



6 September 2021

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: The unfolding situation in Afghanistan

Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) is the peak body for Catholic Leaders of Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life in Australia. We add our voices to the many individuals and organisations around Australia who are calling on our government to stand in solidarity with the peoples of Afghanistan, who face grave danger in the face of the recent Taliban take-over of the country.

Australia, having fought and had a presence in Afghanistan for the past 20 years, has a level of responsibility for the danger that Afghans now face. Afghans at great risk include those who worked for or assisted the Australian Government, and a wide array of Australian organisations in Afghanistan. This aside, we have a responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of all Afghan peoples at risk, based on our common humanity. This particularly includes the human rights defenders, women and girls who may be subjected to great suffering through a denial of civil rights, forced marriages and sexual violence under the Taliban regime or other extremist groups.

We therefore ask the government to commit to an intake of 20,000 Afghan refugees, in addition to the quota of our current Humanitarian and Refugee Program. We understand that it is difficult to move people out of the country while the situation in Afghanistan is unstable and the global COVID-19 Pandemic continues to wage on. However, we urge you to make a long-term commitment to a quota of 20,000 Afghani refugees, not only from Afghanistan but from the other countries to which they have fled, and to move people to safety as expediently as is possible.

Whilst we are grateful that the government will not return Afghani visa holders who are in Australia while it is unsafe to do so, we ask that you grant permanent protection visas to those who have sought asylum in Australia and to those who are on temporary visas, which includes a large number of Hazara men. The Hazara community has been continually targeted by the Taliban and other extremist groups for many years, and the situation in Afghanistan is likely to remain unsafe for them for years to come.

Finally, we ask that you expedite the processing of family reunion visas which have previously been lodged by Afghans in Australia and provide economic support for Afghans who would now like to make an application. The state of family and partner reunion visas in Australia is currently before a senate inquiry, and the situation now unfolding in Afghanistan highlights the problems with our system. Families can often only afford for one person to leave first, and a large community of men, particularly Hazaras, who have previously

fled Afghanistan for Australia, were recognised as refugees and granted protection, have since faced ongoing family separation. Obtaining a family reunion visa via the Refugee and Humanitarian Visa Program is costly, can take many years to be processed due to a small quota, and is not available for the family of those who have arrived by boat, seeking asylum in Australia. This has prevented wives and children from joining these men and creates unnecessary hurdles when individuals in Afghanistan face imminent suffering.

The situation in Afghanistan should encourage a sincere review of this system, not only as signatories of the *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, or as key players in the war in Afghanistan, but also as a nation concerned with global solidarity and the wellbeing of people.

Australia must make a greater commitment to assist those Afghanis whose lives are now at risk. We urge the government to hear the cries of our brother and sisters with open hearts and take decisive action.

Yours faithfully,



Peter Carroll FMS
President



Anne Walker
National Executive Director