



Resource Guide #2

Supporting Refugees: The Afghan Crisis & Our Duty as Zoroastrians



October 1st, 2021

Introduction

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the U.S. launched what would become the longest war in American history. The Afghanistan War spanned four U.S. presidencies and lasted two decades. On August 15, 2021, two weeks before the war was set to end when the last American troops would withdraw, the Afghan government collapsed and the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan. With the Taliban's reacquisition of control of Afghanistan comes many global concerns on Afghans' freedom of expression and assembly. These concerns extend to the uncertain protection of human rights of Afghanistan's people, particularly its women and children.

As a group of Zoroastrians living in North America, with many of our community members having arrived in North America as religious refugees themselves, we have a duty to continue our engagement with our tenets of Humata, Hukhta, and Hvarshata as we communally work to support the Afghan community, both locally and globally. ZYNA has compiled the following background information and resources to spur discussion and action within the Zoroastrian community to support refugees, particularly Afghan refugees as they flee this crisis.

History

[Investigators determined that the terrorists responsible for the September 11th attacks were from Afghanistan](#) and that the leader of the attacks, which killed more than 2,700 people, was Osama bin Laden, leader of the Islamic militant group al Qaeda. Believing that bin Laden was being harbored by the Taliban in Afghanistan, President George W. Bush launched an airstrike campaign against al Qaeda and Taliban targets, which included many Afghan cities. On December 6, 2001, the Taliban's rule of Afghanistan officially came to an end as the last city in Afghanistan fell, and both al Qaeda and bin Laden fled the country.

Following the fall of the Taliban's rule, the U.S. began a reconstruction plan which involved carrying out humanitarian efforts and training Afghan security forces. But as the U.S.' focus shifted to the war in Iraq in 2003, the Taliban began to regroup and attacks within the country escalated. As Taliban attacks continued, President Obama pledged to send additional American troops to Afghanistan to stabilize the deteriorating situation there. It was not until bin Laden was killed in Pakistan by U.S. Navy SEALs in 2011 that a U.S. plan to end the Afghanistan War was released; all American troops would withdraw from Afghanistan by 2014 except for about 10,000 American soldiers who would remain in the country to train local Afghan forces.

But by 2015, Taliban attacks in Afghanistan had escalated and President Trump authorized the U.S. to make combat decisions in the country. It was not until 2019 that the U.S. and the Taliban eventually began peace talks but it took until early 2020 for a peace agreement to be signed, although Taliban attacks and American airstrikes in Afghanistan continued.



Pressing news

Following the inauguration of President Biden in 2021, Biden vowed to withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, a symbolic deadline. But as the final withdrawal of American troops began in May 2021, the Taliban began to regain control over major Afghanistan cities, eventually leading to the Afghan government's collapse on August 15, 2021.

With the collapse of the Afghan government came the evacuation of the U.S. Embassy as thousands of Afghan citizens rushed to the airport in the country's capital, Kabul, attempting to flee the country. Findings from the United Nations show that Afghanistan is the world's third-largest displaced population, with some 5 million Afghans having been displaced by the war since 2012. As a result of these massive displacements and the government's collapse, many Afghans are seeking refugee status abroad.

[Many Afghans are entering the U.S. on temporary grounds using humanitarian parole](#), which has several issues; unlike refugees entering the U.S. through the formal refugee admissions program where they receive support to find housing and obtain health care and food stamps, those entering as humanitarian parolees are not legally considered as refugees and therefore do not automatically have access to the same aid services. As a result, the Afghans arriving in the U.S. through this process have uncertain futures; many are unsure whether they have families in the U.S. willing to take them in and they also may not have been able to travel with enough resources and cash to pay for furnishing an apartment or even acquiring a phone. The U.S. has pledged to provide small emergency grants for this purpose, but the system is overwhelmed, and it is unlikely that these funds will cover the needs of the many Afghans arriving in the country.

The Biden administration recently determined that they would [raise the cap on refugee admissions to 125,000 people](#) beginning on October 1st, 2021, when the new fiscal year begins. This decision is unlikely to affect those fleeing Afghanistan in the wake of the Taliban taking over the country, or the Haitians living in a makeshift camp at the U.S.' southern border since these individuals are not technically classified as refugees. In light of these recent developments, it is even more critical to provide support to refugees where possible.

Connection to Zoroastrianism

As Zoroastrians, we must always remember to follow the path of Asha. Asha is translated as truth and/or righteousness. It is the duty of every Zoroastrian to deliver indiscriminate charity unto the less fortunate. Providing help to refugees coming to North America is a very righteous deed, and will be duly noticed by Ahura Mazda. Such acts will also make passing the Chinvat Bridge easier in the afterlife.

This is especially relevant given how many Zoroastrians in North America are religious refugees from Iran, and how many Parsis have ancestors who fled Iran to find a home in India where they could flourish and practice their faith without fear. As a community with such close ties to refugee struggles, it is imperative that we support others the same way we were supported, and ease the transition for our struggling brothers and sisters everywhere.



What can we do as allies?

We have listed resources to help, book recommendations, social media accounts, podcasts, and other content for Zoroastrians to consume and educate themselves and their communities on these issues. As well, we have listed organizations and causes to donate to help Afghan refugees.

Charities to Donate To

- [Women for Afghan Women](#) is rooted in its grassroots approach to provide support services for women, children, and families
- [Rescue.org](#) gives humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan
- [The International Refugee Assistance Project](#) helps provide legal services to incoming Afghan refugees
- [The Welcome to America Project](#) resource resettled Afghan refugees, those who interpreted, navigated, and worked security for our armed services personnel

Volunteer and Take Action

- [Volunteer to help Afghan Special Immigrant Visa](#) holders who were evacuated to the US. Provide support through airport pick-up, apartment set up, bringing meals, etc.
- [Email the White House](#) through the International Rescue Committee to urge the Biden Administration to take steps to ensure "vulnerable Afghans have pathways to safety"
- [How Canadians can help](#). Volunteer, donate or sponsor an Afghan refugee

To Read

- [Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History](#) by Thomas Barfield

Social Media

- Twitter: [UNHCR Afghanistan](#) and [IRC – International Rescue Committee](#)
- Facebook: [United Afghan Association](#)
- Instagram: [Welcome to America Project](#)

Podcasts

- [World Affairs: Where Will Afghanistan's Refugees Go?](#)
- [NPR: How Many Afghans Will Biden Allow to Live in the US?](#)
- [NPR: Resettled](#)
- [Displaced – Weekly podcast with leading humanitarians, foreign policymakers, and innovators to understand how they think about and tack global crises](#)
 - [Recommended Episodes:](#)
 - [Viet Thanh Nguyen on trauma, displacement, and identifying as a refugee](#)
 - [Refugee Resettlement: Minister Ahmed Hussen Explains the Canadian Model](#)



About Zoroastrians

Zoroastrians are followers of one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions founded by the prophet Zarathushtra more than 3,000 years ago in ancient Iran. Zoroastrians have long served as bridge builders in interfaith dialogue, believing in truth, righteousness, charity, beneficence, respect and care for the environment, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Zoroastrianism flourished as the imperial religion of three Persian empires, those of the Achaemenians, Parthians, and Sassanians, and was the dominant religion from Turkey and eastward to China during those times. North America's Zoroastrian community includes those who arrived from the Indian subcontinent, known as Parsis, and those who came directly from Iran seeking religious freedom.

About FEZANA

Founded in 1987, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) represents a diverse and growing Zarathushti community in the western diaspora. Guided by the blessings of Ahura Mazda and the teachings of prophet Zarathushtra, the non-profit federation serves as the coordinating body for 27 Zoroastrian associations and 14 corresponding groups in Canada and the United States. The activities of FEZANA are conducted in a spirit of mutual respect, cooperation, and unity among all member associations, and with due regard for the Zarathushti principles of goodness, truth, reason, benevolence, implicit trust, and charity toward all mankind. Visit www.fezana.org and follow FEZANA on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook @TheFEZANA.

About ZYNA

The Zoroastrian Youth of North America (ZYNA) is a FEZANA committee dedicated to advancing thought leadership, engagement, and active participation among next-generation Zarathushtis. ZYNA aims to increase the civic engagement and involvement of youth in the Zoroastrian community through an established infrastructure. By working to educate and provide community engagement opportunities for young Zarathushtis in Canada and the United States, ZYNA is creating a sustainable footprint for future generations to advance Zoroastrian interests throughout North America.

Did you enjoy reading this guide and would like to be part of creating the next issue? Please reach out to Bitakavoosi at bitakavoosi@gmail.com. To see all our resource guides please visit <https://fezana.org/category/zyna/resourceguide/>

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