

Hon Nanaia Mahuta – Minister of Foreign Affairs

URGENT

16 September 2021

Tēnā koe Minister Mahuta,

More action needed from Government on Afghanistan

We write to you as a collective voice of organisations and individuals in Aotearoa advocating for the rights and protection of Afghan nationals. We welcome the statements New Zealand has made at the United Nations and the efforts taken to evacuate people. However, more action is needed. As a society that values compassion and kindness, we need to ensure that our response meets the scale of the crisis.

The needs in Afghanistan are growing by the hour. Right now, there are compounding crises taking place, including hunger, displacement, conflict, and Covid-19. Basic services are collapsing, and aid is running out. There are ongoing reports of gross human rights abuses. Women, children, and those who have worked to promote human rights, democracy and education, are amongst the people most at risk. Urgent action is needed to prevent an even greater humanitarian disaster and to ensure that every individual has their rights and dignity upheld.

We are concerned that, alongside causing anguish, delays in Government action and decisions increase risk of harm to those who need aid from, or safe resettlement to, New Zealand. We collectively call on the Government to:

1) Urgently increase humanitarian and development support. The Government must:

- At least double aid to Afghanistan to support local organisations; and
- Increase humanitarian aid to surrounding countries that are taking in refugees.

2) Establish and ensure safe pathways of relocation and resettlement for Afghan nationals to New Zealand. Over 21,000 people across Aotearoa have come together to call on the Government to take action to help people fleeing Afghanistan. We implore the Government to:

- Evacuate the remaining people in Afghanistan left from the initial mission, and include at risk individuals connected to New Zealand in these efforts;
- Welcome at least 1500 Afghan refugees in this year's (July 1 2021 - June 30 2022) current refugee intake, over and above the current Refugee Resettlement Quota commitments, for those at most immediate risk or with connections to Aotearoa;
- Expedite visa processing of both the Refugee Family Support Category (RFSC) Visas and Critical Purpose Visitor Visas;

- Create or re-establish additional humanitarian pathways to support the reunification of families of Afghan New Zealanders not already lodged with RFSC; and
- Utilise and expand the community sponsorship scheme to create more viable routes for people to come to New Zealand.

3) Establish formal mechanisms to liaise and consult meaningfully with the Afghan community here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

It is essential that the Government increases its efforts to listen to, support and provide relief to New Zealand's Afghan community. We stand with the 6000 Afghan New Zealanders, many who worry for the safety of their families and neighbours.

4) Lead international efforts. The Government must:

- Take concrete measures to enact the Prime Minister's commitment "to reassure Afghan women and girls that we will closely follow the developments in their country, listen to their voices, and continue to support their rights and opportunities."¹
- Drive agreement in the international community to establish a robust investigative mechanism – with a mandate to document, collect and preserve evidence of ongoing crimes and human rights violations across Afghanistan.

Your Government is perceived to be one that practices kindness and is committed to collective action for the betterment of humanity, yet other countries have taken significant steps to address the need for international support and assistance, while New Zealand has not. Canada has announced the resettlement of up to 20,000 vulnerable Afghan nationals and the UK has committed to accepting 20,000 Afghan refugees. The US is expected to admit 50,000 Afghan refugees and has set aside a US\$500 million fund which will help meet urgent migration needs. European countries and our Australian neighbours are also taking steps. The OCHA is seeking US\$606 million to assist nearly 11 million people during the four remaining months this year. What is required is an international collaborative effort.

The New Zealand Government spent 20 years and hundreds of millions of dollars in military expenditure as part of the international intervention in Afghanistan. We have an obligation to the people of Afghanistan to stand by them now. Be it the provision of aid, or safe pathways to New Zealand, the time for response is immediate and the cost of inaction is high.

We now call on you to do more.

We look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Yours Sincerely,

¹ Joint call by women leaders on the rights of girls and women in Afghanistan' available at: <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/media-and-resources/joint-call-women-leaders-rights-girls-women-afghanistan/>

Organisations

1. ActionStation
2. Afghan Cultural Association of Wellington
3. Amnesty International Aotearoa New Zealand
4. Anglican Missions
5. Aotearoa Resettled Community Coalition (ARCC)
6. Asylum Support Seekers Trust (ASST)
7. Belong Aotearoa
8. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand
9. ChildFund
10. Christian Churches New Zealand
11. Christian World Service
12. Community Law Centres O Aotearoa
13. Congregational Union of New Zealand
14. Council for International Development
15. ECPAT NZ
16. Fairtrade ANZ
17. Hagar
18. Hazara Afghan Youth Association (HAYA)
19. Hazara Association of New Zealand
20. Methodist Church of New Zealand
21. NZBMS (New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society)
22. Oxfam Aotearoa
23. ReliefAid
24. Save the Children
25. Tearfund
26. The Gender Justice Collective
27. The National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago

28. Tutapona International
29. UN Women Aotearoa New Zealand
30. United Afghan Association of Canterbury
31. Vineyard Churches Aotearoa New Zealand
32. Wesleyan Methodist Church of New Zealand
33. World Vision New Zealand

Individuals

34. Alberto Costi, Professor, Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington
35. Amin Vakili, Civil Society Activist and members of the Afghan Cultural Association of Wellington
36. Archbishop Don Tamihere. Te Pihopa o Aotearoa
37. Archbishop Philip Richardson, Bishop of Waikato and Taranaki
38. Associate Professor Bethan Greener PhD, Massey
39. Blake Dawson, Barrister (Brandon Street Chambers)
40. Bridget Crichton (Fa'amatua'inu), Lecturer, AUT School of Law
41. Carol Peters, PhD, QSM, Whangarei District Councillor
42. Dr Arif Ali, Hazara Association of New Zealand and Afghan Cultural Association of Wellington.
43. Dr Charles Mpofu; Senior Lecturer
44. Dr Marnie Lloyd, Lecturer, Victoria University of Wellington
45. Dr Natalia Szablewska, International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Expert, Auckland University of Technology
46. Dr. Heather Devere, Director of Practice, Te Ao o Rongomaraeroa/National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
47. Eleanor Holroyd Co-Director AUT Centre of Migrant and Refugee Research
48. James Meager, Public Law Solicitor
49. Jane Verbitsky Associate Professor

50. Javid Nazari, President of Afghan Cultural Association of Wellington
51. John McBride, Barrister
52. Marianne Elliott, Human Rights Advocate
53. Mohammad Raqiz Nabizadah, member of Afghan Cultural Association of Wellington
54. Monique van Alphen Fyfe, Barrister | Rōia Tūtahi (Stout Street Chambers)
55. Natalie Baird, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law | Te Kaupeka Ture, University of Canterbury | Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
56. Nicola Muir, Author
57. Paul Rishworth QC
58. Right Reverend Fakafo Kaio - Moderator Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa NZ
59. Shakerah Zakeri, member of the Afghan community
60. Sulaiman Sarwary, PHD student and member of Aotearoa's Afghan Community
61. Wendy Aldred, Barrister (Stout Street Chambers)