

Re: LGBTQ+ Afghan refugees

Dear Prime Minister,

I write to you as the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Culture at the London Borough of Lambeth, regarding the plight of the LGBTQ+ population of, and refugees, from Afghanistan.

While the current focus of policymakers' time at present rightly falls on managing the humanitarian crisis which the withdrawal of US, UK and other Coalition forces has inevitably created, I feel it is important to make sure that Government ministers and planners look carefully and quickly at the plight of those Afghans who identify as LGBTQ+.

Lambeth council welcomes the specific recent comments made by the Prime Minister on judging the new Taliban administration in Afghanistan on the basis of how they facilitate evacuation of those who wish still to leave the country and by how the Taliban ensure the rights of women are protected. However, as yet, the Government has been silent on those Afghans who identify as LGBTQ+ and now live in the greatest of peril.

Even before the overthrow of the previous Government, now replaced by a regime that has routinely and callously executed LGBTQ+ people, the community was forced to maintain secrecy of both their sexual orientation and gender identity. However, there was progress on human rights. Now that the Taliban are in charge, LGBTQ+ people live in utter fear of a return to the Taliban's policy of carrying out the death penalty for simply being who they are.

According to a report written for the Australian government in 2009ⁱ which reviewed the approach the Taliban took when they were first in power towards minorities, the Taliban's state-sponsored killing of LGBTQ+ was unusually cruel. The report found:

- A number of gay men/men who have sex with men were sentenced to death by having entire walls bulldozed onto them with mechanical diggers, just because they had a relationship with another man.
- Gay men were forced to stand motionless in extreme heat for hours on end, wearing 'blackface' as a public punishment.

Maria Sjödin, deputy executive director of international LGBTQ advocacy group OutRight Action International, was interviewed recently by media in the USA. She said: "We have heard from people who are desperately trying to get out of Afghanistan, because they know enough about the Taliban the previous time they ruled and their ideology, to know that they might become targets. That said, most people who may be persecuted in some way—including LGBTQI people—will not have an opportunity to flee."ⁱⁱ

"It is therefore clear that the environment for LGBTQ+ people in Afghanistan is harsher at present than almost anywhere else in the world. The UK Government must prioritise the needs and human rights of LGBTQ+ people that have been evacuated or have found safe



passage out of Afghanistan, and ensure that once here, suitable support, counselling and advice is provided in the UK for them.

I know that the Chief Executives of Stonewall and Rainbow Migration have written to the Foreign, Commonwealth and International Development Secretary, calling on the Government for support for LGBTQ+ Afghans, including in facilitating evacuation, if they choose to leave. Lambeth council makes the same call today and asks you, through this letter, to set out what the UK Government will now do to deliver on this.

It is only a matter of time before the Taliban re-commence their hideous punishments again, systematically and across the country. According to the 'I' newspaper, one LGBTQ+ Afghani reported that his partner was murdered just days ago, with his body dismembered and publicly dragged around the local area as a warning to othersⁱⁱⁱ.

The actions you take to secure the human rights – and indeed the lives – of LGBTQ+ Afghans will speak volumes. A supportive stance, delivered on the ground by the creation of evacuation corridors in third countries, must be secured with urgency or lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans/non-binary people in Afghanistan face a terrifying future. On behalf of the council, I call on your Government to act quickly to protect the lives of all LGBTQ+ people in – and displaced from – Afghanistan.

Please do act.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr. Sonia Winifred

Cabinet Member, Equalities and Culture
LB of Lambeth

cc. Cllr. Claire Holland, Leader of Lambeth council
Florence Eshalomi MP for Vauxhall
Helen Hayes MP for Dulwich and West Norwood
Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP for Streatham.

Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab MP, Foreign, Commonwealth and International Development Secretary

Rt. Hon. Priti Patel MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department

Nancy Kelley, CEO, Stonewall

Leila Zadeh, CEO, Rainbow Migration

ⁱ Report written on behalf of the Dept. of Immigration & Citizenship

https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/06/11/aus_afghanistan_sexual_minorities_200902.pdf

ⁱⁱ Interview for 'The Daily Beast' <https://www.thedailybeast.com/lgbtq-afghans-fear-death-sentence-as-the-taliban-takes-over>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://inews.co.uk/news/world/afghanistan-government-evacuate-lgbt-people-threat-taliban-1166311>