

**Letter of 18 August 2021 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defence and the Minister for Migration on the implementation of the motion submitted by Salima Belhaj et al. concerning the expansion of categories relating to the special procedure for interpreters**

As requested by the House in the 'two minutes' debate of 18 August 2021 on the current situation in Afghanistan, we are writing to inform the House about the manner in which the government will implement the Belhaj et al. motion on expanding the categories relating to the special procedure for interpreters.

The government will uphold both the letter and the spirit of the motion. The situation in Afghanistan is heart-breaking. The dramatic developments that have unfolded in the country in recent days have major consequences for Afghanistan and its people. The government shares the view of the majority of the House that everything possible must be done to evacuate not only the Dutch nationals still in the country, interpreters who have worked for the Netherlands as part of an international military or police mission and local embassy staff and their families, but also as many Afghans as possible who have worked for the Netherlands or as part of the Netherlands' contribution to international military or police missions and face an elevated risk as a result. This group includes, in particular, staff of Dutch development projects, human rights and women's rights defenders and journalists and their fixers. The cases in question involve acute circumstances and situations of extreme hardship.

An interministerial task force has been established to quickly consider all cases that reach the government. The individuals in question and civil society organisations can register via telephone no. +31 247 247 247 or via the email address [kabul@minbuza.nl](mailto:kabul@minbuza.nl). Both the telephone number and email address are being monitored day and night, seven days a week by a crisis team that processes every registration.

All our efforts are aimed at getting the maximum number of acute and extreme hardship cases onto Dutch military evacuation flights or evacuation flights operated by partner countries. People will need to make their own way to the airport in Kabul, however, because there is no way of picking people up in Afghanistan itself. Given the volatile security situation in the city, it is not possible to reach the access gates at the airport at all times. It is currently impossible to predict how this situation will unfold in the days ahead.

The Netherlands will continue operating military evacuation flights for as long as possible. This is dependent on the security and stability of the situation at the airport in Kabul. That security is guaranteed by the presence of US troops. As soon as security is no longer guaranteed by the US, it will be impossible in the current circumstances for the coalition countries to operate evacuation flights. Until that time, the government will of course make every possible effort to take the groups referred to in the Belhaj et al. motion on evacuation flights operated by the Netherlands and its partners.

The key priority is that, on the basis of the above approach, as many people as possible are brought to safety by means of evacuation. After their arrival in the Netherlands, the evacuees' cases will be dealt with expeditiously. The initial reception of these individuals has already been arranged in close cooperation with government bodies, municipalities and other actors. The same dynamic approach must be taken with their asylum applications as well.

In regard to the matter of asylum, the government wishes to make clear that due care will be taken, in accordance with our legislation and country policy.

Furthermore the government acknowledges and affirms, as does the motion, that every one of these individuals faces risks to some extent, and that they are vulnerable or are otherwise affected by the situation in Afghanistan.

In this connection and further to the Belhaj et al. motion, the government promises that anyone who was hired on a long-term basis by the Netherlands or who had a contract with the Netherlands will be treated on the same basis as the interpreters if they apply for asylum in the Netherlands after evacuation. The other evacuees will continue to fall under the Aliens Act 2000 Implementation Guidelines in the category of 'at-risk group' and the same will apply to those for whom evacuation is not currently possible. Needless to say, risks and vulnerabilities will also be examined in the cases of future Afghan asylum applicants in the Netherlands.

In every case, this will be definitively established in an individual asylum procedure. In any event, a moratorium is in place for the coming period in respect of asylum decisions and returns. We will also assess this in the forthcoming country report, expected in September or October 2021, in order to determine whether additional persons or groups should be included.

With respect to adoption of this policy on the basis of the country report, the House will not merely be involved; the policy will take effect only after consultation with the House. This is a departure from customary practice, in which the adoption of amended policy and notification to the House occur simultaneously.