



August 17, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520
VIA EMAIL

Dear Secretary Blinken,

I write today on behalf of the American Sociological Association, the national professional membership association for sociologists and others who are interested in sociology. ASA's more than 10,000 members include students, faculty working in a full range of institutions, and people working in government agencies and nonprofit and private sector institutions. We hope that the U.S. Department of State will take a number of steps in the coming days and weeks to address the emerging crisis in Afghanistan.

The uncertainty, fear, and despair that the Afghan people are experiencing today cannot be overstated. These conditions are especially dire for women and girls, as they face life again under Taliban rule. During the Taliban's rule two decades ago, women, especially leaders in women's rights groups or those who sought education beyond elementary school, suffered horrifying state-sponsored violence. Extreme limitations of movement and on their civil liberties, lashings, public beatings, and killings became everyday weapons of control as women were subjected to unparalleled severe restrictions. Afghan women again face these imminent threats today. Scholars who have actively advocated for democracy and civil and human rights in Afghanistan over the last twenty years are also at significant risk under Taliban rule.

In this letter, we articulate several specific recommendations for protecting Afghans, with especial attention to women and girls, who are most vulnerable under Taliban rule.

First, we urge the Biden administration to support all Afghans at these trying times, but especially women, whose gender makes them a likely target for repression and state-sponsored violence. In particular, we call on the Biden administration to strongly and unconditionally support the work of the women's right movements on the ground and to coordinate with other governments to extend protections to these activists and the vital work they do. We trust that some of the emergency aid allocated for "persons at risk as a result of the situation in Afghanistan" will be directed for livelihood assistance and protection for these women.

Second, with urgency we ask the Biden administration to continue evacuation flights for as long as possible to include scholars, students, and civil society actors, especially women and girls.

Third, we ask the administration to ensure that Afghan women and girls, whose lives are in great peril today due to state-sponsored persecution, have immediate access to asylum protection. We understand that asylum applicants must demonstrate persecution on the bases of one of five protected grounds—race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Afghan women seeking asylum protection today fall under more than one of these protected categories. The extreme risk of severe violence they face is precisely the type of state-sponsored persecution the asylum system is designed to address.

We urge the Biden administration to offer these Afghans (1) asylum, withholding of removal, and protection under the Convention Against Torture for those who reach the United States, (2) admission as a refugees from outside the United States (which does not require them to reach U.S. soil); and (3) humanitarian parole to allow physical entry even if they are not admitted as a refugees (as has been done for many groups escaping state-sponsored violence starting right after World War II). Recognizing the extreme strain on the asylum system today, we also encourage the State Department to consider other alternative pathways to legal protection to Afghan women fleeing state repression, including extending Temporary Protected Status to this vulnerable group.

Fourth, given that the U.S. consulate in Afghanistan is no longer operational, we encourage all U.S. consulates located outside of Afghanistan to receive and process visa applications from Afghans. We ask the Biden administration to also encourage other countries to similarly facilitate the timely processing of applications and entry to their countries.

Fifth, with respect to scholars in particular, we request that the Biden administration waive the intent-to-return requirement on J visa applications for Afghan nationals for the foreseeable future to facilitate their rapid processing without forcing them into a refugee processing track that is not their current first choice or intent.

Finally, we urge you to lead an effort to establish a high-level Interagency Refugee Coordinator to manage refugee processing and relocation across the U.S. government.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. We know you share our concern for the well-being of Afghans, and we are grateful for your efforts to ensure that U.S. public policy offers maximum protection to those who are most vulnerable under the current circumstances.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cecilia Menjivar', written in a cursive style.

Cecilia Menjívar
President