



Update on Evacuation of Afghan Interpreters



Kind donor,

You are receiving this email because you donated to the Afghan campaign.

This update marks eight months since Kabul fell to the Taliban. Over this time, we have all come together to evacuate those at greatest risk of retaliation for helping Canada – interpreters and locally employed civilians and their families. Your generosity and support have inspired, propelled and consolidated this amazing effort lasting longer than anyone expected. Thank you for sharing this long mission with us.

Your donations facilitated the evacuation of an additional 169 people in this first part of 2022, as well as application support for 153 people. The tally now stands at 2061 Afghans evacuated and safe in Canada or a third country awaiting onward travel. On their behalf, thank you for providing this safe passage and precious hope for a better future.

Donations

To date, your generous donations now total over \$3.6 million. Of that \$3.3 million has been spent and approximately \$340,000 remains. This campaign now has at least 3801 individual donors and 4466 individual donations due to many donors contributing more than once or anonymously. We want to extend our deep and enduring appreciation to all of you for making this campaign possible.

Please note that our charity, Veterans Transition Network (VTN), will stop accepting donations on Monday May 2, 2022. We will be closing our website donation portal for this campaign, and not accepting any more cheque donations, stock transfers or EFTs. In short, we are ending the fundraising campaign so we can focus on our commitments to provide mental health programs for veterans. **This was a very tough decision.**

While VTN remains hugely invested in this campaign, it is outside our normal operations. VTN exists to provide Canada's veterans with much needed group counselling and transition-from-military programs. Our program demand continues to increase during these tough times for those battling PTSD or other service-related injuries. This Afghan mission now needs tremendous, dedicated and long-term focus on immigration policy and we hope another charity will step up as we begin to step back.

For now, we will still advocate in the media as spokespeople for this campaign with the platform we have as veterans for Afghan allies and their families. We will still work behind the scenes, as contacts for various international groups and/or facilitate discussions with those who can help speed the process, including meetings with IRCC staff. We will still update you on how your remaining \$340,000 is spent throughout this year until it is spent down. The only real change at this point is that we will stop taking donations for this campaign.

If you wish to make a donation in our care prior to May 2, please know that it will be used in full to support Afghan allies, and we will spend it in the best way we can in this always-evolving environment. We will prioritize evacuations and migration assistance over resettlement initiatives, continue to waive all administration fees, and do our best to make every dollar count.

In addition to your generous donations, VTN also has an additional \$1 million from a wealthy family that was earmarked for a charter flight that we discussed in previous updates. Unfortunately, we believe that this flight is no longer feasible due to conditions on the ground. This family has generously redirected this sum to facilitate new evacuation possibilities and emerging needs for Afghans in immigration purgatory.

Where can you donate after May 2, to keep supporting evacuations? Good question. At the time of this

writing, we're unsure if any group will continue evacuations with a focus on Afghan interpreters and locally employed civilians after we spend down your donations (likely by this summer). There are many groups working on resettlement; others are shifting efforts to Ukraine. Some groups may continue to focus their evacuation efforts on journalists, women leaders and/or human rights workers. Our campaign continues to prioritize Afghans who helped Canada's military mission, and synergies over "who do we help" are still being hammered out with other groups, and new relationships are forming at the time of this writing. We will advise further in our next update.

For now, our work continues!



Afghan Campaign 2022: Evacuations now a Migration Mission

Thousands remain at risk. How can we save them with the remaining funds?

It has become clear over these long, frustrating months that our emergency evacuation effort has now become a long-term migration effort. Those we evacuate now may wait in third countries for months for various approvals and processing before moving on to Canada. In response, VTN is now mixing evacuations with increased application assistance in an attempt to help move people through the process more quickly.

This is our current mix of initiatives:

Ground evacuations: Your donations covered the costs for the 169 people evacuated by ground in

January, thanks to the continuing heroism and professionalism of “[Canadian Dave's](#)” team and the coordination efforts of Aman Lara. We expected your donations to fund further road evacuations of VTN’s military-related evacuees in February and March, however these were temporarily halted due to OPSEC (operational security) concerns. This is now thankfully resolved, and we expect to resume these convoys shortly with Canadian Dave’s team.

New evacuation route: VTN is currently pursuing an effort to secure visas and travel for a test group of 23 individuals, including interpreters and their family members, to a lily-pad country. This pilot group of 23 individuals has been vetted by IRCC to provide the best possible chance of ensuring onward travel to Canada. This “proof of concept” evacuation, funded by a wealthy family, represents a new potential pathway out of Afghanistan. If we are successful, we will work to scale up these efforts and perform more evacuations via this new route.

VTN’s Knowledge Network for Afghan Allies (application assistance): In 2021, your donations helped evacuate a well-connected and at-risk NGO worker from Kabul named Beazhan Hussaini, along with his family. His evacuation was a stroke of luck for this campaign as his skills and knowledge are proving invaluable.



With your donations, VTN now contracts Beazhan to assist 300 at-risk Afghans who supported Canada’s mission and need help with their applications. He provides straight talk about the process that he just went through himself, daily/weekly contact and guidance for their cases, and offers them VTN trauma counselling support (see below). Already he has helped 153 people with applications.

Trauma Counselling and Training (mental health support): VTN now provides free counselling for individuals (online modules) and families (via zoom) awaiting immigration or recently arrived, along with trauma workshops (via zoom) for Pakistan counselling students. Beazhan connects Afghans to these high-level resources, adapted from VTN's 22-year veterans' trauma counselling programs with input from UBC's Institute for Veterans Education and Transition (IVET).

This trauma support is an important component to the migration process, as mental health affects successful resettlement. Your donations aren't used for this effort, however the federal government funding for this and other initiatives resulted from public pressure. Thus, please know that you are helping give the gift of trauma counselling; few would need it more than the people we are assisting. So far, 184 individuals have utilized the online modules and 64 family members were helped via zoom counselling. More about these programs and Beazhan's story [here](#).



[Jack's Story](#) - One person Beazhan is assisting is an interpreter we call "Jack" for his safety. You helped him get to Islamabad where he has waited since Feb. 2 with his wife and five boys. We share his story as an example of so many of our evacuees who continue to wait for immigration hurdles in Pakistan and other countries to come to Canada.

"I really appreciate the VTN donors. They've done a lot for us. I want to thank them.. God Bless You." – Jack

Special Committee on Afghanistan: We feel it was your support of this campaign and the corresponding publicity that spurred the creation of Canada's special parliamentary committee on Afghanistan. Its stated focus is humanitarian needs.

Interpreters: On April 11, the committee heard from five former Afghan interpreters advocating for immigration changes to rescue their families and others at risk in Afghanistan. These interpreters eloquently describe and decry the IRCC process that stagnates urgent immigration for Afghans. Their testimony is found [here](#).

Advocates: On February 14, Major-Generals Dean Milner and David Fraser and VTN's Executive Director, Oliver Thorne, also provided comments, along with representatives from the Afghan Women's Organization

Refugee & Immigrant Services, Canada Afghanistan Business Council and the Canadian Red Cross. [Here is the two-hour session](#) (VTN's opening statement begins at 19:55:40)

Featured Story: Samandar



Please meet Samandar Khan, former Kandahar interpreter, whose family is now reunited in Canada because of your safe houses. He was VTN Board President Tim Laidler's interpreter in 2008. Both men advocated for interpreters back then, during this campaign and more. [Their journey is detailed here.](#)

Of interest: In July 2021, Samandar helped organize a protest at the Vancouver Art Gallery with other interpreters. Note the man in the grey sports jacket and sunglasses – that is Trevor Street, longtime VTN donor who, along with his wife Sarah, donated \$100,000 to this effort, took out ads in Ottawa newspapers and served two tours in Afghanistan where his interpreter was targeted and killed. The other man in a grey jacket is VTN's Tim Laidler. Samandar Khan took the photo.



How you can help further

Contact politicians: Thank you to everyone who previously made your voices heard. Please continue to contact your local politicians. Afghans need policy amendments that allow their biometric verification to occur after arrival in Canada, and for IRCC to issue single-use travel documents to Afghans approved under the Special Immigration Measures program who do not have passports.

Follow VTN on social media: The larger our number of social followers (voters), the more influence we have with politicians and policy makers.

Find ways to help welcome both Afghans and Ukrainian refugees in your communities. Both are fleeing terrible circumstances and both deserve warm welcomes. This acceptance of dual immigration will help with the optics and argument that Afghans should have expedited immigration like Ukrainians.

Donate: Along with VTN's evacuations, you can also support other Canadian charities doing great work for Afghans [here](#).

Support Afghan Canadians: VTN acknowledges the many Afghan Canadians who continue to advocate for their families and others still at risk in Afghanistan. They hold protests and recently a hunger strike in Ottawa to raise awareness. VTN stands with them. Please honk or support their local efforts in any way you can.

Thank You for Your Support

On behalf of the many volunteer veterans and organizations who work tirelessly to identify, assist, protect and evacuate our Afghan allies, thank you for your support.

It means everything to the Afghans now safely in Canada with bright and hopeful new beginnings. It also means a great deal to veterans who fought for a different future for Afghans, and lost 158 fellow Canadian soldiers in the process. Many others returned with physical and psychological injuries, such as PTSD, that we address in our counselling programs.

Thank you especially for your unwavering support over these eight months. Without your donations and interest, this effort simply wouldn't be happening. I also want to thank all the veterans, journalists, bloggers, influencers and speakers who contributed to the national conversation about the debt we owe interpreters and civilians who work alongside our Canadian Armed Forces whether in Afghanistan or conflicts yet to come. Although VTN will wind down donations through our charity, we will continue to work with you to keep this national conscience conversation going.

We will always owe a debt to those Afghans who kept our soldiers safe.

Our deepest gratitude,



Oliver Thorne

Executive Director

Veterans Transition Network | Réseau de Transition des Vétérans

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