



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
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Tom Tugendhat MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

27 October 2021

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your letter of 12 October with follow up questions to the 1 September evidence session on UK policy towards Afghanistan.

At-risk groups

1. What is your assessment of the degree of risk faced by the Hazara community in Afghanistan, and what is the UK Government doing to assist them?

Afghanistan's Hazara community (most of whom are Shia) has long suffered through political and social exclusion and repression. Recent decades have seen violent attacks against Hazara, including more recently as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) forces have targeted Shia communities.

Since the Taliban seized power, the Taliban's leadership have made some efforts to reassure Shia leaders and to talk of Afghanistan as a country of 'all ethnicities'. But in the provinces the picture is more mixed and concerning. In central Daykundi province, a large group of Hazara families have been displaced from their land, seemingly at the behest of local Taliban commanders: the history of local tensions over land rights makes understanding the complex local dynamics very difficult.

The threat from ISKP has grown in recent years, as evidenced by the horrific attacks at mosques in Kunduz and Kandahar in recent weeks. The Taliban's capacity to tackle this threat from ISKP remains limited. We continue to track the situation in-country closely. Lord Ahmad, as Minister for Human Rights, also recently met with members of the Hazara diaspora to make clear UK solidarity with and support for the community as well as to hear their concerns.

2. What is your assessment of the degree of risk faced by disabled people in Afghanistan, and what is the UK Government doing to assist them?

Those with disabilities face particular challenges in Afghanistan, given the incredibly limited care facilities. The Taliban often reference their desire to support those disabled as a consequence of the last forty years of conflict. But it is highly likely the risks to the disabled will grow as the pressure on the health service increases. The UK is working with international partners to identify how we can support basic health services. The international community recently worked with the UN to ensure that the Afghan health system received a critical injection of \$45 million of funding.

The UK has doubled its funding to Afghanistan to £286 million this year. We are providing humanitarian aid via existing programmes in Afghanistan through the UN and NGOs, including emergency food and shelter. We are working with international partners, including the UN and World Bank, as to how we can best support basic services.

Assistance helplines

3. How many complaints has the Government received about phone calls to helplines for British and non-British citizens in Afghanistan going unanswered?

Throughout the Afghanistan response, the FCDO received over 40,000 phone calls from those in Afghanistan. During the initial response, the number of calls each day were three to four times the FCDO's usual volumes. Due to the significant increase in the volume of calls, the FCDO was unable to answer a number of the calls we received between 16-19 August. While the FCDO did not receive or record any complaints concerning unanswered telephone calls to its formal feedback or complaint channels, we are aware that a number of MPs and members of the public flagged concerns, including via social media. In response, the FCDO deployed a surge team of staff from around the FCDO network to take calls and every day since 20 August our Consular Contact Centre has answered more than 92% of calls received.

Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme

4. When will the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) open for applications?; Will cases that were submitted by MPs and their staff to the FCDO as special cases, or to the Home Office as urgent queries, automatically be considered under the ACRS, or will at-risk Afghan individuals have to reapply when the scheme is launched?; Your predecessor said the scheme would take people "based on objective, independent international or related criteria for those at a risk of persecution." Which criteria was he referring to? Were these same criteria used when deciding who would be evacuated under LOTR?

The Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), announced by the Home Secretary and led by the Home Office, will provide those put at risk by recent events in Afghanistan with a route to safety. The ACRS is one of the most generous schemes in our country's history under which we will welcome up to 5,000 vulnerable Afghans over the next year and up to a total of 20,000 in the coming years. Further details on the scheme will be published by the Home Office on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghanistan-resettlement-and-immigration-policy-statement>

There will be many more people seeking to come to the UK under the scheme than there are places. There will not be a formal application process for the ACRS. Instead, eligible people will be prioritised and referred for resettlement to the UK.

The scheme will prioritise those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights and freedom of speech, rule of law (for example, judges, women's rights activists, academics, journalists); and vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians, and LGBT+).

Those Afghan nationals who were specifically called forward by the FCDO to Kabul airport for evacuation by the UK military will be guaranteed a place under the ACRS. Those in this group previously received a personalised e-mail notifying them that they should proceed to the airport. Their details have been transferred to the Home Office who will administer the scheme.

Calls with foreign governments

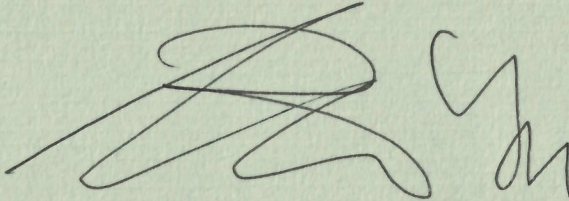
5. Since the beginning of 2021, on what dates was the FCDO contacted by other countries' foreign ministries seeking a telephone call with ministers, in which Afghanistan was one of the issues to be discussed?

- For each contact, did the call take place, and if so on what date?
- Before the fall of Kabul on 15 August, when did your predecessor last speak to foreign ministers from: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and the US?
- For each of these calls, was Afghanistan on the agenda?

There are a variety of ways in which Ministerial calls are arranged, for example through our diplomatic missions or direct contact with Ministerial offices. We do not centrally log when and by whom requests were made, or what subjects were suggested. As a result, the information does not exist to answer the first part of this question.

I refer you to the table attached to my predecessor's written response of 15 September which lists meetings of FCDO Ministers and their counterparts in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan in 2021.

My predecessor was in regular contact with the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan and the USA. He spoke with US Secretary of State Blinken on a number of bilateral and multilateral occasions on Afghanistan, including the G7 and G20 meetings in June 2021.

Best wishes,


THE RT HON ELIZABETH TRUSS MP



Foreign Affairs Committee

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From the Chair
Tom Tugendhat MP

Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
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SW1A 2AH

27 September 2021

Dear Foreign Secretary

I am writing with some questions to follow up on our 1 September evidence session with your predecessor, on UK policy towards Afghanistan.

At-risk groups

- What is your assessment of the degree of risk faced by the Hazara community in Afghanistan, and what is the UK Government doing to assist them?
- What is your assessment of the degree of risk faced by disabled people in Afghanistan, and what is the UK Government doing to assist them?

Assistance helplines

- How many complaints has the Government received about phone calls to helplines for British and non-British citizens in Afghanistan going unanswered?

Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme

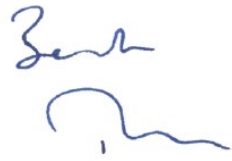
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- Your predecessor said the scheme would take people "based on objective, independent international or related criteria for those at a risk of persecution." Which criteria was he referring to? Were these same criteria used when deciding who would be evacuated under LOTR?

Calls with foreign governments

When he appeared before us, your predecessor told the Committee that he had had over 40 meetings or telephone calls where Afghanistan was on the agenda between mid-March and 30 August. I would be very grateful if you could provide the following information:

- Since the beginning of 2021, on what dates was the FCDO contacted by other countries' foreign ministries seeking a telephone call with ministers, in which Afghanistan was one of the issues to be discussed?
- For each contact, did the call take place, and if so on what date?
- Before the fall of Kabul on 15 August, when did your predecessor last speak to foreign ministers from: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and the US?
- For each of these calls, was Afghanistan on the agenda?

I would appreciate your responses to the above questions by 11 October.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Tugendhat', with a stylized flourish underneath.

TOM TUGENDHAT