color, creed, and political persuasion – a bipartisan team of people who began their work in August 2021 and continue their work today. I want to thank those volunteers that are here today as well as all the volunteers all over the nation who have not given up.*

*And I want to say to all the Afghanistan veterans here in San Diego and elsewhere – We know you are worried and hurting and fearful for your friends and partners and allies. We have not forgotten you or them. I haven't forgotten, and I stand with you, and as your Congressman, I'm here to help.*

**San Diego City Councilmember Raul Campillo said,** *“As the Councilmember for the largest Afghan community in San Diego, I am so proud to work with AfghanEvac to help support my community members, particularly in Serra Mesa. Numerous individuals reached out to me personally to help them with their family members this last year, and I could trust Afghan Evac to do all they could. We must do all we can to support the Afghan people and the military and civilian heroes who stepped up to serve them.”*

**San Diego City Councilmember Chris Cate said,** *“The work of the #AfghanEvac coalition goes beyond the scope of partisan politics. I'm proud to support the sincere efforts of these volunteers who have devoted themselves to helping thousands of Afghan families and individuals who have lost their homes and way of life. Despite the impressive list of the coalition's accomplishments, there's a long road ahead in the resettlement process, and we cannot slow down now.”*

**Chair of the Select Board of Pembroke, MA, and U.S. Army veteran Jessica Bradley Rushing said,** *“I am so proud to be a part of the continued relocation and resettlement of our Afghan friends and allies. But that work is not done - there's so much more we need to accomplish. It is imperative that our nation keep the promises we made to those who stood by our side through twenty years of America's longest war.”*

**Human First Coalition Chief Operations Officer, Connecticut GOP Official, and U.S. Army veteran Alex Plitsas said,** *“I am one of many who would not be standing here today if it were not for the courage of Afghan civilians who stood beside us on the battlefield and provided assistance over the past 20 years. We as a nation made a commitment to honor these Afghan allies who remain left behind in Afghanistan, as well as those who were already evacuated, with a pathway to resettle in the United States. We are calling on Congress to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act to help ease and improve the process for resettling Afghan allies and their families.”*

**Former Congresswoman Susan Davis (D-Calif. - 53rd) said,** *“I am so pleased to see this outpouring of support for newly arrived Afghans and hope even more San Diegans can assist during this difficult time. I want to thank the leaders from across the region who have come together today.”*

Notable Attendees of Saturday's Press Conference included:

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- U.S. Rep. Scott Peters (D-Calif. - 52nd District)
- California State Assemblymember Christopher Ward\*
- Councilmember Chris Cate (San Diego)
- Councilmember Raul Campillo (San Diego)
- California Republican Party Regional Vice Chair Francis Barazza
- Connecticut Republican Party Official and Human First Spokesman Alex Plitsas
- Pembroke MA Selectwoman Jessica Bradley Rushing
- Lucky Manan, evacuated Afghan
- Prince Wafa, evacuated Afghan
- Shawn VanDiver, Founder of #AfghanEvac

In addition to acknowledging the consequential efforts of volunteers and nonprofits, which have enabled more than 88,000 Afghans to arrive in the United States, with 2,800 of those Afghans resettling in the San Diego region, elected officials from the State of California and U.S. Congress declared March 1st to be #AfghanEvac Day in honor of the six-month anniversary of the withdrawal. Both the City of San Diego and the County of San Diego are expected to declare the date as well during meetings next week.

Composed of veterans, frontline civilians, public servants, Afghans, and Americans across religious, political, and geographic boundaries, the #AfghanEvac Coalition is united in the shared commitment to help Afghan allies who have stood with Americans for twenty years through the longest conflict in US history. San Diego Convention Center Board Member Shawn VanDiver and Washington, DC resident March Bishop established the coalition in August 2021 to unite the disparate volunteer groups and organizations already working to evacuate Afghans following the fall of Kabul and withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. Today, the Coalition represents more than 180 organizations and works closely with the US Departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs, as well as the related White House teams in the West Wing, National Security Council, and Office of the First Lady.

Organizations within the #AfghanEvac Coalition have safely evacuated thousands of Afghans since September 2021 and the Coalition has distributed more than \$1,000,000 in direct aid to Afghans arriving in the US via a microgrant partnership with Globally.

Additionally, the #AfghanEvac and the Evacuate our Allies Coalitions have been working with a bipartisan, bicameral group of Congressional leaders to ensure the *Afghan Adjustment Act* moves forward in a timely manner.

Donations to the Afghan Welcome Fund can be made [here](#).

*AfghanEvac was founded in San Diego in 2021 and aims to help unite the operational efforts and voices of more than 180 member organizations working across the full enterprise of relocation and resettlement following the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan after our nation's longest conflict.*

### More info on accomplishments:

- **Established twice-daily coordination and deconfliction calls on August 18th with 7 groups. Since then, our calls have grown to more than 180 organizations and we've reduced calls to three times a week.**

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- **Established a close partnership with government agencies working on this issue, including the US Departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs as well as with the White House teams in the West Wing, National Security Council, and on the First Lady's team. Standing weekly meetings with Department of State, National Security Council and daily ad-hoc conversations. Bi-weekly standing meetings with the Department of Defense and regular near-daily communications.**
- **Dedicated liaison within the Department of State to the Coalition - unprecedented access to real-time official information.**
- **Coalition organizations and members have helped thousands of Afghan allies reach safety (since August). Since September have worked with the US State Department to manifest and safely evacuate Afghans who have a path to resettlement here in the US.**
- **Distributed more than \$1,000,000 in direct aid to Afghans who have arrived here in \$5,000 microgrants with our partners at Globally.**
- **Penned an open letter to the President and bi-partisan, bi-cameral congressional leadership spurring significant changes in national policy which made an extraordinary impact on our mission.**
- **Created explainer graphics which help policy makers, Afghans in need, volunteers across our ecosystem, and the public better understand the complex issues at play.**
- **Built a secure, universal case management system for all organizations in our coalition to use to ensure Afghan data is safe, secure, and easy to use.**
- **Built the Tools and Resources for Afghans in Need (TRAIN) tool as a self-service mechanism for identifying and connecting people with needed resources, whether they're in Afghanistan, another country, or right here in the United States.**
- **Built a strong community of civically engaged veterans, frontline civilians, and other dedicated Americans that spans political identity, religious ideology, and more.**

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