

A Year of Feminist Crisis Response In Afghanistan

AUGUST 2022

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JUST AROUND A YEAR AGO, in August 2021, we at Urgent Action Fund, Asia and Pacific, truly understood the reason for our existence. When the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, throwing its people and financial systems into disarray, we plunged right into the kind of crisis that we were set up for.

As international aid organisations and other non-profits with offices and staff across Afghanistan began security assessments, we were already mobilising money and moving resources needed to evacuate women and non-binary defenders facing most immediate threats. We were one of the first funds to successfully move money directly into the hands of activists and defenders in not just Kabul but other provinces of Afghanistan. And over the following months, we continued to build on our successes, with unwavering support from a trusting network of advisors, partner organisations and the advice and support of UAF A&P's Board and the larger funding ecosystem.

And now a year into offering grants in Afghanistan, we realise it's time to rethink our crisis response, and step back to restrategise where we can be more effective as a rapid response fund.

In 11 months, from September 2021 to the end of July 2022, we raised over two million US dollars for Afghanistan response alone and disbursed 2.4 million US dollars, in the form of 523 grants.

These grants supported more than two thousand Afghan women and non-binary defenders, their families and communities, ensuring their safety, security and survival during this period.

Time To Pass The Baton On

We remain committed to supporting the security and well-being needs of Afghanistan's women and non-binary human rights defenders, and will continue to process grant requests that seek assistance for continuing activism or to secure the resilience of movements. However, we are stepping back from our crisis response mode in Afghanistan.

A year on, the context in Afghanistan has changed. We are cognisant that as a rapid response grantmaker, we discharged our role as first responders to crisis well. It's now time to pass the baton on to international development organisations and aid agencies, and step back from Afghanistan crisis response. We will continue to work with defenders and communities on the ground to review emerging needs and strategise on what role we could play in this changed terrain and context.

Working With Emotional Discomfort

We did not take this decision lightly. UAF A&P recognises the increasing number of women and non-binary defenders who are at risk and need support in Afghanistan - denying applications takes a huge emotional and psychological toll on our team members, who engage with the lived realities of applicants. However, we are also struggling to match our mandate and the available resources we have, with the needs we are being asked to support.

The overwhelming needs of Afghanistan were front and centred through the last year, but as a regional fund we need to ensure that we have resources to support defenders from all regions of Asia and the Pacific. In times of emotional discomfort and distress, we have relied on our feminist values and transparent communication to offer a realistic picture of our abilities and limitations.

What We Commit To Do

- From 1 September 2022, we will prioritise our team's capacity and ability to process applications, and prioritise applications that are aligned with our core mandate as a rapid response feminist fund.
- We will continue to advocate for, and raise resources for Afghan women and non-binary human rights defenders by partnering with other feminist funds, and women's funds in our global ecosystem.
- We will continue to design and facilitate convenings to provide safe spaces for Afghan women and non-binary defenders to reflect and ideate on their self and collective care, and path to resilience.
- We will continue to amplify the voices of Afghan women and non-binary defenders to be seen and heard, and narrate their stories of resistance and resilience, and find more global platforms for them to continue feminist advocacy and movement building.

**In Solidarity,
Urgent Action Fund, Asia & Pacific**

