

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 30, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
245 Murray Lane, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

We are writing to express our deep concern about the perilous situation of Afghan nationals who are directly affiliated with U.S. assistance programming in Afghanistan. Time is of the essence. Many of our Afghan partners who championed democracy and human rights are unable to apply for the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program or other existing channels to protect Afghan allies. We urge you to accelerate your plans to address the potentially life-threatening situation these individuals face with the current U.S. withdrawal from the country, and to include them in the announced plans for relocating to a third country Afghan interpreters, drivers, and others who worked with the United States to await processing of their visa requests, regardless of whether they have already begun the application process. How we withdraw, and what political arrangement is left in our wake, matters deeply not just for U.S. interests, but also for the lives of these brave Afghan partners.

We are very concerned that the Administration's current interpretation of eligibility for the SIV program only includes Afghan nationals who have worked under U.S. contracts. It does not include the same pathway to safety for Afghans who have worked under U.S. cooperative agreements and grants, though such individuals were essential to the fulfillment of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. The United States has a moral obligation and a national security interest to assist Afghan citizens who face serious threats because of their invaluable work and involvement in carrying out U.S. programming.

Through nearly two decades of U.S. assistance programming in Afghanistan, the United States has funded, through cooperative agreements and grants, multiple programs on human rights, democracy assistance, support for independent media, and the empowerment of women and marginalized groups. Thousands of Afghan nationals directly implemented U.S.-funded civilian aid and development programs across the country, alongside U.S. and international personnel. They demonstrated a commitment and dedication to this important work for their country despite the fact that the association with the United States placed their lives at risk.

There are already reports of Taliban threats targeting those who have worked on behalf of democracy and human rights under U.S. cooperative agreements and grants once troops are withdrawn. These threats cannot be ignored.

In addition, with the rapidly deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, there is an urgent need to include Afghans among the nationalities eligible for priority admission under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, specifically under the category for groups of special humanitarian concern

to the United States (Priority 2). This action would mirror the actions taken to provide Iraqi nationals with such eligibility following the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. The United States enabled priority admissions for Iraqi nationals who were employed directly by the U.S. government in Iraq as well as for nationals who were employed in Iraq by a non-governmental or media organization based in the United States, or an organization or entity that received a U.S. grant, cooperative agreement, or contract. We should extend the same protection to Afghan nationals affiliated with the U.S. mission and programs in Afghanistan.

Time is not on the side of our Afghan colleagues. In order to avert the worst-case scenario and do all that we can to protect U.S.-affiliated Afghans from their would-be killers, torturers, and abusers, the Administration should provide greater clarity on overall plans to protect and support Afghan allies through the SIV program, including what steps and resources it is devoting to accelerate the processing time for SIV applications. We should also pursue other initiatives, including listing Afghans as among the nationalities eligible for Priority-2 admission under the Refugee Admissions Program. The Administration should also guarantee that Afghan nationals employed by an organization that received a U.S. cooperative agreement or grant will be eligible for consideration under the SIV program.

We urge your prompt attention to this issue and look forward to learning from you about how you intend to assist those who have sided with us in Afghanistan.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ **Robert P. Casey, Jr.**  
Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



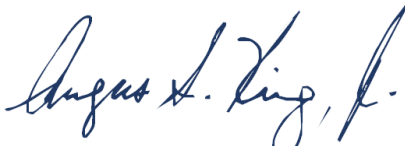
Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator




Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Samantha Power  
Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development