

24 August 2021

To: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

CC: Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN-Habitat
Michelle Bachelet Jeria, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Gilles Michaud, Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security

Dear Secretary-General Guterres,

As you are well aware, the situation in Afghanistan is very dangerous and likely to get much worse. We understand that the United Nations' position is to remain in the country and deliver services however this is being done at the expense of the safety and security of Afghan nationals who are in the employ of the United Nations.

As former United Nations' personnel who worked in Afghanistan, we are gravely concerned about the safety of our colleagues and friends who are at risk because they contributed to the United Nations' mission working on human rights and sustainable development. Their work has been absolutely critical for the UN's delivery across the country for the past two decades, especially given the languages, cultural considerations and constantly evolving security situation.

Due to their service with the United Nations and with programmes funded by western governments including the United States, European Union, Australia, Netherlands, Japan and the Swiss government, they are known in their communities, including by insurgents, for this work. We are already receiving disturbing reports of the Taliban raiding homes, beating people for affiliation with international organizations and requesting meetings for "letters of forgiveness".

As per the United Nations Security Management System Security Policy Manual, "Locally-recruited personnel and/or their eligible family members may be evacuated from a duty station only in the most exceptional cases in which their security is endangered as a direct consequence of their employment by organizations of the United Nations common system. A decision in this regard can only be made by the Secretary-General, as recommended by the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, based on a recommendation by the D[esignated] O[fficial]."

We believe these conditions are met in the case of Afghanistan and locally-recruited personnel and their family members are indeed endangered ***as a direct consequence of their employment by organizations of the United Nations common system.*** We have been trying to support our former colleagues to get on lists with donor countries for visas and evacuations, but without the formal backing and efforts of the United Nations' systems, we have had limited success.

We therefore request you to urgently help locally-recruited personnel of the United Nations in Afghanistan and their families by supporting evacuation and visa processes for all that request them before the 31 August 2021.

The Afghan colleagues that we are in contact with remain dedicated to working for the United Nations, furthering the ideals of the mission and contributing to development of their country. But they should not be asked to sacrifice their lives and safety in order to accomplish this. It would be much safer for them to continue their work from outside of the country.

We implore you to act with urgency.

Sincerely,

Julie Greenwalt, Urban Environment Specialist, UN-Habitat Afghanistan, 2014-2015

Manuel Vega-Cuberos, Head of Knowledge Management, UN-Habitat Afghanistan, 2017-2019

Depika Sherchan, Housing, Land and Property Rights Advisor, UN-Habitat Afghanistan, 2015-2019

Ida Zeline Lien, Urban Advisor, UN-Habitat Afghanistan, 2016-2017

Naïk Lashermes, Urban Advisor, UN-Habitat Afghanistan, 2017-2019

Helena Ohlsson, Urban Advisor, UN-Habitat Afghanistan, 2015-2017

Keiko Matsuo, Human Settlements Officer, UN-Habitat Afghanistan, 2017-2020

Matthew French, Urban Advisor, UN-Habitat Afghanistan, 2013-2016

Dirk Snyman, Chief Technical Advisor, UNEP Afghanistan, 2017-2020

Felicity Cain, Technical Advisor, UN-Habitat Afghanistan, 2018-2021