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WORLD | MIDDLE EAST

# Afghan Refugees Suspend Protests at U.A.E. Camp After Talks With U.S.

Afghans evacuated last summer have complained of prison-like conditions inside the Abu Dhabi transit facility



Afghan refugees protested over the lengthy U.S. relocation process at a facility in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., last week.

PHOTO: RISE TO PEACE/REUTERS

By [Jessica Donati](#) [Follow](#)

Feb. 15, 2022 2:43 pm ET

WASHINGTON—Afghan refugees protesting conditions at a transit facility in the United Arab Emirates agreed to suspend protests after several days of talks with local U.S. and Gulf officials, the refugees said on Tuesday.

[Protests erupted last week among thousands of Afghans](#) over what the refugees described as prison-like conditions at the Abu Dhabi facility

where they have been held since their evacuation from Afghanistan this summer.

The U.S. is responsible for processing immigration cases, but the Emiratis run the facility. The unrest reflects widespread frustration over long immigration wait times among Afghan refugees stranded in the U.A.E. and third countries.

Several refugees at the U.A.E. facility told The Wall Street Journal they had agreed to suspend the protests in return for promises from the U.S. and Emirati authorities to improve conditions at the camp within two weeks.

Those included U.S. pledges to speed up paperwork and resume evacuation flights to the U.S. for Afghans with completed documentation.

“If the timeline is exceeded, Afghan refugees’ gatherings and demonstrations will resume to raise their voices to the world for justice,” the refugees said in a statement outlining their conditions.

The State Department declined to comment on whether it had pledged to speed up processing.

“A ‘deal’ is not an accurate description of where things stand,” a spokesman said in a statement. “U.S. Embassy staff have been having regular meetings with Afghans at Emirates Humanitarian City and are committed to continuing to do so.”

The refugees at the facility have complained about the lack of access to U.S. immigration officials and the slow progress of their applications. They say months pass between communications from the U.S. Embassy.

Others are frustrated at being stuck there for months despite, they say, having a clear legal path to enter the U.S. Some are married to American citizens or legal permanent residents. Others served for years alongside U.S. troops and diplomats, or otherwise worked to promote the U.S. vision for Afghanistan.

Frustration over conditions at the facility has been magnified by concerns over resettlement after the U.S. told refugee leaders last week that thousands may not qualify for U.S. entry and will need to be relocated to third countries.

While no country has offered to take in substantial numbers from the

U.A.E., the U.S. is hopeful that Canada or Europe will step in.

As part of the outcome of talks, the refugees said the U.S. had committed to bringing in third countries, including France, Germany, Canada and Australia, to discuss resettlement options within the two-week deadline.

The facility in Abu Dhabi was intended as a temporary transit hub and instead has become home to some 10,000 Afghans who have been stuck there for close to six months.

Thousands more are stranded around the world, with clusters in places like Albania, Mexico and even Uganda.

The refugees have asked the U.A.E. to lift strict restrictions on movement inside the camp, which were officially instituted to prevent the spread of coronavirus. The measures have confined refugees for periods of time to their rooms or corridors, they say.

The refugees have also asked the Emiratis to improve the quality of the food, which they say is served in plastic bags and often causes food poisoning.

The U.A.E. declined to comment.

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