

Western nations speed up evacuations from Afghanistan

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British citizens and dual nationals living in Afghanistan board a military plane for evacuation from Kabul airport, Afghanistan on August 16, 2021 [Ben Shread/UK MOD/Handout via Reuters]

London, August 18 (RHC)-- Planes carrying hundreds of evacuees from Kabul have arrived in the United Kingdom and Germany as Western nations stepped up evacuation efforts and the Taliban promised women's rights, media freedom and amnesty for government officials in Afghanistan.

A British Royal Air Force plane carrying British nationals and embassy staff landed at an air base in Oxfordshire, UK, while a German government-chartered Lufthansa flight carrying 130 evacuees landed in Frankfurt in Germany.

The United States said its military flights had evacuated 3,200 people from Kabul so far, including 1,100 on Tuesday alone.

In Kabul, the Taliban sought to strike a conciliatory tone at its first press conference since its lightning seizure of the Afghan capital, promising to respect the rights of women "within the framework of Islam" and expressing a desire for peaceful relations with other countries.

"We don't want any internal or external enemies," said Zabihullah Mujahid, the armed group's main spokesman. The Taliban announcements, short on details but suggesting a softer line than during the group's rule 20 years ago, came as one of the group's co-founders, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, returned to Afghanistan for the first time in more than 10 years.

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