

Letter of 26 August 2021 from the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Migration to the House of Representatives on the start of the implementation of the plan for departure from Kabul Airport

By means of this letter, we inform you that the implementation has started of the plan for the departure of the embassy team and military personnel from Kabul Airport. This is a painful moment, as it means that despite all the efforts that have been made over the past several days, people who qualify for evacuation to the Netherlands will be left behind. The Netherlands has been informed by the United States that the departures must take place today. In all probability, the last flights will leave today.

As is already known, the United States, which is responsible for security at the airport, has announced that it will withdraw from Kabul on 31 August. This means that during several days before that date, great numbers of American military personnel and equipment must be flown out. Before the US forces leave, the forces of several other countries that make a major contribution to ensuring airport security will also leave. In the letter to parliament of 24 August updating the House on the Afghanistan evacuation operation (Parliamentary Paper 2021Z14527), the government reported that for this reason the Netherlands had to expect that the window for getting people out would soon close.

In view of the very rapidly worsening situation at and around the airport, the Netherlands is unfortunately no longer able to assist evacuees in gaining access to the airport. People are strongly advised not to come to the airport. Everything possible is being done to transport the several hundred people who are now inside the airport gates on the flights scheduled for departure today. The Dutch military personnel and embassy team now present at the airport will themselves depart on the last flights.

Until 31 August, a Dutch C-130 will remain in the region with a small team of military personnel. This C-130 can be rapidly deployed if, contrary to current expectations, opportunities arise to bring additional people to safety from Kabul. An agreement has also been made with our coalition partners whose aircraft will be allowed to leave later that, if necessary, evacuees with the Netherlands as their final destination can be transported on those flights.

The government will do everything possible to continue to assist Dutch nationals still remaining in Afghanistan, interpreters who have worked for the Netherlands as part of an international military or police mission and their families, and other at-risk people identified in the motion submitted by MP Salima Belhaj et al. (Parliamentary Paper 27925 no. 788). The government will inform the House about these efforts as quickly as possible, and in any event later today. That letter to parliament will also further discuss the progress made in implementing the plan for departure and evacuations.