



Action Points for Supporting Afghan Nationals on the Ground and in Exile

In the face of the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, in particular, the situation of women's and girls' rights, the continuously shrinking space for civil society, the annihilation of democratic principles and values, and the increasing violence and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities;

Considering the ongoing violations of Afghans' right to seek asylum, especially with regard to the obstacles that stand in their path to flee from persecution, the level of corruption in this process, and the perception of double standards in States' treatment of refugee cases;

Whereas the international community showed commitment to support Afghanistan but so far failed to provide adequate and effective humanitarian assistance to Afghan nationals on the ground and in exile, while their lives are still at significant risk;

It becomes more urgent than ever that Members of Parliaments, governments, international organisations, and other relevant stakeholders take concrete measures to engage in a meaningful way and elaborate tangible responses to support Afghans on the ground and in exile.

The following action points, which were developed following the rich exchange that took place during the third PGA Roundtable on Afghanistan on 30 May 2022, should therefore be taken into consideration by the international community:

I. On General Support for Afghanistan from the International Community and Members of Parliaments all over the world:

- 1. Keep the situation in Afghanistan a top priority on the international agenda and send strong messages:** the multiplication of crises all around the world should not push the situation in Afghanistan to the background, especially regarding the status of women's and girls' rights, which represents the worst women's rights crisis since 1996. What is happening in Afghanistan affects all countries worldwide, and it is the international community's responsibility to continue addressing the situation: we cannot forget about Afghanistan.
- 2. Allow Afghans to raise their voices in international, regional, and national fora:** it is of utmost importance to listen to their expertise and to include them in any discussion aiming at calibrating the international community response to address the deteriorating situation in their country.
- 3. Develop partnerships and give space to Afghan actors in your home country, including democratically elected Afghan Members of Parliaments:** invite them to speak in your national parliaments so that any government and civil society actor can listen carefully to their voices and ensure support, and build a partnership with them to stay in close contact.

4. **Do not recognise the Taliban as the legitimate government:** when engaging with the Taliban *de facto* authorities, avoid taking any step that would grant them legitimacy. Whenever possible, targeted development cooperation efforts shall be directed towards Afghan civil society, professional associations and other entities, including relevant international organizations and NGOs, that are able to bypass the controls and scrutiny from the Taliban oppressors (see, for example, the expanded approach developed by the World Bank to supporting the people of Afghanistan).
5. **Reflect on targeted sanctions that will impact the Taliban and international actors engaging with them without imposing more suffering on the Afghan population:** Afghan nationals are already suffering too much from intersecting crises, including economic and food supply crises and lack of healthcare services. Afghan people should not pay an even higher price for the Taliban's abuses, and their lives should not be at an even higher risk.
6. **Build a leadership to drive an international community coordinated and concerted answer to the situation in Afghanistan:** it is crucial that countries committed to implementing a feminist foreign policy lead the international community response to address the situation and continue building a larger consensus at the international level on the protection and promotion of human rights in Afghanistan so that statements turn into practical actions.
7. **Actively and effectively monitor the human rights situation and report on human rights violations, including on issues relevant to women and girls:** although accessing reliable monitoring of the human rights situation, including in Afghan provinces, remains a challenge, it is of utmost importance that the international community supports the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Mr. Richard Bennett, in fully implementing their respective mandates.

II. On the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan:

8. **Continue supporting human rights defenders and independent NGOs actively working on the ground:** implement precise mechanisms to enable them to work from a safe place. In particular, support NGOs with grassroots and connections on the ground to help them reach people living in isolated areas, including people in hiding, and ensure that these people also have access to humanitarian assistance.
9. **Unite your voices to denounce any pressure or attacks targeting human rights defenders and independent NGOs:** speak up when reports underline attacks and abuses against human rights defenders, protesters, women and girls, or any religious or ethnic minority.
10. **Help restore central banking functions to enable the resumption of basic services for the population within the Afghan economy while ensuring no recognition for the Executive branch of the de facto Taliban government:** the severe ongoing economic crisis that Afghans face worsens their already precarious situation. The frozen funds should be used for Afghan citizens, with the appropriate oversight by the Central Bank;
11. **Calibrate any humanitarian assistance according to the specific needs of Afghans by listening to their voices:** it is a priority to include Afghans in any action related to

Afghanistan, especially when it comes to humanitarian assistance: they know best what Afghans need, depending on the different provinces where they are located.

12. **Reengage with Afghanistan on the ground:** human resources are needed on the ground to help Afghan nationals and mitigate the damages and trauma. Practical support and humanitarian assistance to the Afghan society should be strengthened, including the one already provided by UN agencies working on the ground.

III. On the Rights of Afghans to Seek Asylum

13. **Ensure that Afghans' right to seek asylum is respected and avoid applying double standards:** Afghan nationals are fleeing persecution. They have the right to seek asylum and find a place where their lives will not be at risk anymore. Their cases must remain a priority for the entire international community, not only neighbouring Afghan countries. These refugees have expertise that will contribute to any society.
14. **Encourage the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to facilitate the procedure to provide asylum certificates to Afghan refugees:** such certificate is the only document that will give Afghans their refugee status, thus allowing them to have access to basic services and to proceed with their resettlement applications. The UNHCR should guarantee a safe and rapid procedure with integrity. These individuals and families have left everything behind and generally deal with significant trauma: it is of utmost importance that the UN assist them in the best way possible so that their living conditions do not worsen.
15. **Government resources need to be devoted to expedited processing applications:** the procedure length represents an additional element that threatens Afghan lives. Governments should therefore ensure that the necessary financial and human resources are allocated to these processes, which should also be more accessible.
16. **Continue evacuations for those seeking to flee and facilitate safe resettlement, as well as international cooperation for family reunification:** there is still a long way to go on evacuation, as the majority of countries that have pledged to evacuate a certain number of Afghans have not reached their threshold - not to mention that a far greater number of Afghans, including some who have worked with the international community, are at great risk and left without assistance from this same international community. It is also necessary to ensure safe resettlement, especially for women and girls who continue to face heinous crimes such as sexual crimes, gender-based violence, human trafficking, harassment, and other forms of abuses in shelters and elsewhere.
17. **Once resettled in a safe place, help Afghan refugees to rebuild their lives:** assist them in finding jobs and training that fit with their expertise and will allow them to contribute to the society, ensure that Afghan students can continue their education, and earmark mental health resources to help them heal from trauma.
18. **Build and support networks to expand Afghans' legacy:** Afghans need peer support, and their knowledge, expertise, culture, and heritage cannot be lost.

IV. On Fighting against Impunity

19. **Ensure that those responsible for human rights violations and the commission of international crimes are held to account before a court of law that abides by the principles of Rule of Law and international standards:** this must include holding the Taliban accountable for their crimes and Afghanistan responsible for its obligations under international law.
20. **Support the ICC to move forward with its investigation on Afghanistan, which should include a specific focus on gender persecution and the enslavement of children:** efforts to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity on the territory of Afghanistan or by its nationals since 1 May 2003 should be strengthened.
21. **Develop mechanisms for accountability and reparations for victims, including by activating the principle of universal jurisdiction or any other accountability mechanism:** Afghans have waited for justice for too long. The fight against impunity should remain a priority, and countries should effectively adopt domestic legislation that incorporates the definitions of international crimes.
22. **Victims must be at the centre of any process:** victims' inalienable rights to truth, justice, reparations, memory, and guarantees of non-recurrence must be respected and guaranteed.
23. **Implement effective counter-terrorism policies that follow a human rights-based approach to eradicate the threat of terrorism and extremism:** the rise of radicalism and extremism is a phenomenon that can affect any country. Concrete tools that follow a human rights-based approach need to be adopted to avoid these phenomena to spread and protect universal values, democracy, justice, freedom, and human rights. When terrorist attacks arise to the gravity-scale of crimes against humanity, they shall be qualified as such, and the ICC and other mechanisms shall be triggered without hesitation, which characterized past failed efforts to fight impunity.