CANADIAN CAMPAIGN FOR AFGHAN PEACE

Open Letter: Immediate Action Canada Should Take to Help Afghans

We, members of the Canadian Campaign for Afghan Peace, and the undersigned, represent a cross-section of voices from the Afghan community in Canada, Canadian civil society, international organizations, nonprofits, activists, and individually concerned citizens. We are deeply disturbed by the escalating humanitarian crisis unfolding in Afghanistan. As a beacon of freedom, rule of law, and human rights, we are writing to urge Canada to recognize the moral imperative to resettle more Afghans, provide immediate and further humanitarian aid, engage in proactive diplomacy in support of international humanitarian law, and preserve the rights of girls, women, and ethnic and religious minorities.

In the aftermath of an abrupt withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan, the Taliban have invaded the country. The progress that Canada has helped make in Afghanistan through funding and military support is jeopardized by Taliban rule. Girls and women are at risk of forced marriage and being banned from studying and working. Some groups are disproportionately vulnerable at the hands of the Taliban, such as the Hazara community, Afghan Hindus, and Afghan Sikhs. These groups have historically and currently face systematic discrimination, repeated targeted violence, and resulting displacement. Over 35 million Afghan people are at the heart of a humanitarian catastrophe. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, there are 389,645 and counting Afghans who are internally displaced, and thousands more fleeing to neighbouring countries. This is in addition to 2.7 million Afghans already registered as refugees.

We are grateful to the Canadian government for their rapid response and commendable measures to support Afghans to date. This includes a special immigration program for those who were integral to Canada's efforts in Afghanistan. On August 13, 2021, the government announced that Canada will expedite the resettlement of 20,000 vulnerable Afghans who were already eligible for resettlement. While the current measures are a positive first step, **we believe that Canada can, and should do more.** Some of us and our parents have been resettled to Canada as refugees over the past three decades. There are others like us who are still seeking safety and a future for themselves and their families; who need Canada's advocacy and voice at this crucial moment in the world's history. We urge you to meet the following demands:

1. **Expand the Afghan Resettlement Program:** Broaden and enhance the current special immigration program to a goal of resettling at least double the number previously announced; broaden the eligibility criteria to include Afghan civilians trapped within Afghanistan; make it clear that Hazaras are included in the vulnerable group category; allow new applicants who are not within the current system; urgently eliminate barriers to applying for the program in consideration of the closure of the Canadian embassy and potential border closures; and increase funding to resettlement agencies and Afghan-led organizations in Canada to support Afghan newcomers.
2. **Provide Immediate Humanitarian Assistance and Aid:** Provide emergency humanitarian aid and support for Afghanistan through funding to non-governmental organizations and Canada's humanitarian partners on the ground. This would provide immediate lifesaving resources including, but not limited to, food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, drinking water, medical supplies and equipment, and COVID-19 vaccines.
3. **Engage in Proactive Diplomacy:** Take a proactive role in advocating for human rights in Afghanistan on the international stage through forums such as the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council; and ensure that any engagement with the ruling power be conditional upon the preservation of the progress achieved over the last 20 years with regards to democracy, human rights, freedom of speech, rule of law, and education for girls and women.
4. **Emphasis on Preserving The Rights of Girls, Women, and Ethnic and Religious Minorities:** Lead the international advocacy of the rights of girls, women, and ethnic and religious minorities during this transitional period in Afghanistan's governance and power. This includes championing efforts to guarantee the security and protection of these groups within Afghanistan as well as prioritizing their resettlement.

The full scale crisis occurring in Afghanistan is a humanitarian emergency that requires an exceptional and time-sensitive response. The Taliban cannot be trusted to respect human rights and the rule of law. We appreciate that Canada is a global champion in promoting peace, development, and human rights around the world. Canada can make an impact right now. All that is needed is the willpower. We are counting on your support.