

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 24, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to highlight the existential threat LGBTQ+ Afghans face under Taliban rule, and to urge you to expand the Department of State’s recently announced Priority 2 (“P-2”) designation granting U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) access for certain Afghan nationals to explicitly include LGBTQ+ Afghans. We further implore you to work with the Department of Defense to ensure that charter flights receive uninterrupted access to the airport, as charter flights will likely provide the best opportunity for priority refugees to escape.

With the Taliban’s takeover of the country, LGBTQ+ Afghans face the prospect of violent death. Sharia law, cemented in Afghanistan’s constitution, prohibits all forms of same-sex activity, and makes same-sex activity punishable by death. Just as it was for ISIS in Iraq, Sharia law is the Taliban’s guiding compass as it establishes its rule over Afghanistan’s government and society. During its campaign in Iraq and Syria, ISIS frequently executed LGBTQ+ individuals by stoning them to death, castrating and hanging them in public squares, and throwing them off buildings.¹

Under Taliban rule, LGBTQ+ Afghans will suffer a similar fate. Last month, Taliban judge Gul Rahim promised that once Taliban forces had taken over Afghanistan, they will implement Sharia law and seek to prosecute and execute LGBTQ+ Afghans:

“For homosexuals, there can only be two punishments: either stoning, or he must stand behind a wall that will fall down on him.”²

The Biden Administration has been a champion of LGBTQ+ rights in the United States and abroad. In a February 2021 Memorandum President Biden stated,

“[I]t shall be the policy of the United States to pursue an end to violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics, and

¹ Vinograd, Cassandra. “ISIS Hurls Gay Men off BUILDINGS, Stones Them: Analysts.” *NBCNews.com*, 26 Aug. 2015 (www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/isis-hurls-gay-men-buildings-stones-them-analysts-n305171); Okporo, Edefe. “The Dire Plight of LGBTQ+ Afghan Refugees.” *ADVOCATE*, 16 Aug. 2021 (www.advocate.com/commentary/2021/8/16/dire-plight-lgbtq-afghan-refugees).

² Browning, Bil. “Taliban Promises to Brutally Execute Gays If It Regains Power in Afghanistan.” *LGBTQ Nation*, 14 July 2021 (www.lgbtqnation.com/2021/07/taliban-promises-brutally-execute-gays-regains-power-afghanistan).

to lead by the power of our example in the cause of advancing the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons around the world.”³

While Canada announced on August 14 it would resettle more than 20,000 Afghan citizens, with an emphasis on protecting LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and others typically targeted by the Taliban, the United States has yet to announce any such policy for LGBTQ+ Afghans.⁴

We have a moral obligation to uphold our values and utilize every tool at our disposal to protect the LGBTQ+ Afghan community. On August 2, the Department of State announced a “Priority 2 (P-2) designation” granting eligible Afghan nationals and their family members access to the USRAP for Afghans looking to flee Taliban rule but who aren’t eligible for a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV). The P-2 designation is made at the discretion of the Department of State and is typically used for “groups of special concern” the Department determines “as having access to the program by virtue of their circumstances.”⁵

In the spirit of upholding our values and leading by example, we urge you to expand the Department of State’s P-2 designation granting USRAP access for Afghan nationals to explicitly include LGBTQ+ Afghans. While we appreciate that the situation in Afghanistan is fluid, you have the power to protect the lives of countless LGBTQ+ Afghans from the horrors they face living under a regime that threatens their very existence. Thank you for your consideration of this matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

_____/s/
David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Sheila Jackson-Lee
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

³ “Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons around the World.” *The White House*, 5 Feb. 2021 (www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/04/memorandum-advancing-the-human-rights-of-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer-and-intersex-persons-around-the-world/).

⁴ Peltier, Elian. “Canada Promises Refuge for 20,000 Afghans as Nations Scramble to Evacuate.” *The New York Times*, 14 Aug. 2021 (www.nytimes.com/2021/08/14/world/asia/canada-refugees-afghanistan.html).

⁵ “U.S. Refugee Admissions Program Priority 2 Designation for Afghan Nationals - United States Department of State.” *U.S. Department of State*, 2 Aug. 2021 (www.state.gov/u-s-refugee-admissions-program-priority-2-designation-for-afghan-nationals).

_____/s/
J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

_____/s/
William R. Keating
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Steven Horsford
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Scott Peters
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Jake Auchincloss
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Deborah K. Ross
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Brad Schneider
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

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Mark Takano
Member of Congress

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James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr.
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress

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David E. Price
Member of Congress

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Judy Chu
Member of Congress

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John Yarmuth
Member of Congress

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Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

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Dina Titus
Member of Congress

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Andy Levin
Member of Congress

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Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

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Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

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Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

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Jim Costa
Member of Congress

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Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

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Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

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Peter Welch
Member of Congress

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Nikema Williams
Member of Congress

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Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

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Jim Cooper
Member of Congress

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Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

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Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

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Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress

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Colin Allred
Member of Congress

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Teresa Leger Fernández
Member of Congress

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Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress

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Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Darren Soto
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Lois Frankel
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Angie Craig
Member of Congress