

The Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP, Home Secretary
The Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF
United Kingdom
(Sent via Email)

4th March 2023

Dear Home Secretary,

As a group of leading press freedom, journalist support and free expression organisations, we want to highlight the dire circumstances faced by Afghan journalists, media workers and writers. As the situation in-country deteriorates, journalists, especially women and those from marginalised backgrounds such as ethnic Hazaras, find themselves at heightened risk of retaliation. As a result, it is vital that the UK Government honours its pledges to those at-risk through the [Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme \(ACRS\)](#).

We have received a number of requests of support from Afghan journalists based either in-country or other countries, such as Pakistan and Iran. Many of them are at heightened risk from the Taliban due to their profession and so are reaching out for urgent support and relocation. However, without clarification on progress for ACRS, there is little if any support that can be provided and this leaves the journalists vulnerable to threats of disappearance, violence, arrest, imprisonment and assassination. The experiences of the eight Afghan journalists, who have worked for the BBC and other agencies who have recently had their visa applications reopened after a legal action against the UK Government demonstrates the urgency needed to protect journalists who remain in Afghanistan.

The Government has stated that Pathway Three of the ACRS would reopen a year after the scheme's commencement to enable the Government to "work with international partners and NGOs (non-governmental organisations) to welcome wider groups of Afghans at risk." Of the groups prioritised in the scheme, the Government has highlighted those who have "stood up for values such as democracy ... freedom of speech, and rule of law", which surely captures Afghan journalists who have risked their lives reporting in the public interest. However, the year mark has passed, with Pathway Three still closed for applications with no information forthcoming as to when it will reopen. This lack of clarity breeds uncertainty for those at risk and must be urgently addressed by the Home Office and other relevant departments.

This lack of clarity also extends to those who are based in other countries, such as Pakistan and Iran. The Afghanistan Journalists' Support Organization [reported on 3 February](#) that a number of Afghan journalists had been arrested in Islamabad. According to the report, phones, laptops, cameras, and other electronic and personal devices of journalists have been seized and inspected. Those arrested have passports and visas and are legally residing in Pakistan. They were later released but one Afghan journalist said that the behaviour of the Pakistani police towards those fleeing the Taliban was "insulting and

wrong". This follows [earlier reports](#) that Pakistani authorities have deported 600 Afghans, including women and children from Pakistan.

As well as arrest, journalists fleeing Afghanistan to Pakistan face other problems. One female journalist, who is currently in Pakistan after being forced to leave Afghanistan for fear of retribution by the Taliban, has shared her [shocking story with Index on Censorship](#).

To this end, the undersigned organisations would like to request information on:

- Specific details about Pathway 3 of the ACRS including -
 - When will it reopen;
 - How long it will remain open for;
 - How many spaces will be available for at-risk Afghans;
 - The eligibility criteria for inclusion, including the current location of the individual in need;
 - Any support for direct and extended family members;
 - How partners and NGOs can support the process to identify, vet and refer potential applicants;
- Any specific considerations the UK Government has made to respond to the needs and threats facing at-risk Afghan journalists and writers;
- Whether, through the FCDO, the UK Government has engaged with Pakistani authorities to ensure all Afghan journalists are protected from threats of deportation or other acts that could endanger their safety.

As a group of organisations who have a track record supporting and protecting journalists, writers, media workers and outlets at risk across the globe, we stand ready to support where we can, whether through coordination with key partners or verifying and sourcing requests for support. However this cannot be done without meaningful commitments and leadership from the UK Government through the ACRS.

We would welcome any information about Pathway Three of the ACRS to ensure we can offer meaningful support to at-risk Afghan journalists and writers. We would also welcome the opportunity to meet you or one of your team to brief you directly.

We await your response.

Kind regards,

Martin Bright, Editor at Large, Index on Censorship

Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary, National Union of Journalists

Ross Holder, Head of Asia/Pacific Region, PEN International

Dalia Nasreddin, UK Campaigns Manager, English PEN

Copied to:

The Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State (Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and United Nations)

Sir John Whittingdale MP, Chair of the Press Freedom APPG

Mark Logan MP, Chair of the Afghanistan APPG