

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden

President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC

The Honorable Anthony Blinken

Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Janet Yellen

Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue NW,
Washington, DC 20220

Jake Sullivan

National Security Advisor
White House National Security Council
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20502

Via Email

RE: Providing urgent and fast-acting relief in light of catastrophic earthquake

Dear President Biden, Secretary Blinken, Secretary Yellen, Mr. Sullivan:

We write to you on behalf of the undersigned organizations, Afghan American community, grassroots advocacy, non-governmental organizations in the humanitarian, peacebuilding, refugee and immigration fields.

On Saturday, October 7th, a 6.3-magnitude earthquake hit near the city of Herat, in the western part of Afghanistan. While the level of devastation is still unfolding, it is clear that Afghans are yet again dealing with a calamity as families and community members are searching through the rubble for loved ones. News organizations reported “entire villages [being] razed as death toll soars” past 2400, while thousands more have lost their homes and are deeply affected.¹ Reports say there “still appeared to be limited international assistance [...] after the quake” as traumatized Afghans spent the nights sleeping in their cars or outside their house, fearful of continuing quakes.²

Afghans remain one of the most vulnerable populations in the world, suffering from forty years of war, the effects of climate change, human rights, women’s rights, economic and humanitarian crises. Its population is under the grasp of the brutal rule of the Taliban, whose repression of Afghans is unique on the global stage. In the wake of America’s withdrawal, the Taliban has instilled a policy of gender apartheid and ethnically cleansed marginalized ethnic groups such as

¹ [Christina Goldbaum, Najim Rahim and Yaqoob Akbary, Entire Villages Razed as Death Toll Soars From Quakes in Afghanistan, The New York Times, October 8th, 2023](#)

² [Rick Noack and Haq Nawaz Khan, Afghanistan earthquake death toll surpasses 2,400, The Washington Post, October 8th, 2023](#)

the Hazaras³⁴. Half the country's 39 million face "severe hunger" and "three million are on the brink of starvation."⁵

This devastating quake adds another complex layer of adversity and pain as the de facto Taliban authorities remain unable to respond. It should be the goal of the international community, led by the United States, to help the civilian population of this beleaguered country rebuild their lives as best they can under the circumstances.

We want to remind you of the U.S.' special moral obligation and debt it owes to the Afghan people. For twenty years, it said it would stand by to support the people of Afghanistan in their desire to build a sustainable, peaceful and democratic country. It also holds partial responsibility for the failure of the past twenty years, therefore making the actions we request imperative.

Commit Aid

The United States should commit emergency humanitarian assistance to those affected by the catastrophe in and around Herat, working with grassroots aid organizations who know their communities the best and can work the most effectively. It should work diligently to ensure that the Taliban isn't able to circumvent or seize aid meant for victims and civilians. We urge that aid is committed quickly and urgently to provide critical aid to the Afghan people.

Economic Relief

While large aid organizations are attempting to respond, their response is hampered by the United States' economic sanctions and restrictions on the banking sector in Afghanistan, which remains largely disconnected from the outside world.⁶ International banks continue to cite U.S. Treasury's wide-ranging economic sanctions for an unwillingness and inability to communicate with banks in Afghanistan.⁷ Last year, your administration diligently worked in tandem with the aid and Afghan-American community to successfully prevent a larger disaster from playing out in Afghanistan. A large-scale famine was prevented, partially due to the Treasury Department issuing multiple General Licenses that provided much-needed relief. The U.S. Treasury should issue general licenses per the steps they took to avert a famine last year. Additionally, we ask for increased cooperation and guidance from Treasury officials to banks in the U.S. and elsewhere in order to revive the Afghan economy and provide greater stability to the Afghan public.

We ask that the U.S. take decisive action to help and assist millions of Afghans in dire need, recognizing that no amount of aid is a substitute for a functioning economy. It should provide critical sanctions relief and coordinate to utilize the Afghan Fund to stabilize the

³ [Amending the Crime Against Humanity of Apartheid to Recognize and Encompass Gender Apartheid - Atlantic Center Strategic Litigation project & Global Justice Center](#)

⁴ [Sitarah Mohammadi and Sajjad Askary. Why the Hazara people fear genocide in Afghanistan. Al Jazeera. October 7, 2001](#)

⁵ [Rana Deraz. Afghanistan emergency. World Food Programme. September 4th, 2023](#)

⁶ [Afghanistan: Economic Crisis Underlies Mass Hunger. Human Rights Watch. August 4th, 2023](#)

⁷ [Report: Afghanistan should be open for business, but misconceptions about sanctions are increasing suffering for millions. Norwegian Refugee Council. April 5, 2023](#)

macro-economic conditions in Afghanistan. Working to do this will allow lives to be saved, hospitals to function and aid to be delivered. As yet another brutal winter approaches, now is time to stand by millions of Afghans at a critical time.

We strongly urge you to take decisive action and hope you engage with us further to discuss as you deliberate around this particular issue. We are ready to hold discussions on feasible solutions and to put forward Afghan stakeholders and economic experts. Please contact Arash Azizzada (arash@weareafghans.org) with Afghans For A Better Tomorrow (AFBT) for relevant stakeholder engagement.

Signed,

Afghan American Cultural Association
Afghan American Artists and Writers Association (AAAWA)
Afghan American Foundation
Afghan Cultural Society of MN
Afghans For A Better Tomorrow (AFBT)
Afghan Refugee Relief
Afghan-American Community Organization (AACO)
Afghanistan Advocacy Group
Afghans Empowered
Afghans Peak/Afghans Rising
American Muslim Empowerment Network (AMEN)
Charity & Security Network
Combined Arms
Community Supported Film
Engage Action
Ghafoor Foundation
Hindus for Human Rights
Human Rights First
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
Law Office of Spojmei Nasiri
MADRE
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
Muslims for Just Futures
Nooristan Foundation
Paloonkey
Peace Action
REACT DC
ReThinking Foreign Policy
RootsAction.org
Secure Justice
September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows
The 5ive Pillars Organization
The Feminist Front

The Lamia Afghan Foundation
Uplift Afghanistan Fund
Win Without War
Women for Afghan Women (WAW)