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The Prime Minister  
The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP

24 August 2021

Dear Boris

Thank you for your letter of 20 August seeking Scotland's continued support in resettling vulnerable Afghans in the UK and your recognition of the role Scotland is already playing under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy.

I want to take this opportunity to re-iterate that Scotland is committed to playing our part in welcoming and supporting people fleeing Afghanistan, through both the programme supporting locally employed staff and resettlement of refugees. We will work with the UK Government, COSLA, local authorities and other partners in Scotland to support these programmes and provide people with the safety and security they need to rebuild their lives.

I recognise the incredibly difficult circumstances in which UK officials and service personnel are operating in Afghanistan. Their work is invaluable for those that they are able to assist, and it is crucial that the UK makes every effort to support people to reach a place of safety. It is imperative that these urgent evacuation operations should support as many people as possible. I ask in particular that you seek to ensure those who have worked to support British interests in Afghanistan are able to benefit from the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy, whether or not they were directly employed by the UK Government. We must do all we can to support people who are at risk because of the help and assistance they have given to us.

Scotland is proud to play our part in supporting people arriving from Afghanistan who worked in support of the UK. I commend the work of Scottish local authorities who have received families through the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy and those preparing to do so.

The Scottish Government also welcomes your announcement of a refugee resettlement programme to support Afghan nationals. I am pleased that this will be in addition to Afghans arriving through relocation and the UK's existing commitments to global refugee resettlement. Refugee resettlement is about meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, and I note your approach to prioritise women and girls, as well as those at risk of human rights abuses.

While recognising the pressures on accommodation capacity, we are concerned that the commitment to resettle 20,000 refugees in 'the long term' and just 5,000 in the first year is not sufficient in the context of the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding. We believe a commitment to a substantial increase in numbers is required and urgently seek further details of how civilians, especially women, girls and others in need of refuge will be protected.

As you will be aware, all 32 of Scotland's local authorities participated in the Syrian Resettlement Programme, with over 3,500 refugees welcomed into communities across Scotland under both that programme and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme. We want our local authorities to be able to continue to provide strong support for refugees. To do that, we need more detail about the new Afghan Citizens Resettlement Programme, including timescales for arrivals and funding to support local authority participation, as well as wider services which are essential to support people to settle and be able to begin to rebuild their lives.

People across our communities, including Afghans with family and friends who are still in Afghanistan, are distressed and concerned about how people will be able to leave and find a place of safety. I am keen to know more about options for humanitarian routes for people in Afghanistan. In the current situation, many people will find it extremely difficult to directly reach a place of safety. We must work to reduce the risk of people being forced to make perilous journeys or becoming vulnerable to the exploitation of traffickers.

During the Westminster debate on Wednesday 18 August you indicated agreement to a summit with devolved nations. I would be grateful for more detail on plans for this.

I also welcome the commitment you made during the debate that the UK will not return Afghan nationals who have sought asylum in the UK. Given the drastic situation in Afghanistan, I expect the Home Office to consider asylum applications from Afghan nationals quickly and compassionately. Any cases which are in the asylum appeals process, or where people have previously been refused asylum on the basis that Kabul is safe, should also be urgently reviewed.

I look forward to receiving further detail about evacuation, safe routes and resettlement from Afghanistan as soon as possible. Scotland is committed to playing our part, and I am keen that communities across Scotland are able to be involved in the humanitarian response in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan.



**NICOLA STURGEON**