



Refugee Council of Australia

27 January 2022

Mr Dave Sharma MP
Member for Wentworth
Suite 302, Level 3, 179-191 New South Head Road
Edgecliff NSW 2027

The need for a genuinely additional intake from Afghanistan

Dear Mr Sharma,

Earlier this week, I received an email from you in which you made the following claim:

The government has announced we will be providing at least 15,000 additional places for Afghan nationals to resettle in Australia under our humanitarian program. This is on top of the more than 4,300 Afghans who have been brought to Australia since evacuations began from Kabul in August.

Unfortunately, this information is incorrect. As I am involved in detailed discussions with the Government on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, I thought I should write to you to explain what is happening and to seek your active support for a genuinely additional allocation of places for refugees from Afghanistan.

The 15,000 places are part of already existing visa allocations

The 15,000 places for Afghan nationals over four years announced by Immigration Minister Alex Hawke are not additional but are part of the Humanitarian and Migration program places announced by the Government in the 2021 Budget. The 10,000 refugee and humanitarian visas issued to Afghan nationals over four years will be taken from 55,000 refugee and humanitarian visas to be issued over the four years of the forward estimates (13,750 places p.a.). The 5000 family migration visas will be part of the 640,000 migration program visas (160,000 places p.a.) to be issued in the four years to June 2025.

The 4300 Afghan evacuees are not additional to these 15,000 visas

In line with Immigration Minister Alex Hawke's announcement last Friday, the 4300 Afghans evacuated since August will be included in this allocation of 15,000 places, not part of a separate allocation. I understand your confusion about the possibility of the places for the evacuees being part of an additional allocation of visas. This was the expectation created by the members of the Government in discussions with Afghan community leaders in meetings which I attended in August and September, reinforced by some media reports at the time. However, it has been deeply disappointing to see that the visas being issued to evacuees are now part of the general and limited pool of visas allocated to Afghan nationals.

The Government has substantially cut the Refugee program, not added to it

Rather than adding refugee places in light of the growing displacement crises in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ethiopia and elsewhere, the Government has done the opposite. Since the 2019 election, 28,382 places have been cut from the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. In the 2019 Budget (handed down a month prior to the election), the Government announced an annual Refugee and Humanitarian Program of 18,750 places, budgeting for 75,000 places over the four years of the forward estimates (July 2019 to June 2023). However, those 75,000 places over four years have now diminished to fewer than 47,000. The 2019-20 program fell 5,579 places short when the COVID-19 pandemic called a halt to the issuing of new visas in March 2020. In its 2020-21 Budget, the Government cut the Refugee and Humanitarian Program by 5,000 places per year, with then Acting Immigration Minister Alan Tudge suggesting this cut could be reviewed in future years. The reduced 2020-21 Refugee and Humanitarian Program fell short by 7,803 places due to the COVID-19 pandemic while the Migration Program exceeded its target of

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for refugees, people seeking asylum
and the organisations and individuals
who support them • Founded 1981

160,000 places. None of the refugee places left unfilled have been retained for future years, despite funds for those places being set aside in the 2019 and 2020 Budgets.

Refugee and Humanitarian Program places 2019-2023

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Total
Places in 2019-20 Budget (forward estimates)	18,750	18,750	18,750	18,750	75,000
Places removed in 2020-21 Budget	-	-5,000	-5,000	-5,000	-15,000
Visas not issued due to COVID pandemic	-5,579	-7,803	-	-	-13,382
Revised total	13,171	5,749	13,750	13,750	46,618
<i>Difference</i>	<i>-5,579</i>	<i>-12,803</i>	<i>-5,000</i>	<i>-5,000</i>	-28,382

The crisis response compares poorly with the record of previous Coalition Governments

The Morrison Government's response to the crisis in Afghanistan is in stark contrast to the Menzies Government's response to the post-war refugee crisis in Europe (131,709 humanitarian arrivals in four years to 1952-53), the Fraser Government's response to the needs of refugees from Indochina (81,470 humanitarian visas in four years to 1982-83) and the Abbott Government's response to mass displacement from Syria and Iraq. In September 2015, the Abbott Government committed itself to a special additional allocation of 12,000 visas for refugees from Syria and Iraq on top of the annual humanitarian program of 13,750 places. This resulted in 39,146 Syrians and Iraqis being resettled over the four years from July 2015. The allocation of 21,968 refugee and humanitarian visas in 2016-17 was higher than any year since 1980-81 when the Fraser Government issued 22,545 refugee visas. In 2017-18, the Turnbull Government increased the annual Refugee and Humanitarian Program to 16,250 places and then to 18,750 the following year.

Abbott and Turnbull Governments' response to crisis in Syria and Iraq

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	4 year total
Refugees from Syria	4,261	6,261	3,227	1,836	15,585
Refugees from Iraq	4,358	7,478	4,630	7,095	23,561
Total Syrian and Iraqi intake	8,619	13,739	7,857	8,931	39,146
Other offshore humanitarian visas	6,933	6,518	6,968	8,181	28,600
Onshore protection visas	2,003	1,711	1,425	1,650	6,789
Total humanitarian visas issued	17,555	21,968	16,250	18,762	74,535
Annual program target	13,750	13,750	16,250	18,750	62,500
Additional intake	3,800	8,200	-	-	12,000
Revised total target	17,550	21,950	16,250	18,750	74,500

The need to act on the community's wish for a larger intake from Afghanistan

Members of Australia's Afghan diaspora, church leaders, veterans' groups and hundreds of thousands of Australians – including many people in your electorate – have actively supported calls for an additional allocation of at least 20,000 visas for refugees from Afghanistan. This additional intake is absolutely vital: to help save lives of people at grave risk in Afghanistan (including many relatives and close associates of Australian citizens), to provide viable options for displaced people in the region with nowhere to go, to keep faith with Australia's 20-year commitment to peace-building and human rights in Afghanistan and to contribute substantially to a more effective international response through refugee resettlement, humanitarian aid and diplomacy.

We really need your assistance, as a Government MP skilled in international affairs, to lobby for an appropriate, effective and generous response to the shocking events which are happening now in Afghanistan. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with you.

Yours faithfully



Paul Power
Chief Executive Officer