

**Submission to the Special Committee on Afghanistan
May 2022**

Dear Honourable Members,

Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) is urging the government to take the necessary steps to fulfill its promise to resettle 40,000 Afghan nationals in Canada.

JHR would like first to acknowledge the government's leadership in making 40,000 spaces available to Afghans. This is an equivalent commitment to the entire continent of Europe. It is important to commend the Liberals for their ambition in this regard.

To date, the government has faced challenges operationalizing in particular the previously announced special humanitarian program, a program for women leaders, human rights defenders, persecuted religious or ethnic minorities, LGBTI individuals, journalists and those who helped Canadian journalists.

As a media development organization that works internationally to support media freedoms, JHR is extremely grateful for the government's support.

On its own, working with private resources, JHR has helped evacuate more than 400 Afghan journalists and media professionals and their families. Of these, 218 of these are permanently resettled in Canada and countries such as Germany and France.

JHR, working in partnership with veterans' group Aman Lara and the Government of Canada, has also successfully, safely and legally relocated more than 750 Afghans from Afghanistan.

Despite this success, JHR is aware of more than 300 journalists and human rights defenders that continue to fear for their lives in Afghanistan and neighboring countries as they await a clear pathway.

Honorable Members, we are humbly requesting that you consider **these three urgent recommendations** as part of your ongoing study.

- 1. Increase the number of humanitarian stream spaces from the current total of 3,000.**

- a. Canada's PP3 Humanitarian Stream is not yet meeting the government's stated policy objectives *with the speed that the urgent situation for journalists in Afghanistan requires*, and must be properly resourced in order to do so.
2. Global Affairs Canada must properly and sufficiently resource JHR and Aman Lara to continue and expand the work we have been doing ensuring safe and legal passage for Canada-bound Afghans out of Afghanistan.
3. IRCC must provide the resources necessary to speed up the volume of cases processed.

Overview of Key Obstacles to the Safe Relocation of Afghans to Canada

1. *Referral of Afghan refugees via existing pathways has been slow and cumbersome.*
 - Canada is currently not on track to meet its commitment to welcome 40,000 Afghan refugees who, given the escalating risk within Afghanistan, cannot afford to wait.
 - Even if Canada evacuated 1000 Afghans a month, as the Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada indicated last week in testimony, *Canada would still not achieve the 40,000 policy goal by the end of 2023.*
 - Greater speed and volume is urgently needed to get eligible Afghans out of harm's way and meet the current need *while also achieving the government's stated policy goals.*
 - NGOs helping facilitate legal and safe passage are currently at risk of losing the government support necessary to support those awaiting a pathway to Canada.
 - The United States has evacuated over 100,000 Afghans, and is busy moving people out of Afghanistan at a rate of 3000 per month. Canada's rate is far slower. This is in part because the effort has to date largely been outsourced to under-resourced networks of NGOs.
 - If the government's plan is to outsource the bulk of this initiative to NGOs, it will need to scale both the financial and immigration processing resources required by the NGO networks in order to achieve its stated policy aims within the two-

year timeframe, as quoted by Minister Fraser.

- Canada's response to the crisis in Ukraine has demonstrated that strong political will can, and will, make a difference in ensuring we stand by our commitments for those fleeing persecution and violence.
- JHR encourages the Government of Canada to show that same agility and creativity of thinking when it comes to supporting the needs of Afghans.

2. *The Government's PP3 Humanitarian Stream is not yet living up to its promise to meaningfully prioritize vulnerable groups.*

- The Government of Canada accepts referrals of Afghan refugees from three referral partners: UNHCR, Frontline Defenders and Protect Defenders. The total number of spaces available is 3,000.
- These agencies face significant resource constraints and in many cases do not share Canada's timelines. Afghan refugees registered with the UNHCR in Pakistan are being told to expect a five year wait to be referred to Canada. Frontline Defenders has told JHR categorically that they are not accepting new cases in 2022.
- While JHR is *immensely* grateful for the partnership with Protect Defenders, a referral partner with a quota to refer so few people (900) *is not a solution that is fit for purpose* to refer up to 3000 persecuted minorities, journalists and LGBTQ quickly on to Canada.
- Result: Over the last eight months, the government's PP3 Humanitarian Stream has yet to live up to the stated policy objective of prioritizing high risk groups including journalists and those who helped Canadian journalists, women leaders, human rights defenders, persecuted minorities, and LGBTI individuals.
- JHR recommends the government both significantly increase these quotas for the existing referral partners and find agile, innovative ways to work with the Canadian NGOs involved as a kind of 'referral network.'
- This 'referral network' concept draws on and makes good use of the NGOs and veterans' enhanced knowledge of and insights into the Afghan applicant

population.

- JHR further recommends the government either provide funding directly to the members of this 'referral network' or support the NGOs to engage foundation partners to then source the funds and expertise to be able to train and staff the NGOs up to do this "referral network" work at scale.

3. *Government support for Afghan refugee serving organizations is currently in jeopardy.*

- JHR is one of very few organizations who have received funding from the Government of Canada for the purpose of safely identifying pathways out of Afghanistan, and providing safe haven and supplies to Afghans en route to Canada.
- Working with Global Affairs Canada, JHR, with veterans' organization Aman Lara, has been able to support 750 individuals fleeing for their lives since January of this year alone.
- Working with Aman Lara and Global Affairs Canada, JHR has the capacity to assist *an order of magnitude* more vulnerable Afghans. JHR and Aman Lara are also working with Afghan nationals who are fluent in Dari and Pashto and who are able to assist the refugees directly and respond to the evolving situation on the ground.
- However, this funding, and the funding of our peers, is about to lapse. As a result, vulnerable individuals and their families currently in neighbouring countries may be left without the financial assistance they need for food, shelter, and basic necessities.

Recommendations

1. **Establish a referral method that maximizes the NGOs' knowledge of the applicant populations** along with a pathway to guarantee safe, legal passage out of Afghanistan, in partnership with NGOs that are best informed about the populations they represent. This will ensure faster, better informed and more precise referral of refugees who reflect Canadian priorities.
2. **IRCC can step in to assist the referral partners with instruction and guidelines on screening of the refugees' applications** as well as, ideally, access to the refugee loan program to facilitate more eligible Afghans' safe passage to Canada on the financial side.

3. **Immediately finalize the allocation of remaining Afghan refugee “spots,” creating certainty for thousands of Afghan refugees currently waiting in limbo, and prioritizing spots for journalists, persecuted minorities, LGBTQ, women leaders and human rights defenders.**
4. **Extend existing funding for Afghan refugee serving organizations** to ensure that those hiding in Afghanistan and neighboring countries can safely await a pathway to Canada.
5. Some [countries have recently announced opportunities for Afghan nationals](#) who have worked or been affiliated with those countries to apply for permission to travel to those countries. These programs are established by those countries and *UNHCR does not refer people to the programs or process applications.*
6. **Consider more agile, creative approaches**, such as we have seen with the Ukraine effort, **to bring Afghans to Canada through temporary visa programs, economic pathways and student visa initiatives.**
7. **Significantly expand the space available via private sponsorship** and make the process for accessing spots transparent and efficient.

About Journalists for Human Rights

Founded in 2002, Journalists for Human Rights has worked around the world to train and engage local journalists, media outlets, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen and improve human rights coverage in local contexts.

In response to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, JHR has partnered with Canadian media organizations, unions and veteran’s groups, to identify, vet, and evacuate vulnerable Afghans with a connection to Canada. As a recipient of funding from the Government of Canada, JHR has worked to ensure Afghan journalists and their families are safe both within Afghanistan and neighboring countries.