

June 4, 2021

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

Dear Mr. President,

As 137 faith leaders and 57 faith-based organizations across traditions, we write to urge the Biden administration to immediately implement plans to evacuate vulnerable U.S.-affiliated Afghans out of Afghanistan in conjunction with the ongoing withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, and to authorize as many Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) as are necessary. The Afghan SIV program was created to provide a pathway to protection to those who face danger because of their service to the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. It is our moral imperative to keep our promise to those we pledged to protect.

As people of faith, our concern stems from shared values rooted in our sacred texts that remind us to love our neighbor and welcome the sojourner among us. As Leviticus 19:34 (CE) reminds us: "Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself, because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt."

The United States has a moral duty to protect those who have protected us. The way we leave Afghanistan will be an enduring mark on our nation's history. As we draw an end to America's longest war, we must remember that our departure from Afghanistan will put our allies there, who have saved so many American lives, at grave risk. They include local translators, engineers, security guards, embassy clerks, logisticians, cultural advisors, and soldiers. As we prepare to withdraw, we cannot abandon them, especially as that service to us puts them in danger; we must bring them to safety in the United States.

Afghans whose lives are in danger because of their service with American armed forces, work with U.S.-based NGOs or media, or on projects funded by USAID, must be evacuated to American territory, where their visas can be safely vetted and processed. This evacuation could follow the model the U.S. adopted in previous evacuations, whereby vulnerable Afghans and their families could be airlifted from Afghanistan to U.S. territory, where U.S. government officials could process their visa applications or other humanitarian protection before flying applicants to their final destination for resettlement in the U.S.

Honoring our commitments in Afghanistan will rightly be seen as part of a history of American actions to protect individuals facing violence and persecution as a result of assisting the United States. The U.S. has successfully undertaken such efforts before. In 1975, the Ford administration evacuated 130,000 Vietnamese to Guam where these refugees went through initial screenings before they were flown to reception centers in the continental U.S. In 1996, the Clinton administration airlifted thousands of Iraqis who had assisted American efforts in Northern Iraq to Guam, where they completed security screening and immigration processing. In 1999, after Serbian forces attacked Pristina in Kosovo, the Clinton administration airlifted 20,000 Kosovar Albanians to Fort Dix, NJ, where they were processed and received refugee status.

The SIV program has brought thousands of Iraqis and Afghans to safety in the U.S. But the program has had dangerous delays for applicants and unnecessary bureaucratic complications, brought about by challenges with in-country processing. There is very limited refugee processing in the region - made more difficult by the deteriorating security situation. Given the short window of time available to us before U.S. troops withdraw from Afghanistan, the completion of the SIV and humanitarian processing should be incorporated into the framework of an evacuation. Our allies must be brought to safety, and rapidly processed for protection while being treated as guests and not detainees within the United States.

We also urge Congress to authorize as many additional visas as may be necessary to cover all who qualify, and extend the program until U.S. forces have left Afghanistan and the program is no longer needed. There is currently a deficit of at least 11,000 visas needed, but it may be more. As we demand that the U.S. organize an immediate evacuation of U.S.-affiliated Afghans in need of protection, we recognize that this includes around 17,000 Afghans who have a pending application for an SIV as well as their family members, who are already at risk because of the support they have provided to our troops and government, and face a heightened risk as the U.S. withdraws from Afghanistan.

This is urgent. Given the September 11 deadline, there is no moment to lose to protect those who helped us as we carried out our mission in Afghanistan. At this moment, the future of a generation of Afghans who believed and worked with us on our mission is at risk. As the U.S. prepares to depart Afghanistan, we must commit to providing refuge to those Afghans who committed themselves to our efforts.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Faith Organizations

American Muslim Empowerment Network (AMEN)
Arizona Interfaith Power & Light
Bethany Christian Services
CAO DAI TEMPLE
CaoDai Today
Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice
Church of the Brethren/Quaker
Church of the Nazarene
Church World Service
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
Con Dau Parishioners Association
Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Texas
Disciples Immigration Legal Counsel
Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries
Dominican Sisters ~ Grand Rapids
Episcopal Peace Fellowship-Maine
Evangelical Church Of Christ Of The Central Highlands
Evangelical Immigration Table
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Faiths for Safe Water
Fellowship Southwest
Franciscan Action Network
HIAS
IHM Sisters - Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office
Interfaith Action of SW Michigan
Interfaith Welcome Coalition - San Antonio
InterReligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia
Journey's End Refugee Services, Inc.
Jubilee Campaign USA
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Makom Solel Lakeside
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
National Justice for Our Neighbors
New York Justice for Our Neighbors, Inc.

Olympia Zen Center, a Buddhist Community
Pax Christi Northern California
Pax Christi USA
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Sapulpa Church of the Nazarene
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Congregational Leadership
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Western Province Leadership
Sisters of Charity, BVM
Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, PA
Sisters of St. Francis, Sylvania Ohio
Sisters, Home Visitors of Mary
South Asian Fund For Education , Scholarship and Training Inc
Spring Hill United Church of Christ (UCC)
Sts Luke & James Episcopal Church Minneapolis MN
Temple B'rith Kodesh Social Act Committee
The Episcopal Church
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
UNITED SIKHS
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)
World Relief

Faith Leaders

National

Mary E. Hunt, Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)
Laura May, Meditationchappel.org
Mr. Jason Miller, Franciscan Action Network
Mr. Johnny Zokovitch, Pax Christi USA
Rev. Mark Stephenson, Christian Reformed Church in North America
Rev. Dr. Chuck Currie, Office of the Rev. Dr. Chuck Currie
Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries
Rev. Laura Randall, UUSC
Reverend Leslie Wilson, African American Ministers In Action
Sister Kate O'Donnell, Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Committee Peace

Arizona

Jean Rivers, Methodist Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Rev. Doug Bland, Arizona Interfaith Power & Light
Rev. Dr. Eric O. Ledermann, University Presbyterian Church of Temple
Frank Bergen, Episcopal Church of St. Matthew

California

Sister Dianne Nixon, Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (SNJM)
Catechist Lorin Peters, St. Leander's Catholic Parish
Chaplain, Michael Eselun, UCLA Center for Integrative Oncology
Dr. Maurine Huang, Parkview Presbyterian Church
Mrs. Mary Hogan, St. Joseph's Basilica
Ms. J.L. Angell, Presbyterian
Rev. Marilyn Chilcote, St. John's Presbyterian Church
Rev. Robert McKenzie, St. John's Presbyterian Church in Berkeley
Rev. Dr. Eileen Altman, First Congregational Church of Palo Alto, UCC
Rev. Dr. John Rawlinson, St. Cuthbert's Episcopal Church, Oakland
Rev. Lita Sample, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Rev. Marilyn Chilcote, Beacon Presbyterian Fellowship

Rev. Mary Kay Will, United Methodist Church
Rev. Rick Sample, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Rev. Will McGarvey, Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County
Sister Rosemary Everett, Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary
Sister Linda Snow, Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet

Colorado

Rabbi Deborah Bronstein, Congregation Har HaShem

Connecticut

Reverend Carla Dietz, United Congregational Church Worcester

Florida

Anne Richter, Board Member, Espiritu Santo Catholic Church, Pax Christi Florida
Dr. Maria Pouncey, Migrant Education
Rev. Dr. William Olewiler, United Methodist Pastor (retired)
Rev. Joel Tooley, Melbourne First Church of the Nazarene
Alice Naegele, United Methodist Women

Georgia

Rev. Jenelle Holmes, Ormewood Church

Illinois

Ministry Leader Paul Zigterman, Lombard Christian Reformed Church
Mrs. Bonnie Zigterman, Lombard Christian Reformed Church
Ms. Janice Gintzler, Hazel Crest Community, United Methodist Women
Rabbi Isaac Serotta, Makom Solel Lakeside
Rev. Sally Scheib, United Church of Christ
Sister Anne Irose, Adorers of the Blood of Christ

Indiana

Rev. Dr. Gordon Gibson, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Elkhart
Rev. Richard Schmidt, Living Hope Community Church
Rev. Sarah Nowak, Pleasant View Lutheran Church

Iowa

Brother Brian McLaughlin, Divine Word Missionaries
Ms. Sue Moss, Lovely Lane UMC

Kentucky

Sister Marlene Lehmkuhl, Sea of Charity of Nazareth
The Rev. Canon Elise Johnstone, Episcopal Diocese of Lexington

Louisiana

Rev. James VanderWeele (retired)

Maine

Rev. Cindy Maddox, First Congregational Church, UCC

Maryland

Rev. Patricia Hollinger, Church of the Brethren/Quaker (retired)

Massachusetts

Rev. Eliot Moss, St. John's Episcopal Church, Athol
Rev. Dr. Mark Boyea, First Parish Church
Rev. Mary Katherine Morn, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Rev. Steve Kanji Ruhl, Touch the Earth Zen Buddhist Sangha

Michigan

Rev. Dr. Sid Mohn, UCC
Rev. James C. Johnson, Mercy Health, Muskegon
Rev. Justo Gonzalez, United Church of Christ
Sister Monica Stuhlreyer, IHM Sisters
Sister Barbara Hansen

Minnesota

Ms. Mary Kozmik, St. Paul's Monastery
The Rev. Dr. Paula Nordhem, United Church of Christ
The Rev. Dr. William Heisley, Sts. Luke and James Episcopal Church
The Rev. Larry Bussey, Sts. Luke and James

Missouri

Rev. Christopher Miller, Trinity Presbyterian Church PC (USA)
Rev. Dr. Jane Fidler-Hoffman, Retired United Church of Christ

Nebraska

Mr. Norm Rohlfing, Zion UCC
Sister Valeria Lewandoski, Servants of Mary US/Jamaica Community

New Jersey

Rabbi David Greenstein, Congregation Shomrei Emunah
Reverend Julie Yarborough, Christ Church

New York

Canon John Denaro, St. Ann & the Holy Trinity Church
Cynthia Grguric (self)
Dr. Hussein Rashid, Itinerant Shi'i Preacher
Dr. Robert Berson, Ethical Society of Northern Westchester
Elder Maria Studer, United Presbyterian Church
Ken Pitcher, Executive Director, Refuge Rochester
Rabbi Peter Stein, Temple B'rith Kodesh
Rev. Kay Woike, UCC
Rev. Lane Campbell, First Universalist Church of Rochester, NY
Rev. Richard Gilbert, First Universalist Church of Rochester, NY
Reverend John Long, First Presbyterian Church
Reverend Kirk Baker, Presbyterian Church USA
The Rev. Elizabeth Maxwell, Church of the Ascension

North Carolina

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hammer, Catholic Community of St. Francis of Assisi, Raleigh
Pastor Ga. A., HMong Church of Christ
Rev. Dr. Doug Wingeier, United Methodist
The Rev. Christine Payden-Travers, Episcopal Priest (retired)

Ohio

Mr. George Marsh, Sisters and Associates of St. Francis, Tiffin
Pastor Chrissy Stonebraker-Martinez, InterReligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia
Rev. Rebecca Tollefson
Rev. Amy Heckman, Church of the Nazarene
Sister Andrea Koverman, Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati
Sr. Patricia Gardner, Sisters of St. Francis

Oklahoma

Rev. Chris Moore, Fellowship Congregational UCC

Oregon

Kenneth Crouse, First Congregational UCC, Race Matters Chair
Rev. M. Lynne Smouse, Ainsworth United Church of Christ
The Rev. Cecil Prescod, Ainsworth United Church of Christ
The Rev. Dr. Rodney Page, Church World Service (former Director)

Pennsylvania

Mrs. Maryann Richmond, Lititz Moravian congregation
Ms. Frances Homer, Baptist Church of West Chester, PA
Rev. Luke Martin, 1040 For Peace and Mennonite Church
Rev. Paul Hagedorn, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Sandra Koenig, St James UCC, Limerick
Sister Nora Nash, Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

Rhode Island

Ms. Nancy Green, First Unitarian Church of Providence
Mary Costello, Sisters of Mercy
Sister Mary Pendergast, Sisters of Mercy
Sister Sheila Harrington, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Texas

Karen Morrow, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Field Personnel
Le Sanh Huongmuoi Le, Cao Dai Tay Ninh Temples of Texas
Rabbi Ralph Mecklenburger, Beth-El, Fort Worth
Rev. Binh Ta, Holy Ghost Catholic Parish
Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Linden-Schade, Preston Meadow Lutheran Church
Rev. Megan Peglar, University Christian Church
Sister JT Dwyer, Daughters of Charity
Sr. Rose Gansle, Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament
Minh Duc Do, Vice President, The Junior Sacerdotal Council of the Third Amnesty of God of the TayNinh Holy See

Tennessee

Fr. Neil Pezzulo, Glenmary Home Missioners
The Rev. Carol Westpfahl, The Episcopal Church

Vermont

Rev. Canon Dr. David Hamilton
The Venerable Catherine Cooke, Cathedral Church of St. Paul - Episcopal

Washington

Pastor Anne Hall, Lutheran Church in the San Juans
Rev. Eido Frances Carney, Olympia Zen Center, a Buddhist community
Rev. Mark Lancaster, Generous Heart Sangha - Buddhist
Rev. Marvin Eckfeldt Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (retired)
Rev. Tom Quigley, First Congregational Church of Bellevue (UCC)
Sister Aneelah Afzali, American Muslim Empowerment Network (MAPS)

West Virginia

Rabbi Victor Urecki, B'nai Jacob Synagogue

Wisconsin

Rev. Dr. Janet Wolfe, First Presbyterian Church, Marshfield
Rev. Valerie Showalter, Madison Mennonite Church
Sister Lois Aceto, Racine Dominicans

Wyoming

Rev. Michelina Laws, Presbytery of Wyoming