



The Observatory
for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders

OPEN LETTER - THE OBSERVATORY

AFGHANISTAN: Open letter to Foreign Affairs Ministers to demand urgent action to protect human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society members in danger

Paris-Geneva, August 16, 2021

Your Excellencies,

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (an FIDH-OMCT partnership) is appealing for your urgent assistance to support at-risk Afghan human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society members who seek to leave their country amid the rapid and dramatic deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan.

The announcement in April 2021 of the full and unconditional withdrawal of international armed forces from the country by September 2021 has led to an intensification of attacks against civilians, which has resulted in an alarming increase in casualties. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)), from April 1, 2021, to June 30, 2021, 1,086 people were killed and 2,314 injured. This represents an increase of 90% and 91% respectively from the January – March 2021 period. [In addition, since the beginning of the year nearly 400.000 people have been forced from their homes](#) - some 244,000 since May alone. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has [warned](#) of an “imminent humanitarian crisis” in Afghanistan as a result of insecurity and displacement. Over the past few weeks, the situation has worsened further as the Taliban have taken control of the majority of Afghanistan’s territory. Between July 1 and August 13, 2021, aid organizations verified the [arrival](#) of 13,500 internally displaced persons in Kabul.

In this extremely worrying context, human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society members are particularly vulnerable. Systematic attacks on, and killings of, human rights defenders were rampant across Afghanistan even before the Taliban’s offensive. This has resulted in their almost total inability to carry out any human rights work and the collapse of civic space in Afghanistan. In light of the heightened danger posed by the Taliban’s offensive, and the impossibility for civil society members to relocate within Afghanistan, many civil society members are now seeking safety abroad. They are in need of urgent protection.

We urge you to take immediate action to issue emergency visas to human rights defenders and civil society members whose lives are in danger, in accordance with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and similar guidelines in other countries. We also call on you to immediately halt repatriations of Afghan civil society members at risk of deportation, in accordance with international human rights law.

We trust that you will be sensitive to the urgency and severity of the situation and will respond positively to our appeal.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Alice Mogwe
President
FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights

Gerald Staberock
Secretary General
OMCT - World Organisation Against Torture



fidh



OMCT
SOS-Torture Network