



United Nations Association in Canada
Association canadienne pour les Nations Unies

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The world watches as events unfold in Afghanistan

The United Nations Association in Canada (UNA-Canada), along with the global community as a whole, is watching with considerable trepidation as events unfold with extraordinary speed in Afghanistan. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has remarked, a proud people with a rich cultural history, which has recently endured generations of war and hardship, as well as tangible development and progress, is facing political instability and high social unrest as a result of a rapid and forcible change of government. Fear of retribution, and of a return to a former strict enforcement of repressive social norms is generating panic among many who are desperate to flee the country, in spite of assurances of safety from the new governing forces.

As desperate Afghans were trying to escape the Taliban and board planes, during chaotic scenes at Kabul airport since Monday, Mr. Guterres called for international unity on Afghanistan. Highlighting the need to protect civilians and allow humanitarian access, he urged nations to show willingness to receive Afghan refugees, and to halt any deportations. In the immediate situation, this has to be a priority for Canada and other like-minded countries.

Along with many countries, Canada has invested significant human, as well as economic and physical resources over almost 20 years in support of the country and its people. That has included a heavily targeted support for programmes to uphold human rights and counter violations against women and girls. “It is essential that the hard-won rights of Afghan women and girls are protected,” Guterres stressed. “They are looking to the international community for support — the same international community that assured them that opportunities would be expanded, education would be guaranteed, freedoms would spread and rights would be secured.”

Last but not least, international unity will also be critical to ensuring Afghanistan is never again used as a platform or safe haven for terrorist organizations.

As the US pulls out of Afghanistan, the Taliban has clearly won renewed control of the country, with little effective or organized opposition. Will it be the same Taliban as 20 years ago – or will it bring a changed face and modus operandi? Time will tell. As roughly half of all Afghans, or some 18 million people, depend on humanitarian aid, the UN has committed to continue to provide basic services so long as the safety of personnel and premises are respected. Other countries will legitimately be hesitant in the face of past history with the Taliban.

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Collectively we cannot and must not abandon the people of Afghanistan. Now is the time to reaffirm our humanity by helping those most in need. It is a time to show absolute respect for the rights of others: especially the vulnerable, and the displaced. This is surely the litmus test of a society's commitment to the protection of human rights.

Sarah Kambites
A /President & CEO UNA-Canada

As a national civil society organization, the United Nations Association in Canada (UNA-Canada) strives to raise awareness, concern and empathy on international issues. Our mandate is to educate and engage Canadians on the UN and global issues that affect us all, including the equality of women and girls and their full participation in their societies. We'll continue to promote global citizenship action in Canada, with regard to the values embedded in the UN Charter and to encourage full participation of all citizens to embrace an inclusive and peaceful society. A major focus of our programmes is to support youth as they gain empathy-based skills that enable them to live and serve as caring global citizens. For more information please visit our website at www.unac.org

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