

14/10/2021

Re: Protection for refugees and people seeking asylum from Afghanistan

Dear **Member of Parliament**

On behalf of the Catholic community in your electorate we write to you about the current humanitarian crisis facing people from Afghanistan.

We urge the Government to adopt a compassionate and welcoming response to people from Afghanistan seeking Australia's protection. In the coming weeks representatives of the Catholic community would value an opportunity to meet with you to discuss our concerns further.

We appreciate your past support for refugees and asylum seekers and your willingness to discuss these issues with us. We strongly believe that the Australian Government can and should swiftly adopt the following three additional measures to ensure the safety and reduce the anguish of people seeking asylum and recognised refugees from Afghanistan on temporary visas who are living, working, studying, volunteering (including on the frontline of the COVID-19 response), praying and nurturing families in our neighbourhoods and communities:

1. Commit to an intake of an additional 20,000 refugees from Afghanistan, focused on those most at risk.
2. Make immediate arrangements to bring the families of refugees from Afghanistan to Australia.
3. Grant permanent protection to all people from Afghanistan in Australia on temporary protection visas or currently seeking asylum.

The Taliban's seizure of control drastically diminishes prospects for peace and security in Afghanistan within the foreseeable future. Ethnic and religious minorities such as the Shia Hazaras, women and girls, human rights defenders, ex-government officials, and local staff of Coalition forces, foreign embassies, and international NGOs are particularly unsafe and at risk of targeted persecution at the hands of the Taliban. Horrifying accounts are already emerging of atrocities including extrajudicial executions, and the forced marriage of women and girls.

In light of these developments, we welcome the Government's initial commitment to allocate a 'floor' of 3,000 places for refugees from Afghanistan in the 2021-2022 annual humanitarian intake.

As the situation on the ground in Afghanistan deteriorates, the Afghan diaspora in Australia is suffering acutely from afar. People seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas are in situations of particular vulnerability, having lived in limbo in Australia for up to ten years, often enduring protracted separation from loved ones. Many are challenged by the hopelessness of watching parents, spouses, siblings, and children struggle to survive under or flee from the Taliban.

Now, many fear that they may be forced to return to certain persecution under the Taliban regime when the moratorium on returns to Afghanistan expires.

Recently, Pope Francis called on countries, like Australia, to take in refugees fearing persecution in Afghanistan:

"In these troubled times that see Afghans seeking refuge, I pray for the most vulnerable among them. I pray that many countries will welcome and protect those seeking a new life."

We hope you can heed the call of Pope Francis and open your heart to those seeking safety a new life from Afghanistan.

We look forward to your reply.

Yours in hope,

Signatories: