



Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

Ref No: MC21-036563

Fr Peter Smith
Justice and Peace Office, Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney,
Level 12, Polding Centre, 133-141 Liverpool Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Fr Smith

Thank you for your correspondence to the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Karen Andrews MP, concerning the rapidly deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and the safety of Afghan nationals/Australia's protection policy. The Minister appreciates the time you have taken to bring this matter to her attention and has asked that I reply on her behalf.

The Australian Government as a whole is focused on the rapidly deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan.

The Government announced on 18 August 2021 that, owing to the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, the cases of Afghan citizens will be prioritised for processing within Australia's offshore Humanitarian Program. An initial 3,000 humanitarian places will be allocated to Afghan nationals within Australia's annual program, which currently provides 13,750 places annually. The Government anticipates this initial allocation will increase further over the course of 2021-22. As the Prime Minister, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, stated on 19 August 2021, the Government will monitor grants within the current ceiling and will consider an increase to the Humanitarian Program above 13,750 if required.

Within the program allocation for Afghan citizens, priority will be given to persecuted minorities, women, children and those who have links to Australia. Afghanistan citizens who meet the requirements for a humanitarian visa and wish to seek Australia's assistance are strongly encouraged to make an application. The Government will continue to work with Afghan community leaders in Australia to identify needs and requirements of their countrymen and women. The Government will also continue to utilise our close working relationship with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to identify those Afghans most in need.

It is Government policy that no Afghan visa holder currently in Australia will be asked to return to Afghanistan while the security situation there remains dire. Afghan citizens currently in Australia on temporary visas will be supported by the Government. Individuals who wish to seek Australia's protection, and are found to engage Australia's non-refoulement obligations, may be granted protection provided they are also able to fulfil the relevant visa criteria, which includes the health, character and security requirements that apply to all Australian visas. However, each case is assessed on its individual merits, with the safety in particular countries being a factor of consideration. Afghan citizens who have applied for a protection visa in Australia are a processing priority.

The Government recognises the importance of family reunion for refugees and humanitarian entrants. A key aim of Australia's Humanitarian Program is to reunite refugees and people who are in refugee-like situations overseas with their family in Australia through 'split family' provisions and the Special Humanitarian Program. Immediate family of people who have been resettled under the Humanitarian Program are given highest priority in processing.

Temporary protection visa holders are not eligible to propose relatives through the Humanitarian Program. This is in line with the Government's Operation Sovereign Borders policy that no one who comes to Australia illegally by boat will settle here – established to safeguard vulnerable people from exploitation by people smugglers, prevent the loss of life at sea, and ensure the integrity of Australia's borders. These settings have successfully stemmed the flow of people smuggling ventures to Australia and saved countless lives at sea.

The Government values your commitment to supporting durable migration outcomes for vulnerable persons in need and advocating the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. I thank the Justice and Peace Office of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney for its long-standing engagement with, and support in delivering Australia's Humanitarian Program.

Thank you for bringing your concerns to the Minister's attention.

Yours sincerely



Director
Humanitarian Contracts Management Section
Humanitarian and Child Wellbeing Policy and Capability Branch
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