

## **The Open Letter from the Afghan Evacuees Residing in Emirates Humanitarian City EHC Abu Dhabi UAE.**

To: President Biden, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McCarthy, and Leader McConnell

Date: February 18, 2022

Dear President Biden, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McCarthy, and Leader McConnell:

We write in regards to our Afghan friends, colleagues and allies who were evacuated to the Emirates Humanitarian City (EHC) in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE) over the past six months.

An estimated 12,000 Afghans currently reside within the EHC. They include Women Leaders, U.S. citizens and green cardholders, Visa (SIV) applicants, Civil Society Activists, Human Rights Defenders, PHDs, Judges, Lawyers, Prosecutors, Ex-Military Personnel, Journalists, Religious Minorities, Athletes, Ethnic Groups, LGBTs and people who worked in the projects funded by the USA Organizations, Australia, New Zeland, Canada, European Union and other international organizations that have been waiting for their resettlement process to be officially started either by the US or other governments' embassies. The overwhelming majority have ties to the United States, which was the single largest employer in Afghanistan for the past two decades.

We recognize that the ongoing evacuation effort remains challenging and are extremely grateful that your Administration is working hard to help at-risk Afghans reach safety. While we agree that rescuing allies from Afghanistan should remain a top priority, we believe the United States has a moral obligation to all Afghans who supported the global war on terror and supported the Afghanistan and global community through the humanitarians projects based on the democratic values and principles.

### Background

The population of evacuees at the EHC includes a mixture of those at risk people having being evacuated by the US government through Military and private charters since August 2021. There are also a number of Afghans who do not necessarily have a clear US visa pathway available to them but are eligible for refugee status as persecuted and displaced people.

Each evacuee's documents and identifying data were verified and recorded, including their passport and national ID numbers, and they were transported to the UAE on non-commercial military flights. Flights were coordinated by USG officials at Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA) and Mazar-E-Sharif International Airport.

After the US mission in Afghanistan ended on August 31, 2021, Afghan nationals continued to be transported to EHC via civilian planes manifested and coordinated by various US-based organizations, including veteran and other volunteer organizations. This ongoing effort represents the only private-public humanitarian evacuation partnership of its kind in American history.

Since August, 2021, all incoming evacuees from Afghanistan have been interviewed by Department of State and Homeland Security officials upon entering Abu Dhabi and arriving at the EHC. This process included in-person interviews, document review, health screenings and biometric data collection. Interviewed evacuees were issued individualized Custom and Border Protection (CBP) numbers and Flight's Numbers.

#### Today

We are extraordinarily grateful for the US government's assistance in moving Afghans to safety during and after the fall of Kabul. Unfortunately, those in the EHC have been living in limbo for six months with no sense of next steps. Information sharing has been sporadic, inconsistent and often conflicting as the extent of the US government's presence and relationship to the camp appears to vacillate from day to day.

Conditions at the EHC have become untenable as residents struggle to understand their futures. Many reports experiencing severe depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress, haunted by the fear of being deported back to Afghanistan and to their deaths. The community is collectively traumatized by the Taliban's violent resurgence and the subsequent loss of homes, livelihoods and loved ones and also by extending the uncertain situation without any specific planning in EHC, the families particularly women and children will be getting mentally disturbed and there will be families' disputes, conflicts amongst EHC residents, suicides, psychosocial personality disorders, basic human rights violation and even chaos.

We are concerned with the disparate treatment Afghans are receiving based on the date or organizer of the flight that brought them out of Afghanistan, factors that are largely outside of their knowledge and control.

#### **Highlights of recommendations for Biden Administration:**

1. The Department of State and Department of Defense should turn EHC into USG administered "lily pad" for speedy processing of evacuees, preparing them for onward movement to the US. Currently, EHC is not a USG controlled lily-pad and does not have the same privilege as lily-pads in Qatar (CAS).
2. The Department of State should relocate all these evacuees to the lily pads in Qatar if turning EHC into a lily pad is difficult. The US-Qatar agreement will allow many people

to enter Qatar via US chartered flights to get processed in a US-controlled base with capacity and capabilities. The relocation will also help prevent Afghans from being targeted or potential injuries from Yemeni launched missiles. To this date, two missiles have landed near the refugee camp.

3. The Department of State should relocate the Afghan evacuees residing in Emirates Humanitarian City (EHC) to the US despite their immigration status as they fall under the evacuation process. Most of these evacuees were manifested from Afghanistan under the USG official evacuation operation and are logical and appropriate to transport them to the US like other 76000+ evacuees who were manifested under a similar procedure. USG has relied on Humanitarian parole, and it makes sense to parole these 12,000 people under the same process.
4. The Department of State should grant refugee status to these Afghans to come to the United States like the Syrian refugee process. This way, Afghan evacuees will be given refugee status avoiding a lengthy process.
5. The Department of State should request the data of Afghan evacuees taken by the US military personnel at Kabul airport and the US embassy personnel in the month of August before their departure to Abu Dhabi to determine the US official led evacuees from the civilian chartered flights. Anyone evacuated since August should be manifested to the US despite their immigration status as it falls under the official USG evacuation operation. From a legal and technical point of view, every evacuee brought to EHC since August, 2021 falls under the US government responsibility and needs to get evacuated like those evacuations reached the US within three days via Qatar.
6. The State Department, Department of Defense, and Department of Homeland Security should work on coordinated mechanisms to pull out EHC evacuees' immigration cases from the central case system. This way, an Afghan national with P-1 and P-2 cases applied can get a case number and be processed. Under the current circumstances, it will take 2-8 years for even longer for an Afghan national to receive the initial response regarding their case status. For instance, the Department of State only processes the Special immigrant visa cases received on August 27, 2021. The USCIS has received more than 46,000 Humanitarian Parole requests, and the EHC evacuees can't get a response in the next several years.
7. The Department of State should be transparent with the evacuees regarding their status and clarify why evacuees were left in limbo, and others who were processed were given false hope that they would be flown to the US for the past six months. This comes with limited Department of State staff being rotated every couple of weeks after getting familiar with

the processing system. Once the new team arrived, most evacuees were interviewed again and asked contradicting questions from the earlier DoS employees.

8. The Department of Defense should dispatch a team to visit the Afghan officers at EHC. They have fought side-by-side US troops in Afghanistan to check their documents, connect them with their former USG mentors, and guide them through appropriate procedures. As of now, there are a lot of Afghan armed forces who have certificates, pictures, and enough evidence to prove they have worked for the US government, but they cannot reach their US advisors/counterparts. One Afghan Special Forces officer, for instance, has worked for US Special Forces in Kandahar. He has documents to prove his employment, but he has no access to his US supervisors to get an HR or recommendation letter.
9. The Department of State should reach out to countries, including Canada, Australia, France, Germany and UK, to urge them to accept those Afghan nationals having worked in the projects funded by these countries' organizations and to those who do not qualify for the manifest to the US. Resettlement too.
10. The people evacuated by the US, their families are hiding in Afghanistan and either waiting to the flights or even not having been included in the evacuation list, the USG should evacuate these families who supported the international community. Moreover, most of these evacuees were the breadwinners of their families now their families are living in the uncertainty and even don't have the source to support their families financially. So, the USG should start their resettlement process at least they reach to their final destination.

We all vulnerable allies of the United States recognize that you have the power, influence and generosity to meet the challenges of this moment, because we are number of people who bestowed our lives for the strengthening of democratic values and principles in Afghanistan, we would like to respectfully beg you to please assist us for a better life for our families particularly for our children, women and girls. Finally, we remain both hopeful and confident that the US government and Congress will feel our current situation and will assist us in resettlement to the final destination with dignity and transparency.

We all thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours;

The EHC Afghans Evacuees Based Abu Dhabi United Arab Emirates UAE