

OPEN LETTER TO IMMIGRATION MINISTER ALEX HAWKE:

IMPROVE REFUGEE COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP IN AUSTRALIA

We are writing on behalf of communities across Australia, including our Afghan communities, that want to see our Government do more to help those facing terrible human rights abuses at the hands of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Australia is home to many people who have fled conflict, violence and persecution over the years and we should be proud as a nation of our track record in resettling refugees. But our commitment to those fleeing the Taliban in Afghanistan does not match the severity of the current situation.

More than 100,000 people, many of them in hiding as they fear for their lives, have reached out to the Australian Government asking for help, and yet we have committed to take just 3,000. These 3,000 will come from our existing yearly humanitarian quota of 13,750 places - down from 18,000 a year ago - and they are not in addition to that quota.

We have a moral obligation to protect the people of Afghanistan, and all over Australia communities say they want to welcome and help people rebuild their lives. **We can do more!**

One way to do this is to announce and implement immediate improvements to the Community Support Program (CSP) that allows communities across Australia to sponsor refugees. CSP has been in place for four years now and for those who have been successful in sponsoring refugees the rewards to both the community and the person sponsored is enormous.

However, the program needs improvement. It's too expensive, too bureaucratic and needs to be separated from the humanitarian intake. Immigration Minister, Alex Hawke, has had recommendations from his Department on how to improve the program on his desk for more than half a year. He has said he is committed to making those improvements and we welcome this commitment. As another major humanitarian crisis is unfolding, we need immediate action.

Allowing communities to sponsor refugees and help them rebuild their lives is a durable solution that benefits both refugees and communities. It will also benefit the economy as we emerge from the pandemic with a major skills shortage. By welcoming more refugees, we not only meet our international obligations to alleviate a global crisis, we also gain from the cultures, knowledge and skills that refugees bring to our shores from all corners of the world.

We commend Minister Hawke and the department for conducting the much-needed review into the Community Support Program. But we urge you to announce as a matter of great urgency the much-needed reforms so we can save thousands of lives.

Minister Hawke, our communities want to help refugees build new lives away from danger. Please announce these improvements to the CSP and let us help more people find refuge in Australia.

Mario Santos - Chair of the Board, AIA

Brad Chilcott - CEO White Ribbon Australia

Paul Power - CEO of RCOA

Tim Costello - Executive Director of Micah Australia

Rev. Simon Hansford - Moderator, Uniting Church of Australia (Synod of NSW and ACT)

Steve Staikos - Mayor, City of Kingston

Dr Judy Tang - Commissioner Victorian Multicultural Commission

Josh Fergeus - Cr. City of Monash

Dr. Ruth McNair - Chairperson Pride Foundation Australia

Maria Bun - Chairperson Australian Impact Investments

Zara Hydarbig - Goulburn Valley Afghanistani Association (Women's leader)

Rose Vincent - CEO Neighbourhood Collective, Australia

Michael Lam - Managing Director, Cornerstone Digital

Andy Vincent - Cornerstone Community

Uncle Leonard Clarke - Framlingham Mission

Eddie Micallef - Chair of Ethnic Community Council of Victoria

Fr. Arnold Heredia - Founder of LinCon

Mohammad Al-Khafaji - CEO of FECCA

Matt Kunkel - CEO of the Migrant Workers Centre

Carly Moore - Mayor, City of Hume

Shabnam Safa - Chair of the National Refugee Advisory and Advocacy Group

Mark Hallam - Sanctuary, Coffs Harbour

Najeeba Wazefadost - ED, Asia Pacific Network of Refugees Coordinating Committee - Diaspora Afghan Network Australia

Andy Griffiths - Children's book author

Denise Scott - Comedian, actress, radio presenter

Terri Psiakis - Comedian, writer

Kate Mulvany - Actress, playwright

Danny McGinlay - Comedian, writer

Adam Zwar - Actor, writer

Michelle Brasier - Actress, writer

Harley Breen - Comedian, TV Presenter

Fayssal Bazi - Actor

Mark Grentell - Director, writer

Fiona Harris - Writer, actress

Mike Mcleish - Writer, actor, cabaret artist

Tony Wilson - Writer, podcaster, MC

Gabrielle de Vietri - Mayor, Yarra City Council

Susan Provan - Director, Melbourne International Comedy Festival

Judith Lucy - Comedian, actress

Shankar Kasynathan - Commissioner, Victorian Multicultural Commission

Damian Callinan - Comedian, writer, actor

Craig Foster - Human rights advocate

Tom Gleeson - Comedian, TV presenter, Gold Logie winner

Vivienne Nguyen AM - Chairperson Victorian Multicultural Commission

Dallas Tout - Deputy Mayor, City of Wagga Wagga



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FOR A FAIR COMMUNITY
SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

