



Canadian Association of University Teachers  
Association canadienne des professeures et professeurs d'université



# Supporting At-Risk Afghan Academics, Teachers, and Trade Unionists

## Submission to the Special Committee on Afghanistan

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We are grateful for the opportunity to make this submission on behalf of our members and in solidarity with our at-risk colleagues in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. We continue to be alarmed at the situation in Afghanistan, especially in relation to Afghanistan's scholars, researchers, civil society leaders, teachers, and trade unionists – in particular women, LGBTQ+ people, and ethnic and religious minorities. Those at risk need to be evacuated and resettled immediately to safe countries like Canada.

Working with international partners, including [Education International](#), [Scholars and Risk](#), and the [International Trade Union Confederation](#), we have been made aware of a several distressing situations facing our colleagues in Afghanistan, and those now languishing as refugees in neighbour countries.

While we have appreciated this government's commitment to bring 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada through the special immigration and humanitarian programs, we remain gravely concerned that delays in processing applications and stringent VISA and refugee status requirements may result in at-risk colleagues facing arrest, detention, death, and for those who have managed to flee the country, deportation.

Our organizations were also heartened to see [increased immigration measures put in place for Ukrainian refugees](#) – including the prioritization of applications and, importantly, the emergency travel provisions which eliminate many of the normal VISA requirements. We hope that similar measures can be extended to our colleagues in Afghanistan, with whom Canadians and the Canadian government also share a special relationship.

Academics, trade unionists, teachers, and progressive civil society leaders in Afghanistan fought for a new, rights-respecting, knowledge-based society after NATO overthrew the Taliban regime in 2001. For 20 years these scholars and unionists worked to protect, defend, and attain fundamental rights to education, access to knowledge, and freedom of expression and freedom of association. This work is already being undermined by the new Taliban regime through political appointments in Afghanistan's major universities and the prohibition of women's return to university to teach or learn.

## Background on our organizations

Founded in 1951, [CAUT/ACPPU](#) is the national voice for academic staff representing 72,000 teachers, librarians, researchers, general staff and other academic professionals at some 125 universities and colleges across the country. CAUT is an outspoken defender of academic freedom and works actively in the public interest to improve the quality and accessibility of post-secondary education in Canada. CAUT is also home to a dedicated [Refugee Foundation](#) which has been reactivated considering the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The Foundation was initially created in the 1970s to offer support to refugees fleeing Vietnam for Canada.

Founded in 1920, the [CTF/FCE](#) is the national voice for the teaching profession. As the national alliance of provincial and territorial teacher organizations, the CTF/FCE represents 18 Member Organizations and over 365,000 elementary and secondary school teachers across Canada. The CTF/FCE upholds teaching as a profession and advocates for adequate resourcing, labour rights, and social justice, across Canada and around the world. The CTF/FCE has 60 years of experience in international development cooperation, including various partnerships supported by the government, through Global Affairs Canada.

The [CLC/CTC](#) is the largest labour organization in Canada, bringing together dozens of national and international unions, provincial and territorial federations of labour and community-based labour councils to represent more than 3 million workers across the country.

Our three organizations are willing and eager to work with this committee and this government to support the resettlement of Afghan refugees, including identifying those at risk. We are also ready to identify how we can

work best with community allies to contribute to the provision of identified needs, such as housing, employment, childcare, health care, and mental health care, among others. The CLC contributed to community level assistance for the influx of Syrian refugees in 2015 and is prepared to identify areas where they could assist with this resettlement effort.

Below are five policy recommendations to ensure that we can successfully get our at-risk colleagues to Canada.

### Policy recommendations

1. Explicit inclusion of academics, teachers, and trade unionists as part of at-risk groups eligible for the special humanitarian program.
2. The consideration of diplomatic “laissez-passer” agreements with third party countries in high-risk cases.
3. Provision of increased resources to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and other relevant departments and agencies to expedite (i) applications under the special programs, and (ii) refugee claims processes for both Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) and non-SAH applicants.
4. More regular communication and case status updates between IRCC, applicants and their sponsors – particularly for those under threat of deportation from third countries.
5. Establishing an emergency travel program for at-risk Afghans, waiving usual VISA and UNHCR refugee designation requirements, until they can be satisfied from a safe location.

On behalf of our three organizations, our members, and our international colleagues, we thank you for the work of your committee and for consideration of our submission.

Respectfully submitted by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF), and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC),



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