

## Elderly British Couple's Children Demand Taliban Release Parents from Detention

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The children of an elderly British couple, Barbie Reynolds, 76, and Peter Reynolds, 80, have issued a desperate plea to Afghanistan's Taliban regime for their parents' immediate release from detention, warning that their deteriorating health could lead to their deaths in custody. The couple, arrested on 1 February in Bamiyan province, have endured nearly six months of imprisonment without charges, raising serious concerns about their treatment and the Taliban's adherence to international human rights norms.

The Reynolds, who have lived in Afghanistan for 18 years, running education and training initiatives, were detained while returning to their home in central Afghanistan. Despite the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, they chose to remain, continuing their humanitarian work. Their four children, based in the UK and the US, have highlighted their parents' fragile health, with Peter suffering suspected stroke or heart attack symptoms and possible recurrence of skin cancer, while Barbie battles anaemia and numbness in her feet, raising fears of potential heart failure. A remote medical assessment underscored the severity of their conditions, which have been worsened by reportedly inadequate prison conditions.

In a statement, the siblings declared: "This is another urgent plea to the Taliban to release our parents before it is too late, and they die in their custody. They have dedicated their lives to the people of Afghanistan for the last 18 years." Their daughter, Sarah Entwistle, revealed that private appeals to the Taliban, urging compassion and fairness, have yielded no progress. "We have maintained a media blackout for two months, hoping to show respect to the Taliban and 'trust the process'," she said, expressing frustration at the lack of action.

The couple, married in Kabul in 1970 and marking their 55th anniversary in detention this week, were initially held in Kabul's notorious Pul-e-Charkhi maximum-security prison. They had daily phone contact with their children from the prison yard until approximately eight weeks ago, when they were transferred to the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) under assurances of imminent release. Those promises remain unfulfilled, and the couple now sleeps on floor mattresses in cells lacking basic furnishings. UN human rights experts, in a statement issued Monday, warned that the Reynolds face "irreparable harm or even death" without adequate medical care, condemning their continued detention as "inhumane" given their age and health.

The UK Foreign Office secured a rare visit to the couple last Thursday, with a spokesperson confirming: "We are supporting the family of two British nationals who are detained in Afghanistan." However, the Taliban's Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, denied allegations of human rights violations, claiming the couple has access to family contact, consular services, and medical treatment. These assurances ring hollow to the family and observers, given the couple's prolonged detention without formal charges or due process.

The Reynolds' plight underscores the Taliban's questionable commitment to humane treatment, with UN experts demanding an immediate review of their detention. The siblings, supported by Doughty Street Chambers and the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, continue

their public campaign, urging the Taliban to honour their stated values of mercy and dignity. As the couple's health worsens, the family's call for their release grows ever more urgent.