



PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET

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Dear Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers,

On behalf of the Catholic Secondary Principals Australia (CaSPA), I would like to promote the richness that refugee families and their children bring to our Australian schools and community. This has been evident for many decades now, especially since World War Two. The multicultural and inclusive societal values of Australia are to be highly commended and our hope, as Catholic Secondary School Principals, is that we can continue to build on this wonderful legacy through the inclusivity of our schools. It is at the heart of our culture.

Refugee families and their children are a true gift to our school communities through the cultural understandings and friendships that develop amongst the students. This mutual respect that emerges can only benefit a more peaceful world in the future. The pandemic has certainly highlighted the need for global cooperation and problem solving, the need to be open to change, and to be compassionate in our relationships across the world. In the spirit of caring for our fellow human beings in addition to upholding the Australian multicultural and inclusive society CaSPA supports the recent call for action from Fr Frank Brennan.

“Afghans know that they can no longer put their faith in the USA. They cannot put their faith in Australia. They cannot put their faith in the United Nations. They are on their own. Only if their homeland once again becomes a breeding ground for the export of terrorism will the international community come knocking. Provided Taliban terrorism is confined to the Afghan population inside Afghanistan, the people of Afghanistan will be left alone, abandoned. Those who co-operated with the international assistance mission these past 20 years will be those most at risk.

While countries like Canada have pledged to take in 20,000 refugees, we have so far pledged only 3,000, and these are allocated places coming from the already existing annual quota of 13,750 which is unfilled because of COVID.

Here in Australia, there are 5,000 Afghans living on temporary protection visas who have no right to sponsor their family members to come to Australia. This past week, our government has resisted calls to give these people who can never return home and whose relatives now face the wrath of the Taliban permanent protection visas and a right of family reunion. Archbishop Mark Coleridge, the

President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, has joined the call of many community leaders that our Government match Canada and offer permanent resettlement to 20,000 Afghan refugees now. Why not at the very least offer permanent resettlement to the 5,000 already here and then choose another 15,000 to come from Afghanistan?

There are lots of people, including our veterans, who know these Afghans want us to do more, we can do much better than 3,000.”

“I think, given our commitment to Afghanistan, the Australian public will want much more.”

As Fr Brennan has said – Australia’s response needed to be broken down into **three issues – the evacuation of people in Afghanistan, the resettlement of Afghanistan refugees and what to do with the approximately 5000 Afghans already living in Australia on temporary protection visas.**

“Those visas were resurrected by Mr Morrison in 2014 when he was immigration minister and it was on the basis that these people came by boat and really we wanted them to go back to where they came from.”

“Everyone knows they cannot possibly go back to Afghanistan. Some of them have been living here for 10 years.”

We have members of Afghan families as students in our schools, and it is heart rendering to see the suffering and angst of the current situation.

In conclusion, as Australian citizens and leaders of school communities with grieving Afghan families, we ask you to reconsider and

(1) grant permanent residency to the 5000 Afghans on Temporary Protection Visas already living in Australia, and

(2) allow them to sponsor their families

(3) increase the number to 20,000 Afghan Refugees who can come safely to Australia.

We need to play our part in this devastating humanitarian crisis.

Kind Regards

Ann Rebgetz

CaSPA President



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