

August 4th, 2021

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Dear Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary,

We are a coalition of British media organisations who have led the reporting from Afghanistan over the past twenty years, providing the British and international public with vital, in-depth coverage over the course of the United Kingdom's involvement there.

Our reporting has been heavily reliant on the loyalty and commitment of the Afghan journalists, translators and support staff who have worked with us throughout this period. They were committed to the vision, shared by the British government and its NATO allies, of a free media as a vital part of a stable, peaceful democracy.

But today fighting is worsening nationwide and the Kabul government has already lost control of more than half the country. After the withdrawal of the final British and NATO units, there are very real fears of brutal Taliban reprisal against those who worked for British media organisations.

In recent years the Taliban have masterminded a campaign of targeted killings against reporters. Prominent victims include Helmand-based reporter Elyas Dayee, who was a vital contributor to much of the UK and international coverage from the province where Britain focused its military effort. He was murdered last year. Pulitzer Prize winning photographer Danish Siddiqui was killed in Afghanistan and his body mutilated in Taliban custody last month.

These attacks, and Taliban closure of media outlets in areas they control, have led human rights and press freedom organisations to raise the alarm about the safety of journalists in Afghanistan. They list journalists among civilians most at risk of Taliban persecution and attacks for their work to build a better Afghanistan.

With that in mind, we write to you to highlight the urgent need for a special Afghan visa programme for Afghan staff who have worked for the British media so that they and their families can leave Afghanistan and find safety in the United Kingdom.

Britain has recognised the vital role of Afghans who served as translators for our armed forces, and the unique dangers they face because of their service, through the creation of a visa programme for them.

The Afghans who worked for UK media outlets have also been critical to our national understanding of what British men and women fought for Afghanistan, and the conduct of our allies in the Afghan government.

The numbers concerned are small, perhaps a few dozen people including family members, yet their work in illuminating the realities of Afghanistan to the British public has carried an exponential impact.

There is an urgent need to act quickly, as the threat to their lives is already acute and worsening.

If left behind, those Afghan journalists and media employees who have played such a vital role informing the British public by working for British media will be left at the risk of persecution, of physical harm, incarceration, torture, or death.

The Biden Administration this week recognised the threat to journalists and media staff with US links, giving them access to its refugee programme for Afghans.

We hope that a British government committed to democracy, which recognises the important role of a free press, will recall their help in their time of need and vulnerability and offer similar sanctuary. We note that the November 2020 report of the Independent Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, chaired by Lord Neuberger and set up at the request of the Government, recommends a visa programme for journalists at risk in their home state.

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

(On behalf of the listed organisations below)

The Daily Express

Daily Mail

Daily Telegraph

Financial Times

ITN (independent news provider for ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5)

Mail on Sunday

NUJ

Reporters Without Borders UK

Sky News

The Economist

The Independent

The Frontline Club

The Guardian

The i

The Mirror

The Observer

The People

The Sunday Telegraph

The Sun / The Sun on Sunday

The Sunday Mirror

The Sunday Times

The Times

Tortoise Media