

LITHUANIA AND ESTONIA: HOPE FOR ACTIONS NOT THE WILL

STATEMENT BY
LITHUANIAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION PLATFORM



Lithuanian National
Non-Governmental
Development Cooperation
Organizations' Platform



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With the situation in Afghanistan deteriorating every minute, the Lithuanian government has no other option but to keep its word and without further delay fully assist its former partners and employees – Afghan civilians whose lives are at risk to be terminated at any moment and who have repeatedly asked the Lithuanian government for help, which it did promise them.

It is not only a question of Lithuania's reputation as a state and the personal responsibility. It is a question of humanity.

It has been known that Afghan civilians are asking their former employers to assist and protect them and their families from Taliban vengeance. These people are facing severe punishments from the Taliban for collaborating with foreign countries on Afghan soil.

"We risked our lives working with the Lithuanian army <...> and your mission would not have been possible without our support. Now we really need your help to save our lives," twelve Afghan civilians who had worked as interpreters for the Lithuanian army are quoted as saying in their letter addressed to President Nausėda, Prime Minister Šimonytė, Defence Minister Anušauskas, Minister of the Interior Bilotaitė, and members of parliament, the Seimas. "If we could safely live in our own country, we wouldn't be asking you for help, but now we are just trying to survive. Please, help us leave Afghanistan."

The letter was received mid-June 2021. At the time, Lithuanian Defence Minister Arvydas Anušauskas responded: "They write to help them leave Afghanistan [sic], so I think this help will be provided. <...> Because these people helped us, it is an important moral duty."

We completely agree: indeed it is.

As reported by the Lithuanian mass media, as early as May 2021 it was known that the US had announced they were planning to evacuate "thousands" of interpreters from Afghanistan. Didn't Lithuanian officials take notice? Didn't they think of a Plan B, C, D, E for their own former employees?.. And if they did, where is the plan? How come it hasn't been implemented? What happened to strategic thinking? Analysis? Planning?

At least three months have passed yet no action has been taken, and, as far as we know, no *plan for action* has been drawn despite all the promises – please present us with facts proving us wrong, if we are.

Once again we have a situation whereby political action does not follow (the declared) political will.

Defence vice-minister Margiris Abukevičius repeated, on Monday 16 August, that "our moral duty to Afghan interpreters remains". We ask: but what is moral duty without real, urgent action? What are such words worth without any action?

We reiterate: this is not a joke. People's lives are at risk. These people signed contracts with the Lithuanian army and fulfilled their duties, now it is time for Lithuania to fulfil hers – to them.

The principle of humanity should never be selective. Selective humanity is as bad as not having humanity at all.

ESTONIA

Estonia encouraged to protect their partner Afghan civilians on World Humanitarian Day

Lithuania's Baltic sister Estonia has expanded her activities in Afghanistan, engaging in strengthening Afghanistan's civil society and funding development cooperation projects in that country.

On Thursday 19 August 2021 the Estonian government is having a meeting to discuss whether also to consider to assist and bring six of their former Afghan employees and close partners in development cooperation from Afghanistan to Estonia.

Thursday 19 August is also World Humanitarian Day.

Estonian civil society organisations are waiting for the government's decision to provide these people with whatever support they may need, including an urgent transfer to Estonia, if such is their wish. Estonian civil society is expecting the right decision from the government and we, the Lithuanian Development Cooperation Platform, are joining them in this expectation.

We are waiting for the right decision that would reflect our common vision for humanity.

Our colleague Agne Kuimet from Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation reports:

“The events of the last few days in Afghanistan have put those Afghans who have cooperated with foreign countries, including the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and non-governmental organizations, in a life-threatening situation.

“On Thursday, a session of the Government of the Republic will be held in connection with the security situation of Estonia's local cooperation partners in Kabul on whether and how to evacuate six people with whom the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Estonian NGOs have worked closely together over the years. These are people whose lives are in direct danger because they work on women's health and girls' education projects funded by Estonian development cooperation funds. In other words, in areas that the Taliban certainly do not approve of.

“The list of co-operation partners has been submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation and MTÜ Mondo, the Estonian partner of the organizations operating in Kabul. Among Mondo's Afghan partners are such organisations as the Afghan Disabled and Vulnerable Society, which supports war victims, and TSCO, which supports the social development of children and women. With the help of Mondo, 275 girls received education in the Jalalabad province; midwife trainings are calculated to improve birth-giving environment for up to 50,000 women; 100 women from the Fayrab province have found a job after attending Mondo's computer skill trainings.

“As one of the main priority countries for Estonian development cooperation, our activities in Afghanistan have been significant in ensuring the rights of women and girls, increasing access to education and developing health care. This has been possible thanks to reliable partners on the ground, who have implemented the goals of Estonia's and the EU's development cooperation.

“Both the Estonian President and Prime Minister emphasized that people whose lives and security are in danger due to cooperating with Estonia must get a safe place in Estonia, because we owe it to them. We hope that this promise is kept but we fear that it may be too little, too late.

“Hopefully, the government will make a quick and correct decision today regarding six Estonian partners whose lives have been in danger for some time. And that the decision is not whether to provide support to people, but HOW to do it.

“Because there is not much time or opportunity any more.”