

Families of 9/11 victims urge Biden to send frozen assets back to Afghan people

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Siblings who arrived from Afghanistan with their families are seen at their makeshift tents as they take refuge near a railway station in Chaman, Pakistan September 1, 2021. (Reuters photo)

Washington, August 19 (RHC)-- Nearly 80 family members of 9/11 victims have urged U.S. President Joe Biden to send back billions of dollars in Afghan government assets held in the United States to the Afghan people.

In a letter addressed to Biden, 77 family members called on the president to reverse an executive order he signed in February to allocate half of the \$7 billion in Afghanistan's assets for distribution to families of the 9/11 victims. Biden has frozen the assets belonging to the Afghan Central Bank since the withdrawal of its occupation forces from the country in August 2021.

According to Biden's order, \$3.5 billion would go to humanitarian aid, and the rest would go to the families of 9/11 victims. "Any use of the \$7 billion to pay off 9/11 family member judgments is legally suspect and morally wrong," the families wrote in their letter, sent to a senior White House aide.

"Order and affirm that the Afghanistan central bank funds belong to the Afghan people and the Afghan people alone," they said. "Victims of terrorism, including 9/11 victims, are entitled to their day in court. But they are not entitled to money that lawfully belongs to the Afghan people," they wrote. "[N]o 9/11 family member joined these lawsuits to take money away from starving Afghans."

The Biden administration, however, ruled out releasing billions of dollars worth of frozen assets on Tuesday, saying the goal is to keep the funds out of reach from the Taliban.

Last week, a group of international economists also urged Washington to release the funds, citing the compounding economic and humanitarian catastrophes in Afghanistan.

They said that the plunge in economic activity in Afghanistan and the sharp cuts to foreign aid by previous supporters of the country after the U.S. military withdrawal had sent the Afghan economy into a tailspin.

Back in June, Taliban Foreign Ministry spokesman Abdul Qahar Balkhi asked "the world to give the Afghans their most basic right, which is their right to life and that is through lifting the sanctions and unfreezing our assets and also giving assistance."

Many of Washington's allies and Western governments have also largely suspended their financial assistance to Afghanistan since the Taliban returned to power. Since their takeover, the Taliban have been struggling to contain a deepening economic crisis.

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