**End of Mission Statement**
**Richard Bennett**
**UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan**

*28 October 2024*

OTTOWA – During my recent six-day mission to Canada (20-26 October 2024), my objectives were to meet recently resettled Afghans for discussions about their urgent human rights concerns, to document their experience of human rights violations in Afghanistan, and to engage with Canadian policymakers about effective strategies for addressing the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan, while reinforcing Canada’s historic support for its people.

I express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Canada for its invitation to the country and for Global Affairs Canada’s facilitation of meetings with key officials, including Special Representative for Afghanistan Ambassador David Sproule, as well as the representatives from [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=763a4f3fec814e96JmltdHM9MTcyOTkwMDgwMCZpZ3VpZD0zZTg5ZTc0My0yMDE2LTY0YjEtMjAyNy1mM2JkMjFjYjY1NDgmaW5zaWQ9NTIwNw&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=3&fclid=3e89e743-2016-64b1-2027-f3bd21cb6548&psq=Canada%27s+immigration+ministry&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuY2FuYWRhLmNhL2VuL2ltbWlncmF0aW9uLXJlZnVnZWVzLWNpdGl6ZW5zaGlwLmh0bWw&ntb=1) and members of Parliament, academia and Canadian-based international organizations.

I was privileged to meet in Toronto and Ottawa with a diverse array of inspiring Afghans—recently resettled refugees, young activists, human rights defenders, and journalists, including many women—who shared their stories. I listened to ethnic and religious minorities, including Hazaras, Uzbeks and Turkmen among others who felt discriminated against in Afghanistan. I spoke to young women detailing their personal experiences of Taliban oppression on their lives before they left for Canada. I heard from former government and security personnel whose colleagues have faced brutal reprisals, and from activists who, after fleeing their homeland under threat, continue their vital work from Canada. Concerns were raised about the international community’s lack of a coherent strategy for addressing the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan, particularly regarding access to education, and the alarming rise of fundamentalist madrassas for boys and girls.

I was impressed by the resilience and determination of Afghans exiled in Canada to advocate for a future Afghanistan where the rights of everyone in the country are respected. The energy and vision of youthful activists, many of them newcomers to Canada, was revealing.

I note the position of Canada that there should be no normalisation of the de facto authorities in Afghanistan without verified improvements in the human rights situation, especially in relation to women and girls. I commend the Government of Canada for taking an important first step, alongside three other States, to hold Afghanistan accountable for its violations of international obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which may lead to proceedings at the International Court of Justice. I urge other nations, especially those within the region, to support this critical effort.

I also call upon Canada, as well as other leading nations in this initiative, to consult closely with Afghans throughout this process, ensuring that Afghan women—particularly those from marginalized communities— participate meaningfully.

Furthermore, Canada should continue to empower and support Afghan-led organizations advocating for human rights, documenting violations, and providing relief to victims through legal and psychosocial support.

As a NATO member, Canada participated in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014— one of its largest military deployments since the Second World War. I invite Canada to continue to analyse their own actions during that time and take appropriate accountability measures.

With the principle of universal jurisdiction enshrined in Canadian law, individuals may be prosecuted in Canadian courts for international crimes committed outside its borders. I urge Canada to explore how this framework could be applied in the context of Afghanistan.

I thank Canada for welcoming over 50,000 Afghans since August 2021, including human rights defenders, journalists, civil society activists, and persecuted minorities. However, there is an ongoing need for international protection as the human rights situation deteriorates. I urge Canada to continue its support for Afghans in need of protection.

Recognizing that neighbouring countries host the majority of Afghan refugees. I call on Canada to take a leadership role in supporting them while advocating for safe pathways for at-risk Afghans seeking refuge farther afield. Specifically, Canada should match other gender-responsive nations by granting refugee status to all Afghan women and girls asylum seekers on its territory, given the pervasive gender persecution they face under the Taliban.

I also urge the Canadian government to expand education visa opportunities and scholarships for Afghans, alongside long-term support for newly arrived refugees together with efforts to reunite families.

Canada and its people have been a vital donor to and supporter of Afghanistan for more than two decades, including since the Taliban’s return to power. However, while the humanitarian crisis continues, international support—including Canada’s—has begun to dwindle. I encourage Canada to sustain its commitment to lifesaving and basic human needs initiatives, such as education, livelihoods, and human rights activities, including legal aid and safe migration programs, while ensuring that the principle of avoiding support to organizations designated terrorist by the Government is adhered to. It is imperative that compliance processes do not inadvertently hinder organizations working to support human rights, feminist and humanitarian efforts on the ground.

At the conclusion of my visit, I look forward to continuing and reinforcing ties with the Afghan community in Canada and to cooperating with the Canadian government to promote a safe, stable, inclusive, and prosperous Afghanistan that meets its human rights obligations to the Afghan people.

***Richard Bennett*** *is the* [*Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-afghanistan)*.*

*For inquiries and media requests, please contact:* *hrc-sr-afghanistan@un.org**.*