

Swedish Migration Agency
Sturegatan 15, Sundbyberg
Stockholm, Sweden

Paris, 10 June 2020

Subject: Support for the asylum request by Afghan journalist **Elyaas Ehsas**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Reporters without borders (RSF), an international press freedom NGO, would like to support the asylum application made by Elyaas Ehsas, an Afghan journalist who fled to Sweden in December 2015.

Mr. Ehsas's history

RSF has been able to document Mr. Ehsas's history. He is from Kabul, where he began working for the radio and TV broadcaster *Rah-e-Farda* in 2013, covering politics. As part of his duties, he also covered Taliban attacks, which led to his being the target of frequent threats by this armed group. In October 2015, he received a phone call from a member of the Taliban who accused him of collaborating with foreign powers and betraying his country. He was contacted again a few days later and was urged to provide information about individuals who were Taliban targets. When he refused to cooperate in any way, he was insulted and threatened. He was told that he would himself become a target and that the Taliban knew where he lived. He reported these threats to the police, but nothing was done.

One of his friends, who worked for security services of Afghanistan, managed to trace the calls and confirmed their Taliban origin. Mr. Ehsas initially changed his place of residence and went into hiding for several days. But, fearing for his safety, he finally fled to Sweden with his brother, while his family, who had also been threatened, initially fled to Puli Khumri, a city in the north of Kabul, and then, because they were still exposed there, finally sought refuge in Pakistan. The Taliban are just as likely to threaten Mr. Ehsas now as they did five years ago and, in fact, are even more likely because his having chosen to live in Europe reinforces his status as a traitor in their eyes.

Press freedom in Afghanistan

Ranked 122nd out of 180 countries and territories in RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index, Afghanistan is one of the world's most dangerous countries for journalists. Media freedom violations take many forms including threats, physical attacks, arbitrary detention and kidnapping, and the media are threatened not only by the Taliban, but also by politicians and even some religious institutions that are closely linked to the government. The silence of the authorities and their inability to guarantee journalists' safety are extremely worrying. A total of 17 Afghan journalists were killed in connection with their work in 2018 and 2019.

The peace accord that Washington and the Taliban signed in February 2020 is historic but

peace is far from assured in Afghanistan and the gains of the past 18 years, which include – in principle, at least – guarantees for press freedom and the protection of journalists, are now threatened. Peace and security are what the Afghan people want most, but they cannot be achieved and guaranteed without free and independent media and without guarantees for journalists' safety.

How we work

When contacted by journalists who have fled their country, we use our network of correspondents to verify that they are indeed journalists and have been threatened. We ask them to provide the contact details of colleagues so that, if necessary, we can get in touch with them and compare what they say with the information we get from our own sources. We support journalists only after establishing that they have been threatened in connection with the provision of news or information.

In the light of all these circumstances, we are convinced that Mr. Ehsas would be exposed to serious reprisals if he had to return his country. We therefore support his asylum request and we hope you will allow him to reside safely in Sweden.

We stand ready to provide you with any additional information that you might need.

Sincerely,



Victoria LAVENUE
Reporters without borders (RSF)
Head of the Assistance Unit
CS 90247, 75083 Paris Cedex 02, France
Tel: +33 1 4483 8459