

URGENT ACTION

STOP DEPORTING AFGHAN REFUGEES

On 3 October 2023, the Pakistani government announced its decision to deport unregistered Afghan refugees back to danger in Afghanistan from 1 November, in brazen breach of its international obligations. Since November, authorities have deported Afghans and increased the crackdown on unregistered Afghan refugees, which has resulted in arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions of refugees and separation of families, including minors, women, and older people. Authorities have not allowed access to detention centres recently set up for deportation purposes. Houses of Afghan refugees have also been demolished, and properties seized. It is imperative to demand that the Government of Pakistan immediately halt the continued detentions, deportations and widespread harassment of Afghan refugees.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

H.E. Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar
Caretaker Prime Minister
Islamic Republic of Pakistan
Constitution Avenue
G-5/2 Islamabad
Pakistan

Dear H.E. Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the decision made by the Pakistani government on 3 October 2023 to forcibly deport more than 1.4 million unregistered Afghan refugees from Pakistan. This decision comes amidst a severe human rights and humanitarian crisis facing the Afghan population.

For decades, tens of thousands of Afghan refugees have made Pakistan their home. However, this recent decision will force Afghans back to danger in Afghanistan. Notably, the deportation poses a significant threat to the human rights of Afghan women and girls, including their rights to education, work, and freedom of movement. For most Afghan women and girls, their only chance of gaining formal education is through staying in Pakistan. Additionally, a significant number of refugees, including journalists, human rights defenders, female protestors, artists, and former government officials, would be at imminent risk of persecution and repression by the Taliban, if forced to return to Afghanistan.

The decision also places Afghans across Pakistan at imminent risk of homelessness, livelihoods loss, lack of access to essential services, and family separation, especially as the harsh winter approaches.

Since 1 November 2023, the crackdown on unregistered Afghan refugees have resulted in arbitrary arrests and separation of families including minors, women, and older people. Detention [centres](#) for deportation purposes have been established. Media, lawyers, civil society, and even family members of those detained are not allowed to access them. Afghan refugees' houses have been demolished, and properties confiscated. Several cases have been documented of Afghan refugees with proper documentation being deported by the authorities. The government has also announced [expulsion of documented refugees](#) in the "next phase" of deportations.

The forced deportations, along with the crackdown on Afghan refugees, violate Pakistani government's international legal obligations, notably the principle of non-refoulement.

I therefore urge you to:

- **Stop the crackdown on Afghan refugees, immediately halt forced returns of Afghans and reverse your decision.**
- **Immediately release refugees arbitrarily detained in detention centres and further refrain from detaining Afghan refugees.**
- **Create pathways for obtaining timely documentation and renewing all expired visas especially of at-risk populations, such as women and girls, human rights defenders, journalists, and religious and gender minorities.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 3 October, Pakistan announced that unregistered Afghans would be deported to Afghanistan from 1 November 2023. Since then, over [300,000](#) Afghans have been reportedly returned.

For 40 years, Pakistan has been a host country to the largest population of Afghan refugees in the world. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are now more than 3.7 million Afghans living in Pakistan. This includes 600,000 who fled Afghanistan due to fear of Taliban's reprisal after the collapse of the Afghan government in August 2021. Amongst these are hundreds of Afghan human rights defenders, women activists and protestors, journalists, and other dissidents who were waiting for relocation to a third country and are now experiencing various forms of harassment in Pakistan.

Under the Taliban's rule, Amnesty International has documented extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, torture, forcible disappearances of dissenting voices, journalists, activists, and former government employees, amongst others. The Taliban have violated the rights of women and girls in the country, including access to education beyond primary school and work. Violations of women and girls' rights are of such magnitude and serious nature that they constitute a system of repression that discriminates them in almost all aspects of their lives.

The Pakistani government is carrying out mass forced deportations just before winter, at a time when Afghanistan is already grappling with a humanitarian crisis. Those being forced to return risk homelessness, loss of livelihood and lack of access to essential services. In Afghanistan, more than 97% of the population is living in poverty, with an estimated 29 million people – nearly three-quarters of its approximately 40 million inhabitants – in need of urgent assistance for daily survival. Moreover, the [UN humanitarian](#) response plan for Afghanistan remains largely unfunded. The human rights and humanitarian crisis are further exacerbated by natural disasters, such as years of persistent drought, climate change impacts, and earthquakes. In October 2023, thousands of people have been affected by earthquakes in Herat province, leading to over two thousand deaths and destruction of numerous homes.

Richard Bennett, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Felipe González Morales, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, and Reem Alsalem, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, have united in [calling](#) on the Pakistan government to abandon its plan for the forced deportation of undocumented Afghan refugees from Pakistan. These experts have expressed their concern about the potential refoulement of Afghan nationals back to Afghanistan, a move that could place many – including numerous families, women, and children – at risk of irreparable harm. They have stressed that these individuals could face serious human rights violations and abuses upon return to their home country. The office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also [called](#) on the Pakistani authorities to suspend forcible returns of Afghan nationals to avoid a human rights catastrophe.

Although Pakistan is not a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, nor the 1967 Protocol, it is bound by the non-refoulement principle. The prohibition of refoulement is an obligation included in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, to which Pakistan is State party and it prohibits States to transfer anyone, in any manner whatsoever, to a place where they would be at risk of torture or other serious human rights violations.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Urdu (preferred language), Sindhi, Balochi, Punjabi, Dari/Farsi/Pashto
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 10 May 2024
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: More than 1.4 million unregistered Afghan refugees