

August 19, 2021

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

Re: Protection of atheists, humanists, ex-Muslims, and those promoting humanist values in Afghanistan

Dear President Biden:

We write to urge your administration to take all necessary steps to protect the human rights of all Afghans, particularly vulnerable religious minorities and nonreligious people, in the wake of the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan as the United States completes the withdrawal of military forces this month.

The resurgence of the Taliban poses a dire threat to the fundamental values of the international humanist community, including freedom of thought, speech, and choice, and the human rights and dignity of women, LGBTQ people, and children. During their rule, and in the two decades that have followed, the Taliban imposed strict Islamic sanctions based upon their interpretation of *Shari'a* law for common crimes, and they have regularly carried out flogging and executions, including by beheading or stoning. Apostasy, defined as the leaving of one's religion, has been punishable by death. Sadly, we have no reason to believe that this profound disregard for human rights will change.

Thus far, your administration has prioritized the evacuation of Afghans who provided services and assistance to the United States and other foreign governments and their families, who are at substantial risk of reprisal from the Taliban, using the Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) program. However, there are many more Afghans likely to be at risk of persecution under Taliban rule, many of whom may not qualify for Special Immigrant Visas. The threat is particularly grave for atheists, humanists and those promoting humanist values, secular campaigners, and Afghans who have left Islam.

Accordingly, we ask your administration to extend Refugee Admissions Program Priority 2 designation to Afghan nationals who are likely to face persecution on the basis of religion, including atheists, ex-Muslims, humanists, and those promoting humanist values. We further ask that your administration takes every step necessary to increase

capacity for processing P-2 admissions and expedite the timeline for resettlement in the United States.

Our nation's refugee program has been decimated by the previous administration and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless, it is of the utmost urgency that the United States lead the international response in confronting this humanitarian crisis by communicating our willingness to resettle as many Afghan refugees as possible. According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 3.5 million Afghans have been displaced. While your administration's initial commitment to an overall refugee admissions level of 125,000 for fiscal year 2022 is a marked increase from previous years, it is not adequate to meet this emerging crisis.

Therefore, we ask that you issue an Emergency Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions that raises the number of refugee admissions permissible for FY 2021, consistent with section 207(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1157(b)), and to further increase your administration's commitment for FY 2022 above the previous admissions level of 125,000. Doing so would send, as you said in your May 3 memorandum raising the refugee admissions to its current level of 62,500, "the important message that the United States remains a safe harbor for some of the most vulnerable people in the world."

In support of this increase, we urge the Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services, as well as all associated agencies, to make funds available to non-governmental organizations working to facilitate refugee resettlement.

Beyond the urgent needs of refugees lie the realities of the people of Afghanistan who remain in their country. The Taliban has given every indication that its rule in 2021 will not be fundamentally different from its tyrannical rule of decades past. It is therefore vital that the United States works to:

- protect human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan by increasing funding and support for non-governmental programs vital for local NGOs that promote women's rights, including in education, reproductive rights, and equality under the law;
- support NGOs and human rights defenders by increasing support for non-governmental groups inside and outside of Afghanistan that promote human rights, women's rights, children's rights, education, health care, and other vital needs.

In support of this goal, we urge the United States Mission to the United Nations to call upon the U.N. Security Council to adopt a resolution that:

- demands that all parties in the Afghan conflict abide by international human rights standards and international humanitarian law;
- reiterates that the International Criminal Court, to which Afghanistan is a party, can prosecute war crimes and other atrocities; and,
- calls on all parties to ensure that all civilians, including internally displaced people, have full and free access to humanitarian assistance from U.N. agencies and humanitarian groups.

Lastly, the U.N. Human Rights Council will be convening a Special Session on August 24 to address the human rights concerns and situation in Afghanistan. We are troubled that, despite your administration's pledge to reengage with the Council in an observer status, the United States has not joined other observer states in requesting the convening of this special session. During this special session, we call on you to direct Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield to encourage the UNHRC to:

- establish a fact-finding mission that be urgently deployed to Afghanistan to assess the situation on the ground and report back to the Council on human rights violations and responsibilities;
- support the High Commissioner for Human Rights in her efforts to prevent the further commission of systematic human rights violations and create a mechanism for international accountability for such violations;
- engage UN Special Procedure mandates to support fact-finding and accountability on the serious human rights violations occurring in Afghanistan; and,
- pay particular attention to the protection of the most vulnerable in Afghanistan – including children, women and girls, religious minorities (including atheists, humanists, and ex-Muslims), human rights defenders, journalists and the media, educators, and the disabled – using the capacity of the Council's diplomatic and political capacity to engage with all stakeholders to protect and support these groups.

The international humanist movement and our members in the United States stand ready to assist your administration however we can, including welcoming refugees into our

communities, to assist in resolving this ongoing humanitarian crisis. Protecting the human rights of all people, including the most vulnerable, is at the core of our values as humanists. We encourage you to take every action possible to protect the lives and dignity of the millions of people affected by this crisis.

Sincerely yours,

Nick Fish
President
American Atheists

Roy Speckhardt
Executive Director
American Humanist Association

Bart Worden
Executive Director
American Ethical Union

Gary McLelland
Chief Executive
Humanists International

cc: The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary of State
The Honorable Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Health & Human Services
The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Representative of the
United States of America to the United Nations