

Statement regarding situation in Afghanistan, August 2021

We, the undersigned, would like to express our deep concerns regarding the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The re-establishment of Taliban control in the country has numerous implications. We would particularly like to highlight the impact on the health and human rights of those in the country, especially women and girls, and refugees from the region.

The health risks for refugees are well-known.¹ Beyond the mental anguish of displacement, communicable diseases and poorly monitored chronic conditions are also common. Refugee camps often have poor sanitary conditions and limited access to food, water and critical medical care including maternity care. Thousands of people have been displaced in Afghanistan and many are fleeing to neighbouring regions. It is imperative we do not see repeats of what has been witnessed in other settings such as Lesbos, Libya and Cox's Bazar. The international community must resettle Afghan refugees swiftly.

As representatives of medical organisations, we are deeply concerned about the access to healthcare for women and girls in the country. Over the last twenty years, significant progress has been made to reduce the remarkably high maternal mortality rates in the country.² Our organisations fear that these efforts will have been in vain. We also fear for the safety of female healthcare workers, violence and sexual violence are well-documented tools used by the Taliban to suppress women and girls. Midwives in Afghanistan are already reporting having meetings with male colleagues banned³ and female surgeons feel abandoned by the West and expect to be banned from working.⁴

While we welcome the decision of the UK government to resettle 20,000 Afghan refugees, with a particular focus on women,⁵ we believe this figure should be increased and the process expedited to bring more people to safety as soon as possible. We are concerned about the speed of the process and the potential for many Afghan refugees to be abandoned if this number is not increased. We also believe steps should be taken to provide medical training places for those now unable to complete their training in Afghanistan.

The UK's previous extensive involvement in the country, including in a military capacity, creates a particular onus on the UK government to ensure the safety of those fleeing for their lives. The UK has so far failed to protect those in need, for example reducing aid⁶ to the country relative to 2019, despite the greatly increased need engendered by the pandemic and the current humanitarian crisis.

We are also conscious that the current situation unfolding in Afghanistan will have a considerable impact on veterans in our Armed Forces. It is essential that the Government does all it can to protect those at risk of triggered Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental health conditions. Many of the refugees resettled in the UK will also be suffering from these issues and it is crucial the NHS is sufficiently supported to care for those in need.

¹ <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/ethics/refugees-overseas-visitors-and-vulnerable-migrants/refugee-and-asylum-seeker-patient-health-toolkit/unique-health-challenges-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>

² https://www.who.int/gho/maternal_health/countries/afg.pdf

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-58191440>

⁴ <https://www.ft.com/content/acb69a3a-51ee-4484-8dad-e04b2c711f89>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/17/uk-to-take-20000-afghan-refugees-over-five-years-under-resettlement-plan>

⁶ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9276/>

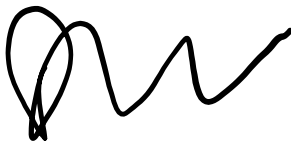
We urge all involved in the conflict in Afghanistan to respect the human rights, including the health-related rights, of all in the country.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Chisholm'.

Dr John Chisholm CBE
Chair, British Medical Association (BMA) medical ethics committee

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kitty Mohan'.

Dr Kitty Mohan
Chair, BMA international committee

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David Wrigley'.

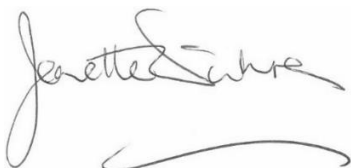
Dr David Wrigley
Deputy Chair, BMA Council

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Helen Stokes-Lampard'.

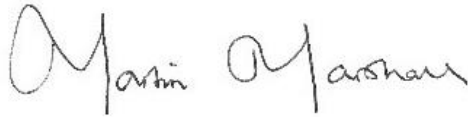
Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard PhD FRCGP
Chair, Academy of Medical Royal Colleges

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Camilla Kingdon'.

Dr Camilla Kingdon
President, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jeanette Dickson'.

Dr Jeanette Dickson
President, Royal College of Radiologists

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Martin Marshall'.

Professor Martin Marshall
Chair of Council, Royal College of General Practitioners

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Edward Morris'.

Mr Edward Morris
President, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ramee Thakar'.

Miss Ramee Thakar
Senior Vice President for Global Health, RCOG

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Gill Walton'.

Gill Walton
Chief Executive, Royal College of Midwives

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Neena Modi'.

Professor Neena Modi FMedSci
President, UK Medical Women's Federation

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Cathryn Edwards'.

Dr Cathryn Edwards
Registrar, Royal College of Physicians

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Neil Mortensen'.

Professor Neil Mortensen
President, Royal College of Surgeons of England

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrian James'.

Dr Adrian James
President, Royal College of Psychiatrists

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Pat Cullen'.

Pat Cullen
General Secretary and Chief Executive, Royal College of Nursing