

## Elderly British Couple Faces Dire Conditions in Taliban Detention

July 22, 2025

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Peter Reynolds, 80, and his wife Barbie, 76, a British couple who have lived in Afghanistan for nearly two decades, are enduring harrowing conditions in Taliban custody. Arrested on 1 February in Bamiyan province, the couple has been detained without charge for over five months, raising serious concerns about their deteriorating health and the lack of transparency surrounding their imprisonment.

The Reynolds, who have run education and training programmes through their organisation Rebuild for 18 years, were apprehended while returning to their home in central Afghanistan. Having chosen to remain in the country after the Taliban's 2021 takeover, they now face an uncertain fate. Their four children, based in the UK and US, have issued a desperate plea for their release, warning that their parents' fragile health puts them at risk of "irreparable harm or even death," as noted in a Monday statement by UN human rights experts.

The couple's children, who have maintained a low profile in hopes of securing a private resolution, revealed their frustration after months of silence. Sarah Entwistle, their daughter, stated, "We have written privately to the Taliban leadership twice, appealing to their stated values of compassion and fairness, but there has been no progress." She added, "We now make this plea publicly, as our parents' health is declining rapidly." The siblings expressed gratitude to Doughty Street Chambers for engaging with the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture to highlight their parents' plight.

The Reynolds' health is a growing concern. A remote medical assessment indicated that Peter may have suffered a stroke or silent heart attack, with symptoms including a red, peeling face suggestive of recurring skin cancer. Barbie, meanwhile, is battling numbness in her feet due to anaemia, potentially exacerbated by inadequate prison food. A medical evaluation warned that her condition could lead to heart failure. The couple, who marked their 55th wedding anniversary in detention this week, were held in Kabul's notorious Pul-e-Charkhi prison until eight weeks ago, where they had daily phone access to their children. They were then moved to the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) with promises of imminent release, which never materialised.

Conditions at the GDI are marginally better, but the couple still sleeps on mattresses on the floor with no proper furniture. UN experts condemned the detention, stating, "There is no justification for holding this elderly couple, particularly in such degrading conditions." They called for an immediate review of the case, highlighting the "cruel" psychological toll of indefinite detention without explanation. The experts added, "The Taliban must ensure humane treatment, accounting for the couple's age and health."

The UK Foreign Office, under scrutiny for its handling of British nationals abroad, secured a rare visit to the couple last Thursday, according to The Times. A spokesperson confirmed, "We are supporting the family of two British nationals detained in Afghanistan." However, with the Labour government's foreign policy facing criticism for its perceived lack of

assertiveness, questions remain about whether sufficient pressure is being applied to secure Reynolds' release.

The children's plea underscores the urgency of the situation. "Our parents have dedicated their lives to Afghanistan's development," Ms Entwistle said. "We beg the Taliban to show mercy and release them before it's too late." As the couple's health deteriorates, the lack of clarity and action from both the Taliban and UK authorities leaves their fate hanging in the balance.