

Media Release: Catholic communities urge Australian Government to do more to protect people from Afghanistan

Almost 600 leaders from Catholic communities across Australia have signed letters urging the Australian Government to do more to protect people from Afghanistan, as the country's humanitarian and human rights crisis worsens.

The letters call on the Australian Government to commit to providing permanent protection to refugees on temporary visas in Australia; expedite family reunion pathways for families of people from Afghanistan in Australia; and commit to an additional intake of 20,000 resettlement places for people from Afghanistan.

The letters are addressed to Prime Minister Scott Morrison and key Government MPs across Australia.

Each letter has been signed by nuns, congregational leaders, priests, school principals, teachers, parish pastoral council members and social justice members, Diocesan representatives, CEOs, and prominent local business people of Catholic faith.

Letters note that "the diaspora in Australia is suffering acutely from afar, and that people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas are in situations of particular vulnerability, having lived in limbo for up to ten years, often enduring protracted separation from loved ones."

The letter-writing initiative is part of a larger national Catholic response to the Afghanistan crisis coordinated by the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA), which is co-convened by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia and Jesuit Social Services. The response is in solidarity with the calls to action and priorities of the Afghanistan diaspora in Australia, as expressed by the [Action For Afghanistan](#) campaign

It follows a [call](#) from Archbishop Mark Coleridge, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), for the Australian Government "to be generous" in its response to the crisis, and Archbishop Anthony Fisher's special [appeal](#) in support of people from Afghanistan.

A range of Catholic agencies are key organising partners in the [Christians United for Afghanistan](#) campaign, through which thousands of Christians and hundreds of local Churches have signed a petition calling for more compassion and leadership for people from Afghanistan.

Fr. Jim McKeon, Parish Priest, Catholic Parish of Epping and Carlingford, Epping said:

"The message of Jesus Christ was always about welcoming the stranger and making them our neighbour. Today, Pope Francis, the Australian Bishops, and Australia's 5 million Catholics stand with the people of Afghanistan and those who are seeking asylum here. Increasingly Catholics are moved to support people from Afghanistan, and to respond to the question being asked by our children "What are we doing to help them?"

Peter Marshall, President, St Vincent De Paul Society, Sydney Harbour North said:

"I remember the compassion that previous Australian Governments showed to refugees following the Vietnam War. Following the war in Afghanistan, the Australian Government has the capacity and the community support to take many more refugees from Afghanistan, but appears to lack

the willingness and the spirit to mount a timely and compassionate response to the innocent victims of another war that Australia has participated in.”

Brother Phillip Elwin FSC, Social Justice Committee, St. Aloysius of Gonzaga Catholic Parish, Cronulla said:

“In the past, tens of thousands of refugees have been accepted into Australia from countries such as Vietnam and Iraq where we engaged in war. With the required checks, we can extend the same generous welcome to families now under serious threat in Afghanistan, especially those who worked alongside our troops.”

Jo Karaolis AM, Chair, Community Action, Our Lady of Dolours Catholic Parish, Chatswood said:

“It is shaming to be an Australian when we abandon our friends and allies in Afghanistan and offer a measly 3000 places when in the past after one of our misbegotten wars we have taken no fewer than 12,000 and in the case of Vietnam up to 200,000 refugees. I don’t know what has happened to us. Australians used to have such a strong sense of fair play.”

Dr. Margaret Palmer, Sacred Heart Social and Ecological Justice Group, Bayside Catholic Mission, Sandringam said:

“Australia must not forget Afghanistan. Let us follow the example of Canada and commit to additional places for Afghan refugees in Australia. For those already here on either temporary or permanent protection visas, we need to facilitate their applications for family reunion urgently.”

Dr. Denise Desmarchelier IBVM, Loreto Sisters Australia said:

“Is it too much to hope that the Australian Government would offer an additional 20,000 places to Afghan asylum seekers to mirror Australia’s 20 years of armed presence in Afghanistan?!”

Zaki Haidari, member of Diaspora Advocacy Network of Afghanistan (DANA), Leadership Coordinator, JRS Australia, and RACS Australia Ambassador said:

“As a refugee from Afghanistan living here for the past 9 years on a temporary visa, it is heartening to see the strong sense of solidarity from Catholic and other faith communities in Australia in this time of need for our community. We note in particular the strong call for refugees from Afghanistan already in Australia to have access to permanence and family reunion pathways, and for Australia to introduce an additional intake of 20,000 resettlement places for refugees from Afghanistan. We also note the ongoing offers of practical support from Church agencies on the ground.”

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