

Via email to: secretary@state.gov

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
United States Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

August 17, 2021

URGENT Re: Saving Afghanistan's future

Dear Secretary Blinken:

Scholars at Risk, together with the undersigned higher education institutions, associations, networks, and professionals, request your immediate action to save Afghanistan's scholars, students, practitioners, civil society leaders and activists, especially women and ethnic and religious minorities.

Scholars at Risk is an international network of over 500 other higher education institutions in 40 countries whose core mission is to protect threatened scholars and intellectuals, principally by arranging temporary positions at network-member institutions for those who are unable to work safely in their home countries. Over the last 20 years our network has assisted over 1500 threatened scholars, students and practitioners.

We are racing to offer assistance to colleagues in Afghanistan who at this moment are desperately seeking ways out of the country. Many have already moved into hiding and may soon take the perilous step of looking for a way over land borders. They may not have worn a uniform or received a US government paycheck, but for the better part of twenty years they have fought alongside US interests for a new, rights-respecting, forward-looking, knowledge-based Afghanistan. Hundreds of them traveled to the United States to seek an education and returned to their homeland, dedicated to values of openness, and tolerance. These are not the values of the Taliban, so their lives are now at risk. Timely US government action can still make an enormous difference, and maybe yet save Afghanistan's future. We implore you to act on their behalf now.

Specifically, we seek immediate action from USDOS and relevant USG departments and agencies to:

- **Continue evacuation flights** for as long as possible so as to include scholars, students and civil society actors who have supported the forward-looking, pluralist vision of Afghanistan that the US mission embraced. **Do not end flights until all are safely out.**

SCHOLARS AT RISK

411 Lafayette Street 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10003, USA
www.scholarsatrisk.org

EMAIL: scholarsatrisk@nyu.edu
TEL: +1 212-998-4427
[f](https://www.facebook.com/scholarsatrisk) [i](https://www.instagram.com/scholarsatrisk) [in](https://www.linkedin.com/company/scholarsatrisk) [@scholarsatrisk](https://twitter.com/scholarsatrisk)

SAR EUROPE

c/o MUSSI, Maynooth University
Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland
www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sar-europe

EMAIL: sareurope@mu.ie
TEL: +353 1 7086177
[f](https://www.facebook.com/sar_europe) [i](https://www.instagram.com/sar_europe) [in](https://www.linkedin.com/company/sar_europe) [@sar_europe](https://twitter.com/sar_europe)

- **Include SIV, P1 and P2 candidates among those evacuated** by US forces and their agents for relocation, temporarily to third countries at least, ideally for transit to the US as early as possible.
- **Advise all US and ally embassies and consulates wherever they are located** to receive and process SIV, P1, and P2 applications, as well as J and other appropriate visa applications, for Afghan nationals in their respective territory or for those still in Afghanistan, and facilitate entry to the US or a third country as rapidly as possible.
- **Create a priority processing pathway** for those candidates who demonstrate an existing partner, host institution, job, or sponsor, including for families, that would facilitate their arrival and earliest adjustment. Many US institutions and individuals are ready to help; capture that opportunity by expediting the processing of individuals known to them and for whom they are ready to step forward.
- As to scholars and researchers in particular, **waive the intent-to-return and home residency requirements on US J visa applications** for Afghan nationals for the foreseeable future. Barring full waiver, issue authoritative guidance to consular and border officials supporting a determination of satisfaction of the intent to return by showing a willingness to return in the absence of the Taliban, or a credible, durable and rebuttable demonstration that the individual would be able to return and live safely under the Taliban.
- **Establish a dedicated funding stream for scholars, students, and civil society actors** from Afghanistan, including men and especially women and ethnic and religious minorities, to undertake study, fellowships, lectureships, researcher positions or temporary academic positions at US higher education institutions, similar to the programs created during the Iraq conflict but on a much larger scale reflective of the much larger threat posed by the military withdrawal and subsequent collapse of the Afghan national government. Some funds for such streams might be redirected from existing funds budgeted for Afghanistan programming, but which may not be possible to expend under the current conditions. Nevertheless, new funds will be required to meet the most urgent needs.

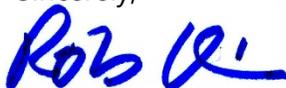
We ask for a phone call with the appropriate officer at your earliest possible convenience to discuss the situation, the recommendations above and any possibilities for further action or support. The window in which to take these steps, save lives, and redeem some measure of the US investment in Afghanistan's future is rapidly closing. Your urgent intervention is needed to mobilize the relevant departments and agencies.

The eroding situation in Afghanistan poses a threat not only to the lives of our colleagues still in Afghanistan, but to the future of that country, and to the future security and honor of the United States. The US higher education community is ready to do its part, but we need your help. If we

move quickly, we can go a long way towards mitigating the worst of the threats and demonstrate continuing commitment to the future of Afghanistan and its people.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your urgent reply. Your staff may reach me anytime at rquinn@nyu.edu or +1-917-710-1946.

Sincerely,



Robert Quinn
Executive Director

[Signatory list attached, updated August 17, 2021]

CC:

Dean Thompson
Acting Assistant Secretary
Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520
Via email: SCA-Press@state.gov

Senator Charles E. Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
Via email: senator@schumer.senate.gov

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
Via email: senator@gillibrand.senate.gov

Signatories to the urgent appeal for Afghanistan’s scholars, students, practitioners, civil society leaders and activists (as of August 17, 2021; list will be updated regularly)

[signatures to be added and updated regularly]