

## The Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program 2009-2017

### What is the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program?

- ☑ In 2009, Congress passed the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009. The Act provides special immigrant visas (SIVs) to Afghans who have worked as translators or interpreters, or who were employed by, or on behalf of, the U.S. government in Afghanistan, and whose lives are now threatened because of their work in support of the U.S. mission. These visas allow these wartime allies to resettle in the United States.<sup>1</sup> A similar program was enacted in 2006 for Iraqi translators, interpreters, and workers, but that program stopped accepting new applications in 2014 and Iraqis apply directly to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program now instead.
- ☑ The Afghan program was designed to provide 7,500 visas over five years. Extensions were passed in 2014, 2015, and 2016 that made 8,500 more visas available. As of Spring 2017 only 1,437 visas remain and the State Department estimates that the remaining visas will be exhausted by June 1, 2017. As a result, the US Embassy in Kabul has stopped scheduling new applicant interviews. This will leave over 15,000 Afghans and their families still waiting at some point in the application phase.<sup>2</sup>

### Why is the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Important?

- ☑ U.S. involvement in Afghanistan is ongoing. We cannot complete our mission there without the Afghan translators, engineers, security guards, embassy clerks, logisticians, cultural advisors, and soldiers who stand by us. Many of these allies and their families now face death threats for their service to the U.S. We gave our word to protect these allies--a promise that we have kept since 2009. That promise is now in jeopardy.
- ☑ The Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program represents a promise that we made to our allies. Following through on that promise is not only vital to maintaining support of the Afghan people, it is vital to completing our mission there and to U.S. national security.
- ☑ Likewise, as the U.S. continues to protect its interests elsewhere around the world, it will need the continued assistance of those willing to stand with us. We must ensure that the U.S. is known as a country that keeps its promises and never forgets its allies. Reauthorizing the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program and increasing the number of visas to accommodate the need of our allies sends the message that the U.S. never leaves anyone behind.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/homesecc/R43725.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/323443-state-dept-confirms-visa-interviews-halted-for-afghans-who-helped-us-troops>

## FY2017 NDAA Provisions for the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program

Since 2009, funding for the Afghan SIV program has been authorized in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The Fiscal Year 2017 NDAA, signed into law in December of 2016, made the following provisions for the Afghan SIV program:

- ☑ Granted an extension of the SIV program for an additional four years until December 31, 2020;
- ☑ Authorized an additional 1,500 available visas;
- ☑ Further restricted applicants for a Special Immigrant Visa to those Afghan nationals who:
  - were employed by or on behalf of the United States Government in Afghanistan for a period of at least two years;
  - served as an interpreter or translator for United States military personnel, the State Department, or USAID in Afghanistan, particularly while traveling off-base or away from U.S. Embassies with such personnel;
  - performed sensitive and trusted activities for the United States Government in Afghanistan;
  - provided faithful and valuable service to the United States Government, which is documented in a positive recommendation or evaluation from a senior supervisor; and
  - have experienced or are experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of the alien's employment by the United States Government.

## The Keeping Our Promise to Our Afghan Allies Act and the Path Forward

- ☑ FY2017 NDAA's authorization of only 1,500 additional proved to be insufficient to service the need of our Afghan allies.<sup>3</sup>
- ☑ Recognizing the current visa shortage crisis, a bi-partisan coalition in congress led by Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), John McCain (R-AZ), Jack Reed (D-RI), Tom Tillis (R-NC) and Representatives Adam Kinzinger (R-IL), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Steve Stivers (R-OH) and Seth Moulton (D-MA) introduced legislation to provide an emergency stopgap solution.<sup>4</sup>
- ☑ The Keeping Our Promise to our Afghan Allies Act (S.630 in the Senate and H.R. 1544 in the House of Representatives) would amend the original Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 to include an additional 2,500 visas. These additional 2,500 visas would add to the 1,500 previously authorized in the FY17 NDAA, bringing the yearly totally to 4,000 visas, the number originally requested by the State Department for FY17.
- ☑ It is vital that Congress;
  - work quickly to authorize an additional 2,500 Special Immigrant Visas in 2017, either through passage of the Keeping or Promise to Our Afghan Allies Act or another legislative vehicle.
  - authorize an adequate number of visas required yearly for as long as the United States commits military forces in Afghanistan.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/world/asia/afghanistan-visa-program-united-states.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/world/asia/afghanistan-visa-program-united-states.html?_r=0)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1544>