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MEDIA RELEASE: Australian Government must respond to unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan

18 August 2021

Families are fleeing their homes, their livelihoods and their loved ones in Afghanistan after the lightning speed return to power by the Taliban, the fundamentalist faction that has now regained power after 20 years.

Since the withdrawal of US and other Western military troops, the country has been thrown into chaos, with crowds of people thronging at the airports, citing fears of retribution, persecution and violence.

This is in addition to over 3.5 million people Afghans already uprooted from their homes due to insecurity and violence.

“It is vital for the Australian Government to respond with compassion to this unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan,” said Kirsty Robertson, CEO of Caritas Australia.

“There was a spike of 29 per cent in civilian casualties this year compared to last year, as well interruptions to social services and losses of income, even before the recent takeover – and now things are only going to get worse.”

“The impacts of COVID-19, prolonged conflict and drought means that hundreds of thousands of people are now facing an uncertain future, where they may not have access to shelter, food, clean water, health care or sanitation for a prolonged period of time.”

“It is going to be harder than ever to reach vulnerable people now that the Taliban are back in power. Already organisations on the ground are scrambling to get emergency supplies out to people, setting aside their education and health programs to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs from this crisis.”

“Our government needs to increase aid to Afghanistan so that women and children in Afghanistan can receive protection and meet their basic needs, otherwise we’re looking at a generation who will potentially experience widespread violence, child labour, early and forced marriages, and sexual exploitation – without the vital support they need.”

Neighbouring countries, Iran and Pakistan, host more than two million Afghan refugees in total - nearly 90 per cent of displaced Afghans, however neither country is able to handle the increased need, as more Afghans flee for safety.

“As a nation, we have to step up and offer additional resettlement places for Afghan refugees, as we did in 2015 for Syrian and Iraqi refugees,” said Ms. Robertson. “If Canada has already committed to 20,000 additional places for Afghan refugees, we could match this offer to show the international community that we will help alleviate the pressures on Iran and Pakistan to respond to this humanitarian crisis.”

“This is especially relevant as August 19 is World Humanitarian Day, and we need to take courageous steps to build the world we want. Right now, too many lives are in grave danger, and we have an opportunity as a nation to alleviate some of this injustice.”

The Catholic agency for international aid and development

Address: 24-32 O’Riordan St, Alexandria NSW 2015

Phone: 1800 024 413 **Fax:** +61 2 8306 3401

Email: questions@caritas.org.au **ABN:** 90 970 605 069

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Caritas Australia is raising funds to help support vulnerable communities in Afghanistan. Visit caritas.org.au to donate to the Asia Regional Appeal or call 1800 024 413 toll free to provide much needed support.

Media contact: Jessica Stone 0490 684 867 / jessica.stone@caritas.org.au
caritasmedia@caritas.org.au.

Note:

Kirsty Robertson, CEO of Caritas Australia is available for interview.

Melville Fernandez, Humanitarian Emergencies Manager at Caritas Australia is available for interview.