

Guidelines For Going Into Hiding

Human rights activists in Afghanistan are asking for guidance on how to stay safe from the Taliban and others who would do them harm, until they can find a way out of the country. At Human Rights First, we believe that activists are the best suited to assess their own risk, and to make informed decisions about their own safety.

Human Rights First is not advising activists on whether they should try to escape the country or go into hiding. These are decisions activists themselves are best suited to make.

We offer a range of information to activists in Afghanistan, including on [how to delete their digital histories and avoid the misuse of their biometric data](#). Here, we offer guidance on safe houses, and on how to hide.

We understand that not everyone has the same opportunities to access safe spaces, either alone or through staying with families or friends.

Local considerations and personal circumstances vary widely, and these should guide activists' actions more than generalised advice.

This list for those considering going into hiding is based on our experience of working with activists on the run in a range of contexts, and on the expert advice of others. We will update this advice as we hear more from activists in Afghanistan, including those in hiding.

Plan Ahead

- Understand where you are going: planning is essential to staying safe. Scout your potential new location with digital maps, understand the resources you will and won't have, and where you'll be able to get food, water, and other supplies.
- If a friend or driver is helping you, arrange a meeting point away from your home.
- Develop a believable backstory for you and your family. Decide how much information you want to conceal: are you adopting a whole new identity or just keeping secret that you have a human rights background? Stick as closely as you can to the truth.
- Practice your story to yourself, say it to the mirror, say it to those with you, get your brains used to saying your story out loud.
- Have a plan for you and your family if you are questioned, including scripting out who will say what.
- Include details in your story to make it convincing about why you are at this location. Be consistent with your details and your overall story.
- Have a plan for what your family/friends/colleagues should say if they are asked about where you are.
- Will you need to be near health facilities to get medical care?

- Develop a plan for if you have to leave your safe house, perhaps suddenly. Have an idea of where you will go next, and how you will get there.
- Find out if your real identity is required to buy train/bus/flight tickets and how this might compromise your anonymity.

Blend In

- Abnormal behaviors stand out - don't do anything that will draw the attention of your neighbors or government forces. If you are a family unit, act as a family unit.
- Minimise the number of encounters you are likely to have with those who might question you.

Vary Your Daily Routine and be Prepared

- If you have to leave, for example to buy food, change the times and routes you take. Having a predictable routine is more likely to get you noticed.
- Try to keep a stock of supplies in case your neighborhood is suddenly full of security forces and you can't leave for many days.

Consider Ways in Which You May Unintentionally Reveal Your Location

- If possible, before departing for your new location, buy a new phone and SIM card (or have someone buy them for you) with cash.
- Follow our guide for [thwarting digital surveillance](#) to bolster your digital security while at the new location.
- When you go to bed at night or when your phone is not in use, consider putting it into a storage bag that blocks signals from reaching it. Wrapping it in tin/aluminum foil can work.

Good Locations for Safe Houses Include Those:

- With many ways in and out - giving you more choices if you have to suddenly leave.
- Where you can see who's approaching from far away.
- Where you have little or no personal connection. For example, avoid places where there is a lease in your name or your family's name.