

Written evidence submitted by Mohammad Rafi Hottak.

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Statement

On 15 August 2021, when the Taliban swept back into Kabul, many of us who stood shoulder-to-shoulder with British forces felt the floor drop from under us. For Afghan interpreters, LECs, and Special Forces the very people who made the UK mission possible the takeover was not just a change of flag; it was the start of a manhunt. Families went underground. Phones were smashed. Evidence and Documents were burned, Addresses were abandoned. Every knock at the door sounded like the end.

Against that backdrop, the UK's failure to protect highly sensitive personal data was not a inconsequential administrative mistake, it was a reckless breach and a betrayal of trust. Details that should have been shielded; names, roles within the UK mission, family links, contact numbers, home addresses were exposed while these people were being actively hunted. Even those already evacuated to Britain were terrified for their loved ones left behind. Many of us in the UK spent nights calling home, whispering advice on how to move, where to hide, who to avoid. The fear was not theoretical; arrests, torture, targeted killings and disappearances have since been reported. We cannot always prove which case traces back to the leak, but we do know close allies were detained, brutalised and, in some cases, killed.

When the court injunction was lifted, panic spread through our community. Some sold everything to flee to neighbouring countries, only to be deported back; others were intercepted, detained, or disappeared along the way. British Afghans like me now accept we may never safely return to our homeland; our names and our families will remain targets.

I believe the leak should have remained confidential until all at-risk allies were extracted. The public absolutely has a right to know how such a failure happened, but not at the expense of lives still in jeopardy. Four years on, too many remain in limbo in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran still waiting for evacuation, decisions, or even a clear response. We are told that around 7,000 people linked to the leak were eventually brought out; no one can tell us who they were or how that figure was verified, while large numbers of Interpreters and their families, LECs and "triple-units" are still stranded or stalled in third countries.

Bureaucracy has, time and again, outranked safeguarding. Appeals have been rejected on rigid 90-day deadlines, rules impossible to follow for people in hiding, on the move, or without reliable internet, English literacy, or a safe way to share emails.

Interpreters' AFM applications have been refused; some interpreters remain separated from their spouses still trapped in Afghanistan. After long waits for decisions come longer waits for flights, followed by months sometimes years stuck in BHC hotels in Pakistan. Recently, families were even deported back after nearly two years of waiting. That is not safeguarding; that is abandonment by delay.

The UK evacuation itself did not feel timely, fair, or appropriately prioritised. Some of the most exposed were not on the first lists; too many were pushed to the back by process, confusion, or poor coordination. After arrival in Britain, the Government's handling compounded the harm. I appreciate local councils were unprepared for the shared numbers. But Government could have funded rapid, permanent solutions purchasing properties, fast-tracking local placements, and empowering councils to move people into stable homes. Keeping families in hotels for over two years was costly, corrosive, and avoidable.

Worst of all, the talent of our allies has been squandered. Doctors, engineers, linguists, intelligence specialists and former special forces trained by the best of the UK were left idle or funneled into low-paid, irrelevant work. With planning, we could have delivered fast-track requalification and English classes, and direct pathways into the NHS, education, engineering, cyber, and defence. For those with military backgrounds, the MOD could have created targeted entry schemes or specialist reserve units to connect their skills. Instead, we've overseen a failed integration and a waste of potential the UK actually needs.

This is not about charity; it is about duty and strategy. These people were our force-multipliers. They saved British lives. They believed our promises. We must now Finish the job. Extract all remaining at-risk allies and immediate families and treat leak-affected cases as urgent.

14th October 2025