



INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
ROUNDTABLE

October 12, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
US Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Including Vulnerable Afghan Religious Minorities in P-2 Refugee Program

Dear President Biden and Secretary Blinken:

We are an informal participant-led, multi-religious group that advocates for international religious freedom. Despite our extremely broad diversity of theological views and political positions, we are united in our horror at the unfolding events in Afghanistan following the U.S. troop withdrawal and Taliban takeover. We are especially concerned about the fate of vulnerable religious minorities in Afghanistan, who face abuses at the hands of the Taliban and its affiliates solely because of their religious beliefs. We are writing to urge the White House and the State Department to create an additional P-2 refugee status category for these Afghan religious minorities or to support Congressional efforts to enlarge the P-2 category on an emergency basis.

We collectively have assembled numerous reports of horrific mistreatment of religious minorities by Taliban militants and terror groups such as ISIS-K now roaming freely throughout Afghanistan. Christians, Shias (Hazaras and Nizari Ismailis), and other religious minorities have been murdered, whipped, tortured, had their ID documents seized, and their cell phones destroyed. They are being identified via government records and hunted down in door-to-door searches.[1] They are receiving officially stamped “threat letters” warning that they have been identified for arrest or worse. Property is being stolen. Women (and young boys and girls) are being seized, raped (“married” in the eyes of Taliban thugs), trafficked as sex slaves, or killed, and men are being summarily executed or tortured.[2]

In short, for many religious minorities their status as believers in a faith not approved by the Taliban is a death sentence. Reports of killings of religious minorities are increasing, and many are in hiding. Hundreds of Shia worshippers were killed or wounded in successive ISIS-K suicide bombings at mosques in Kunduz and in Kandahar on October 2 and October 15, 2021.[3] The United States must act to protect these communities now.

Unfortunately, religious minorities were not included when the State Department [created](#) a P-2 category for certain Afghan nationals who are at risk of harm on August 2, 2021.[4] Eligibility for a P-2 visa allows individuals who are members of a group that the U.S. government has identified as “of special humanitarian concern” to apply directly to the US refugee admission program (USRAP), without first having to obtain a US Embassy or NGO referral or having to apply, be processed, and be referred by the UNHCR.[5]

Removing these referral steps speeds up the process for P-2 refugees, although they still must undergo U.S. government processing and extensive security vetting. Thus, every USRAP applicant must meet the legal standard for refugee status—a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group—and show that they are otherwise eligible for admission under U.S immigration law.

Our request is supported by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom [recommendation](#) that the U.S. State Department create a Priority 2 (P-2) category for vulnerable Afghan religious minorities. Similarly, Representative Jackie Speier (D-CA-14) introduced H.R. 4736 on July 28, 2021, with 45 co-sponsors, which would require the State Department to provide for priority refugee slots for Afghans at special risk of persecution, including those at risk due to their religion, race or nationality.[6] Other groups, including those representing humanists and atheists, have asked for P-2 visas for Afghan religious minorities.[7]

In light of rapidly deteriorating conditions for religious minorities in Afghanistan due to Taliban and ISIS-K ascendancy in the region, we recommended the following:

- 1) The U.S. State Department should create a new P-2 category for vulnerable religious minorities from Afghanistan. They should have direct access to USRAP. Their processing can take place at an intermediary (hub or lily pad) country (e.g., Qatar, UAE, etc.) since processing within Afghanistan is not presently possible. It is recommended that an initial annual group of at least 4,000 applicants (primaries and dependents) be included in the proposed expanded P-2 program, as follows (to be reviewed and assessed annually): Hazaras or other Shia: 1500; Christians: 1500; Ahmadis: 500; Sikhs: 250; Hindus: 250.
- 2) U.S. Congress should consider passing legislation creating a legal presumption of eligibility for refugee status for vulnerable religious minorities from Afghanistan, which would create a more

lenient reduced evidentiary burden than for other refugee applicants. This legislation can track the 1989 Lautenberg Amendment.

As precedent, the U.S. State Department, through supporting Congressional legislation, has granted P-2 status in the past to other religiously persecuted groups:

- o The 1989 Lautenberg Amendment extended P-2 status to certain Soviet religious minorities.
- o The 2004 Specter Amendment extended P-2 status to Iranian religious minorities.
- o A 2007 Kennedy-sponsored bill extended P-2 status to certain Iraqi religious minorities.

The situation in Afghanistan demands immediate steps that can save the lives of religious minorities in Afghanistan who face imminent harm. Thank you in advance for your attention to our requests, and we stand ready to meet with Administration officials and members of Congress to facilitate this effort.

Very Respectfully,

SIGNATURES

ORGANIZATIONS

Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA

Amplio Foundation

Anglican Persecuted Church Network

Barnabas Aid

Center for Pluralism

China Aid

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience

Empowering a Billion Women Worldwide (EBW Worldwide)

First Freedom Foundation

Global Peace Foundation

Hindus for Human Rights

International Human Rights Committee

Institut de Recherche et D'études Stratégiques de Khyber IRESK (France)

International Organization to Preserve Human Rights

Jubilee Campaign (USA)

Katartismos Global (KGI Global)

Law and Liberty Trust International

Orthodox Public Affairs Committee

Parity

Redeem!

Religious Freedom Institute

Rumi Forum

Save the Persecuted Christians

Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) America

South Asia Minorities Alliance Foundation

Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

The Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church of America

21Wilberforce

U.S. Campaign for Burma

Union for Reform Judaism

INDIVIDUALS (with title and organization provided only for identification purposes)

Fazal-ur Rehman Afridi, Président, Institut de Recherche et D'études Stratégiques de Khyber (IRESK)

Puneet Ahluwalia, Executive Director, South Asia Minorities Alliance Foundation

Sat Bachan Anthony, Co-Chair of the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation Women's CEO Roundtable

Julia M. Bolz, International Humanitarian Lawyer, Founder, Ayni Education International

Gary Borgendale, Local Ministry Director, Salem Media Group

Scott Brawner, President, Concilium, Inc., Executive Director of the Risk Management Network, and Senior Advisor, Overseas Security Advisory Council

The Honorable Samuel Brownback, former US Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom

Chris Chauncey, Founder and CEO, Amplio Recruiting

Keely Daniels, Advocacy Analyst, International Christian Concern

Anuttama Dasa, Global Minister of Communications, International Society for Krishna Consciousness

Soraya M. Deen, Founder, Muslim Women Speakers

Rev. Dr. William T. Devlin, CEO, Widows And Orphans

Paul Diamond, Barrister, The Chambers of Paul Diamond

Rev. Marian Edmonds-Allen, Executive Director, Parity

George D. Gigicos, Co-Founder and Chairman, Orthodox Public Affairs Committee

Mike Ghouse, President, Center for Pluralism

Lauren B. Homer, Founder and President, Law and Liberty Trust International

Dean Householder, Chief Technology Officer, First Freedom Foundation

Amjad Mahmood Khan, Partner, Brown, Neri, Smith & Khan LLP

Dede Laugesen, Executive Director, Save the Persecuted Christians

Brent Leatherwood, Acting President, Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Faith Joy Hooper McDonnell, Director of Advocacy, Katartismos Global (KGI Global)

Sarah E. Makin, Former Deputy Assistant to the President, Senior Director for Strategic Engagement and Senior Advisor on International Religious Freedom, National Security Council

Nasim Malik, General Secretary, International Human Rights Committee

Greg Mitchell, Chair, IRF Roundtable, Chair, IRF Secretariat

Scott Morgan, Red Eagle Enterprises

Paul Murray, International Vice President, Religious Freedom Initiatives, IntGlobal Peace Foundation

Patrice J. Pederson, President, First Freedom Foundation

Max Primorac, Former Acting Assistant to the Administrator, Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, US Agency for International Development

John Cotton Richmond, former US Ambassador to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

Susan Ryan, Independent Religious Freedom Advocate

Nina Shea, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute and Director of its Center For Religious Freedom

Bhupindar Singh, Representative to US Government and UN, Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) America

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director, Barnabas Aid

Patricia Streeter, Co-leader, Anglican Persecuted Church Network

Rev. Susan Taylor, Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Ingrid Vanderveldt, Chair, Religious Freedom and Business Foundation CEO Roundtable

Brian L Wills, President, Healing For The Nations

Cc:

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
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The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
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Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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- [1] <https://www.christianpost.com/news/taliban-hunting-for-christians-inspecting-phones-for-bible-apps.html>; <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2021/8/20/afghani-christians-are-facing-a-taliban-reign-of-terror> nbsp
- [2] <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/images-bloodied-afghans-contradict-taliban-s-claims-moderation-n1277042>
- [3] <https://www.voanews.com/a/suicide-bombers-kill-dozens-at-shiite-mosque/6273132.html>
- [4] <https://www.state.gov/u-s-refugee-admissions-program-priority-2-designation-for-afghan-nationals/>
- [5] <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL31269>
- [6] <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4736?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Afghanistan%22%2C%22Afghanistan%22%5D%7D&r=9&s=1>
- [7] <https://aeu.org/2021/08/aeu-joint-statement-on-the-situation-in-afghanistan/>