

The Hon. Alex Hawke MP
Minister for Immigration, Citizenship,
Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs
Member for Mitchell
PO Box 1173
Castle Hill, NSW, 1765

Monday 23 August 2021

Dear Minister Hawke,

As leaders of churches throughout your electorate, we wanted to take the time to write to you to share our deep concern at the situation in Afghanistan.

We know that yourself and Prime Minister Morrison are caring people, and are no doubt personally moved by the plight of the Afghans, in particular the many women and girls who now fear for their lives and their futures.

As Christians, we believe dignity is bestowed by God and that when we say people are made in the 'image of God', we mean that they already have something from God.

We do not give people dignity, as they inherently have it as a gift from God. But although we do not bestow dignity, we know that humans can certainly erode that dignity.

That is what we fear and know the Taliban are doing, when they persecute those who do not share their beliefs, and oppress the women and minorities they live alongside.

So, when it is within our national power to protect dignity - whether by increasing our humanitarian intake or recognising the fears of those Afghans already here who have fled and are still waiting to be given secure residency - we are prompted by our Christian faith to speak out.

We do this in the belief that when we are approaching a desperate human, we are indeed approaching someone who matters to God - and in this spirit we are writing to you about the crisis facing the people of Afghanistan.

In writing to you, we are also joining our voice and support to the '*7 practical steps*' the Australian Government can take, that has been put forward by the Refugee Council of Australia, and co-signed by more than **300 organisations, businesses, and community groups**.

Seven urgent and practical steps Australia can take to provide safety and leadership on the situation in Afghanistan

1. Continue to do everything possible to **evacuate people who are at grave risk** within Afghanistan, including those who have worked for or assisted the Australian Government and Australian organisations (including the embassy, armed forces, NGOs and media), human rights defenders and women and girls whose lives and security are under great threat.
2. **Urge governments in the region to keep borders open** for people trying to flee persecution in Afghanistan, including and particularly Pakistan and Iran.
3. Offer **additional refugee resettlement places** for Afghan refugees immediately, as the Australian Government did in 2015 with 12,000 additional places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Canada has already announced its commitment of 20,000 additional places for Afghan refugees. Australia could match this offer and urge other resettlement states to do the same, sending a strong and positive message to states receiving Afghan refugees that the world is ready to share responsibility in the protection of lives at risk.

4. As many people are now at risk from hunger and lack of shelter due to their forced displacement, immediately **increase Australian aid to the region** to support programs to assist people who have been displaced across borders and, wherever possible, support organisations still offering assistance within Afghanistan.
5. We welcome the extension of temporary visas of all Afghan citizens in Australia that you announced on 17 August. A vital next step of this is to ensure that people whose asylum claims have been previously rejected be **supported to submit new claims in the light of the changed circumstances in Afghanistan**.
6. **Extend permanent protection to 4300 Afghans on temporary protection visas**, recognising that members of this group are unlikely to be able to return in safety for many years to come and need the assurance that they can continue to live in Australia without the constant fear of forced return.
7. Assist Afghan Australians, including people with temporary and permanent protection visas, with **urgent family reunion applications** for relatives who are at particular risk, as members of minorities targeted by the Taliban or people likely to be targeted because of their connections to western nations. This should include giving priority to finalising family reunion applications which have previously been lodged but are waiting on a decision from the Department of Home Affairs.

We urge you to address these critical priorities.

We are grateful for your service to our community and continue to uphold you and your family in prayer.

Signed by the below Church leaders working and serving in the Mitchell Electorate:

Catholic Church

1. *Most Rev Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv STL DD, Bishop of Parramatta*
2. *Father Wim Hoekstra, Parish Priest, St Michael's Parish Baulkham Hills*
3. *Dr Sebastian Salaske-Lentern, Peace, Justice & Ecology Coordinator, Diocese of Parramatta*
4. *Sue Martin, Social Justice Coordinator St Madeleine's Parish Kenthurst and Northern Deanery Delegate Diocese of Parramatta*
5. *Monica Guy, Northern Deanery Delegate Diocese of Parramatta, St. Bernadette's Parish Castle Hill*
6. *Gregory Guy, Northern Deanery Delegate Diocese of Parramatta, St. Bernadette's Parish Castle Hill*
7. *Chris Worthington, Northern Deanery Delegate Parramatta Diocese, St Michael's Parish Baulkham Hills*
8. *Carey Moylan, Formation Coordinator St Madeleine's Parish Kenthurst and Northern Deanery Delegate Parramatta Diocese*
9. *Sr Ann Love, Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart and Parishioner of St Michael's Parish Baulkham Hills*
10. *Father Luis Fernando Montano Rodriguez, Parish Priest, St Bernadette's Parish Castle Hill*
11. *Lorraine Murphy ocds, Northern Deanery Delegate Diocese of Parramatta, Pastoral Council Member Christ the King Parish North Rocks*
12. *Michael Want, SVdP Richmond Conference Member, Nepean Social Justice Committee Representative Richmond Conference, St Monica's (Richmond) Walking with Refugees group in Conjunction with SVdP*

Anglican Church

13. *Rt Rev Chris Edwards, Bishop of the Northern Region, Anglican Diocese of Sydney*
14. *Rev John Gray, Senior Minister, St Paul's Anglican Church, Castle Hill*
15. *Rev Graeme Howells, Senior Minister, Rouse Hill Anglican Church*
16. *Rev Ron Irving, Senior Minister, St Matthews Anglican Church, West Pennant Hills*
17. *Rev. Richard Heape, Acting Senior Minister, Kellyville Anglican Church*
18. *Rev John Lavender, Assistant Director, Evangelism & New Churches (ENC) Anglican Diocese of Sydney*
19. *Rev André Grassy, Minister, Holy Trinity Anglican Church Baulkham Hills*

20. Rev Pete Stedman, Senior Minister, Norwest Anglican Church
21. Rev Geoff Deutscher, Senior Chaplain St James' Chapel Anglicare Castle Hill

Uniting Church

22. Rev Niall Reid, Minister of Northmead and Parramatta Centenary Uniting Church (Ex-Moderator Synod of NSW and the ACT)
23. Hee Won Chang, Candidate for Ordained Ministry in UCA, Wesley Castle Hill Uniting Church
24. Rev John Barr, Chairperson Pastoral Relations Committee Presbytery of Parramatta-Nepean, Uniting Church in Australia
25. Rev. Meredith Williams, Minister of Wentworthville Uniting Church
26. Rev. Carmel Ieraci, Minister at Wesley Castle Hill Uniting Church
27. Rev. Geoff Stevenson, Chairperson-Mission Strategist of Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery (regional Uniting Church body across Western Sydney)

Baptist Church

28. Rev. Ric Sindel, Co-Lead Pastor, Rouse Hill Baptist Church
29. Rev. Ian Deane, Senior Pastor, Castle Hill Baptist Church
30. Pastor William Aitken, Youth Pastor, Castle Hill Baptist Church
31. Pastor Mitchell Levingston, Senior Pastor, The Centre Dural
32. Pastor Brian Codrington, Community Outreach & Missions Pastor, The Centre, Dural
33. Ps David O'Connor, Lead Pastor, NewHope Baptist Church
34. Rev Sid Grindley, Interim pastor Carlingford Baptist Church
35. Rev Stephen Bates, Co-Lead Pastor, Parramatta Baptist Church
36. Glen Hadfield, Parramatta Baptist Church
37. Rev Anthony Richardson Baulkham Hills Baptist Church
38. Elder Christal Richardson Baulkham Hills Baptist Church
39. John Macindoe, Lead Pastor, Pennant Hills Baptist Church
40. Pastor Nathan Vella, Associate Pastor, Castle Hill Baptist Church
41. Pastor Marcus Reid, Lead Pastor, Riverstone Baptist Church
42. Pastor Ben Dixon, Riverstone Baptist Church

Pentecostal Church

43. Pastor Aaron Williamson, Senior Pastor, Dayspring Church, Castle Hill
44. Ps Donna Crouch, Executive Pastor, Hillsong Church Australia
45. Ps Sam DiMauro, Campus Pastor, Hillsong Church Baulkham Hills

Independent Baptist Church

46. Jonathan Cannon, Pastor, Redeemer Baptist Church
47. Russell Bailey, Pastoral Ministry, Redeemer Baptist Church
48. Phillip Bailey, Pastoral Ministry, Redeemer Baptist Church
49. Ian Cannon, Pastoral Ministry, Redeemer Baptist Church
50. Andrew Poyitt, Pastoral Ministry, Redeemer Baptist Church

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