

## Written evidence submitted by Nowzad charity (AFG0047)

In direct response to Raphael Marshall's submitted evidence as requested.

'Pen' Farthing

CEO – Nowzad charity 1119185

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### Introduction

The below is fact which can be checked and is in direct response to Raphael Marshall's unverified evidence which I assume he was paid to write? How is such a junior inexperienced 'aide' even allowed the platform he was to write such nonsense?

1. In response to paragraph 207. Of course Nowzad's ability (through fundraising) to charter its own flight for people and animals is relevant. Our chartered flight was capable of flying 230 passengers with the dogs and cats transported in the cargo hold – where you are unable to transport people. Nowzad's staff and families including women and young children; totalled 67. We offered HMG continuously throughout Operation Pitting 160 seats for British evacuees. It was always declined.

2. In response to paragraph 208. Mr Marshall states; 'PJHQ pointed out correctly that there was no reason to believe the Taliban would target animal rights charities'. I would ask since when was Mr Marshall authorised to determine if a PJHQ statement was indeed correct or otherwise? Truly well above his station. I would also suggest that the PJHQ embed within the crisis team was not as good at research as one would hope? Nowzad is NOT an animal rights charity. It is an animal welfare charity. Big difference. The charity is managed by a former Royal Marine Commando who served and fought in Helmand Province with 42 Commando Royal Marines. Our afghan team of men and women veterinarians and support staff provided veterinary support to many embassies for the care and welfare of their working dogs. Our staff had their biometric data stored at both the British and American embassies including at Resolute Support. Our core mission has always been to facilitate the rescue and transportation of animals adopted by coalition soldiers serving in Afghanistan. At the time of the Taliban retaking Kabul our charity had supported over 1700 soldiers to be reunited with their adopted dog or cat. This justification was used

during the process to ask for the Nowzad team to be considered to be called forward for evacuation compared to an interpreter who last worked for HMG over 7 years ago and has been living and working in Afghanistan safely since then.

I would again strongly suggest that if considering the evacuation of an interpreter who last worked for the British in 2014 (HMG has had 7 years to evacuate these people if they were an actual priority....) was considered a priority then so too should have been supporting the Nowzad staff who currently supported the NATO mission in Afghanistan to be evacuated on a chartered flight that the UK government was not even paying for.

3. In response to paragraph 209; I am glad that the protection of domestic animals was not a war aim in Afghanistan. Why is this even relevant? At no point did I or anyone from Nowzad ask HMG for protection for our dogs and cats.

4. In response to paragraph 210; PJHQ noted that it would be unethical to prioritise Nowzad's Afghan staff – we never ever asked anyone to prioritise our staff. And to confirm HMG did not prioritise Nowzad staff – on the 30<sup>th</sup> August in response to Steven Kinnock MP stating on LBC that Pen Farthing's animals were given priority, Ben Wallace MP tweeted in response; 'they weren't'. HMG claims that 15,000 Afghans were evacuated – how can anyone say that the Nowzad 67 staff were prioritised when they were not even called forward until 1430hrs (L) on the 25<sup>th</sup> August?

5. In response to paragraph 211. Let me make this abundantly clear; NO HMG capacity was used to transport any animals. None. This demonstrates the clear speculation of Mr Marshall's submitted evidence. Sadly, it seems Mr Marshall just made it up to have his five minutes in the spot light. What is Mr Marshall even referring to? Whilst I was awaiting our chartered flight I noted two periods of 3 hours where no evacuation flights landed or took off on the 28<sup>th</sup> August. Clearly Nowzad did not waste any capacity. I asked again if HMG would like to use the spare seats on our chartered flight. HMG refused. I left Kabul on a 230 seat flight with just me on-board. The dogs and cats were in the cargo hold.

6. In response to paragraph 212. What direct trade off? How did Nowzad's animals prevent anyone from being evacuated?  
On the 21<sup>st</sup> August 2021 at 1020hrs (L) I received a voice note from the Lt Col Baron Force Protection explicitly telling me not to attempt to gain entry to Kabul airport via the Baron and the Abbey gate. (The voice note I still have)

It may be of interest to the committee to know that I came through the SOUTH gate not the Abbey gate. For the record the south gate was manned by the Taliban not British or American troops.

My first encounter with any British military was once I was over 1000m inside the airport perimeter at the British / Taliban checkpoint by the old civilian terminal. I had to wait over an hour to be handed over by the Taliban commander to the British officers in command. The British troops would not step across onto the Taliban held side of the airport.

7. In response to paragraph 213; NO British soldiers were tasked with escorting dogs through any crowds into Kabul airport. I finally managed to secure entry via the south gate with the Nowzad dogs and cats (not my pets....) on the 27<sup>th</sup> August at approx 1600hrs (L). The British government had already declared that they were no longer facilitating evacuees into Kabul airport. In fact, the Abbey gate was already closed due to the suicide bombing the previous day.

8. In response to paragraph 214; How is the Nowzad staff being assisted in crossing the border from Afghanistan to Pakistan an exception to the 'then' policy? The Nowzad staff were issued with call forward papers and Ben Wallace MP said on the 25<sup>th</sup> August 2021 that evacuees would be better off attempting to cross the Afghanistan / Pakistan border rather than attempt to gain entry at the airport. And so we facilitated (at our expenses) the transportation of our staff to a border crossing; where finally on the 11<sup>th</sup> September they were given permission to cross into Pakistan.

9. In response to paragraph 216; please ask Mr Marshall (he won't be able to as this is just wild speculation on his part) to provide any details of any interpreters who were declined space on any flight because the Nowzad staff were prioritized? They weren't. The Nowzad staff did not even leave on a flight. And in any case we had a flight capable of transporting 230 people.

10. In response to paragraph 217; NO British soldiers (or any nation for that matter) were put at risk. Mr Marshall has just invented an event which never even took place. This just proves his evidence is not worth the paper it was written on. For the record; I came through the south gate. This was controlled by the Taliban. I never attempted to come through the British controlled Abbey gate and only finally gained entry to Kabul airport on the 27<sup>th</sup> August after the British and Americans had ceased operating the Abbey gate.

11. In response to paragraph 218; Speculation again. The organisation that Mr Marshall is referring to was left in Kabul as they were unable to secure a

chartered flight. Their operations manager was not a former soldier nor did they have contracts for military establishments. Mr Marshall is not in Afghanistan so is he using social media to make this determination?

12. In response to paragraph 219; HMG did NOT transport any animals at all. And no other evacuees were left behind due to Nowzad's actions. We made entry to Kabul airport after the British had already declared they were no longer allowing access to the airport as they had closed the Abbey gate.

13. In response to paragraph 220; for two 3 hour periods on the 28<sup>th</sup> I noted that no aircraft landed or took off from Kabul airport. I would strongly suggest that this proved there was more than enough capacity for my self-funded chartered aircraft to land. US troops waiting on the flight line to depart Afghanistan volunteered to help me load the aircraft.

14. in response to paragraph 221; I would not suggest that the committee even consider any of the 4 noted points as HMG did not evacuate any animals nor did HMG facilitate the transportation of the Nowzad staff to Pakistan. Our charity supporters fund-raised for a security company to provide secure transportation. Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP has already interviewed a member of our charity team in relation to how we facilitated the transportation of our staff from Kabul to Pakistan.

15. In response to the interviewing of FCDO chief by the committee and the prominent focus on the letter of permission delivered to the Nowzad charity by Trudy Harrison MP on the 25<sup>th</sup> August 2021. It should be of no surprise. The Westmorland Gazette published an article online outlining Trudy Harrison's support for the Nowzad evacuation on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

The tremendous teamwork shown by many volunteers to facilitate the evacuation of the Nowzad staff and their families, myself and the animals should be applauded not used as a deflection for failings across the board in Afghanistan.

Afghan evacuees from the Nowzad 67 (now 69 as two of our staff's wives were pregnant at the time of the evacuation) are now able to start new lives in the UK which includes women and very young children. The Nowzad team and the British public who supported us should be commended for what we and they achieved; our good name should not be used for cheap political point scoring or to detract from the horrific failings of consecutive British governments to look after those Afghans who worked as interpreters or aided the military whilst we operated in Afghanistan.

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