

MEDIA RELEASE – AUGUST 26, 2021

Federal Government must act immediately to protect Afghan refugees: Jesuit Social Services

The Federal Government must show compassion and true leadership to support people impacted by the unfolding crisis in Afghanistan, including an immediate increase of Australia's intake of humanitarian refugees, says Jesuit Social Services.

"Like millions of Australians, we are deeply distressed at the scenes emerging from Afghanistan of people trying to flee the Taliban and what the Taliban's control means for ethnic and religious minorities, for women and children and others at risk of persecution," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"Afghanistan was already experiencing multiple crises due to the impact of COVID-19 and climate change. This current situation is an international emergency and it is clear many lives are at risk."

Jesuit Social Services and the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA), which Jesuit Social Services co-convenes with Jesuit Refugee Service (Australia), support calls for the Federal Government to provide at least 20,000 humanitarian places for people fleeing Afghanistan.

"We welcome reports that the Government is considering prioritising refugees from Afghanistan in its 2021-22 humanitarian intake – however action is needed now.

"Australia has an opportunity to provide not only immediate safety, but also hope for a positive future, to thousands of men, women and children caught in this crisis."

Jesuit Social Services also calls for support for the more than 5,100 Afghans currently living in Australia – many of whom have been assessed as refugees but cannot return to Afghanistan.

"These people have made significant commitments to Australia for years, through working, studying and volunteering in our communities. With the fear of persecution and other atrocities ever-present in Afghanistan, these people deserve the opportunity to permanently rebuild their lives here.

"The guarantee of permanent visas for Afghans already in the country under temporary protection or those who are having their status currently processed is the right thing to do. It's the kind thing to do. It would provide people with surety and understanding that Australia supports them and it would be a recognition of the valuable roles they play in the community," says Ms Edwards.

The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum – which represents leaders across the Catholic Church, health, education, refugee and social services - continues to offer its collective assistance to help settle displaced people from Afghanistan.

"We know the support in the community is there to help vulnerable and displaced people through this crisis. The time is now for our Federal Government to step up and demonstrate true care, compassion and leadership to people in their time of great need."

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