

**OPERATION ALLIES WELCOME: EXAMINING DHS'S  
EFFORTS TO RESETTLE VULNERABLE AFGHANS**

---

**JOINT HEARING**  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT,  
MANAGEMENT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY  
AND THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER SECURITY,  
FACILITATION, AND OPERATIONS  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS  
FIRST SESSION

OCTOBER 21, 2021

**Serial No. 117-33**

Printed for the use of the Committee on Homeland Security



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.govinfo.gov/>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

46-713 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2022

## COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

BENNIE G. THOMPSON, Mississippi, *Chairman*

SHEILA JACKSON LEE, Texas	JOHN KATKO, New York
JAMES R. LANGEVIN, Rhode Island	MICHAEL T. MCCAUL, Texas
DONALD M. PAYNE, JR., New Jersey	CLAY HIGGINS, Louisiana
J. LUIS CORREA, California	MICHAEL GUEST, Mississippi
ELISSA SLOTKIN, Michigan	DAN BISHOP, North Carolina
EMANUEL CLEAVER, Missouri	JEFFERSON VAN DREW, New Jersey
AL GREEN, Texas	RALPH NORMAN, South Carolina
YVETTE D. CLARKE, New York	MARIANNETTE MILLER-MEEKS, Iowa
ERIC SWALWELL, California	DIANA HARSHBARGER, Tennessee
DINA TITUS, Nevada	ANDREW S. CLYDE, Georgia
BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN, New Jersey	CARLOS A. GIMENEZ, Florida
KATHLEEN M. RICE, New York	JAKE LATURNER, Kansas
VAL BUTLER DEMINGS, Florida	PETER MELJER, Michigan
NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGÁN, California	KAT CAMMACK, Florida
JOSH GOTTHEIMER, New Jersey	AUGUST PFLUGER, Texas
ELAINE G. LURIA, Virginia	ANDREW R. GARBARINO, New York
TOM MALINOWSKI, New Jersey	
RITCHIE TORRES, New York	

HOPE GOINS, *Staff Director*

DANIEL KROESE, *Minority Staff Director*

NATALIE NIXON, *Clerk*

---

## SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, MANAGEMENT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

J. LUIS CORREA, California, *Chairman*

DINA TITUS, Nevada	PETER MELJER, Michigan, <i>Ranking Member</i>
DONALD M. PAYNE, JR., New Jersey	DAN BISHOP, North Carolina
RITCHIE TORRES, New York	DIANA HARSHBARGER, Tennessee
BENNIE G. THOMPSON, Mississippi ( <i>ex officio</i> )	JOHN KATKO, New York ( <i>ex officio</i> )

LISA CANINI, *Subcommittee Staff Director*

ERIC HEIGHBERGER, *Minority Subcommittee Staff Director*

GEREMIAH LOFTON, *Subcommittee Clerk*

---

## SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER SECURITY, FACILITATION, AND OPERATIONS

NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGÁN, California, *Chairwoman*

J. LUIS CORREA, California	CLAY HIGGINS, Louisiana, <i>Ranking Member</i>
EMANUEL CLEAVER, Missouri	MICHAEL GUEST, Mississippi
AL GREEN, Texas	DAN BISHOP, North Carolina
YVETTE D. CLARKE, New York	ANDREW S. CLYDE, Georgia
BENNIE G. THOMPSON, Mississippi ( <i>ex officio</i> )	JOHN KATKO, New York ( <i>ex officio</i> )

BRIEANA MARTICORENA, *Subcommittee Staff Director*

NATASHA EBY, *Minority Subcommittee Staff Director*

ZACHARY WOOD, *Subcommittee Clerk*

# CONTENTS

---

	Page
STATEMENTS	
The Honorable J. Luis Correa, a Representative in Congress From the State of California, and Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability:	
Oral Statement .....	1
Prepared Statement .....	2
The Honorable Peter Meijer, a Representative in Congress From the State of Michigan, and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability:	
Oral Statement .....	3
Prepared Statement .....	5
The Honorable Nanette Diaz Barragan, a Representative in Congress From the State of California, and Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations:	
Oral Statement .....	6
Prepared Statement .....	8
The Honorable Clay Higgins, a Representative in Congress From the State of Louisiana, and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations:	
Oral Statement .....	8
Prepared Statement .....	9
The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson, a Representative in Congress From the State of Mississippi, and Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security:	
Prepared Statement .....	10
WITNESSES	
Mr. Michael Breen, President and Chief Executive Officer, Human Rights First:	
Oral Statement .....	12
Prepared Statement .....	13
Ms. Robin Dunn Marcos, Senior Director for Resettlement, Asylum and Integration, International Rescue Committee:	
Oral Statement .....	16
Prepared Statement .....	18
Ms. Naheed Samadi Bahram, U.S. Country Director, Women for Afghan Women:	
Oral Statement .....	21
Prepared Statement .....	22
Mr. Art delaCruz, Chief Executive Officer, Team Rubicon:	
Oral Statement .....	23
Prepared Statement .....	25
FOR THE RECORD	
The Honorable J. Luis Correa, a Representative in Congress From the State of California, and Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability:	
Statement of Church World Service .....	52
The Honorable Andrew S. Clyde, a Representative in Congress From the State of Georgia:	
Article, <i>Wall Street Journal</i> .....	42



## **OPERATION ALLIES WELCOME: EXAMINING DHS'S EFFORTS TO RESETTLE VULNERABLE AFGHANS**

---

**Thursday, October 21, 2021**

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, MANAGEMENT,  
AND ACCOUNTABILITY, AND THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER SECURITY,  
FACILITATION, AND OPERATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittees met, pursuant to notice, at 2:32 p.m., in room 310, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. J. Luis Correa [Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability] presiding.

Present: Representatives Correa, Barragán, Payne, Titus, Jackson Lee, Langevin, Meijer, Higgins, Bishop, Harshbarger, and Clyde.

Mr. CORREA. The Homeland Security Subcommittees on Oversight Committee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability and Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations will now come to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare the subcommittees in recess at any point.

We now begin by thanking everyone who is joining us today. I would like to also thank Chairwoman Barragán and Ranking Member Higgins of the Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations subcommittee for coming together with myself and Ranking Member Meijer and holding this important hearing.

We are here this afternoon to discuss Operation Allies Welcome, the effort led by the Department of Homeland Security, to resettle Afghan evacuees and ensure that they have the support necessary to build their new lives here in America. We know that this transition will not be easy, and to leave one's home and resettle in a new country is a difficult undertaking, no matter what the reasons are. Unfortunately, many of our Afghan allies faced hardship long before arriving in the United States. The Federal Government evacuated thousands of our allies and brought them to America for a safer and more prosperous life, but that is hardly where our obligation ends. We now face the much greater challenge of finding communities where these evacuees can build new lives and provide them with on-going support.

This means ensuring that our allies will have access to long-term housing, employment, as well as access to basic human needs like

health care, food, and clothing. Thankfully, Americans across the country are welcoming Afghan evacuees into their cities and communities with open arms. This should come as no surprise, since it is a long-held American tradition to welcome those who are looking for a better life, and it is a tradition that makes us stronger as a Nation.

I have had the opportunity to observe first-hand how refugees can bring new life and new opportunities to America as well. My district is home to the largest community of Vietnamese Americans, many of whom resettled in southern California after the Vietnam War. They have built a home in the United States and enrich our society, contributing to the creation of a more diverse and prosperous community. I have no doubt that our Afghan allies will also do the same in the cities they decide to settle in.

We are fortunate to have seen incredible outpouring of support, including from our veterans, faith leaders, and Afghan American community members. While the Department of Homeland Security seeks to provide supporting coordination services for these organizations, it is civil society that has stepped up to deliver the local and long-term care for our Afghan evacuees. I am pleased to welcome today representatives from four non-Governmental organizations that are working directly with the Government to ensure that our Afghan allies have access to those services and care.

This month, evacuees began moving out of the temporary housing at military bases around the country and into local communities that have welcomed them. But many, of course, are still waiting to see where their new homes will be.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses how we can best support Afghans during this critical period and what additional support we may provide from DHS and other Federal partners to ensure this transition is smooth. I think all of us can agree that we owe it to our Afghan allies to get it right the first time.

[The statement of Chairman Correa follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN J. LUIS CORREA

OCTOBER 21, 2021

We're here this afternoon to discuss Operation Allies Welcome, the effort led by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to resettle Afghan evacuees and ensure they have the support necessary to build new homes here in America. We know that this transition will not be an easy one. To leave one's home and resettle in a new country is a difficult undertaking, no matter the reason. Unfortunately, many of our Afghan allies have faced hardships long before arriving in the United States.

The Federal Government evacuated thousands of our allies and brought them to America for a safer and more prosperous life, but that is hardly where our obligation to them ends. We now face the much greater challenge of finding communities where these evacuees can build a new life and providing them with on-going support. This means ensuring that our allies will have access to long-term housing and employment, as well as access to basic human needs like health care, food, and clothing.

Thankfully, Americans across the country are welcoming Afghan evacuees into their cities with open arms. This should come as no surprise since it is a long-held American tradition to welcome those who seek a better life. And it is a tradition that makes us stronger as a Nation.

I have had the opportunity to observe first-hand how refugees can bring new life and new opportunities to American cities. My district is home to a large community of Vietnamese-Americans, many of whom resettled in Southern California after the Vietnam war. They have built a home in the United States and enriched our society,

contributing to the creation of a more diverse and prosperous community. I have no doubt that our Afghan allies will do the same in the cities that they settle into.

We are fortunate to have seen an incredible outpouring of support, including from the veteran, faith, and Afghan American communities. While the Department of Homeland Security seeks to provide support and coordination services for these organizations, it is civil society that has stepped up to deliver the local and long-term care for Afghan evacuees.

I am pleased to welcome today representatives from four non-governmental organizations that are working directly with the Government to ensure that our Afghan allies have access to that care. This month, evacuees began moving out of temporary housing at military bases and into the local communities that have welcomed them. But many are still waiting to see their new homes for the first time.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses how we can best support Afghans during this critical period and what additional support may be necessary from DHS and other Federal partners to ensure this transition goes smoothly. I think we can all agree that we owe it to our Afghan allies to get this one right.

Mr. CORREA. With that, I thank you again for joining us today. The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability, the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. Meijer, for an opening statement.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important joint subcommittee hearing today, and thank you to our witnesses for joining us in this discussion.

We are gathered here after months of extreme turbulence for America and its allies following the U.S. military's drawdown and then the full withdrawal from Afghanistan that concluded at the end of August 2021. As a veteran of the Iraq war, and later a conflicts analyst who served in Afghanistan with the humanitarian aid community from late 2013 to early 2015, this is a very personal subject, as I know it is to many in the room. As the veterans' community saw what was happening, I think we all felt a sense of heartbreak and rage looking at the images coming out of Afghanistan in August after the swift takeover by the Taliban and complete collapse of the Afghan government and security forces.

I was one of the many Americans receiving desperate emails, calls, texts, WhatsApp messages from friends in Afghanistan seeking aid and assistance. This is a personal issue, as I said, and I appreciate how personal it is for some of the other Members and witnesses here today, and again, deeply grateful for everyone's participation.

Despite repeated calls and warnings from a bipartisan group of lawmakers dating back to April, the administration failed to adequately plan for this withdrawal and was not prepared to protect our Afghan allies who put their lives on the line to help the United States. In the final weeks of August, the U.S. military, State Department personnel, and others on the ground completed incredible work under impossible circumstances, saving countless lives in the process, and helping over 120,000 individuals leave Hamid Karzai International Airport. This group included Americans, U.S. lawful permanent residents, Special Immigrant Visa holders, interpreters, and other Afghan allies, fearful of what a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan would be.

Tragically, given the unimaginable conditions on the ground and the fact that the country had been ceded to the Taliban, this effort cost the lives of 13 brave U.S. service members and scores of Afghans frantically trying to reach safety. Policy decisions made here in the District of Columbia put our folks in this dangerous position.

But every American should take pride in the heroism that those on the ground displayed in their final days. Every American should, likewise, demand accountability from officials whose decisions put them in a position that required those very heroic acts.

My thoughts and prayers remain with those who lost loved ones and for those who were left behind in the chaos of the withdrawal, and I hope today we can discuss ideas to make sure every at-risk individual who served alongside U.S. forces, supported the U.S. mission, or otherwise, put their lives on the line our mission is accounted for.

With the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan having now concluded, we have largely shifted that mission from evacuating Afghan allies to resettling them. The United States has an on-going moral obligation to evacuate Afghan allies left behind, and at the same time, ensure that resettlement of individuals who have already been evacuated is completed in a safe, secure, and humane manner.

Operation Allies Welcome is a whole-of-Government effort led by DHS in coordination with DOD, State Department, Health and Human Services, and other Federal partners to provide resources, immigration processing, medical services, transportation, temporary housing, and a variety of other essential services to the evacuated Afghan population in the United States.

I know from first-hand experience what an incredibly complex undertaking this is. Prior to serving in Congress, I worked alongside Team Rubicon and volunteered with them which is a veteran-based, non-Governmental organization focusing on disaster response efforts, both in the United States and abroad, and I am very grateful and thrilled to see them represented here today.

While working with Team Rubicon, I witnessed first-hand communities around the world that struggled with a variety of crises, and our work focused on helping those communities build back following a natural disaster. We provided vital support and exceptional subject-matter expertise in disaster situations, often at times working hand-in-glove with governments around the world as well as other NGO and private-sector organizations.

Now Team Rubicon and other NGO's are teaming up with the U.S. Government to facilitate the successful resettlement of Afghan evacuees through Operation Allies Welcome. Their work encompasses a wide range of activities for providing food and transportation to coordinating with the local communities where evacuees will be resettled to help them find housing and employment.

The work that NGO's are currently conducting on behalf of Afghan nationals in the United States and around the world is key not only to Operation Allies Welcome but to the successful integration of these evacuees into their new communities. These organizations are filling gaps in the capabilities of our own Government during this undertaking, and we have a lot to learn, and I am grateful to be having this hearing here today.

I am also excited to hear how the groups are working with the Federal Government during this historic resettlement effort so that we can better understand the challenges, how operations are going, what we need to anticipate moving forward, and also how we can help.



The evacuees arriving in the United States have already been through so much prior to their arrival, so again, we owe it to them to ensure the resettlement is better planned and better executed than the evacuation was. I was proud to join a bipartisan group of my colleagues in introducing the Welcome Act in September to provide evacuees admitted to the United States under humanitarian parole with the standard refugee benefits that are provided to others. I was pleased to see this language signed into law as part of the Government funding measure that passed Congress at the end of September.

But there is more that we need to know, and there is more that we need to do, and that is the purpose of this hearing. We know this to be a long-term, large-scale operation, and as Members of Congress, we are here to listen, to learn, and to help in this effort.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this hearing, and thank you to Chairwoman Barragán and Ranking Member Higgins for leading this important hearing with us today. I am sincerely looking forward to hearing the witnesses' testimony and ensuring the Government is leveraging the full range of NGO's and their capabilities to make Operation Allies Welcome a success.

[The statement of Ranking Member Meijer follows:]

#### STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER PETER MEIJER

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important joint subcommittee hearing today, and thank you to our witnesses for joining us in today's discussion.

We are gathered here today after months of extreme turbulence for America and its allies following the U.S. military's drawdown and then full withdrawal from Afghanistan on August 30, 2021.

I served in the Iraq War and then later worked as a conflict analyst with the humanitarian aid community, living in Afghanistan from late 2013 to early 2015. Like so many other veterans, I was both enraged and heartbroken by the images we saw coming out of Afghanistan in August following the collapse of the Afghan government and the Taliban's swift takeover of the country. I was one of the many Americans receiving desperate calls, texts, and emails from friends and former colleagues at all hours of the day pleading for help. This is personal for me, and I appreciate how personal it is for the other Members and witnesses with us here today. I am truly grateful for everyone's participation.

Despite repeated calls and warnings from a bipartisan group of lawmakers dating back to April, the administration failed to adequately plan for this withdrawal and was not prepared to protect our Afghan allies who put their lives, and the lives of their families, on the line to help the United States. In the final weeks of August, the U.S. military, State Department personnel, and others on the ground completed incredible work under impossible circumstances and saved countless lives, with over 120,000 individuals being airlifted to safety out of the Kabul airport. This group included Americans, U.S. lawful permanent residents, Special Immigrant Visa holders, interpreters, and other vulnerable Afghans fearful of a what a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan would mean.

Tragically, given the unimaginable conditions on the ground and the fact that the administration had ceded control to the Taliban, this effort cost the lives of 13 brave U.S. service members and scores of Afghans who were frantically trying to reach safety. Policy decisions made here in the District of Columbia put our people in this dangerous position. Every American should take pride in the heroism that Americans on the ground displayed in our final days in Afghanistan, and every American should demand accountability from the officials whose decisions put them in a position that required those heroic acts. My thoughts and prayers remain with those who lost loved ones and for those who were left behind in the chaos of the withdrawal, and I hope today we can discuss ideas to make sure every at-risk individual in Afghanistan is accounted for.

With the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan now concluded, the administration has largely shifted from evacuating Afghan allies to resettling them. The United States has an on-going moral obligation to evacuate our Afghan allies who risked their lives to support the the United States that still remain in Afghanistan, and

at the same time, ensure the resettlement of individuals already evacuated is completed in a safe, secure, and humane manner.

Operation Allies Welcome is the whole-of-Government effort being led by DHS in coordination with DOD, State, HHS, and other Federal partners to provide resources, immigration processing, medical services, transportation, temporary housing, and a variety of other essential services to the evacuated Afghan population arriving in the United States.

I know from first-hand experience what an incredible and complex undertaking this is. Prior to serving in Congress, I worked with Team Rubicon, a veteran-based non-Governmental organization that focuses on disaster response efforts both in the United States and abroad, and I am thrilled to see them represented among our witnesses today.

While working with Team Rubicon, I witnessed first-hand communities around the world that struggled with a variety of crises, and our work focused on helping these communities build back following a natural disaster. We provided vital support and exceptional subject-matter expertise in disaster situations. We often worked hand-in-glove with governments around the world as well as other NGO's and private-sector organizations to ensure optimal results.

Now Team Rubicon and many other NGO's are teaming up with the U.S. Government to facilitate the successful resettlement of Afghan evacuees through Operation Allies Welcome. Their work encompasses a wide range of activities, from providing food and transportation, to coordinating with the local communities where evacuees will be resettled to help them find housing and employment opportunities.

The work that NGO's are currently conducting on behalf of Afghan nationals in the United States and around the world is key not only to Operation Allies Welcome, but to the successful integration of the evacuees into their new communities. These organizations are filling gaps in the capabilities of our own Government during this tremendous undertaking, and we truly have much to learn from their work and experiences. I am excited to hear how these groups are working with the Federal Government during this historic resettlement effort. We want to better understand the challenges, how operations are going today, what we need to anticipate going forward, and how we can help.

The evacuees arriving in the United States have already been through so much. We owe it to them to ensure the resettlement is better planned and better executed than the evacuation. I was proud to join a bipartisan group of my colleagues in introducing the WELCOMED Act in September to provide evacuees admitted to the United States under humanitarian parole with the standard refugee benefits they need, and I was pleased to see this language signed into law as part of the Government funding measure that Congress passed at the end of September. But there is more we need to know, and more we need to do—and that is the purpose of this hearing today. We know this will be a long-term, large-scale operation, and we as Members of Congress are here to listen, learn, and help in this effort.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this hearing, and thank you Chairwoman Barragán and Ranking Member Higgins for leading this important hearing with us today. I am sincerely looking forward to hearing the witnesses' testimony and ensuring that the Government is leveraging the full range of NGO's and their capabilities to make Operation Allies Welcome a success.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Ranking Member, and I know this is a personal issue for you, and I am glad you are part of this oversight, because it is so important to you. Of course, thank you as well for your service to our country.

The Chair now recognizes the Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Border Security and Operations, the gentlewoman from California, Ms. Barragán, for an opening statement.

Ms. Barragán.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you. Good afternoon. I would also like to begin by thanking everyone for joining us today. I would like to thank Chairman Correa and Ranking Member Meijer for working with Ranking Member Higgins and me to have this important and timely hearing.

During this hearing, we will hear from diverse voices on the ground while working alongside the Department of Homeland Security to welcome and resettle our Afghan partners through Oper-

ation Allies Welcome. As we have heard, DHS is tasked with leading the coordination of resettling thousands of Afghans who worked alongside our military and diplomats, as well as particularly vulnerable Afghans such as journalists, human rights workers, and women activists.

However, this resettlement mission requires a whole-of-community approach. Multiple Federal agencies, resettlement organizations, and nongovernmental organizations are working with communities and companies like Airbnb day and night to welcome new arrivals into American communities. Resettlement agencies, like the International Rescue Commission, quickly operationalized to provide services and humanitarian assistance to Afghans being brought into the United States, particularly to those housed on military bases. Civil society groups, like Women for Afghan Women, are working to ensure the services administered to new arrivals meet the needs of this population while being culturally appropriate.

Afghan-American-led organizations, like Women for Afghan Women, are particularly critical during this time. Many of their volunteers encompass steep knowledge of Afghan customs and languages needed to serve this population. NGO's, like Human Rights First, have been leading voices and strong advocates in efforts to evacuate, welcome, and properly support the resettlement of vulnerable Afghans here in the United States. Veterans and veteran service organizations, including organizations composed mostly of veterans, like Team Rubicon, have been stepping forward and galvanizing communities to help our Afghan allies resettle and rebuild here in the United States.

Each witness represented here holds a unique perspective and is vital to our discussion. Operation Allies Welcome is well under way with evacuees being resettled across the United States. Communities Nation-wide, like the ones that I represent in California, are preparing to embrace these families. Supporting those who risk their lives to help our troops over the last two decades, along with those fleeing persecution in dangerous conditions, is the right thing to do.

That is why I am proud that Congress passed a continuing resolution which allows evacuees to receive refugee benefits, like temporary housing, employment training, and medical care. These benefits are critical to meet immediate and long-term needs. The continuing resolution also includes additional funding for Federal agencies working to resettle our Afghan partners. For example, U.S. citizenship and Immigration Services received additional funding to process Special Immigrant Visas and humanitarian parole applications. Other agencies received funding to augment medical support and humanitarian assistance.

As Operation Allies Welcome progresses, Congress must work, continue to work with both Federal and non-Federal partners to meet the needs of evacuees and advance this resettlement mission. I am eager to hear from the witnesses on the needs of the Afghan evacuees and how the Department can improve services and coordination efforts under Operation Allies Welcome.

Thank you, and I yield back.

[The statement of Chairwoman Barragán follows:]

## STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN NANETTE BARRAGÁN

OCTOBER 21, 2021

During this hearing, we will hear from diverse voices on the ground, who are working alongside the Department of Homeland Security to welcome and resettle our Afghan partners through Operation Allies Welcome. As we've heard, DHS is tasked with leading the coordination of resettling thousands of Afghans who worked alongside our military and diplomats, as well as particularly vulnerable Afghans such as journalists, human rights workers, and women activists. However, this resettlement mission requires a whole-of-community approach.

Multiple Federal agencies, resettlement organizations, and non-Governmental organizations (NGO's) are working day and night to welcome new arrivals into American communities. Resettlement agencies, like the International Rescue Commission, quickly operationalized to provide services and humanitarian assistance to Afghans being brought into the United States—particularly to those housed on military bases. Civil society groups, like Women for Afghan Women, are working to ensure the services administered to new arrivals meet the needs of this population while being culturally appropriate.

Afghan American-led organizations, like Women for Afghan Women, are particularly critical during this time. Many of their volunteers encompass deep knowledge of Afghan customs and languages needed to serve this population. NGO's, like Human Rights First, have been leading voices and strong advocates in efforts to evacuate, welcome, and properly support the resettlement of vulnerable Afghans here in the United States. Veterans and veteran service organizations, including organizations composed mostly of veterans like Team Rubicon, have been stepping forward and galvanizing communities to help our Afghan allies resettle and rebuild here in the United States.

Each witness represented here holds a unique perspective and is vital to our discussion. Operation Allies Welcome is well under way, with evacuees being resettled across the United States. Communities Nation-wide, like the ones that I represent in California, are preparing to embrace these families. Supporting those who risked their lives to help our troops over the last two decades, along with those fleeing persecution and dangerous conditions, is the right thing to do.

That is why I am proud that Congress passed a Continuing Resolution, which allows evacuees to receive refugee benefits like temporary housing, employment training, and medical care. These benefits are critical to meet immediate and long-term needs. The Continuing Resolution also includes additional funding for Federal agencies working to resettle our Afghan partners. For example, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) received additional funding to process Special Immigrant Visa and humanitarian parole applications. Other agencies received funding to augment medical support and humanitarian assistance.

As Operational Allies Welcome progresses, Congress must continue working with both Federal and non-Federal partners to meet the needs of the evacuees and advance this resettlement mission. I am eager to hear from the witnesses on the needs of the Afghan evacuees and how the Department can improve services and coordination efforts under Operation Allies Welcome.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Chairwoman Barragán.

Now the Chair recognizes the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Border Security, the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, for an opening statement.

Welcome, sir.

Mr. HIGGINS. I thank my friend, the Chairman, and the Chairwoman for holding this very important joint hearing today. I would also like to thank our witnesses for being here to join today's discussions.

It has been 2 months since the United States' chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan. On August 29, President Biden directed the Department of Homeland Security, who we have yet to hear from in a hearing format, to lead the implementation of the on-going efforts across the Federal Government to support and resettle Afghans who were evacuated. The disastrous withdrawal led to thousands of vulnerable Afghans coming to the United States under various

authorities, such as the SIV, the Special Immigrant Visas, and humanitarian parole programs.

Some of these individuals are being paroled into the interior of the United States, or they are even prematurely leaving military bases before undergoing proper and necessary vetting.

The Committee on Homeland Security Republicans have received very little information from the Biden administration on how these efforts are progressing. It is shameful, in my opinion, that only now has the Majority decided to hold a hearing on Afghanistan, and I am requesting, respectfully, that the committee hold a full committee hearing with relevant Government witnesses on the entire resettlement process, including the screening and vetting of Afghans into the United States.

As part of our Congressional oversight authority, the committee must address the fallout, including any National security threats, due to the manner in which the United States withdrew from Afghanistan. Additionally, the committee must also address the screening and vetting process for all Afghans leaving Kabul during the chaotic last days.

The committee Republicans have yet to receive answers to many questions we put to the Department of Homeland Security despite numerous letters and attempts, dozens and dozens.

I want to be clear that we are very appreciative of the hard work of the nonprofits and to all the organizations here today that have stepped forward in this hour of need to help all vulnerable Afghans who worked alongside American military forces and our Government at great risk to themselves and their families. We recognize the importance of your work in Operation Allies Welcome, helping with the resettlement efforts, coordinating donations, and logistics support, just to name a few of your contributions. We are very grateful.

I look forward to the witnesses' testimony. I thank them for appearing before us today. But before I yield back the balance of my time, I again request a full committee hearing on Afghanistan. Mr. Chairman, respectfully to your leadership, sir, I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Higgins follows:]

#### STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER CLAY HIGGINS

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Chairwoman Barragán, and Ranking Member Meijer for holding this very important joint hearing today. I would also like to thank all our witnesses for being here to join today's discussions.

It's been almost 2 months since the United States' chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan. On August 29, President Biden directed the Department of Homeland Security, who we have yet to hear from in a hearing format, to lead the implementation of the on-going efforts across the Federal Government to support and resettle vulnerable Afghans who were evacuated.

This disastrous withdrawal led to thousands of vulnerable Afghans coming to the United States under various authorities such as the Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) and humanitarian parole. Some of these individuals are being paroled into the interior of the United States, or prematurely leaving military bases, before undergoing proper and necessary vetting.

Committee on Homeland Security Republicans have received very little information from the Biden administration on how these efforts are progressing. I am requesting that the committee hold a full committee hearing, with relevant Government witnesses, on the entire resettlement process, including the screening and vetting, of Afghans in the United States.

As part of our Congressional oversight authority, the committee must address the fallout, including any National security threats, due to the manner in which the

United States withdrew from Afghanistan. Additionally, the committee must also address the screening and vetting process of all Afghans leaving Kabul during those chaotic last days. Committee Republicans have yet to receive answers to many questions we have put to the Department of Homeland Security, despite numerous letters and attempts.

I want to be clear that we are very appreciative of the hard work of the non-profits, and to all the organizations here today, that have stepped forward in this hour of need to help all vulnerable Afghans who worked alongside Americans at great risk to themselves and their families. We recognize the importance of your work in Operation Allies Welcome, helping with the resettlement efforts, coordinating donations and logistics support, just to name a few of your contributions.

I look forward to the witnesses' testimony and I thank them for appearing before us today. But before I yield back the balance of my time, I again request a full committee hearing on Afghanistan. With that, I yield back.

Mr. CORREA. I thank the Ranking Member, Mr. Higgins, for his comments.

Members are now reminded that the committee will operate according to the guidelines laid out by the Chairman and Ranking Member in their February 3 colloquy regarding remote procedures. Without objection, Members not on the subcommittee will be permitted to sit and question the witnesses. Members may also submit statements for the record.

[The statement of Chairman Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OCTOBER 21, 2021

Just weeks after 9/11, U.S. military operations began in Afghanistan—operations that would last 20 years, until this past August. The recent withdrawal of American forces resulted in the need to quickly evacuate U.S. citizens and Afghan allies. Our military undertook an unprecedented airlift mission, facilitating the evacuation of more than 124,000 people in 17 days.

The President's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan has been fiercely debated, and there are many questions still to be answered about how the evacuation was carried out. But the task before us now is resettling the tens of thousands of vulnerable individuals and families who were evacuated from their country. Many of them risked their lives, and the lives of their families, to assist the U.S. Government and our military over the past two decades. They served bravely in key roles, such as translators, interpreters, and drivers, which made them integral partners in the fight against terrorism. It is critical we honor these Afghans' contributions by welcoming them into communities across the United States and providing them with the support they need to start their new lives.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is uniquely qualified to carry out this work given its experience bringing different agencies together to execute a common mission. DHS often convenes partners—including State and local governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and public—to respond to a crisis. That is why the Biden administration tapped DHS to lead the Federal Government's resettlement efforts, known as Operation Allies Welcome.

As the lead Federal agency, DHS helps ensure unity of effort, clear roles and responsibilities, and effective coordination across the Government. To date, Operation Allies Welcome has provided Afghans with initial support such as medical care, language access resources, and immigration assistance while they await transfer from military bases to their new communities. But DHS and the Federal Government are not acting alone.

The private sector and a vast network of non-profit organizations are vital partners for ensuring Afghans have the support they need, especially as they resettle in U.S. communities across the Nation. Several of these non-profit partners are represented here today. I want to thank the witnesses for joining us and express my gratitude for the important work that you and your organizations are doing. I look forward to hearing how Congress and the administration can support your efforts to safely and compassionately resettle our Afghan allies.

Mr. CORREA. Now I would like to welcome our witnesses.

Our first witness is Mr. Michael Breen. Mr. Breen is president and CEO of Human Rights, one of the Nation's leading human rights advocacy organizations. He is also an Army veteran—thank you for your service to our country, sir—who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

After leaving the military, Mr. Breen served in the Office of the White House Counsel and co-founded the International Refugee Assistance Project, working with refugee families from Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.

Our second witness, Ms. Robin Dunn Marcos, served as senior director of Resettlement Asylum Integration Programs for the International Rescue Committee, or IRC. She oversees a staff of over 400 that are providing Afghan evacuees with required processing for onward travel to their final destinations, and the IRC is running the assurance program which matches Afghan evacuees with resettlement agencies.

Our third witness, Ms. Naheed Samadi Bahram, serves as the U.S. country director for Women for Afghan Women, a grassroots civil society organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the rights of disenfranchised Afghan women and girls. Over the past 20 years, Women for Afghan Women has provided life-changing services, education, and training for its clients across Afghanistan and the United States. A native of Afghanistan, Ms. Bahram and her family migrated to Pakistan after her mother was killed in an explosion. She moved to the United States in 2006.

Our final witness will be introduced by our Ranking Member, Mr. Meijer.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Our final witness is Art delaCruz, who is the chief executive officer for Team Rubicon, as I mentioned earlier, a veteran-based disaster response organization to leverage those veteran skill sets as first responders to help disaster victims at home and abroad suffering from both environmental and man-made disasters. The organization also promotes service and camaraderie to help veterans gain community, a sense of purpose and identity to promote transition to civilian life.

Mr. delaCruz served honorably for over 22 years in the United States Navy, and enjoyed a career that included a broad range of assignments. He commanded a Navy strike fighter squadron, spent a year with McKinsey & Company as a Secretary of Defense Corporate Fellow, serving as a Top Gun instructor as well, and made 6 combat deployments. After retiring, he spent 2½ years in the aerospace and defense sectors in the roles of business development, strategy, and planning.

We are excited to have him here today and are grateful for his participation in this hearing.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you.

Mr. delaCruz, thank you for your service to our country as well.

Without objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted into the record. Now I ask each witness to summarize his or her statement for 5 statements, beginning with Mr. Breen.

Welcome.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL BREEN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER, HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST**

Mr. BREEN. Thank you. Chairwoman Barragán, Ranking Member Higgins, Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Meijer, and distinguished Members of the subcommittees, thank you for this opportunity to testify on Operation Allies Welcome and resettlement of vulnerable Afghans in our communities.

Human Rights First is an independent, nonprofit organization that for more than four decades, has pressed the United States to take a leading role in promoting and defending human rights. Today, we are at the forefront of the effort to bring to safety Afghans who are in danger following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

After President Biden announced that he would order the complete withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan by September of this year, Human Rights First and our partners established the Evacuate our Allies Coalition, comprised of trusted human rights and refugee organizations to work alongside veterans and front-line civilians to advocate in the evacuation of at-risk Afghan allies to safety. We immediately recognized the need to protect the allies who fought alongside the U.S. military in Afghanistan and other Afghans at risk of persecution by the Taliban.

Through the spring and summer of 2021, we advocated for a plan to evacuate United States territory all persons who qualified on the Special Immigrant Visa program, estimated at around 80,000 individuals, similar to past evacuations of Vietnamese, Iraqis, and Kosovars following conflicts in their countries.

We were encouraged in late July to see late-stage applicants under the Special Immigrant Visa program brought to Fort Lee in Virginia and hoped that the pace of arrivals would continue increasing the remainder of the year.

But with the withdrawal of U.S. military forces and the Afghan government's fall to the Taliban, those hopes were dashed. We, nonetheless, continued to advocate for evacuation, welcoming support for the resettlement of vulnerable Afghans.

With the arrival of tens of thousands of Afghans to the United States and many more still abroad, we quickly established Project Afghan Legal Assistance, or PALA to support their access to legal counsel. Through PALA and our leadership of the EOA coalition, Human Rights First is spearheading and collaboration between U.S. legal organizations, law firms, resettlement agencies, and other stakeholders to provide legal representation to Afghan refugees. Through PALA, we recruited hundreds of volunteer attorneys and interpreters to assist Afghans with their immigration needs. We also work with coalition and Federal agencies to identify legal challenges to their protection and identify referral networks.

Our aim is to help secure legal representation for all Afghan refugees arriving in the United States, and we will continue to mobilize the pro bono community to meet that challenge. Thousands of Afghans remain stranded in Afghanistan or third countries, and they need a clear and viable pathway for reaching safety in the United States. Many filed humanitarian parole applications with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service. Yet, we have heard that a handful of those have been adjudicated. Families



have paid sizable filing fees only to have their applications sit at USCIS with no information on when or if they will be reunited with their loved ones.

How we welcome the Afghans is as important as the legal frameworks that make up our immigration laws. Congress can do its part to honor the sacrifices many of these Afghans made by our side by following these recommendations.

First, urge the Biden administration to release a plan to evacuate allies and at-risk Afghans seeking to leave Afghanistan and bring those located in host countries swiftly to safety in the United States.

Second, create categorical parole programs for Afghan nationals that prioritizes and expedites the thousands of humanitarian parole requests filed by vulnerable Afghans abroad, and waive all application fees associated with applications filed by at-risk Afghans.

Third, enhance access to legal counsel to Afghans being brought to safety by ensuring, including through oversight of DHS, that Afghans at the 8 safe havens across the United States have full access to legal orientations, the ability to consult and meet with legal counsel to better prepare themselves for what is required of them in the U.S. immigration system, and unlimited access to attorneys for case preparation.

Finally, pass the bipartisan Afghan Adjustment Act, which would allow Afghan parolees to have an opportunity to seek permanent residence. They deserve an opportunity to rebuild their lives and contribute to our communities without the fear and limitations associated with uncertain immigration status.

As a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, I can tell you that veterans and others who served understand the moral obligation, not only to evacuate our allies to the United States, but also to welcome into our country and our communities.

This is a matter of honor, but it is much more. It is an insight into the soul of this country. Many Americans owe their lives to our Afghan allies. We have a duty to honor their service and our commitments by creating pathways to their resettlement in the United States.

As a leader of a human rights organization, and together with many thousands of my fellow veterans, I ask you to join in our commitment to seeing our allies evacuated to safety, welcoming Afghans as our neighbors and our friends, and helping integrate into our communities the thousands of Afghans who have already been evacuated to the United States.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Breen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL BREEN

OCTOBER 21, 2021

Chairwoman Barragán, Ranking Member Higgins, Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Meijer, and distinguished Members of the subcommittees: Thank you for this opportunity to testify on Operation Allies Welcome and resettling vulnerable Afghans to our communities.

Human Rights First is an independent, non-profit advocacy organization that challenges America to live up to its ideals. For more than four decades Human Rights First has pressed the United States to take a leading role in promoting and defending human rights. Founded in 1978, Human Rights First was instrumental

in working with Congress to pass the landmark 1980 Refugee Act, which established the framework for the United States asylum and refugee resettlement programs. Working with veterans, former U.S. officials and other partners, Human Rights First advocated for enactment of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2007 to provide visas and resettlement for Iraqi refugees and Iraqis at risk due to their U.S. ties and for issuance of Special Immigrant Visas for Afghans in danger due to their work with the United States. Now, we add to this legacy by working to resettle into our communities the more than 70,000 Afghans that have arrived in the United States in the past 2 months and help bring to safety thousands more at-risk Afghans still in Afghanistan or in third countries.

After President Biden announced he would order the complete withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan by September of this year, Human Rights First and our partners established the Evacuate Our Allies (EOA) coalition, comprised of trusted human rights, religious, and refugee organizations who work alongside veterans and front-line civilians to advocate for the evacuation of at-risk Afghan allies to safety. We saw a clear need for the administration to create a plan to save the allies who fought alongside us through the past 2 decades of war. In the spring and summer of 2021, the Coalition called for the immediate evacuation to United States territory of all persons who qualified for the Special Immigrant Visa program, estimated at around 80,000 individuals.

In the intervening months, we engaged with the administration on ways to facilitate this evacuation. Our plan pointed to historical examples of evacuation efforts for Vietnamese, Iraqi, and Kosovar populations following conflicts in their countries as precedent for what could be done for at-risk Afghans. We were encouraged when the Biden administration announced Operation Allies Refugee. The arrival of late-stage applicants of the Special Immigrant Visa program brought to Ft. Lee in Virginia at the end of July brought hope that the pace of arrivals would continue, and the number of Afghans evacuated increase, through the remainder of the year.

When the Afghan government rapidly fell to the Taliban in mid-August, our coalition's mission took on a new sense of urgency to ensure the rapid evacuation and rescue of Afghans who are at risk of Taliban persecution, and their prompt resettlement in the United States. The Evacuate Our Allies Coalition redoubled efforts to support those who were left behind, and it continues efforts to ensure those brought to safety are welcomed into our communities.

While August 31 saw the withdrawal of the U.S. military from Afghanistan, the coalition continues to advocate for the evacuation, welcome, and support for the resettlement of vulnerable Afghans.

#### VETERAN ENGAGEMENT

As a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, I can tell you that veterans understand the moral obligation to not only evacuate our allies to the United States, but also to welcome them into our country and our communities.

Since the end of the war was announced in April of this year, veterans have worked tirelessly on both objectives, working alongside us over long hours to support evacuation efforts and assisting those Afghans who made it to our soil. Many of these Afghans saved the lives of American soldiers, and veterans recognize their duty to protect those who fought alongside them by creating pathways to resettlement and integration into American communities.

#### EVACUATION AND THE IMMIGRATION PROCESS

To date, more than 70,000 Afghans have been evacuated to the United States, with thousands more expected to arrive in the coming weeks and months. Most Afghan arrivals are sent to 1 of 8 U.S. military bases across the country to begin their immigration process, obtain work authorization, and receive required medical examinations and vaccinations.

The overwhelming majority of Afghans are admitted to the United States on parole. When that parole expires, they will have to apply for lasting immigration status in the United States, or risk return to Afghanistan. Thousands remain in Afghanistan or are stranded in third countries, seeking access to the safety and protection of United States.

Afghan evacuees are currently required to navigate our country's complex immigration system to find the appropriate immigration relief without guarantee of legal counsel. Approximately 40 percent of these arrivals are eligible for Special Immigrant Visas, while others come from mixed-family immigration backgrounds and may qualify for adjustment of status through U.S. citizen or Lawful Permanent Resident family members.

Thousands of vulnerable evacuated Afghans admitted on parole—including human rights defenders, women and children, LGBTQ individuals, and others—may have no option but to seek asylum through the same legally complex, paper-intensive, and backlogged system that has prevented thousands of others from securing safety in the United States.

These circumstances present a number of legal challenges that Human Rights First endeavors to address.

#### PROJECT: AFGHAN LEGAL ASSISTANCE (PALA)

With the arrival of tens of thousands of Afghans to the United States and many more still abroad, we quickly established Project: Afghan Legal Assistance (PALA) to support their access to legal counsel. Through PALA and our leadership of the EOA coalition, Human Rights First is spearheading a collaboration between U.S. legal organizations, law firms, resettlement agencies, and other stakeholders to provide legal representation to Afghan refugees.

Though PALA, we organize coalition and liaison meetings with the several Federal agencies that support Afghans through Operation Allies Welcome to identify representation needs, rapidly communicate legal challenges, and identify referral networks for Afghans in need of legal assistance. We have recruited hundreds of pro bono attorneys and interpreters to provide volunteer assistance to Afghan refugees and have created legal resources to help volunteer lawyers to represent Afghans in immigration matters. We will continue to mobilize the pro bono community to help us meet our goal of securing legal representation for all Afghans arriving in the United States who seek protection.

#### ACTION FROM CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION

With the processing of Special Immigrant Visas and refugee admissions slowed to a near stop in recent times, many vulnerable Afghans have spent years languishing in danger despite clear eligibility for resettlement to the United States.

As a result, many of the Afghans evacuees being admitted on temporary status under normal circumstances would have qualified for Special Immigrant Visas or refugee admission and would have entered the country with permanent status. Instead, they are faced with uncertainty and forced to navigate the complicated immigration system to obtain stability in the United States. To that end, Human Rights First and our partners are working with veteran's organizations, faith leaders, and the Afghan American community to ask Congressional leaders to pass an Afghan Adjustment Act to ensure that our Afghan allies and other vulnerable Afghans receive lasting immigration status without the need to pursue more legally complex and overburdened avenues, such as asylum.

Other vulnerable Afghans who were not fortunate enough to be evacuated during the summer remain stranded at risk of persecution by the Taliban in Afghanistan or in third countries and are desperately searching for options to bring themselves and their families to safety. The administration must also identify pathways for such at-risk individuals to be brought to the United States through humanitarian parole or other non-immigrant or immigrant visas.

Since August 31, thousands of humanitarian parole applications have been filed with United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), yet we have heard of less than a handful that have been adjudicated. Families have paid sizable filing fees only to have their applications sit at USCIS with no information on when or if they will be reunited with their loved ones. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) should waive all filing fees for humanitarian parole and other visas filed by at-risk Afghans, as our Coalition has recommended. The mission for DHS and the Biden administration is to identify immediate and viable solutions for Afghans who remain in danger in Afghanistan, as well as those who are in precarious situations in third countries.

The need for a categorical parole program is clear. The thousands of humanitarian parole requests filed by vulnerable Afghans residing abroad must be prioritized and expedited so that these Afghan nationals are brought to the safety of the United States quickly.

#### CONCLUSION

The United States has been a historic global leader in shielding refugees fleeing persecution. The Nation led efforts to draft the Refugee Convention in the wake of World War II and, with bipartisan support, enshrined its commitments into law when it enacted the Refugee Act. For decades, Republican and Democratic administrations recognized the moral and strategic importance of a strong commitment to providing refuge to the persecuted. President Biden has made clear his commitment

to protecting refugees by setting the goal of welcoming 125,000 refugees in the coming year. Now the United States must complete the mission of Operation Allies Welcome in a manner that honors our long tradition of bringing at-risk people to safety.

On September 30, 2021, Congress passed a Continuing Resolution that includes welcome provisions to aid Afghans overseas and provides authorization and funds for the welcome and integration of Afghans arriving in the United States through humanitarian parole. However, more must be done to address the needs of arriving Afghans; an Afghan Adjustment Act is a good start.

Until this pathway is secured, however, USCIS must work to quickly process their asylum applications and ensure that they are not subject to lengthy delays, a difficult task given the backlogs in the asylum system that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

DHS must also work diligently to expedite applications for humanitarian parole for at-risk Afghans abroad, waive the fees associated with such applications and ensure that no effort is spared to bring Afghans swiftly to safety in the United States.

Finally, reports of Afghan refugees being blocked, turned away, and mistreated when they attempt to cross international borders to seek refuge is yet another reminder that the Biden administration must encourage other nations to uphold international law so that Afghans can escape to safety and seek refuge. The administration can set a strong example by upholding U.S. asylum laws and refugee treaties and restoring access to asylum at our own borders in accordance with those laws.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Human Rights First's recommendations for Congress include:

- *Pass an Afghan Adjustment Act*, which would allow Afghan parolees who are being evacuated from Afghanistan, even those who were advised to destroy their documents, to have an opportunity to seek legal permanent residence. These parolees are fleeing violence and persecution; they deserve an opportunity to rebuild their lives in safety—and without the fear and limitations associated with uncertain immigration status.
- *Urge the Biden administration release a plan to evacuate allies and at-risk Afghans* seeking to leave Afghanistan and bring those located in host countries swiftly to safety in the United States. Create a categorical parole program for Afghan nationals that prioritizes and expedites the thousands of humanitarian parole requests filed by vulnerable Afghans abroad and waive all application fees associated with applications filed by at-risk Afghans.
- *Enhance access to legal counsel for Afghans being brought to safety.*—Ensure, including through oversight of DHS, that Afghans at the 8 Safe Havens across the United States have full access to legal orientations, the ability to consult and meet with legal counsel to better prepare themselves for what is required of them in the U.S. immigration system, and unlimited access to attorneys for case preparation. In addition, support funding should be offered for legal orientations and counsel to Afghans who must navigate our complex immigration systems.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you for your testimony.

I now recognize Ms. Marcos to summarize her statements for 5 minutes.

#### STATEMENT OF ROBIN DUNN MARCOS, SENIOR DIRECTOR FOR RESETTLEMENT, ASYLUM AND INTEGRATION, INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

Ms. MARCOS. Chairwoman Barragán and Ranking Member Higgins, Chairman Correa and Ranking Member Meijer, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Operation Allies Welcome, and the resettlement of Afghans in the United States. My name is Robin Dunn Marcos, and I am the senior director for resettlement and asylum and integration programming at the International Rescue Committee. The IRC helps people whose lives and livelihoods have been shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover, and regain control of their future.

Since late July 2021, the IRC, at the invitation of the U.S. Government, has been working to welcome, process, and eventually re-

settle tens of thousands of at-risk Afghans. I have led a team to quickly stand up services on the 8 safe havens established at U.S. Government facilities across the country, and I have personally served at 5 of those locations. I am overseeing a staff of over 400 employees to register and process Afghan guests for onward travel to their final destinations, to coordinate interpretation services and volunteer management, and to support Government partners to complete medical checks and other immigration processing steps, among other activities.

Today, across the 8 Government facilities, we are supporting the reception and processing of over 60,000 Afghan guests, and the IRC alone is expected to sponsor over 10,000 Afghans across our network of resettlement offices this year.

As operations have turned from a short emergency response to a longer-term effort, the needs of guests have and will continue to change. The IRC has strived to incorporate its full breadth of humanitarian expertise in areas such as prevention and response to gender-based violence, child protection, and psychosocial support for refugees.

As with any rapid humanitarian response, challenges have arisen. We have found the U.S. Government to be a willing partner in addressing these problems and working toward sustainable solutions. Some challenges, however, require the intervention of Congress.

First, it is critical that Congress pass legislation to ensure Afghans are able to simply and quickly adjust to lawful permanent residence. Most Afghans arriving in the United States are entering under humanitarian parole which will only permit them to remain in the United States for up to 2 years and which does not offer a pathway to lawful permanent resident status.

Second, we urge Congress to demand the Biden administration create a categorical humanitarian parole program for, at minimum, U.S.-affiliated Afghans who remain in Afghanistan, or who have fled to third countries.

Third, we urge Congress to mandate reforms to the Afghan Priority 2 resettlement program to increase applicant access, expand eligibility, streamline processes, and improve communications across applicants, referring organizations, and U.S. Government program administrators.

Finally, Congress should also ensure Afghan parolees have access to affordable and efficient legal services. Given the temporary nature of parole and the complexity of immigration law, Afghan parolees must receive legal screenings to understand their options and pursue permanent status and protection if eligible.

There are also measures the Department of Homeland Security can take immediately to improve the on-going evacuation, processing, and resettlement of Afghans. DHS should work in close coordination with the IRC, other resettlement agencies, and the State Department, to facilitate smooth transitions from the Government facilities to final destinations in the true spirit of a public-private partnership. The urgency of moving guests off the Government facilities expeditiously has to be measured against the pace of departures and the capacity of receiving communities.

For the IRC, involvement in this domestic emergency response is unprecedented. It is truly an historic operation in terms of size, scope, and complexity. Each of the guests has their own harrowing story of escape and are thankful to the United States for bringing them to safety.

One of IRC's staff members from our Atlanta office, himself a previous SIV recipient, went back to Kabul to help his wife and children evacuate. He struggled to exit the country, but was finally evacuated to Germany. After a month delay, he and his family just arrived at one of the safe havens in Virginia, and he is anxiously waiting for them to complete processing so he can take them home. When asked how it felt to be back in the United States, he replied, The feelings cannot be expressed. You do not know how much love I have for this soil.

In this unique and urgent moment, we beckon the U.S. Government, including the Department of Homeland Security, to engage with the IRC and its other partners in a fully open, transparent, and collaborative fashion. Thank you for your time and holding a hearing on this important topic. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Marcos follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBIN DUNN MARCOS

OCTOBER 21, 2021

Chairwoman Barragán and Ranking Member Higgins of the Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations; Chairman Correa and Ranking Member Meijer of the Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability; and Members of the subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record and testify today on Operation Allies Welcome and the resettlement of Afghans in the United States.

My name is Robin Dunn Marcos and I am the senior director for resettlement, asylum, and integration programming at the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The IRC was founded in 1933 at the suggestion of Albert Einstein and is currently at work in 40 countries and in 31 offices across 28 U.S. cities. The IRC helps people whose lives and livelihoods have been shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover, and regain control of their future. The Resettlement, Asylum, and Integration department creates opportunities for refugees and other vulnerable migrants to thrive in the United States and Europe, serving more than 50,000 individuals each year through a diverse portfolio of programs aimed at 5 core outcomes: Health, safety, economic well-being, education, and empowerment. In the United States, the IRC has partnered with the U.S. Government to resettle more than 412,000 refugees and Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) recipients comprising over 100 nationalities. In my work, I oversee programming across these offices and provide technical support to the Resettlement Support Center Asia, which conducts overseas processing for inbound refugees to the United States through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

Since late July 2021, the IRC, at the invitation of the U.S. Government, has been working to welcome, process, and eventually resettle tens of thousands of Afghans who are at risk of reprisal at the hands of the Taliban because of their affiliation with the United States or other reasons. In support of "Operation Allies Welcome", I have led a team to quickly stand-up services on the 8 "Safe Havens" established on U.S. Government facilities across the country. I am overseeing a staff of over 400 employees, including interpreters, many of whom are former SIV recipients, to register and process Afghan guests for on-ward travel to final destinations; coordinate interpretation services and volunteer management; and support Government partners to complete medical checks and other immigration processing steps, among other activities. The IRC is also managing the assurance process that matches Afghan guests with 1 of the 9 sponsoring Resettlement Agencies (RAs). The IRC alone is expected to sponsor over 10,000 parolees through the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA program) across its network of resettlement offices this year. By contrast, IRC resettled a total of 3,822 refugees and SIV recipients in fiscal year 2021

through the Reception & Placement program. Two-thousand one hundred twenty-two arrivals were from Afghanistan.

The IRC's involvement has grown in proportion to the scale of the operation. Initially, our activities were limited to 1 Virginia-based government facility and focused narrowly on the reception of Afghans who were in the final stages of Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) processing. As the evacuation effort grew, so too did our operations. Today, across the 8 Government facilities, we are supporting the reception and processing of over 60,000 Afghan guests. Guests arrived with a variety of immigration statuses, including Lawful Permanent Residency, humanitarian parole, and U.S. citizenship. Guests are expected to stay at the Government facilities for weeks or months, depending on their visa status and processing steps, the ability of resettlement agencies to absorb this capacity, and public health measures to mitigate the risks of communicable diseases.

As operations have turned from a short, emergency response to a longer-term effort, the needs of guests have and will continue to change. The IRC has strived to incorporate its full breadth of humanitarian expertise in areas such as prevention and response to gender-based violence, child protection and psychosocial support for refugees. IRC is also ensuring that minimum standards are in place for safeguarding and staff care for all IRC operations. Services are expanding across Government facilities by partner entities, including legal counseling, cultural orientation, English lessons, recreational activities, trauma-informed psychosocial support, family reunification services, and donations distribution.

As with any rapid humanitarian response, challenges have arisen. We have found the U.S. Government to be a willing partner in addressing these problems and working toward sustainable solutions. Some challenges, however, require the intervention of Congress. We were grateful to see the inclusion of supplemental emergency funding for the Afghan evacuation and resettlement effort in the recent fiscal year 2022 Continuing Resolution, as well as a critical provision to extend resettlement services to Afghans entering the country under humanitarian parole. Additional necessary steps remain.

First, it is critical that Congress pass legislation to ensure Afghans are able to simply and quickly adjust to Lawful Permanent Resident status. Most Afghans arriving in the United States are entering under humanitarian parole, which will only permit them to remain in the United States for up to 2 years and which does not offer a pathway to Lawful Permanent Resident status. Humanitarian parole also does not protect Afghans from refoulement, putting them at risk of being forcibly returned to persecution, torture, or other serious human rights violations. Humanitarian parole was used to expedite the admission of these individuals given the emergency nature of the evacuation, despite these Afghans being eligible for a Special Immigrant Visa or resettlement through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Corrective action is needed to ensure our new neighbors are not penalized and forced to seek existing alternative protection pathways, such as asylum, that are limited and overwhelmed. This would likely result in tens of thousands of new asylum claims, and given the asylum system backlog, inevitable and lengthy legal limbo for many. Asylum applicants are subject to a 1-year wait time for employment authorization while their application is pending and their ability to apply for other benefits, like driver's licenses and health insurance, would be specific to their State residency.

Second, we urge Congress to demand the Biden administration create a categorical humanitarian parole program for, at a minimum, U.S.-affiliated Afghans who remain in Afghanistan or have fled to third countries. The administration is currently prioritizing American citizens, Green Card holders, immediate family members of American citizens and Green Card holders, U.S. embassy staff, and Chief of Mission-approved SIV applicants. A pathway to refuge is just as critical for persons eligible for the Priority 2 program, all Special Immigrant Visa applicants, and family reunification cases. The administration's commitment to these Afghans did not end on August 31. Tens of thousands are living in fear of reprisals specifically because of their affiliations with the U.S. Congress should create a humanitarian parole program to guide and expedite the review of these applicants and to grant travel documentation allowing those eligible to travel to the United States.

Third, we urge Congress to mandate reforms to the Afghan P-2 resettlement program to increase applicant access, expand eligibility, streamline processes, and improve communication across applicants, referring organizations, and U.S. Government program administrators. Eligibility should be expanded to include parents, siblings, and their immediate families (a measure particularly critical for female-headed households or where women are sole wage-earners); surviving eligible family members of a deceased principal applicant; and employees on sub-grants and sub-contracts of U.S. Government-funded efforts. Referral processes should be stream-

lined and standardized across funding agencies. Physical documentation requirements should be adjusted to account for the realities of a humanitarian emergency: applicants should not be turned away from life-saving approvals due to administrative barriers. We also urge Congress to support referring organizations to expand staffing and internal processing capacity to support the thousands of current and former staff members now seeking protection. Further, we urge the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration to create an information platform for P-2 applicants to provide up-to-date guidance and establish a regular NGO consultation group to identify and resolve implementation challenges.

Finally, Congress should also ensure Afghan parolees have access to affordable and efficient legal services. Given the temporary nature of parole and the complexity of immigration law, Afghan parolees must receive legal screenings to understand their options and pursue permanent status and protection as eligible. Without a legislative fix, many Afghans paroled into the United States will have no alternative than to apply for asylum, contributing to the already-overwhelmed U.S. asylum system. Without affordable, high-quality legal assistance, Afghan parolees will be set up for failure, having to navigate the U.S. asylum and immigration system, deadlines, and requirements on their own and often without sufficient evidentiary documentation or identification documents, which many were forced to destroy out of fear of Taliban reprisal precisely on account of their close association with the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. Many will be at risk of missing time-limited opportunities to pursue permanent protection and become vulnerable to detention and deportation.

There are also measures the Department of Homeland Security can take immediately to improve the on-going evacuation, processing, and resettlement of Afghans.

DHS should work in close coordination with the Resettlement Agencies and PRM to facilitate smooth transitions from the Government facilities to final destinations. The urgency of moving guests off the Government facilities expeditiously has to be measured against the pace of departures and the capacity of receiving communities.

DHS should expeditiously adjudicate humanitarian parole applications for Afghan nationals in a manner that does not disadvantage existing applicants, should grant fee waivers for humanitarian parole applications and should create an electronic application process for these applications. To the extent DHS does not believe it can do a mass fee waiver for this category of applicants without a regulation, the process should be streamlined as much as possible. Foremost, DHS must ensure robust funding for the Refugee Corps and staffing for overseas locations with Afghans to begin resettlement adjudications in earnest, creating safe pathways and expediting life-saving refugee protections.

There are also operational steps that DHS can take to streamline the processing of Afghan guests in the United States. With large numbers of Afghan parolees being unable to access their Arrival/Departure Records (Form I-94) from the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website, we urge CBP to issue hard copy Form I-94s at Ports of Entry. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) should support rapid self-sufficiency in clients by issuing Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) to guests before they depart the Government facilities and offering EADs in a digital format.

For the IRC, involvement in this domestic emergency response is unprecedented and it is truly a historic operation in terms of size, scope, and complexity. Each of the guests has their own harrowing story of escape and are thankful to the United States for bringing them to safety. One of the IRC's staff members from the Atlanta office, himself a previous SIV recipient, has worked for us for 2 years. He went back to Kabul to help his wife and children evacuate and ended up trapped behind Taliban lines. He finally got out of Kabul and was evacuated to Germany for over a month. He and his family just arrived at one of the Safe Haven Government facilities in Virginia and he is waiting to take them home. When asked how it felt to be back in the United States, he replied, "The feelings can't be expressed! You don't know how much love I have for this soil."

We have witnessed a groundswell of support from the American public. The IRC has seen a 47 percent increase in volunteer applications in this past month compared to the same time frame last year and recent polling by CBS News/YouGov shows that 81 percent of Americans say the United States should help Afghan allies come to the United States. In this unique and urgent moment, we beckon the U.S. Government, including the Department of Homeland Security, to engage with the IRC and its other partners in a fully open, transparent, and collaborative fashion.

Thank you for your time and holding a hearing on this important topic. I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Ms. Marcos, for your testimony.



I now recognize Ms. Bahram to summarize her statement in 5 minutes.

Welcome.

**STATEMENT OF NAHEED SAMADI BAHRAM, U.S. COUNTRY  
DIRECTOR, WOMEN FOR AFGHAN WOMEN**

Ms. BAHRAM. Dear subcommittee Members, thank you so much for this opportunity today. My name is Naheed Samadi Bahram. I am the U.S. country director at Women for Afghan Women, the largest women rights organization globally with over 1,200 staff working on the ground in Afghanistan.

Women for Afghan Women is based in New York, and started its operation from New York. We have been supporting Afghans and other immigrant communities through social, educational, and legal services. We appreciate the launch of Operation Allies Welcome, which is an incredibly important initiative to safely resettle Afghans in the United States.

Women for Afghan Women and the Afghan community at large are very appreciative of the resources and effort that have been made so far. Some positive feedbacks I have been hearing from the community includes the committee being available and connecting the members of our community to governmental departments and organizing listening sessions, where a lot of the questions that were unknown have been answered.

The Afghan community and our allies have been also instrumental in providing refugees with the assistance that they need. Community members are donating essential items, fundraising, settling apartments, and ready to welcome our Afghan neighbors in our communities. We are eager to work with the refugee resettlement organizations to provide the culturally and linguistically competent services.

Through our observation with the resettlement efforts these last several weeks, we have 3 key recommendations we hope to collaborate on. The first one, we strongly want the involvement of Afghans in this process, in decision making as well as partners with the refugee resettlement organizations. As many of us already and have expertise on this issue, many of us have been refugees and have been through this process ourselves.

We also want to let everybody know that there are a large group of Afghans with their expertise available to help, but, unfortunately, not being called on. We want Operation Allies to partner with Afghans on any of these decision making and resettlement. For example, initially, a group of unaccompanied Afghan minors was sent to one of the agencies where there was no Dari or Pashtal language services. We heard that children were speaking to the parents, and the parents try to speak English. Once they couldn't, they tried to speak in Spanish. We know Spanish is not the language spoken in Afghanistan.

Our second recommendation is to assess and evaluate the conditions present in the bases where Afghan refugees are waiting to be processed. I, myself, visited one yesterday, and I think I was lucky to visit the best one, but I have heard so much from the community and people that I know in the base.

Some example of that is, I had a friend whose family are in one of the bases. Her sister got her period and was not able to receive a pad for over 24 hours after asking multiple times.

Another family with a pregnant woman said after standing for hours in a line for food will not get enough portion for her and her baby to be—to feed—to be feed. She start losing weight, and therefore, her husband has been sharing his portion of food with her.

The other thing that I observed yesterday in one of the bases was a lot of—there is a lot of unknown, and people are really worried about how long they will be staying on the bases.

Last, but not least, is during these periods of resettling, we do understand it is a challenging period, and we have thousands of people here, but we also want to add that organizations like us are ready to work, and Afghans around the country are ready to work.

I do not want to take more time, and I want to appreciate this opportunity to testify in front of all of you, and thank you for your time, concentration, and support of the Afghan people. It is very personal to me, and I really appreciate the outpouring love that we have been getting from all over the world. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bahram follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NAHEED SAMADI BAHRAM

OCTOBER 21, 2021

Dear subcommittee Members: Thank you for this opportunity to testify today. My name is Naheed Samadi Bahram. I am the U.S. country director at Women for Afghan Women, the largest Afghan women's rights organization globally. We are based in Queens, New York where we support Afghan and other immigrant communities through social, educational, and legal assistance.

We appreciate the launch of Operation Allies Welcome, which is an incredibly important initiative to safely resettle Afghans in the United States. Women for Afghan Women and the Afghan community at large are very appreciative of the resources and efforts that have been made thus far.

Some positive feedback included Afghans expressing their gratitude for the prompt responses and assistance when reaching out to Government departments with questions or requesting information. Listening sessions have been extremely valuable to the community to build on this important communication channel.

The Afghan community and our allies have also been instrumental in providing refugees with the assistance they need. Community members are donating essential items, providing translation services, fundraising for resettlement efforts, and filling in gaps where needed. Many individuals continue to reach out to us, eager to do more to support incoming refugees.

Through our observations with the resettlement efforts these last several weeks, we have three key recommendations that we hope we can collaborate together on:

Our first recommendation is to strongly increase involvement of Afghans in decision-making processes and leverage their expertise.

As you may already know, the vast majority of Afghans in the United States came through the refugee and asylum programs, which saved their lives and gave them hope. We must ensure that Afghans are not only present when making decisions on organizing and strengthening resettlement efforts, but that their voices and lived experiences are being prioritized.

There are Afghans in the United States that have a tremendous amount of expertise in diverse fields such as interpretation, operations and management, communications, medical and emergency services, law, and so much more. Operation Allies Welcome can greatly benefit from increasing the role our community plays in making key decisions on resettlement.

For example, in the initial stages of this initiative, many unaccompanied Afghan minors were processed and connected to services that did not have any Dari or Pashto language services. WAW hopes to serve as a bridge and ensure that Government and non-Governmental agencies have the linguistic and cultural competencies that are integral to resettlement efforts. In fact, we have already reached out to organizations in the New York area to see how we could provide our assistance.

Our second recommendation is to assess and evaluate the conditions present at military bases where Afghan refugees are waiting to be processed.

We have received various feedback based on the different locations Afghan refugees are waiting. Some concerning stories were shared that we wanted to bring to your attention.

One individual shared that her family member who was waiting at a military base for processing was on her period and repeatedly requested pads, but was not provided with these supplies until 24 hours later. Another family shared that a pregnant woman waited in line for a few hours to receive food, but when she did receive her portion it was not enough nutrition for her and she began to lose weight, therefore her husband had to share his portion of food with her.

We fully acknowledge the challenges in providing resources to a large group of arrivals, but are eager and willing to support Afghan refugees in receiving basic needs during this transition. Please let us know how we can assist.

Our last recommendation during this period where thousands of new families are arriving, is for Operation Allies Welcome to strengthen partnerships with organizations and groups in addition to the 9 resettlement agencies.

Women for Afghan Women has been in close contact with Lutheran Social Services in Virginia as well as 5 resettlement agencies in New York. We are supplementing resettlement needs by assessing what other types of support and items are needed for newly-arrived families.

This model of partnership can be replicated in all areas where Afghans are resettled. During this time when many groups have limited capacity, we can increase cooperation among Government and resettlement agencies, community-based organizations, religious institutions, and Afghan community members that are very eager to provide culturally- and linguistically-appropriate support and fill in gaps as needed.

Thousands of Afghan professionals are available and very willing to provide their skills and expertise. We look forward to finding ways to plug them into Operation Allies Welcome and leveraging all resources to successfully resettle our new Afghan community members.

I greatly appreciate this opportunity to testify in front of you all today, thank you for your time, consideration, and support of the Afghan people. We truly appreciate it.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Ms. Bahram, for your testimony.

I would like to recognize Mr. delaCruz to summarize your statements in 5 minutes.

Welcome.

#### **STATEMENT OF ART DELACRUZ, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, TEAM RUBICON**

Mr. DELACRUZ. Good afternoon, Chairman Correa, Chairwoman Barragán, Ranking Member Meijer, Ranking Member Higgins, and Members of the subcommittees. I am Art delaCruz, the CEO of Team Rubicon, and I would like to thank you for convening this forum.

So Team Rubicon is a National disaster response organization that mobilizes military veterans and civilians to help communities prepare, respond, and recover from natural disasters and humanitarian crises.

Founded in 2010, we have grown from 8 volunteers to 150,000, and these men and women, the majority of who are military veterans, deploy at a moment's notice to address unmet needs in communities across the country following floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, fires, and the same internationally.

From Hurricane Sandy to Hurricane Ida, from tornadoes in Moore, Oklahoma, to Kansas, to derechos in Iowa and international responses in the Philippines, Haiti, Mozambique, Team Rubicon is a humanitarian organization that seeks, with support, to alleviate human suffering and provide a safer, more stable tomorrow.

We are committed to serving people who need us in times of emergency, and our men and women will not turn away. We respond to all phases of the disaster cycle from mitigation efforts to lessen the impacts of wildfires, to helping homeowners get back into safe homes after disasters. Team Rubicon has conducted almost 1,000 operations since our founding in 2010.

Our volunteers are called gray shirts. They serve in other capacities to meet any disaster to include recently the pandemic, specifically with COVID-19. We define a disaster as anything that overwhelms a local community. Since March 2020, in over 300 communities, we have managed to help in efforts with food banks, setting up testing sites, facilitating financial aid, COVID field hospitals, and medical services in places like the Navajo Nation. We do this while simultaneously addressing disaster response and rebuilds of houses which is core to our mission, to include being in Louisiana since the record 2020 season.

In December 2020, we added vaccine distribution. We have worked closely with similar agencies. We have seen with FEMA and the Veterans Administration to manage fixed and mobile sites, and we created a coalition of veterans, and we are proud to say we have achieved 1.6 million vaccinations in 105 cities.

I will take this moment to emphasize that the majority of our volunteers are military veterans who work alongside first responders and all sorts of civilians from every background. They bring unique skills and experience to the forefront in the execution of this mission, and I am joined by people from all of these backgrounds, and they, coupled with military specialties, bring success. We train. We have a penchant to continue to serve that makes these services possible. These men and women who come from all of our service, I would like to think that they have unique schooling. It is not just the service, it is what they learn. It is their skills. It is their experience. It is classes and leadership decisiveness, resource management, ingenuity, and training that make our mission possible.

As you know, it is no surprise that veterans continuing to serve after they take off their uniform is a legacy that we should all be proud of.

Regarding the Afghan resettlement, as the Nation watched the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent evacuations and associated efforts, the veteran bias for action again prompted our organization and many others into action.

To be clear, it is not my intent or an area of expertise to discuss withdrawal operations or efforts. Rather, I would like to take this time to point out that Team Rubicon, like many organizations, was founded post-9/11, and many of our volunteer veterans deployed to Afghanistan and forged strong and lasting relationships. They had complex emotions during the withdrawal like many veterans across the country, and our volunteers were eager to assist in the resettling. Images of men, women, and children on C-17s as they took off served as catalysts for action.

It is time to do something, and they asked, what is the next mission at hand? How can our organization help?

Collaboration happened quickly. Team Rubicon was asked to consider potential roles our volunteers could serve with. We met with

organizations, the State Department, FEMA, the Department of Defense leadership, leadership from VOADs across the country, and base leadership.

Ultimately, Team Rubicon decided we could have impact by managing donations. It wasn't a core mission of our men and women. We were going to figure it out. We were going to build the technology to do it, and we did so.

For context, after the suicide bombing, these men, women, and children often left with nothing but the clothes on their back. That drove the urgency for meeting their immediate needs. From clothing to shoes, toiletries, diapers, and baby formula, all of this had to be a priority. With no clear mechanism, process, or authority, we collaborated, and we began to figure this out to quickly pivot to solve this in our space.

We were initially asked to support two bases with donated goods management. It quickly grew to 7 bases along with the management of shipments to Holloman Air Force Base. We began our operations on August 30, 2021, under the guidance of the defense coordinating officers, and we continued at Fort McCoy, Camp Atterbury, Joint Base McGuire, Dona Ana Range, Quantico, Fort Pickett, Fort Lee, and Fort Bliss.

It is also important to note that communities across the country rallied. Places like the Twin Cities and Chicago gave us donations that we could pack and move into the bases. At the time of this writing, over 4 million items at an estimated value of \$15.5 million have been distributed across the country. These donated goods have come from across the country from citizens who are ready to help.

As we look forward, we understand the transition into communities across the United States will require a whole-of-community effort. The other witnesses have already mentioned that, and I hope this committee knows that men and women volunteers are ready to rally to this. Other non-profits, veteran service organizations, coalitions have answered and are at the ready to continue this call, place incredible agencies we have had the opportunity to work with, like Ministries 25, Save the Children, Salvation Army, State VOAD, Samaritan Purse, American Red Cross, International Organization for Migration, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Peace Corps, among the many—

Mr. CORREA. Mr. delaCruz, I am going to ask you to summarize and conclude, please. Thank you.

Mr. DELACRUZ. Thank you again for the opportunity to serve. We look forward to any questions you might have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. delaCruz follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ART DELACRUZ

OCTOBER 21, 2021

Good afternoon, Chairman Correa, Chairwoman Barragán, Ranking Member Meijer, Ranking Member Higgins, and Members of the subcommittees, I am Art delaCruz, the CEO of Team Rubicon and a 22-year military veteran. On behalf of Team Rubicon, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the efforts to resettle Afghan families.

## TEAM RUBICON MISSION

Team Rubicon is a National disaster response organization that mobilizes military veterans and civilians to help communities prepare, respond, and recover from natural disasters and humanitarian crises. Founded in 2010 in the wake of the Haiti earthquake, our nonprofit has grown from 8 volunteers to over 150,000. These men and women, the majority of whom are military veterans, deploy at a moment's notice to address unmet needs in communities across the country immediately following floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, fires, and on a limited basis, to the same internationally. From Hurricane Sandy to Hurricane Ida, from the tornadoes of Moore, OK to the derechos in Iowa, to international responses in the Philippines, Haiti, or Mozambique, Team Rubicon is a humanitarian organization that seeks to alleviate suffering and provide a safer and more stable tomorrow. We are committed to serving people who need us in times of emergency and that means we do not turn away people who need help.

Team Rubicon responds to all phases of the disaster life cycle, from mitigation efforts to lessen the impacts of wildfires in the West Coast, expedient home repair to get homeowners back home after devastating hurricanes, and long-term resilient home rebuilding to ensure residents can weather the next disaster safely at home. To date, Team Rubicon has conducted almost 1,000 operations since our founding in 2010.

In addition to responding to traditional disasters, our volunteers, also called Greyshirts, have served in other capacities to meet needs associated with the pandemic and COVID-19. Broadly speaking, we define a disaster as anything that overwhelms the resources of a community. Since March 2020 and in over 300 communities across the country, our volunteers mobilized to aid in staffing and managing food banks, setting up and facilitating testing sites, assisting with financial aid distribution, expeditiously setting up and manning domestic COVID field hospitals, and providing medical decompression services in places such as Navajo Nation. These efforts ran simultaneously as we continued to deliver disaster response and rebuild services in core response areas, such as a continued presence in Louisiana following the hurricane response 2020 record storm season. In December 2020, Team Rubicon added vaccine distribution to our operation set. With the approval of vaccines under emergency use authorization, we partnered with agencies such as FEMA and the Veterans Administration to manage fixed and mobile sites to ensure equitable vaccination distribution across the country. A consortium of veteran service organizations came together as the Veterans Coalition for Vaccination (VCV) to create a Nation-wide network of veteran volunteers to serve as a resource to augment the efforts to convert vaccines to vaccinations. To date, Team Rubicon has assisted in distributing over 1.6 million vaccines to over 105 cities.

I would like to take a moment to emphasize that most of our volunteers are military veterans who work alongside first responders and civilians from all backgrounds. Our veterans bring unique skills and expertise to the forefront of the execution of our mission. I'd be remiss if I did not take time to explain that it is not their military specialties that bring Team Rubicon success, it is the cumulative training coupled with their penchant to continue to serve that makes delivery of our services possible. If you view the experience in the Navy, Army, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard as unique schooling, you'll be able to understand that these men and women are graduates of classes on decision making, leadership, decisiveness, resource management, safety, process development, training—and many others that allow a mission to be developed and successfully executed. As you know, veteran service after taking off the uniform is legacy and something this Nation has seen benefit from since our earliest conflicts. Men and women who wore the uniform of our military services tend to continue to find ways to serve and contribute to our society.

## EFFORTS TO SUPPORT AFGHAN RESETTLEMENT

As the Nation watched the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent evacuations and associated efforts, the veteran bias for service was once again prompted into action. To be clear, it is not my intent or an area of expertise to discuss the withdrawal operations or efforts. Rather, I would like to take this time to point out that Team Rubicon originated post-9/11, and many of our veteran volunteers deployed to Afghanistan and forged strong relationships with Afghan translators and linguists. While processing complex emotions of the withdrawal, our volunteers, like many veterans across the country, were eager to assist their Afghan allies in resettling. Images of men, women, and children on C-17s as they took off from Kabul, served as the catalysts for thinking about what mission might lie next for our volunteers and how they could positively impact the futures of the Afghan

families. What might be the next task at hand? How could an organization with many veterans with first-hand experience contribute?

Team Rubicon was asked to consider potential roles our volunteers could serve in the Afghan resettlement efforts. Initially, we met with organizations convened by the State Department that included FEMA, Department of Defense leadership, leadership from Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (VOADs), and base leadership. Ultimately, Team Rubicon decided, in collaboration with these agencies, that an area where we could have immediate and direct impact was in the management and distribution of donated goods. Though we had no core mission centered on donation management, it was clear that the needs would be urgent and great.

After the suicide bombing, the evacuees were limited with what they could bring aboard the evacuation flights. Many literally fled with the clothes on their backs and if lucky, had a backpack of belongings. They would arrive with nothing so it would be critical to meet their immediate and basic needs, including a change of clothing. Other items such as toiletries, diapers, and baby formula would also be priority. With no clear mechanism, process, or authority to receive these donations from the community, partners or corporate sponsors, Team Rubicon had a massive task ahead. The enablers built during our COVID operations, allowed us to quickly pivot and problem-solve in the space. Our tech team built out an inventory system to keep track of donations and meet needs as they arose. We were initially asked to support 2 bases with donated goods management and that quickly increased to 7 bases, along with the management of donation shipments to Holloman Air Force Base.

Team Rubicon began our operations on August 30, 2021, under the guidance of the Defense Coordinating Officers at the respective bases. Within days, the volunteers were able to begin collection operations. They collected items based on the unique needs of each base, established locations to collect and sort donations, and created processes for needed items to be shipped to the bases for distribution.

At Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, we designed a manual that could be replicated at Camp Atterbury, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, Don Ana Range, Quantico and Fort Pickett. Donations drives were launched in larger cities to collect donations en masse at the United Center in Chicago and at the Minnesota Twins' Target Field Stadium. An ad hoc partnership was formed with community organizations; the Salvation Army, Goodwill, local churches and community leaders served as local donation points and leadership teams at Camp Atterbury designed packing and sorting processes that were implemented State-wide. Each base established an Amazon wish list to meet the ever-changing needs on the ground. At the time of this writing, over 4 million items, at an estimated value of \$15.5 million, have been distributed and 2.8 million items were sorted and ready for distribution. These donated goods came in from across the country and Team Rubicon served to communicate needed items, received the donations, and ensured they were distributed on the bases. It was, and still is, heartening to see the outpouring of support from communities and people across the country and we continue to receive donations even as we speak.

In addition to donated goods management, Team Rubicon is serving at all points of the resettlement process including providing cultural advisors to ensure that all donated items are culturally appropriate. Further, we provided logistics support and translators as Afghan families first arrived via Dulles Airport. Finally, we are currently setting up housing units for families as they move from bases into communities and anticipate this occurring more frequently across the country as the resettlement process continues.

As we look forward, we understand that the transition into communities across the United States will require a whole-of-community effort. We have started conversations with Welcome.US and the Operation Allies Welcome to explore how our capabilities can be extended to meet additional needs.

I will conclude by stating that what Team Rubicon has done is a small portion of the work being conducted across the country on behalf of the Afghan families. Other nonprofits, veteran service organizations, and coalitions have answered and continue to answer the call to ensure the resettlement process continues. Families will leave these bases and begin new lives in communities across the country. Housing and employment, schooling, building new friendships, establishing community relationships, and creating new bonds to our culture while retaining their own will all be efforts that we can impact. Veterans, with their unique connection and bonds from serving with the Afghans, have the ability to lead and activate the upswell of support that will continue and grow in the coming months and years across this country, and I am confident they are up to the task.

## CONCLUSION

Members of the committees, thank you again for the opportunity to share Team Rubicon's mission, the on-going needs of Afghan families in the United States, and our efforts to support these needs. To date 1,081 volunteers have deployed to support this effort and our volunteers will continue to raise their hands as needed.

We look forward to continuing to work with Congress and Government partners. I look forward to answering any questions you may have and working with the committees in the future.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you very much, Mr. delaCruz. I want to thank all our witnesses for your testimony.

I will remind the subcommittee that we will each have 5 minutes to question the panel, and I will recognize myself for 5 minutes of questions.

Following up on Mr. delaCruz' comments and Ms. Bahram, Operation Allies Welcome was a big operation. Last week, I was visiting a lily pad in Qatar, trying to take in the magnitude of the mission. I did a lot in very quick time. Yet, as you have all mentioned, there is so much left to do. What has your experience been working with the Department of Homeland and Federal partners?

Ms. Bahram, you mentioned the need for something beyond humanitarian parole for some kind of a permanent residence, and Mr. delaCruz, you talked about the fact that folks have some skills, and we are trying to figure out how to place those skills, how to use those skills in the United States.

Ms. Bahram, you mentioned that when—some people are being—the language challenge. Some Afghans are being spoken to in Spanish. In the 1960's, I had that experience. I was just sitting there because nobody spoke Spanish, so I know the feeling. But the challenge today is how do you get somebody's attention to your issues? Do you feel you have a go-to person or agency that will address your concerns? Ms. Bahram.

Ms. BAHRAM. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, we have. We have reached out to Department of Homeland Security, and they arranged a session with us, a listening session where they answered a lot of our questions. Fortunately, a day after that session, I still was in touch with the agency that had the children, and the translation service that they were using was Google translation.

Mr. CORREA. How about you, Mr. delaCruz? Do you feel you have got some access to some folks who can make some decisions for you and help the process?

Mr. DELACRUZ. Sir, in our process, the coordination has been good, and particularly with the Federal coordinating officer and the defense coordinating officers on the base. They are serving as our primary conduit between both our volunteers, other volunteers, and the Afghan humanitarian parolees, sir.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Breen, same question.

Mr. BREEN. Thank you. Our coordination has been good. I think we would love to see a continuing effort to strengthen the inter-agency coordination and response here on this Government problem that is extremely complicated as we mentioned, and it is going to go on for a while. So we do think it is important that we just continue to focus on that strong interagency coordination.

As you mentioned, sir, I do think it is critical that we address the legal status of these individuals as they come in. For that, Con-



gressional action is very important. We very much need the Afghan Adjustment Act passed.

Mr. CORREA. Ms. Marcos, same question.

Ms. MARCOS. Yes, sir. I also agree. Coordination has been good, but this is an enormous operation, and there is more that can be done.

Mr. CORREA. I will now recognize our Ranking Member for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I guess I want to start with Mr. Breen. Knowing—I believe actually we first met close to a decade ago when you were working with IRAP which was then the Iraq Refugee Assistance Program, and largely focused on the Special Immigrant Visa program, so kind-of a full circle here. How would you assess what you are hearing and what is going on in terms of our continuing plan to evacuate at-risk Afghan allies?

Mr. BREEN. Thank you. Thank you for your service in many capacities and your continued leadership.

I would say that we have come a long way, and we have a long way to go. There are many thousands of Afghans, as I mentioned, who are outside of the United States and have not yet reached lily pads. It is critical that we not take our eye off the ball and continue to evacuate them. Many of them are at great risk.

It is also important, I think, that we, as I said, grapple with the uncertainty and legal status that will follow if we don't deal with the consequences of humanitarian parole as the primary pathway to entry, right. It is not a pathway to permanent status. It is typically a temporary allowance to enter and remain in the United States. As a result of that, Afghans who have been or will enter the United States under humanitarian parole under Operation Allies Welcome are going to find themselves under a cloud of legal uncertainty.

The Adjustment Act would essentially allow them to have the same rights and privileges they would have had they been admitted through the U.S. refugee resettlement, or through the SIV program. Virtually, all the Afghans arriving meet that legal definition of a refugee or qualify for the SIV program, so to not [inaudible] would, in essence, legally penalize them for having been evacuated, and it is really important that we avoid that.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you. No, I appreciate that, and, having talked with a number of administration officials going back to April, I hope that the assurances we are being given that there is a plan in development, that that will ultimately occur, are not empty ones.

Mr. delaCruz, thank you again. It is great to have you and Team Rubicon represented here today. You know, I know first-hand what a valuable asset the veterans community has been to our country in general, but also addressing these complex emergency operations, and also recognizing that for many of Team Rubicon's volunteers and staff members, this is an intensely personal mission that Jake Wood, co-founder of Team Rubicon, an Afghanistan veteran.

But first, I just wanted to give you the opportunity to speak a little bit more about how you and other veterans working with

Team Rubicon have experienced the last few months and how that has impacted your efforts here.

Mr. DELACRUZ. Yes. So, obviously, like the veteran community, Team Rubicon is as diverse as the members of this Nation. So I think the way that people addressed it and the feelings they had with respect to the withdrawal, they were across the board.

The one common thing I can say from the veteran community is there was a common bond and this understanding that we had to welcome our allies back. That bond, that standing shoulder to shoulder on the dirt of Afghanistan could not be broken, and they understood that they could play a role. They activated to try to make the resettlement process as smooth as possible and contribute to the best of their ability, leveraging their skills, experience, and, oftentimes, a deeply personal connection.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you. Do you feel it is important for the Federal Government to continue to engage, especially with veteran service organizations, regarding the on-going resettlement efforts? If so, what is the best way that our Government can accomplish that?

Mr. DELACRUZ. Yes. I believe veterans should be considered an asset in this moment, and we should find opportunities where we can apply those skills that experience the adaptability that can, in these times, again, as has been mentioned by others, of ambiguity and a requirement to come to solutions I believe veterans, partnered with the civilian community, can have immense impact.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you. In your written testimony, you mentioned that Team Rubicon is working to set up housing units for families as they move from bases into welcoming communities, and you also anticipate this occurring more frequently as the process continues, as I think many of us do. We have heard directly from several organizations involved in those efforts that housing will be one of the biggest challenges.

Can you provide some more detail on what you are doing to assist with housing capacity issues, what challenges you are facing, and what you think the Government should be doing specifically in that area to help?

Mr. DELACRUZ. Representative Meijer, we aren't specifically involved in generating the housing. We are simply helping to provide the furniture, assembling, making sure the housing is ready to welcome the families. So I am unfortunately unable to comment on that, sir.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes the Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Border Security, the gentlewoman from California, Ms. Barragán, for 5 minutes of questions. Welcome.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This question is for everybody on the panel. As our Afghan allies speak to make a new life here in America, there will undoubtedly be challenges in navigating our complicated legal and asylum systems. Can you describe the importance of legal services to Afghan evacuees arriving on military bases? Anybody want to go first?

Mr. BREEN. I am happy to briefly address that.

In a word, it is critical. It is absolutely crucial that they have access to legal advice. Our immigration system, as you well know, ma'am, is complicated on the best of days, and the legal status and the situation that Afghans who have been evacuated are facing is even more complicated.

Again, I think Congress has the opportunity to alleviate that, to some great extent, with the Afghan Adjustment Act, but access to counsel is critical.

We stood up Project Afghan Legal Assistance to meet precisely that need. There has been an overwhelming desire on the part of the American legal profession to meet that need and step forward through us and through many of our partners and allies. So that capacity is there, but ensuring access to counsel is absolutely critical.

This is a situation in which it can make a life-or-death difference. We are facing—a lot of these families are facing legal situations that are not their doing. They had to destroy their documents in order to prevent themselves from being targeted by the Taliban at the checkpoint. Their documents were destroyed by the U.S. Embassy during the withdrawal from Kabul and so on.

So these are complicated legal challenges they face, and access to counsel is absolutely critical.

Thank you.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you. Anybody else want to comment on it?

Ms. MARCOS. I agree. It is very critical that all the Afghans have access to legal counseling, as well as the pathway to legal permanent residency.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Great.

Ms. BAHRAM. I want to comment on this because for people who are inside the base, I think it is important that the process should start, especially the majority of them who are on humanitarian visas. They need to change the status. Some of them who will be applying for asylum, they are losing time while they are on the base and do not have legal assistance.

So I think that is something that we have to think about. They only have 1 year to apply for asylum, and some of them have already been there over 2 months.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Right. Thank you very much.

I will move on to my next question. Sadly, we know that many of the Afghan families and individuals who have come to the United States have suffered significant trauma along the way, and they are now facing the prospect of building a new home in a country with a different language and different customs.

This is for witness Marcos.

Can you describe the access that Afghan families have to mental health services upon arriving to the United States, and are there mental health services available for children as well?

Ms. MARCOS. Thank you.

There are efforts under way to stand up, across all safe havens, services for both adults and children. At the final destinations, resettlement agencies will work hard with the community, including Afghans in the community, to provide appropriate psychosocial services during the resettlement process.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you.

For our witness Ms. Bahram, how can these mental health services be improved? Can you talk about how important it is that these services continue once evacuees leave military bases and resettle in communities?

Ms. BAHRAM. I think the past few weeks have been such a difficult time, not only for Afghans who are coming through evacuation but Afghans all around the world, and we have seen that when we serve the immigrant community here, how much is the need for providing that service.

I think what we need to do right now is to recruit as many Afghan mental health professionals as possible, because the majority of the community who we might be dealing with will not be speaking the languages that we have. Having a translator or interpreter in those systems makes it difficult, especially for a woman to be speaking about the issues that she is going through.

So we as an organization have been training all of our staff on mental health first. But we are also in the process of hiring an Afghan mental health provider so that we have staff ready to meet the need.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Well, thank you.

I just want to thank you all for the work that you do.

I think we, as Americans, need to come together to welcome everybody with open arms and not let the immigration issue become a wedge issue, and certainly not those that have fled Afghanistan and are here in America now, to welcome them in with open arms.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Chairperson Barragán.

The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Border Security, the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. Higgins.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. delaCruz, we are going to be moving fast here, good sir. Thank you for your service and for being here today.

Afghan refugees, it is reported, are leaving military bases before official resettlement administered by the U.S. Government.

Team Rubicon and other nonprofits here today, other NGO's, are providing intensive care for Afghan refugees, like transportation, temporary housing, food, medical screening, religious accommodation, other mechanisms to ease the process of resettlement.

Given all that assistance, what incentive do Afghan refugees have to voluntarily leave the U.S. military bases with no resources or direction, forfeiting the assistance from nonprofits like yours, before official resettlement? Give us your opinion on that, sir.

Mr. DELACRUZ. Sir, our involvement has been limited to the management, distribution, and collection of donated goods. So, unfortunately, I cannot comment on your question.

I can tell you that—

Mr. HIGGINS. So from your—I was kind-of asking for your opinion. You have an inside view. But you are just not knowledgeable enough about this particular question to comment on that?

Mr. DELACRUZ. Sir, yes, I don't have the insight or the observations to be able to answer that question, sir.

Mr. HIGGINS. OK. Well, then the odds go down that you can answer this one.

When refugees are resettled into a given community, is the local government involved, and do they have any voice in the resettlement? Do you have an opinion or a view on that?

Mr. DELACRUZ. Sir, from what I have observed over the course of the resettlements, and this is primarily through interactions with different agencies and their local communities, as well as the VOADs, the volunteer organizations assisting in disaster in the communities themselves, I do believe they have a say in the resettlement of the Afghans.

What I have seen primarily has been how do we begin to set the conditions for them to have and enjoy a smooth resettlement into those specific—

Mr. HIGGINS. So if I am receiving reports from local Government elected officials, like mayors and sheriffs, that they have no advance knowledge of resettlement operations until they show up, I should look further into that as to the validity of those claims? You think that those entities are well advised and properly advised, as they should be?

If we are bringing refugees into their community, the local elected officials should certainly be involved and aware. Do you feel like we should look deeper into that?

Let me just move on, because we will look deeper into that.

I would like you to comment, sir, if you can, a confidential informant has advised me, he is a civilian employee with direct interaction with Afghans inside Fort McCoy, he has advised that all the refugees are divided in the living quarters by various factors, and that those that have been identified with disease are segregated.

He advised that the military guards there do not restrict the movement, which is common, from the diseased quarters.

Are you familiar with that?

Mr. DELACRUZ. Sir, I am not familiar with that.

Mr. HIGGINS. OK. We will look into that as well.

That informant also advised me that the Afghan refugees are free to leave, but that if they leave, they cannot return to the base. Are you familiar with that?

Mr. DELACRUZ. I am not familiar with that, sir.

Mr. HIGGINS. We shall investigate that as well.

Finally, I am being told that one of the motives that would cause them to stay in the base is that they are collecting a daily or weekly cash stipend, that they are actually amassing wealth.

Are you aware or have you observed, you heard rumors of or seen, have verification of payments being given to Afghan refugees on the base?

Mr. DELACRUZ. Sir, I have no awareness of that in our scope of managing and distributing donated goods.

Mr. HIGGINS. OK. Thank you for your candor.

Mr. Chairman, I respectfully and officially request that we dive deeper into some of these questions. As you can see, even solid Americans that are inside these resettlement operations, operating, are not aware of some of the things that are being reported that are going on.

So we have an obligation to look into it. I trust your leadership and that of my Chairwoman. I look forward to further hearings on this matter because the American people deserve to know.

Thank you all.

Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Higgins, and thank you for bringing up those issues to our attention.

Now the Chair will now recognize other Members for questioning that they may ask the witnesses. In accordance with the guidelines laid out by the Chairman and the Ranking Member in the February 3 colloquy, I will recognize Members in order of seniority, alternating between Majority and Minority and alternating between the two subcommittees.

Members are also reminded to unmute themselves when recognized for questioning.

The Chair now recognizes for 5 minutes the gentleman, Mr. Payne.

Mr. Payne, welcome.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Madam Chair and the Ranking Members, for having this timely hearing.

Afghan evacuees are temporarily housed at 8 military bases before relocating to communities throughout the United States. During this period, resettlement agencies are providing critical support services while the evacuees undergo immigration processing and receive vaccinations.

Robin Dunn Marcos, Ms. Marcos, what services do resettlement agencies provide to Afghan evacuees on the military bases? How do these services differ from the ones offered by Federal agencies?

Ms. MARCOS. Thank you.

So on the bases there are a number of different organizations that are working together to provide services. Incoming parolees receive COVID tests, they receive medical examinations, they receive the full complement of vaccines that are required, as well as other processing.

The bulk of services to support the Afghan parolees will be at final destination with resettlement agencies where they will provide housing. They will continue any type of psychosocial service, health care, register the children in school, cultural orientations, employment orientation, and intake.

Really the goal is to help them become economically and socially self-sufficient as quickly as possible.

Also English-language classes. There is a whole array of services.

Mr. PAYNE. Are any of them anti-vax? Or they don't have the choice, do they?

Ms. MARCOS. I don't believe they have the choice, sir.

Mr. PAYNE. Interesting.

Mr. Breen, how are the Government and resettlement agencies soliciting feedback to improve operations on the military bases? What has been done in response to feedback?

Mr. BREEN. Thank you, sir.

I would defer to my colleagues who are more active on the bases with respect to that question.

I think, with respect to the larger evacuation, the coordination has been good, but as has been mentioned in this hearing, we

would like to see much stronger interagency coordination and cooperation to ensure that we continue to evacuate those at risk who have not yet reached a lily pad, who are still in Afghanistan or who are in a third country.

That is many thousands of individuals, and it is critical that we continue that evacuation effort.

We have yet to see what I would say is a robust plan to continue to do that from the administration, and I think it is critical that we all continue to collaborate.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you.

Ms. Bahram, what are your thoughts on the engagement efforts? How can the Government and resettlement agencies best solicit feedback from Afghan evacuees in terms of their needs while on the military base?

Ms. BAHRAM. Thank you, sir.

I think yesterday I visited, as I mentioned, one of the bases, and I talked to a few Afghans there, worried that they had—that there were a lot of unknowns. They do not know how long they are there, how long they will be there, in what State they will be resettled.

So I think with resettlement agencies and the Federal Government, I think one of the things that can be discussed is that uncertainty and unclarity about their future.

I think that, as I mentioned earlier in my statement, there is a lot of expertise among Afghans, both people who have been evacuated, but Afghan-American diaspora here, and that can be tapped in and be of use. I think that will be very beneficial for the Federal Government as well as for the refugees who are arriving—who just arrived.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I will yield back.

Ms. BARRAGÁN [presiding.] Thank you.

Mr. Chair Correa has gone to vote. Votes have been called.

Mr. PAYNE. Oh. Madam Chair.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. I will be taking over while he is out to vote.

Next, the Chair recognizes for 5 minutes the gentleman from North Carolina, Mr. Bishop.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, Madam. Thank you, Ms. Barragán.

I appreciate the humanitarian concerns expressed well by the witnesses. I acknowledge that there is a massive scope of humanitarian disaster created by the President's mishandling of the evacuation.

The testimony of the witnesses, I think, is helpful to depict the extent of the burdens on Afghans and Americans alike through that. But I note that it is pretty difficult to fit this subject matter, frankly, into our committee's jurisdiction.

After all, this is the Committee on Homeland Security, and of course one of the committees is Border Security and Facilitation. The other is Oversight. But, again, the security of the homeland is the first obligation of this committee.

I want to make sure. The witnesses that are here could correct me or help me understand whether I am right or wrong. I understand, I think, *The Hill* has said about a month ago that there are 124,000, roughly, evacuated by the United States from Afghanistan.

About 6,000 of those are U.S. citizens. Three percent, so that would be on the order of 3,700, 4,000, are Afghan SIVs. Six percent are lawful permanent residents. That would be about 7,500, roughly. So that leaves about a hundred thousand.

I understand, as Chairman Correa mentioned, lily pad countries, many are—there are, basically, possible parolees, about a hundred thousand.

Someone said, I think in the course of their testimony, about 60,000 so far in the United States—I believe that was the number I heard, and someone can correct me on that as well—that are being initially vetted, the remainder, in the lily pad countries.

Then, at least according to Mr. Breen's testimony, I guess they are all bound to come to the United States, or that is the suggestion.

I was doing some reading. There is a joint Department of State, Department of Homeland Security report on the Afghan SIV process back in April that explained that required processing—the administrative processing, security fraud and criminal backgrounds checks—involves rigorous background checks which are essential to the integrity of the SIV program and U.S. National security and may take anywhere from less than 30 days to over a year depending on the applicant's background.

There is also a special tool that was implemented after 2001, the Security Advisory Opinion, which it provides enhanced scrutiny of certain potentially higher risk nationalities and demographics.

So I guess the question for anybody who is inclined to take it up is, who can speak to the question how security of the homeland can be fully protected while the Biden administration is paroling Afghans from the same refugee and SIV population, whose vetting historically took months and even years, within a matter of days or weeks? Is anybody in a position to speak to that?

So hearing none, let me ask Mr. Breen, if you would at least see if you could correct me on facts, in terms of what my understanding is. Are we talking about a hundred thousand potential parolees?

If so, you spoke about our moral obligation, but if they are not eligible for the SIV program, doesn't that mean they didn't serve along with American troops?

If so, what is our moral obligation there, in your view, and what is the basis for your view about that?

Mr. BREEN. Thank you, Congressman.

The latest information I have—and, again, I am not a Government official—the latest information I have is that, of those evacuated, about 85 percent are Afghans who would be eligible for a Special Immigrant Visa, P1 or P2 refugee status, or their family members. Additional information is about 40 percent of those you are speaking of are children.

So the vast majority of those evacuated, just on the face of it, would qualify for these programs.

I think the concern around humanitarian parole is it is a legal mechanism, of course, that allows you to enter the United States in a moment of great need, but what it does not do is confer upon you any assurance you can remain in the United States.



So what we are likely to see, unless there is an Adjustment Act, is all these folks will have to find some other channel within existing immigration law in order to not overstay that parole. That probably will lead to a large number of affirmative asylum applications or cases.

As you know, sir, I would assume that the asylum system, we currently have a 400,000-case backlog in the existing asylum system, and so I don't think it is in anybody's interest to see all those affirmative asylum cases added to that backlog.

There are also a number of other legal issues that may arise related to extortion by the Taliban, forced cooperation with the Taliban. One interpretation of existing U.S. law would bar someone from entering if they had been forced at gunpoint to feed a member of the Taliban.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Mr. Bishop, I am going to interject here because votes are happening, and Members are waiting to ask their questions, and the gentleman's time has expired.

So I am going to now recognize, the Chair recognizes for 5 minutes the gentlewoman, Representative Titus, from Nevada.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you very much, and thank you for that courtesy.

You were talking about the backlog with the permanent asylum. If you are looking at Las Vegas or Nevada, the closest court is southern California. That takes a lot of time and a lot of resources for people to get down there.

Could you comment on the possibility of using mobile courts to address some of this backlog?

Anybody? No?

Well, that seems like it would be a good idea, to help people fill out the paperwork and hold court in places other than where they are formally established now if we want to get through with the backlog. So I guess I will answer my own question.

How about the possibility of using private sponsorships like they do in Canada? Because our State and many States have different programs. We have got something called a Wilson-Fish program in Nevada. We have to depend on Catholic Charities.

Fortunately, we have an Office for New Americans that is helpful, but it is not actually done in the executive department.

Would that be something that we could use? Seems to me we have got to think outside the box to deal with this problem.

Mr. BREEN. Congresswoman, I certainly agree with the thinking outside the box.

I think the most critical intervention that I would recommend would be creating a categorical parole program for Afghan nationals, and that would prioritize and expedite the thousands of humanitarian parole requests that have been filed versus having to file them one at a time. Bringing that along with a fee waiver I think would be very effective.

Ms. TITUS. Anybody else?

Ms. MARCOS. The use of cosponsorship and private sponsorship we absolutely agree should be used in the resettlement of Afghans, as well as other refugees.

Ms. TITUS. What about the mobile asylum courts?

Ms. MARCOS. Sorry, ma'am, I can't speak to that.

Ms. TITUS. Well, there was an article in the paper about an audit that is being done at the State Department to look at the Special Visa program and some of this resettlement. I wonder how much one hand knows what the other hand is doing.

Do you know or can you comment on State Department versus Homeland Security, what those problems are, in addition to Federal versus State and local and private?

Anybody?

Mr. BREEN. Ma'am, there is a complicated immigration law problem that is waiting for us if there is not an Adjustment Act passed.

So I think, to your point about mobile courts and other things, we are all for and have advocated strongly for methods that would clear the asylum backlog of 400,000. I mean, that in itself is a problem worthy of Congressional attention, to put it mildly.

But in this case, I think the best move we could make, respectfully, would be to avoid adding additional cases, affirmative claims, to that asylum backlog by passing the Adjustment Act.

That would allow Afghans who have been evacuated to have a very clear path, assuming they meet the requirements, toward permanent residency in the United States, which is the objective that I think we all share.

Ms. TITUS. Any comment about the cooperation or the audit for the State Department or how it affects what Homeland Security or what you all are doing?

Well, OK. Thank you.

I will yield back. That was useless.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you, Representative Titus.

The Chair recognizes for 5 minutes the gentlewoman from Tennessee, Mrs. Harshbarger.

Mrs. HARSHBARGER. Thank you so much, Chairwoman. I do have a couple questions.

I thank the witnesses for being here today.

I guess my question is this, and either one of you can answer this, and it may be different in every case. But what was the vetting process that your organization had to go through to get the—I guess, is it a contract that you got with the Government, in order to go ahead and process these Afghans for Operation Allies Welcome.

What kind of process did you have to go through, and was it a contract that you were awarded to do this?

Mr. BREEN. Ma'am, I would just simply say, we are not a Government contractor. We provide the services and the legal assistance that we provide on a volunteer basis, on a pro bono basis. So we are an independent organization.

Mrs. HARSHBARGER. So you are an independent, of course, but so how did you—I mean, how did they choose you to do this, I guess is my question. Did you offer up your organization? Or how did they end up using all four of your organizations to do this operation? Anybody can start.

Ms. BAHRAM. This is Naheed.

We do not have any contract with the Government. As a social service organization and human rights, women's rights organization, we feel it is our duty to provide the services.

As I mentioned, there are no contracts with the Government or no funding from the Federal Government for this project. We have been receiving private funding and foundation money, that we have been using that toward the resettlement work that we have been doing.

I also really appreciate if people will call the people from Afghanistan as Afghan, not Afghani, because Afghani is the currency of the country.

Thank you.

Mrs. HARSHBARGER. Well, as a follow-up to that, when you are successful in your efforts of resettling a refugee in the United States, I guess my question is, what are you doing to make sure that he or she is successfully acclimated and assimilated as a member of their new community?

Another, even to that, how do you determine—or who determines where these refugees will take refuge, what State?

Because we were on a briefing and I asked the briefer, because 421 or 451 were located in Tennessee, and I knew the breakdown, and I got that 2 minutes before the briefing on which parts of the State that those refugees were placed.

I guess my question is, do you have any input on that?

But how do you follow them up, and what kind of outcomes do you use to measure how they are being assimilated, or do you do that?

That is for anybody.

Ms. MARCOS. There are 9 nonprofit organizations that have cooperative agreements with the Department of State to enter into a public-private partnership on the resettlement of refugees, and within that program there are certain measures that all of the resettlement agencies must abide by.

The 9 National resettlement agencies have a network across the country of over 200 offices. So that is the network that is initially resettling the parolees. It was kind-of fit right into that established infrastructure.

As I mentioned, the goal of the resettlement program is to assist refugees to become economically and socially self-sufficient as quickly as possible after arrival.

IRC, like many other resettlement agencies, offers a number of services, both through Federal, State, local, and private funding, through citizenship. Each one of those have different outcomes that we track, but this is certainly something that we do.

Mrs. HARSHBARGER. OK. Yes, I am just interested. I don't know how the process works when you volunteer as an organization to do that or how the Government allows different organizations to go about that.

Just making sure that you can measure the outcomes to make sure these citizens are assimilated, that is very important.

I will look further into that, and any information you could forward to us would be advantageous, for myself at least.

With that, Madam Chair, I yield back.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Well, thank you for that.

The Chair recognizes for 5 minutes the gentlewoman from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee, if you are prepared.

Ms. Jackson Lee, I think you are on mute maybe. Yes.

OK. I think maybe she is not ready. I know there is votes happening. What I am going to do here is I am going to recess so the Chair can return.

Ms. Jackson Lee, are you prepared to ask your questions?

Ms. JACKSON LEE. No. I would like you to—I am walking on the floor to vote.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. OK.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. So I would like to come.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. OK.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. But I do want to ask questions, so I would like to have you come back to me. Thank you.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you.

So what we will do is, I have to run to vote, and the Chair is not back yet. We are going to recess, hopefully just for a few minutes, until the Chair gets back to resume the hearing.

If our witnesses could just hold tight as we recess very shortly. We have Members that want to ask questions, and we do expect the Chair to come back very shortly.

With that, we will stand in recess. Thank you.

[Recess.]

Mr. CORREA. The committee will again come to order.

Our next member, Mr. Clyde, will now be recognized for 5 minutes of questioning.

Welcome, sir.

Mr. CLYDE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Like the rest of the world, I was horrified to see the dire humanitarian crisis unfold throughout Afghanistan in August. The circumstances leading to this tragedy were completely unavoidable and were a direct result of a leadership void in the Biden administration.

This administration must learn from these failures so they do not repeat these mistakes in the future.

Furthermore, we must ensure that the mechanisms we have in place to vet individuals coming from Afghanistan are sufficient and prioritize the safety and security of our citizens and of our Nation.

Although the heartbreaking images from Hamid Karzai International Airport will forever be ingrained in our country's conscience, I am encouraged by the fact that many Americans, both at home and abroad, have stepped up to the plate to help their fellow men in time of need.

The testimonies provided by each of the witnesses today prove that, and I thank you.

So my first question is for Ms. Bahram.

I am not sure if you saw the heartbreaking article in *The Wall Street Journal* this weekend about a mother who was being coerced to hand over her 3-year-old daughter to a man who lent her money so she could survive the aftermath of the humanitarian crisis.

It is reported that the loan resulted in an insurmountable debt load that she could not bear—it was \$550—and he demanded payment.

The article goes on to discuss the dire conditions in Afghanistan, including a U.N. report that states 95 percent of Afghans are suffering from malnutrition leading into the winter months.

I understand that your organization is the largest women's organization in Afghanistan, with over 850 local Afghan staff working tirelessly to provide support services to women, children, and families.

So my question is, how has your staff in the United States and in Afghanistan been affected by the withdrawal, and what steps are you having to take to assist staff and clients in Afghanistan?

Ms. BAHRAM. Thank you, sir.

As mentioned, we have over 1,200 staff in Afghanistan. The majority of them are at high risk because they are women's rights and human rights defenders.

The majority of them work with families who were—with women who were survivors of domestic violence or underage marriages or forced marriages, and fight Taliban in order to get the woman to safety.

So our staff in Afghanistan obviously have been under a lot of risk, and we, unfortunately, were unable to evacuate any of them during the evacuation period.

It has affected us personally, professionally. I have had losses during the war in Afghanistan. From the day I was born till now, I haven't seen a day of peace. But the past few weeks have been the darkest days of my life.

I am sorry.

Knowing people do not have simple food to eat, having a simple dinner on my dining table has been very difficult.

Mr. CLYDE. I am sorry.

Ms. BAHRAM. My people do not have access to their bank account, and I being able to get my paycheck has been very difficult.

Knowing people have been separated from their children at the airport and hundreds killed at that explosion, many bodies not recovered, one that I know personally, has been very difficult to live with my family.

So I think it is a time for us to understand the importance of humanitarian aid for Afghanistan, and knowing that we should not let the people suffer anymore.

As an Afghan American, I feel as an American we are responsible and we owe them, because the past 20 years there have been a lot of achievements, not only for women's rights but throughout the country, and having now kids 12 years and older sitting at home and not being able to go to school is our failure.

Mr. CLYDE. Yes. So everything that has been achieved—or much that has been achieved—I just see us losing that, and it is indeed a very, very terrible humanitarian crisis.

So, Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask to submit the following article titled "As Afghanistan Sinks Into Destitution, Some Sell Children to Survive" for the record.

Mr. CORREA. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

ARTICLE SUBMITTED BY HONORABLE ANDREW CLYDE

AS AFGHANISTAN SINKS INTO DESTITUTION, SOME SELL CHILDREN TO SURVIVE

U.N. WARNS THAT 95 PERCENT OF AFGHANS AREN'T GETTING ENOUGH TO EAT AS  
WINTER APPROACHES*By Saeed Shah / Photographs by Joel van Houdt for The Wall Street Journal**Oct. 16, 2021 8:31 am ET*

**HERAT, Afghanistan**—Desperate to feed her family, Saleha, a housecleaner here in western Afghanistan, has incurred such an insurmountable debt that the only way she sees out is to hand over her 3-year-old daughter, Najiba, to the man who lent her the money.

The debt is \$550.

Saleha, a 40-year-old mother of six who goes by one name, earns 70 cents a day cleaning homes in a wealthier neighborhood of Herat. Her much older husband doesn't have any work.

Such is the starkness of deepening poverty in Afghanistan, a humanitarian crisis that is worsening fast after the Taliban seized power on Aug. 15, prompting the U.S. to freeze \$9 billion in Afghan central-bank assets and causing a halt in most foreign aid.



Collecting plastic bottles and other trash to sell for recycling is one of the few ways to make money.

Already, 95 percent of Afghans aren't getting enough to eat, according to the United Nations' World Food Program, which has warned that "people are being pushed to the brink of survival." Almost the entire Afghan population of 40 million people could fall below the poverty line in coming months, according to the U.N.

Behind these statistics lie countless personal tragedies of families like Saleha's. She and her husband used to work on a farm in the western province of Badghis, but two years ago lost that income because of fighting in the area and drought. So they borrowed money just to get food. Hoping to find employment, they ended up moving to a giant encampment of people displaced from other provinces, known as Shahrak Sabz, in Herat.

With the financial system and trade paralyzed after the Taliban takeover, prices for basic food items like flour and oil have doubled since mid-August. The lender offered early this month to write off the debt if she hands over her little girl.



Men wait to receive food aid at a distribution point run by the World Food Program in the Herat suburbs.



At the World Food Program, people get sacks of flour, lentils and bottles of cooking oil, enough to keep a family going for a month.

They have 3 months to provide the money. Otherwise, Najiba will be doing household work in the lender's home and be married off to one of his three sons when she reaches puberty. They are not sure which one. The oldest is now 6.

"If life continues to be this awful, I will kill my children and myself," said Saleha, speaking in her tiny two-room home. "I don't even know what we will eat tonight."

"I will try to find money to save my daughter's life," added her husband, Abdul Wahab.

The lender, Khalid Ahmad, confirmed he had made the offer to the couple.

"I also don't have money. They haven't paid me back," said Mr. Ahmad, reached by phone in Badghis. "So there is no option but taking the daughter."



A man collected wood branches used for cooking and heating at the Shahrak Sabz camp.

Following the Taliban takeover, neighboring Pakistan and Iran, where many men from this community used to work as laborers, closed their borders, bracing for a flood of refugees. All that is left as work is collecting plastic bottles and other trash to sell for recycling. Other families in the area have had to surrender children to repay debts, residents say.

Growing destitution could undermine the Taliban's so-far solid hold on power and serve as a recruiting tool for the local branch of Islamic State, their only significant rival. A Taliban official in the west of the country said that Afghans would have to get used to a meager existence.

"We suffered for 20 years fighting jihad, we lost members of our families, we didn't have proper food, and in the end, we were rewarded with this government. If people have to struggle for a few months, so what?" said the official. "Popularity is not important for the Taliban."

Taliban officials have repeatedly said they welcome international aid for Afghanistan but wouldn't compromise on their Islamic beliefs to secure assistance.

The humanitarian crisis, however, is prompting a debate within the international community over whether to condition foreign assistance on the Taliban moderating their behavior and showing more respect for the rights of women and minorities.

Afghanistan's new health minister, a urologist appointed by the Taliban and one of the few non-clerics in the new administration, pleaded for the international community not to abandon the country.

"It is the same mother, the same child, the same patient you were previously helping. They haven't changed," Dr. Qalandar Ibaad said in an interview. "Governments change in all countries."



In Kabul, a Taliban member waits outside a bakery while women ask for money.



Groups like the International Committee of the Red Cross and the U.N. warn that emergency humanitarian aid must be unconditional. While demanding that the Taliban allow women to study and work is important, they argue, a more urgent priority is to make sure women don't freeze or starve to death this winter.

The U.S. and other Western nations that spent the past two decades fighting in Afghanistan have a particular responsibility, some aid officials say.

"These countries who have their fingerprints all over the sorry situation here have at least to disburse the funding we need so we can avoid people perishing in enormous numbers this winter," Jan Egeland, secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, which operates in more than a dozen Afghan provinces, said in an interview in Kabul. "To pause the lifesaving funding because we're still negotiating female rights would be utterly wrong."

Mr. Egeland, a former head of the U.N.'s emergency aid arm, said his organization wouldn't reopen the boys schools in provinces where girls schools weren't allowed, but it wouldn't withhold aid that could save lives.

Heather Barr, associate director of the women's rights division at Human Rights Watch, said that donors had vowed they would judge the Taliban by its actions, but the risk of famine left them with little choice but to provide aid regardless.

"The Taliban are holding Afghans hostage and playing chicken with the international community," she said.



Herat Regional Hospital has run out of common medicines and basic supplies.



Abdul Rahman, sitting in the orthopedic ward at Herat Regional Hospital, was shot by robbers for the motorbike he was riding.

Some 2,300 Afghan hospitals and clinics were dependent on foreign funding before the Taliban takeover. Just 17 percent of those are now fully functional, and 64 percent are out of essential drugs, said Richard Brennan, the regional emergency director for the World Health Organization.

International aid had also paid the salaries of tens of thousands of doctors, nurses and teachers, now struggling to get by.

In Herat, an emergency feeding center for severely malnourished babies run by the French charity Doctors Without Borders is full and has had to expand capacity. Babies are arriving with respiratory distress, dehydration, and shock. Their mothers are getting such little sustenance that they can't produce enough milk.

At Herat Regional Hospital, the staff have threatened to quit after not having been paid for 4 months. The government hospital has run out of even common medicines like antibiotics and basic supplies like surgical gloves and bandages. Oxygen is in short supply.

Patients have to purchase their own medicines, anesthetic, and other necessities for surgeries.

"I hope we don't go back to the situation of 25, 30 years ago, when there were basically no health facilities in this country," said Dr. Mohammad Aref Jalali, the medical director. "We could lose everything we have achieved."

In the orthopedic ward, Abdul Rahman, was lying on a bed with pins sticking out of his leg, where he was shot by robbers for the motorbike he was riding. The wound had become infected and doctors told the father of seven they might now have to amputate the leg.

"If they cut off my leg, there's no one else to provide for my family," said Mr. Rahman, a laborer, age 37. "What will happen to my little children?"



A child flies a kite at Herat Regional Hospital, where staff members haven't been paid for four months and are threatening to quit.

Mr. CLYDE. Thank you.

I see my time has expired. I have one more question if you will allow me.

Mr. CORREA. If it is a quick one, go ahead, sir.

Mr. CLYDE. All right. For Ms. Marcos.

According to the International Rescue Committee's website, your organization has helped resettle more than 16,000 SIVs since 2006.

So you obviously have seen the extent of the paperwork and the burdensome regulations that have hindered our allies' ability to have their SIV applications processed in a timely manner.

So in an attempt to reduce some of this red tape, the House passed the bipartisan ALLIES Act of 2021. Yet this bill has not passed the Senate. The problems associated with the SIV process have reared their ugly head during the evacuation process in Afghanistan.

Our Nation ended up leaving thousands of people who supported our coalition's mission in Afghanistan while evacuating many who did not. Those left behind now are being targeted by the Taliban.

Can you provide the committee with your thoughts, very briefly, on how Congress could better improve the SIV program and better

support our future allies who have risked all to help us achieve our strategic goals?

Ms. MARCOS. Thank you.

In my testimony I did offer correcting the P2 program, expanding it, to make it eligible for more folks that do not qualify for the time limits under the SIV.

But all the programs could be made more streamlined to get more people timely relief.

Mr. CLYDE. Thank you very much.

With that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Clyde.

Ms. Jackson Lee for 5 minutes of questions.

Ms. Jackson Lee.

It looks like everybody is busy voting, doing something. Very busy place. So I will make some comments and maybe entertain adjourning of the committee hearing.

My thoughts were just, drawing a parallel again to the Vietnam experience, a couple things come to mind.

No. 1, how important it is the Afghan community—Afghan immigrant community and their contributions to this country, how valuable I anticipate they will be, to make sure that people understand who the community is and that you have come in to help us at a time when we do need employees and workers in this country.

Second of all, just to make sure that your contributions and your history are not forgotten. I would ask you to think about creating a program like Writing on America. Let me explain to you.

The Vietnamese community, there is an organization that every year has competitions on essays by refugees, to tell their story, to tell their trials and tribulations as they came to America. Then those essays, essentially the top ones, are essentially compiled and published in a book for generations to come.

I think it is important that the Afghan community do the same thing, for a couple of reasons. No. 1, lessons learned for Americans. No. 2, for the legacy that your children will inherit. They need to know the experience that you have gone through. They need to know the history so they can better understand who they are in the context of being American.

So I would ask you, as a suggestion, to think about doing that.

Finally, in terms of our work on this committee, I started out by asking you if you had a go-to person, a go-to—

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I am on, Mr. Chairman. Sorry.

Mr. CORREA. OK. Ms. Jackson Lee, give me a few seconds here to finish my sentence.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. No problem.

Mr. CORREA. [Inaudible] that you have immediate answers to your concerns. I think addressing the issues, from getting a green card to getting a response to your needs, is essential for full integration, immediate integration into the greater part of America. So I would ask you to think about that.

If you have any questions, like my colleagues have said, our offices are here to help, and we have been helping answer a lot of the questions from the community in the last few weeks.

With that being said, I am going to introduce, or I should say recognize, Ms. Jackson Lee for 5 minutes of questions.

Ms. Jackson Lee, welcome.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chairman, thank you so very much. I was only trying to let you know that I had weaved my way back in or wormed my way back in to the session that I had been on. It seems like I am on a double screen.

But in any event, let me thank the witnesses and the Chairmen, the two Chairmen and Ranking Members, for this very important hearing.

Let me also thank Mr. Breen, Ms. Marcos, and as well, Ms. Bahram, and certainly Art delaCruz. I have heard all of your testimony. It is moving.

All of us were called by our constituents to help Afghans who had helped us. I want to pay tribute to retired Navy Commander Lisa Tonar. We were on late-night calls, 2 and 3 in the morning, to help families in particular that were interpreters and were trying to get out.

One was able to get out before the United States left Afghanistan, but we were left with an interpreter who had a family of 9, including 9 children, more than a family of 9.

In any event, and in addition, we had my constituent, Miriam, who is a doctor, they were stranded and had to make their way near the Uzbekistan border.

The good news was that the doctor was in fact able to have her family take care of those as they just stood by the Uzbekistan border. Ultimately, they were transferred to the United Arab Emirates, where they stay.

So here are my concerns.

First of all, I have heard your concerns about food. I assure you, as a founder and co-chair of the Afghan Caucus since the Afghan war, a bipartisan caucus, having gone to Afghanistan many, many times, we will again assert our concern about these issues to be able to be collaborative and helpful.

But I want to raise the question. I want Miriam to get out. She is in the United Arab Emirates along with the other interpreter and his family with so many children. We have not been able to be out. They are in the UAE's Humanitarian City awaiting admittance into the United States.

Whoever will answer it, No. 1, would it be helpful if we took an inventory of where Afghans who are waiting to come to the United States are, those that are not on American soil? We need to know where they are, if they are in Afghanistan.

I heard the tragedies of what happened. Miriam, this young doctor, had the same thing. She had to escort some women out of a hotel while the Taliban were searching in other rooms. It has been a nightmare.

But I will say to you that I believe that democracy has been planted, it is a seed in the hearts of the Afghan people. I do believe that we are going to see democracy take hold and overcome those who are despots in the government now.

But I do want to know whether an inventory would be helpful and whether we should raise that with all of the departments, from DHS to State.

The other is, anyone wants to comment on those that are being still stationed, if you will, in United Arab Emirates, in the Human-

itarian City? Any thoughts on how Congress can help to facilitate them getting back into the United States? I understand there are more than.

Then last, anyone want to comment about the best way to ensure that adequate food is at the variety of facilities?

I will yield to anyone. There are three questions that I asked, the inventory, getting out of the UAE, and food distribution.

Thank you.

Mr. BREEN. Thank you, Congresswoman. Those are outstanding questions. Thank you so much for raising them.

Very briefly, there are many thousands of families in the situation you have described all over the world, in Afghanistan and hiding, in neighboring countries, in the UAE, in the Gulf. That inventory would be extremely helpful.

We in the NGO community are doing our very best to track all of these families. We need a whole-of-government plan to move those folks to the United States.

Many of us have recommended humanitarian parole on a categorical basis with fee waivers, that would allow that to happen relatively quickly, combined with an Adjustment Act that would meet the [inaudible] requirements for the individuals once they reach the United States.

I think that is a critical need, and thank you so much for raising it again, about the tens of thousands of people who have yet to be evacuated and are at this moment running for their lives.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. We will be in touch. Thank you so much.

Ms. Bahram, I feel your emotion and pain. Do you want to talk about trying to help those with food and other needs?

Ms. Bahram.

Ms. BAHRAM. Our staff in Afghanistan also work in units—with units here with displaced—internal displaced people, and the conditions are not good.

We also, as I mentioned earlier, that not being able to access money or send money. Many of the staff are not able to take their paychecks from their bank account. That has been challenging.

We are, as an organization, we have been searching for answers and looking and reaching out to people to find out a way to do that, but, unfortunately, have been unsuccessful.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Should we reach out to the UAE and the State Department, to at least those who are there, to try and get them moving toward coming to the United States?

Ms. BAHRAM. We definitely should, yes. I just heard that Pakistan will reopen its border as of tomorrow with Afghanistan. So hopefully that will make it a little bit easier for aid to go inside Afghanistan.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Very good.

Well, let me thank you, Mr. Chairman. I see a number of individuals that I will be reaching out to. The Afghan Caucus stands ready to work on a number of these issues, I know, with a number of our other committees. These are two very important subcommittees, and this is a very important hearing.

Thank you to both Chairmen and Ranking Members for allowing me to participate today and your courtesies extended. Thank you again.

We must solve this. These are people who have served on the front lines for us.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Ms. Jackson Lee.

I want to also echo Ms. Jackson Lee's comments about counting on our support in addressing some of these issues. We recognize our Afghan allies, we recognize the suffering of the people in Afghanistan, and are here to try to help as much as we can to make sure that these issues are not forgotten and that you are relegated to a memory somewhere. Let's work together to make sure we address these issues.

Thank you very much.

With that, I would like to call on Mr. Langevin for 5 minutes of questions.

Welcome, sir.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank both Chairs and Ranking Members for allowing me to participate in today's hearing, and I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony.

So some of the testimony from today's witnesses reflects concerns I share about backlogs in processing humanitarian parolee applications. USCIS recently reported to my staff that they were adjudicating 14,000 humanitarian parolee applications with just 6 of their officers. I want to say that again, 14,000 humanitarian parolee applications with 6 officers.

That is completely and utterly unacceptable, and I call upon USCIS to address this shortcoming immediately.

I am similarly concerned about possible backlogs forming at other points in the resettlement processes, as other Government installations face surges in demand for their services.

So I am thinking, for example, of a surge in demand for driver's licenses which could cause backlogs at, say, for example, Departments of Motor Vehicles, and complicate the resettlement process for many Afghans.

So aside from the humanitarian parolee process, are you seeing other choke points where Afghan refugees face significant backlogs in applications for critical documents and services?

Based on your experience, do agencies providing critical documents and services have adequate linguistic and cultural competencies to account for the large number of Afghan refugees they will be serving?

Are there opportunities for Congress to help alleviate these issues, for example, by providing resources necessary to hire additional staff?

This is for all the witnesses. If you could answer that, address those questions.

Ms. BAHRAM. I think there is definitely a need of more staff in USCIS. There has been definitely a backlog. We have applied for many people, for humanitarian parolees, and not have gotten any approved yet.

There is also another issue with that for people who left Afghanistan and are in a third country. None of the countries are processing Afghan humanitarian visas.

So if folks got out through charters and were able to be, for example, in Pakistan, Islamabad, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad are not being processing any Afghan visas.

So the challenge outside as well as inside has been the same.

Mr. LANGEVIN. OK. Other witnesses, if you would care to comment. Again, particularly, do you see other choke points and backlogs that we need to address?

Mr. BREEN. Thank you, Congressman.

I think you have hit on one of the big ones, which is humanitarian parole. Requiring individual applications versus categorical humanitarian parole with fee waivers creates a huge burden on the system. As you say, that is underresourced at this time. It is a huge, critical need.

I would just also underscore very quickly, there are many foreseeable backlogs coming unless an Adjustment Act is passed, primarily in the asylum system, but kind-of across the immigration system. That is foreseeable, that will go on for years and place a huge burden on the whole system unless that Adjustment Act is passed.

Ms. MARCOS. We would also like for 765s, the employment authorizations, to be available digitally, please.

Mr. LANGEVIN. OK. Thank you.

Anybody else?

I had another question. Given that we are getting close to the end of October, it is an unfortunate reality that Afghan children will be missing school time as they live temporarily on U.S. bases.

Will these children and their families need additional educational assistance to make up for this lost time?

What resources will be provided to address that need? Is there an opportunity for Congress to assist in providing such resources?

Then my last one for witness Ms. Marcos.

Are eligible refugees enrolling in Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program or Refugee Medical Assistance? Are they, in fact, eligible?

Remember, these are Afghans that helped U.S. forces, in many ways saved lives of U.S. troops. Providing the right resources and help is important.

Are eligible refugees enrolling in Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program or Refugee Medical Assistance?

Do you believe that refugees are aware of the health care options available to them? If not, how could Congress support efforts to increase awareness and enrollment in health care services?

Ms. MARCOS. I am not well-placed to answer the education question, but the resettlement agencies absolutely will be helping enroll both children and adults in health care benefits.

Ms. BAHRAM. With the education question, I would like to answer, because we have experienced this when the start of Special Immigrant Visa families have arrived in 2014–2015. Many of those kids have never been to school in Afghanistan and were placed in fifth and sixth grade.

So our organization has provided an intensive tutoring program with an amazing group of volunteers, retired teachers who came forward and gave extra time to make sure that these kids will be able to catch up.

I think it is important for us now that we are having a larger number of children out, it is important that we have to think of after-school programs that will specifically address this need.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you very much. I know my time is expired.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your indulgence and for allowing me to participate, you and the other Chair and the Ranking Members. I yield back.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Langevin.

Do we have any other Members that wish to ask questions of our witnesses?

If not, then I want to thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony and for all our Members for the questions.

Before I adjourn, I want to ask unanimous consent to submit a statement to the record from the Church World Service.

Hearing no objections, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

#### STATEMENT OF CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

OCTOBER 21, 2021

As a 75-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions and 24 refugee resettlement offices across 17 States, Church World Service (CWS) urges the committee to affirm the need for the United States to take urgent action to save at-risk Afghans—and invest in our Nation's capacity to welcome and help our new Afghan neighbors integrate and thrive.

CWS urges the Biden administration to process vulnerable Afghans to the United States, including Afghans who remain in Afghanistan and those in other host/third countries, for as long as it takes to get people to safety. Right now, countless vulnerable Afghans remain in imminent danger. The humanitarian crisis is far from over for potentially 1 million at-risk Afghans, including hundreds of thousands of Afghans who assisted the U.S. mission, U.S. citizens, and legal permanent residents who have been left behind, prevented from accessing life-saving services. The Biden administration must have a clear, efficient, and transparent strategy to evacuate Afghans in danger—including women and girls, religious and minority groups, people with disabilities, and others; create safe pathways out of Afghanistan; and establish a process to vet and welcome Afghans to the United States. We are disappointed by the Biden administration's overly narrow list of priority stakeholders for evacuation, which currently includes only: American citizens, legal permanent residents (LPRs), immediate family members of American citizens and LPRs, U.S. Embassy staff, and Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applicants with Chief-of-Mission approval. While these individuals are undoubtedly deserving of evacuation, thousands of other Afghans face immediate needs for protection. The failure to prioritize them too imperils lives.

CWS urges the Biden administration to establish a categorical parole program for Afghan nationals, waive humanitarian parole application fees for Afghan nationals, and ensure transparency and interagency collaboration in the U.S. humanitarian response to Afghanistan. The administration should create a categorical parole program for Afghans and ensure that at a minimum, the program covers Afghans with U.S. ties. Many categorical parole programs have been established in our histories, such as the Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program in 2007 and the Filipino World War II Veterans Parole Program in 2016.

The administration should further waive humanitarian parole application fees for Afghan nationals, as many have paid exorbitant fees for loved ones overseas without clarity on processing times for reunification. CWS urges Congress to provide our Afghan allies and friends with the chance to apply to become lawful permanent residents. As many Afghans were advised to destroy documents associating them to the U.S. mission, this is particularly imperative. Many of the Afghans are or would have been eligible for processing through the SIV program, which grants visa holders immediate lawful permanent resident (LPR/green card) status on arrival. Virtually all of the Afghans arriving via humanitarian parole meet the legal definition of a refugee and, had they been admitted through USRAP, they would have been eligible to adjust to LPR status after 1 year. As Afghans are welcomed to their new homes, and their new communities—integration is essential to stability and a clear future.



CWS urges the Biden administration provide virtual and expedited screening and processing for all at-risk Afghans, including those who have applied for the SIV, humanitarian parole, and family reunification (such as follow-to-join/I-730) programs, as well as those who are referred to USRAP, including P-1, P-2, and P-3 referrals while in Afghanistan or host countries. Further, the administration should identify additional pathways to safety for at-risk Afghans who do not qualify for the SIV or USRAP program. This includes, but is not limited to, individuals who do not have a verifiable U.S. affiliation and are not known to the U.S. Embassy (and therefore do not qualify for P-1), but who were engaged in activities that make them targets of Taliban reprisals. Such individuals include civil servants, women's rights advocates, election workers, human rights lawyers, academics, and journalists. We strongly recommend including individuals who worked on U.S.-funded sub-contracts or sub-grants as well.

CWS welcomes vulnerable Afghans arriving in our communities and asks for your support to help them fully integrate and thrive as they adjust to their new homes. At no other time has our moral responsibility to uphold these principles been greater.

Mr. CORREA. The Members of the subcommittee may have additional questions for the witnesses. We will ask the witnesses to, if you do get the questions, to respond expeditiously in writing to those questions.

I also remind the Members that the committee's record will remain open for 10 days.

Without objection, the subcommittees stand adjourned. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 4:31 p.m., the subcommittees were adjourned.]

