REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL

Afghan Women and Girls Under Immediate Threat: The Responsibility to Protect and Assist Is Just Beginning

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Banner Photo Caption: Girls leave the school after the end of the Zohra rehearsal at Afghanistan National Institute of Music, in Kabul, Afghanistan, Tuesday, May 18, 2021. Photo Credit: MARCUS YAM / LOS ANGELES TIMES.

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Introduction

There is arguably no population more affected by the recent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan than Afghan women and girls. In the 1990s, the Taliban consistently committed human rights abuses against women and girls, restricted their involvement in public life, denied them access to education, denied them access to essential health services, and forced them to marry, among a whole host of other draconian and gender-specific measures. In parts of the country, Taliban forces have recently instituted some of these same measures. Many Afghans—especially women—worry that that it is only a matter of time until the Taliban revert wholesale to their old ways. In a matter of weeks, the Taliban have already begun to erase the gains that Afghan women have made over the last 20 years.

More than 11 million Afghans—almost one-third of the entire population—are women and girls under the age of 25 years old. Some of these women and girls grew up with expectations of a future in which they could study, work, access health care, and have freedom of movement. The United States and other Western powers encouraged and nourished these expectations through both rhetoric and aid programs. Over the last two decades, the United States and other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have invoked the rights of Afghan women and girls to help justify their military engagement in Afghanistan. The responsibility of these nations to promote and protect these rights does not end with the troop withdrawal.

Certain populations are particularly at-risk. These include women and girls who are under direct threat from the Taliban because of their leadership or commitment to a rights-based agenda. Furthermore, half the country needs humanitarian assistance and more than three million Afghans have been

internally displaced by violence or other causes. Afghan women and girls face unique challenges as part of the current crisis. Donors and aid agencies will need to take specific and urgent steps to address the vulnerabilities and needs of these communities.

As part of this effort, the United States—and the international community more broadly—must focus on two overarching goals. The first is to ensure that Afghan women and girls are able to seek meaningful refuge outside of Afghanistan. The second is to stand up an effective, gender-sensitive response to a deteriorating humanitarian situation, of which internal displacement is a key feature. To this end, key donors and other influential UN member states should consider how and to what extent they provide certain forms of longer-term development support for Afghanistan or diplomatic recognition of the Taliban. They should base their considerations on the latter's commitment to safe passage of those seeking safety abroad, as well as respect for fundamental rights of women and girls and the facilitation of efforts to meet their humanitarian needs. Failure of progress on these issues will create additional incentives for Afghan women to seek to flee. And the Taliban must ensure that relief aid can be delivered effectively and allow women to be frontline in those efforts.

International Protection

Drivers of Displacement for Afghan Women and Girls

Over the last two decades, U.S. government-supported institutions and organizations encouraged Afghan women and girls to prioritize education, empower themselves, become leaders, and demand their country uphold human rights. From 2002 to 2020 the U.S. government spent at least $787 million on programs specifically designed to support Afghan women and girls. Reports indicate that many Afghan women who took active roles in these efforts—including those who have worked for the UN—remain in Afghanistan and some are in hiding, fearing reprisals from the Taliban. The Taliban have already started to target these individuals. Women human rights defenders, journalists, politicians, judges, business owners, activists, and other women involved in public life are at risk. If the voices of these Afghan women were to be silenced, the loss to country's future would be immeasurable.

The Taliban is also restricting the rights of women and girls more broadly. For example, Taliban leadership recently stated that they will "not allow co-education." Taliban decisions such as instructing secondary-school age boys to return to school, but denying permission for girls, is alarming. Furthermore, when asked about whether women will be permitted to participate in the government, Taliban spokesman Syed Zekrullah Hashmi explained, "it's not necessary that women be in the cabinet." As worrying as these developments are, perhaps even more concerning is evidence of

members of the Taliban whipping women in the streets and the replacement of Afghanistan's Ministry of Women's Affairs with a ministry for the "propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice."

In August, the Taliban spokesman instructed women to stay home from their jobs, citing security concerns. Now, the mayor of Kabul—where almost 1,000 of the city's employees are women—has issued a new ruling prohibiting female city employees from working. When the Taliban ruled from 1996 to 2001, they also barred women from wage-earning employment, similarly claiming it was a temporary security measure. However, the prohibition was never lifted.

Increasingly repressive standards the Taliban are enforcing for women and girls and a lack of protective services will inevitably force some of them to seek to flee the country—which is their right and should be permitted. Furthermore, widespread poverty, a severe drought, and an economy on the brink of collapse—compounded by conflict—have already forcibly displaced huge numbers of Afghans both inside the country and across borders. By the end of 2020, there were 2.2 million Afghan refugees in neighboring countries. During 2021, at least 663,969 individuals fled their homes and remain displaced within Afghanistan, most in the northern provinces. Numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) continue to rise and women and children account for 80 percent of the forcibly displaced.

Barriers to Refuge in the United States for Afghan Women and Girls

In August, the world watched as the United States and partner countries launched a massive air evacuation out of the international airport in Kabul. More than 125,000 foreign nationals and Afghans were flown out of the country. However, most at-risk Afghan women did not qualify for the programs covered by the evacuation, like the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program or the Priority-2 (P-2) resettlement program. For example, in the case of the SIV program, more Afghan men worked on behalf of the U.S. government or in direct support of U.S. troops in the field in roles such as interpreters, than Afghan women. Therefore, as confirmed by U.S.-based resettlement agencies, while some Afghan women qualify for the SIV program as dependents, very few if any qualify on their own as principal applicants. Some Afghan women who worked for U.S. government-funded programs, were employed by a U.S.-based media organization, or worked for an American NGO qualify for the P-2 program. However, it does not provide a pathway for women who worked for U.S. government subcontractors and subgrantees or Afghan women who worked for community-based organizations that have not received U.S. funding. Nor does it help most Afghan women leaders in government ministries and civil society as well as most activists and women human rights defenders.

With the exception of the SIV program and humanitarian parole, an individual must be outside of Afghanistan to be considered for any of the U.S. programs that grant international protection including the P-1 program (individuals), the P-2 program (groups at risk), the P-3 program (family reunification),

and the P-4 program (private sponsorship). For those at-risk Afghan women who can escape the country, the Biden administration has increased the refugee resettlement ceiling to 125,000 refugees. However, this number is inclusive of all refugees worldwide. Even before the Taliban takeover, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimated that 1.4 million refugees were in need of resettlement. Afghan women and girls at risk of Taliban retribution, at risk of gender-based violence (GBV) with no means of protection, and at risk of other forms of persecution, need to have greater access to the P-1, P-2, P-3 programs, and the forthcoming P-4 program. Afghan women would have a greater chance at protection if the Biden administration increased resettlement slots. Thus, the current Presidential Determination (PD) of 125,000 refugees is too low.

The White House needs to raise the PD to a more reasonable number like 200,000, and increase the regional allocation for Near East and Central Asia from the meager 35,000 individuals as it currently stands. Within a higher regional allocation and a higher overall PD, the State Department should encourage UNHCR and designated NGOs to prioritize at-risk women when they refer P-1 Afghan cases to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). UNHCR can do this by submitting more cases to the USRAP, which meet the criteria of being "women and girls at risk." UNHCR defines this resettlement submission category as comprising "women or girls who have protection problems particular to their gender, and lack effective protection normally provided by male family members. They may be: single heads of families, unaccompanied girls or women, or together with their male (or female) family members." Submission under this category is an important avenue by which UNHCR and NGOs can ensure a meaningful number of Afghan women and girls can access protection through resettlement.

The State Department should also consider establishing a P-2 program specifically for Afghan women and girls who credibly fear Taliban reprisals and who would not qualify for the existing resettlement programs. By doing so, Afghan women and girls who are in immediate danger would likely not be subject to the same administratively burdensome requirements necessary to process P-1 or P-3 cases, such as proving individual persecution or providing extensive documentation.

Indeed, for all categories of resettlement cases, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) need to consider the Afghan-specific, gender-specific details about each woman's situation, which might make it difficult for her to effectively present her case. To start, DHS and CIS should reduce documentation requirements to account for the barriers Afghan women have obtaining official government documents, especially when they are outside of Afghanistan. Furthermore, U.S. government adjudicators should take into account the level of education the women have, the extent to which they might have experienced trauma or be survivors of GBV, the challenges they might have in providing extensive documentation, and other such gender-related considerations when making decisions about resettlement cases.

Safe Passage Arrangements and Territorial Asylum

Following the end of the U.S.-led airport evacuation, Taliban leadership stated that they would allow foreign nationals and Afghans with the necessary travel documents to leave the country. But reports indicate that they continue to prohibit Afghans from flying—even for some with valid travel documents— and neighboring countries have for the most part closed their land borders to incoming Afghan refugees.

Even if the Taliban respected their own stated commitments, many Afghan women and girls likely do not have passports or even official identification documents known as "tazkeera." Indeed, it was not until 2020 that a law was passed allowing for mother's names to be listed on their children's birth certificates. Women's names are generally not included on official documents. Moreover, as of 2018, Afghanistan had the widest gender gap between men and women having IDs in the world, with about 94 percent of Afghan men possessing IDs compared to only 48 percent of women. The lack of government-issued identification documents for Afghan women is even more profound in rural areas and among IDPs where 80 percent of women have no form of ID. Thus, this administrative obstacle alone makes it difficult for many Afghan women to travel. The widespread lack of IDs, together with countless other challenges—including enormous security risks traveling through conservative provinces—means that most at-risk Afghan women and girls do not have a viable way out of the country.

Ensuring safe passage arrangements is thus of the utmost urgency. The United States and other countries should strongly encourage and incentivize Pakistan to open its borders and allow Afghans the right to work when they arrive. Pakistan will likely host some of the largest numbers of Afghan refugees over the coming years. International donors will therefore, need to provide financial assistance to the Pakistani government and organizations working to provide services for refugees. Iran should similarly keep its borders open to Afghans and ensure that it does not isolate Afghans in camps when they arrive. Other neighboring countries, Turkey, and the European Union should be both prepared and welcoming to asylum seekers fleeing a regime, which increasingly persecutes and threatens women and girls, people who worked with foreigners, and minority groups.

In addition, policymakers and those negotiating safe passage arrangements must consider gender-specific complications in Afghanistan that might hinder the ability of women and girls to leave the country. Some of those complications include that Afghan women and girls might not have IDs; they might be hesitant to leave without family members, such as parents, siblings, and in-laws (who often are not included in an individual's asylum/resettlement case); they might be prohibited from traveling without a male relative; and/or they might not feel safe traveling alone or at all, especially by road.

Decision-makers working on safe passage must ensure that movement out of Afghanistan is safe and accessible for everyone.

Humanitarian Response within Afghanistan

Current Humanitarian Situation

Afghanistan is currently facing multiple crises. Even before the Taliban takeover, almost 17 million people were in need of food assistance; now it is up to more than 18 million. Following the collapse of the internationally recognized Afghan government, prices for almost all goods have soared. The cost of food has increased by at least 50 percent and petrol prices have risen by at least 75 percent. Evidence from crises around the world indicates that when prices for basic necessities rise significantly, GBV increases—including forced and early marriage—and women and girls are at increased risk of exploitation. Afghanistan is no exception. Furthermore, the already weak healthcare system is on the brink of collapse. There is limited maternal health care, COVID-19 is rapidly spreading, and more than 600,000 Afghans have been displaced over the course of this year. 80 percent of them are women and children.

Donor Funding

During a global conference on Afghanistan held on September 13, donor countries committed to supporting humanitarian activities in Afghanistan with an additional $1.2 billion. Despite this positive step, so far, donor governments have actually only funded 63 percent of the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan for 2018-2021 and donors have funded the 2021 Flash Appeal, issued on September 5th, to an even lesser extent at just 22 percent coverage. Furthermore, only $2,903,439 or 0.3 percent of this funding is reported to be dedicated to GBV programming—a crucial sector in Afghanistan where the rates of GBV are remarkably high.

As UN Secretary General Guterres noted, these recent pledges of $1.2 billion are "extremely meaningful…" While meaningful symbolically, they must also be meaningful operationally. Foreign governments need to make good on their financial commitments by fully supporting the existing Afghanistan humanitarian response plan and providing surge funding for new flash appeals. They also must substantially increase funding for GBV programming to be commensurate with the need. Less than half of one percent of all humanitarian funding allocated to GBV programs is entirely unacceptable in a country where the rates of GBV are so high and will likely increase under Taliban rule.

Humanitarian Access

Aid organizations must also have safe and unrestricted access to deliver essential services without discrimination. However, the Taliban takeover has dramatically affected service provision. Of more than 150 NGOs and UN agencies operating in Afghanistan, 75 percent report that the Taliban takeover has adversely affected their ability to provide humanitarian aid. More than half of these organizations and agencies have stopped providing services altogether. This assistance includes protection, such as GBV prevention and support services (particularly important for Afghan women and girls who experience physical, sexual or psychological violence at a rate of almost 90 percent); health, shelter, water, and sanitation (WASH); food and nutrition; and livelihoods. Afghan women and girls—including IDPs—need to be able to access these services. With the Taliban in charge, women's mobility, women's right to directly and independently receive resources (such as food aid or cash assistance), and women's ability to independently access health services (including sexual and reproductive health care) is all in jeopardy.

Programs for Specific Populations

This humanitarian aid must serve the most at-risk populations in Afghanistan, which include displaced women and girls. Despite some progress made during the last 20 years, Afghan society continued to marginalize several groups, even before the Taliban seized control. Women and girls are undoubtedly the largest group. But there are also other intersecting identities that can further disadvantage women and girls, including their ethnicity, disability, displacement, marital status, and sexual orientation. For example, Hazara, Shia women are some of the most persecuted groups in Afghanistan because they are women, members of an ethnic minority, and do not embrace Sunni Islam as do the majority of Afghans. These Hazara women fear for their future under Taliban rule, and large numbers have been displaced. About 30 percent of the nearly 10,000 Afghans who have managed to make it across the Afghanistan-Pakistan land border over the last month have been Hazara. And according to sources in Daikundi province, in just one weekend at the end of September, at least 700 Hazara families were displaced from Daikundi to neighboring provinces within Afghanistan.

The larger Afghan society has stigmatized and denied rights to women with disabilities as well. In April 2020, Human Rights Watch explained that, "obtaining access to health care, education, and employment, along with other basic rights, is particularly difficult for Afghan women and girls with disabilities, who face both gender discrimination and stigma and barriers associated with their disability." It is essential that humanitarian actors develop their programming with input from local actors and according to a gender, age, disability, and social inclusion analysis.

Gender-Based Violence

GBV has always been an enormous problem in Afghanistan and is expected to become even more widespread with the Taliban in control. As of September 2020, 87 percent of Afghan women had experienced at least one form of GBV, and 62 percent had experienced all three forms: psychological, physical, and sexual. Child marriage has also been a prevalent problem. As of 2018, 30 to 40 percent of Afghan girls were married before they were eighteen. Now, with the Taliban in power, disturbing reports of Taliban leaders rounding up all unmarried girls in villages and "marrying" them to Taliban fighters have emerged. Similarly alarming, the Taliban have released perpetrators of GBV from prison who are now eager to enact revenge on their accusers.

Safe houses and women's protection centers have also become increasingly inaccessible, as the Taliban have either closed or occupied most of them. Service gaps coupled with harmful gender norms that result in stigma for survivors means that underreporting was already a serious issue before the Taliban assumed control of the entire country. Now, mobility restrictions, a lack of female police officers to whom to report, and fears of reprisal are likely to result in even fewer women and girls accessing needed response services.

With these widespread risks of violence, risks of forced marriage and limited access to help, humanitarian responders must provide robust GBV services. Donors should fully fund requests to support GBV prevention and response programming and ensure that it is resumed and delivered in a survivor-centered way. Furthermore, it is imperative that donors fund frontline organizations that ensure female staff are meaningfully and safely engaged in the humanitarian response, including but not exclusive of GBV programs. When possible, donors should use the leverage they have with the Taliban to ensure that female staff can safely work on the frontlines of GBV programming specifically and the humanitarian response more generally.

Women Safely Working in the Humanitarian Response

As expected, the Taliban have already begun to restrict women's access to work. Aside from the obvious normative and human rights implications, banning women from the workforce will significantly impact the ability of humanitarian agencies to deliver aid effectively. Indeed, it will make an effective humanitarian response impossible.

For example, women's full and safe participation is critical to identifying the priorities, needs, and capabilities of women and girls. Female staff are also necessary to mitigate risks of GBV and provide survivor-centered and culturally appropriate support to survivors. They, too, are needed to provide essential health care including sexual and reproductive health services. Indeed, for humanitarian aid to

be effective and life-saving in Afghanistan, female staff must be a part of all programming. Only through the inclusion of female staff can assistance meet the specific needs of women and girls, as well as those gender-specific needs related to education, WASH, food security, and livelihoods.

As a country director of one humanitarian organization explained, "Restrictions on women working would not only be an infringement of their rights, but would also have widespread repercussions for how aid is delivered. Only women can enter people's homes and assess needs reliably…"

Despite the clear necessity for women's involvement in humanitarian service provision, some UN agencies and other implementing organizations have already begun to work with male-only staff. These decisions not only contradict a principled humanitarian response, but they also render women and girls invisible and risk undermining further negotiations with the Taliban about women working. Both a pragmatic and a principled approach to humanitarian aid in Afghanistan demands that women are able to work and work safely.

International Legitimacy and Financial Support

Many leaders of today's Taliban want international legitimacy and international financial aid. A week after the Taliban took control of Kabul, a senior member of the Taliban's Cultural Commission Abdul Qahar Balkhi said that the Taliban hopes "to be recognized by world countries as the legitimate representative government of the people of Afghanistan who have gained their right to self-determination…" They continue to seek this official recognition, even requesting a seat at the United Nations.

Yet, as soon as the Taliban toppled the Ghani government, the European Union was quick to declare that it would not work with the Taliban let alone recognize them as the legitimate governing power in Afghanistan, unless they respected human rights, were inclusive of women, and abided by international legal obligations. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken explained "our [the U.S. government's] message is, any legitimacy and any support will have to be earned."

Furthermore, just after the conference during which donors pledged an additional $1.2 billion of aid to Afghanistan, Acting Foreign Minister of the Taliban, Amir Khan Muttaqi said that they hoped, "the international community will lend a helping hand to Afghanistan in various domains." The Taliban have already set up a "Commission for the Arrangement and Control of Companies and Organizations," which will regulate the registration, taxation, and activities of humanitarian organizations and private businesses. The establishment of this commission sends the signal that the Taliban seeks oversight, if not full control over foreign aid.

The Taliban has assumed leadership of a country in crisis. To remain in power, they must demonstrate an ability to avert further deterioration of the economy, food security situation, and health care system. This will only be possible with significant international humanitarian assistance in the shorter term and responsible investment in international development in the longer term.

The Taliban could make progress toward international recognition and the resumption of significant development aid by taking at least two measures. First, they could respect the rights of Afghans to leave the country, including those who lack identification documents. The Taliban must allow safe passage for people fleeing the country. Second, they must support comprehensive and principled humanitarian action in Afghanistan. As UN Secretary General Guterres recently noted, "the Taliban's desire for international recognition is the only leverage other countries have" at the moment to influence their behavior.

Donors, other UN member states, and aid agencies should push the Taliban to facilitate safe passage out of the country for at-risk women and girls who seek to leave and to expand humanitarian access to assist those who will remain in Afghanistan. Crucial to effective humanitarian access is respecting the rights of women to be at the front and center of the response. Afghan women must be permitted to safely work in all aspects of humanitarian operations, including and especially as frontline humanitarian staff. The UN should take the lead on these efforts. The UN should negotiate with the Taliban and monitor their actions. Furthermore, all parties that interact with the Taliban must share a consistent message. They should all pressure the Taliban to permit the departure of those women who choose to flee and demand that within Afghanistan women can deliver all forms of humanitarian aid.

Conclusion

As countless people across dozens of fields of expertise try to analyze what went wrong in Afghanistan and how to move forward, the future of women and girls is an abiding and compelling concern. In so many areas of the country, Afghan women and girls have made significant progress over the past twenty years. The average life expectancy for women increased by about ten years, maternal death rates were cut in half, more than 50 percent of girls were attending primary school, and more than 44,000 young Afghan women were attending public universities. At the time of the Taliban takeover, close to 30 percent of the Afghan Parliament were women. However, their educational, financial, political, and social advancements are at risk of being lost. Moreover, the humanitarian and displacement crises within Afghanistan further threaten the fate of millions of women and girls.

Now that the U.S. government has departed Afghanistan and the world is beginning to emerge from the shock of such a swift Taliban victory, it is time to think about what is next. This is particularly

consequential for several at-risk populations of women and girls: women and girls under direct threat, women and girls who require humanitarian assistance, displaced women and girls, and women and girls who hope to flee Afghanistan altogether. All policy decisions and humanitarian response planning must prioritize Afghan women and girls' access to international protection and gender-informed humanitarian programming implemented by Afghan women.

Recommendations

- **The Biden administration should work with neighboring countries of Afghanistan to establish safe passage arrangements by which at-risk Afghan women and girls can safely leave the country and be assured assistance after displacement.** It must ensure that women feel safe to use these means of exit and can realistically access them. In its diplomatic and assistance efforts, the administration must intentionally factor the unique needs of and restrictions on women and girls—such as ID requirements, family ties, and the need to travel with a male chaperone. Furthermore, the Biden administration should work with neighboring countries to ensure that when Afghans—particularly women and children—arrive, the governments of those countries do not impede onward travel if they are trying to relocate elsewhere.

- **The Biden administration should raise the refugee ceiling and prioritize Afghan women and girls for resettlement in the United States through existing and new programs.** Refugees International has already called for the Biden administration to raise the Presidential Determination—the ceiling for the number of refugees permitted to resettle in the United States—from 125,000 for FY2022 to at least 200,000. Within that 200,000, the administration should also increase the regional allocation for Near East and Central Asia to account for the large number of Afghans who will likely need protection. In tandem, the State Department should instruct UNHCR to prioritize submitting P-1 cases to the USRAP of "women and girls at risk" as defined by the UNHCR Resettlement Handbook. Finally, the State Department should consider creating a P-2 program specifically for Afghan women and girls who credibly fear Taliban reprisals. Adjudicators should take into account the culturally specific, case-specific, and gender-specific challenges that Afghan women and girls might have when presenting their cases for resettlement consideration.

- **The Secretary of State should quickly appoint a senior envoy for Afghan women and girls and, as part of the envoy's mandate, include responsibility for coordinating assistance to displaced and at-risk women and girls.** Secretary of State Antony Blinken assured the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on September 14, this individual will be "responsible for focusing and marshalling all of our [the State Department and the U.S. government's] efforts on support for women and girls and minorities in Afghanistan." This senior official should have deep

knowledge of Afghanistan, have worked closely with Afghan women, and ideally have been involved in the response to refugee movements. The position should also include responsibility for coordinating the U.S. response and assistance to displaced Afghan women and girls. The individual selected for this role should report directly to Secretary Blinken and have sufficient financial resources at their disposal to be able to effectively fulfill the position's mandate.

- **The United States and other donor governments should fully fund new and existing humanitarian appeals so that displaced women and girls in humanitarian settings can get the services they need.** They should ensure humanitarian programs consider age, gender, disability, and ethnicity and prioritize robust GBV prevention, response, and mitigation services. They should also fund frontline organizations as directly as possible and increase funding to women's groups inside of Afghanistan.

- **Humanitarian donors and agencies should take steps to effectively address the high levels of GBV in Afghanistan**. These steps include: 1) ensuring humanitarian response plans integrate GBV prevention and response, including establishing effective referral mechanisms to ensure GBV survivors get specialized support from trained humanitarian personnel; 2) securing shelters and safe spaces serving survivors of domestic violence, rape, and other forms of GBV, many of which have recently closed; 3) strengthening programs to ensure the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, as they comprise the majority of the 80 percent of the Afghan population affected by disability and are disproportionately at risk of GBV; 4) integrating the use of safe cash and voucher assistance as a protection mechanism for survivors or those at risk; and 5) following the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and GBV Accountability guidelines on GBV prevention and response, and include measures to prevent gender-based exploitation and abuse by humanitarian personnel in designing GBV interventions.

- **The United Nations, with the support of the United States and other donors, should push the Taliban to allow Afghan women to participate in all aspects of the humanitarian response**. With donor support, the UN must secure written, nation-wide guarantees—which are enforced at the provincial and local levels—that the Taliban will permit women's safe, equal, and unrestricted access to work across the full spectrum of humanitarian response. It is especially important that Afghan women are on the frontlines of humanitarian program implementation. Humanitarian responses can only be effective if they are inclusive of women. Donors and UN agencies should not pressure implementing partners to resume humanitarian response activities absent of women staff. Without female staff, quality and principled humanitarian programming is not possible. UN agencies and implementing partner organizations must also abide by their own duty of care to female staff members, prioritizing their safety and well-being.

Glossary

Special Immigrant Visa (SIV): *A visa issued by the United States government to some Afghan nationals who "meet certain requirements and who were employed in Afghanistan by or on behalf of the U.S. government in Afghanistan, or by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), or a successor mission, in a capacity that required the applicant to serve as an interpreter or translator for U.S. military personnel while traveling off-base with U.S. military personnel stationed at ISAF or to perform activities for the U.S. military personnel stationed at ISAF. As of July 30, 2021, the SIV program requires applicants to have been employed for a minimum of one year, between October 7, 2001, and December 31, 2023. Applicants must also have experienced or be experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of their employment."*

Priority 1 (P-1): *"Individual cases referred by designated entities (an Embassy, designated NGO or the UNHCR) to the program by virtue of their circumstances and apparent need for resettlement."*

Priority 2 (P-2): ***"****Groups of special concern designated by the Department of State as having access to the program by virtue of their circumstances and apparent need for resettlement. Eligibility requirements include Afghans who do not meet the minimum time-in-service for a SIV but who work or worked as employees of contractors, locally-employed staff, interpreters/translators for the U.S. Government, United States Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A), International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), or Resolute Support; Afghans who work or worked for a U.S. government-funded program or project in Afghanistan supported through a U.S. government grant or cooperative agreement; or Afghans who are or were employed in Afghanistan by a U.S.-based media organization or non-governmental organization."*

Priority 3 (P-3): ***"****Individual cases granted access for purposes of reunification with family members already in the United States."*

Priority 4 (P-4): *"A Priority 4 (P-4) category will be linked to the [private sponsorship] pilot program and cover refugees supported by private sponsors who accept primary responsibility for funding and providing core resettlement services. The private sponsorship pilot program will include a matching component and an identification component. Under the matching component, private sponsors will be matched with refugees who already have access to USRAP through another priority category. Upon approval for resettlement, these refugees would be re-assigned to the P-4 category to distinguish them from the typical P-1, P-2, and P-3 categories. Under the identification component, private sponsors who meet certain criteria will be permitted to identify and refer refugees to the P-4 category and apply to sponsor their resettlement."*

Humanitarian Parole: *Is a special status granted "if you have a compelling emergency and there is an urgent humanitarian reason or significant public benefit to allowing you to temporarily enter the United States. Parole does not confer immigration status and does not provide a path to permanent residency or the ability to obtain lawful immigration status. However, a parolee may be able to obtain lawful status in the United States through other means."*