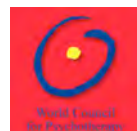


AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION



29 August 2021

Re: Urgent Appeal to help evacuate Afghan Mental Health Professionals in danger

We are a group of Psychology NGOs accredited by ECOSOC to the United Nations who represent 12 international organizations with a constituency of over several hundred thousand mental health professionals around the world.

We are reaching out to you urgently to help evacuate six Afghani mental health professionals and colleagues from Kabul, Afghanistan, who are in grave danger. All six are on a U.S. list of those qualified for evacuation but remain in hiding due to directives not to attempt to reach the airport. These two women and four men have been marked for death because of their well-known and published work, and professional association with United States colleagues. Specifically, they were engaged with a USAID program as part of their work helping children and families in conflict and war, under a Hunter College of the City of New York subcontract, called USWDP, to provide services to Counseling Departments at Kabul University and Herat University. Their U.S. national partner in this project is Martha Bragin, Associate Professor of the Silberman School of Social Work in New York City. Details about them are below in this communication. Included also below is a statement from the Ministry of Higher Education as to why their work is important.

The risk to their lives and to their families is extreme. They have received explicit death threats, their houses have been marked with red paint and ransacked, confiscating their computers and other property.

Members of the psychology community have applied to the U.S. State Department for help, but no action has yet been taken. We appeal to you for whatever actions you can take on their behalf and on behalf of the international mental health community.

They are particularly in danger as they are employees of the former Afghan government, but also supporters of work bringing disparate Afghans together. They did not plan to flee the country, and continue to help others, but are now threatened with death for themselves and their family.

We are most grateful for any assistance you can offer in this emergency situation. Please let us know what steps you may be able to take in this regard, and any referrals or recommendations for us about what more we can do. Our contact information is below.

Respectfully,



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Addendum: Details of the six Afghani national mental health professionals:

Dean Basir Ahmad Karimi is Dean of faculty at Hedat University who has been determined to stay and help his people – until the escalated dangers this week. Given that the establishment of Heart University Counseling Department results from cooperation with USAID, his house has been attacked three times, with a note from the Taliban saying that they would slit the throats of his wife and daughters. His wife is the principal of a girls' school where all teachers in Hedat's education department do their internships and training.

Maryam Ahmadi is a child psychologist and Chair of the Counseling Department at Kabul University. She graduated from Indiana University in the U.S. and has been in Afghanistan as a Principal Investigator conducting research studies on Afghan women's well-being published in March 2021, and conducted a webinar on IASC Mental Health and Psychosocial Support and Peace Building in February, 2021. As a single woman in her 50s, she is in danger as the Taliban maintains that unmarried post-menopausal women have murdered children who might have been born.

Raihana Faqiri is Associate Dean in the Department of Counseling at Kabul University, who pioneered counseling to support women's agency in the Islamic context. She has done studies, conducted webinars, and published case studies of Afghan counseling engaging Afghan families to support higher education for their daughters.

Bezhan Ayubi has a PhD in social work from India but returned to Afghanistan with his wife (who is a judge) and baby to help his Afghan people. Throughout the present trauma, he is working at the counseling center, teaching parents how to keep their children emotionally safe. He is now being threatened.

Sayed Jafar Ahmadi, PhD, is a psychologist and professor at Shaheed Rabbani Education University in Kabul, serving a female majority. He is the onsite supervisor working with students on projects with the Ministry of Education to provide psychosocial support to schools that have come under violent attack. He works on weekends with Hazara girls' schools and youth organizations and was director of the counseling center that developed innovative practices to retain girls in school, about which he publishes extensively and makes training films with his wife, a psychotherapist. As a member of the Hazara community, he has gotten death threats, and last week the Taliban stole his computer and all his writings and documents.

Mohammad Hadi Rasooli, MD, is a psychiatrist who runs a clinic for women survivors of domestic violence and other vulnerable groups in Herat City. He was the Principal Investigator for two studies published in international peer-reviewed journals. At Hedayat University, he created a new counseling approach integrating Afghan culture with family systems, based on western psychology, providing a new understanding child development and healing through the lens of Afghan culture. He is in danger as he has been continually called upon to consult with the Afghan Ministry of Health, notably, in addressing the trauma in Hedayat where girls were committing suicide by setting themselves on fire.

As noted above, these six colleagues have been partners in the work of **Martha Bragin**, Associate Professor at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College and Chairperson of Global Social Work and Practice with Immigrants and Refugees (<https://ssswhunter.cuny.edu/staff-members/bragin-martha-ph-d-lcsw/>). In that capacity since 2002, she has supported the Government of Afghanistan to develop a national system of social work and counseling, partnering with Afghanistan Public Universities to develop curricula and programs to educate a new generation of Afghan professionals. The six Afghani partners have travelled throughout Afghanistan doing participatory research about Afghan wellbeing and building a national training program for Afghan counselors and social workers, to work in country-wide schools, hospitals, clinics, and women's associations. They research treatment and prevention strategies to help parents and teachers help children affected by war.

Statement from the Ministry of Higher Education as to why their work is important:

"One of the hidden realities in Afghanistan is the consequence of more than 30 years of war. No one escapes its effects – the death of loved ones, personal injuries, destruction of homes and families, and shattered lives...higher education must not only produce students who will have

the training, knowledge, creativity, entrepreneurial talents, and citizenship skills to provide for their own well-being and help foster national development, but also ensure that the traumas and other legacies of the violence and carnage of war are adequately addressed. Only then can our nation move forward.” M. Osman Babury, Deputy Minister for Academic Affairs. Afghan Ministry of Higher Education 2013