

Date

Re: Protection for refugees and people seeking asylum from Afghanistan

Dear Paul Fletcher MP,

Today we write to you regarding our deep concerns about the current humanitarian crisis facing people from and in Afghanistan following the Taliban's seizure of leadership of the country.

We ask that you use whatever channels available to you to ensure Australia offers a compassionate and welcoming response to Afghan people fleeing the dire situation.

We ask that you contact Prime Minister Scott Morrison to urge him to take immediate action to ensure the safety of Afghan people seeking Australia's protection.

We also seek an opportunity to meet with you in coming weeks to discuss these concerns further.

Representing numerous people living and working in the Bradfield electorate, we propose that this is a defining moment in your government's leadership: an opportunity, prior to Federal elections to be held in 2022, for the Liberal/Coalition government to represent your electors and show responsible, humane leadership by going further than allocating 3000 of Australia's existing 13,750 humanitarian visas for 2021 to Afghan claimants, and as we, your electors urge you to do, expand our commitment to those beside whom, for twenty years, Australian troops have fought for freedom in Afghanistan. How can we, in good conscience, not respond?

So we ask the Australian Government to swiftly adopt three measures to ensure the safety and reduce the anguish of Afghan people seeking asylum, Afghan people currently on Nauru and in Papua New Guinea and Afghan refugees on temporary visas who are living, working, studying, volunteering – (including on the frontline of the COVID-19 response)– and nurturing families in Australia:

1. Commit to an immediate humanitarian 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 and from interim refugee camps to Australia; and
3. Grant permanent protection to all people from Afghanistan currently on temporary protection visas or seeking asylum in Australia.

The Taliban's seizure of control drastically diminishes prospects for peace and security in Afghanistan in 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. However, while this initial allocation depletes the previous commitment to other, non-Afghan applicants, we believe this response is inadequate.

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 urge you to heed the call of Pope Francis and open your heart to those from Afghanistan seeking safety and new life in Australia.

We look forward to your reply.

Yours in hope,