

ACFID Supplementary Submission on Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) appreciates the opportunity to make a supplementary submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee as part of its ongoing inquiry into Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan. We would be pleased to provide further information on any of the matters raised in this submission.

Executive Summary

When ACFID and its members gave oral evidence to the Committee on 8 November 2021 we warned that without urgent action, Afghanistan would become the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe. Due to insufficient action by the international community, this is the reality we now face.

Due to the compounding effects of economic collapse, drought and a brutal winter, the UN expects that 24.4 million people will need humanitarian assistance this year, and one million children may die due to malnutrition.ⁱ The United Nations Development Programme warns that without urgent action to scale up humanitarian and development support, 97% of the country will be pushed into extreme poverty by the end of June.ⁱⁱ This level of near-universal poverty in a country has not been seen in recent history.ⁱⁱⁱ

For women, the discrimination they have experienced under the Taliban will be nothing compared to the effects of the collapsing economy which may set their access to healthcare and education back decades. Afghan women's rights advocate Jamila Afghani said it best: "We are not supporting Afghan women by starving them."^{iv}

Given the scale of this unfolding humanitarian disaster and the Australian Government's repeated commitments to stand by the people of Afghanistan, Australia must urgently increase its assistance. Minister Payne's announcement of \$65 million in humanitarian funding this financial year and \$35 million through to 2024 was a welcome start, but Australia can and must do more.

Australia must also support programs that meet the basic human needs of people in Afghanistan, including agricultural activities which are critical to ensuring food security over the coming months and education programs which will ensure the next generation of girls and boys in Afghanistan do not grow up illiterate.

Australian NGOs in Afghanistan are committed to staying the course and continuing to support people and communities in need. We are calling on the government to prioritise funding for these organisations to undertake critical development and humanitarian work. This will ensure the gains of the past twenty years, including advances in the rights and wellbeing of women and girls, are not lost.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

ACFID is providing a series of recommendations for the Committee to consider. These have been updated since our previous submission and are centred on action the Australian Government should take.

1. Urgently disburse committed funding and increase Australia's humanitarian assistance this financial year by \$35 million. This increased allocation should support a response by Australia's flagship NGO humanitarian response program, the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP). This should be additional to the \$65 million promised by Minister Payne at the September 2021 UN Pledging conference.
2. In addition to funding this financial year, provide \$100m per annum in humanitarian funding for Afghanistan over the coming years as part of a multi-year country strategy and assistance package that responds to the root causes of the protracted crisis.
3. Advocate at the Human Rights Council for the establishment of an adequately resourced UN Fact-Finding Mission for Afghanistan to monitor the human rights situation and hold the Taliban accountable for violations of human rights and its commitments to the inclusion and protection of women and minorities.
4. Urgently brief relevant Australian financial institutions on the UNSC humanitarian exemption to the Taliban sanctions regime (UNSC Resolution 2615) and how this has been implemented in Australian law to prevent banks blocking financial transfers for humanitarian purposes due to their own de-risking.
5. Advocate for the 12-month humanitarian exemption to the UNSC Sanctions against the Taliban to be made permanent and ensure that all sanctions implemented by Australia (autonomous or UNSC) do not impede the principled delivery of humanitarian aid.
6. Prioritise Afghanistan in Australia's long-term aid programming. Despite the end of our military and diplomatic missions, Australia must not turn its back on the people of Afghanistan. Ministers have pledged that the closure of our embassy in Afghanistan would not impede our ongoing development support to the people of the country.
7. Adopt a 'humanitarian plus' approach by permitting activities which support basic human needs (broadly defined), including agriculture and education. Suspending programs risks setting back the gains of the past twenty years, especially in the rights and opportunities of women and girls.
8. Fund Australian NGOs and Afghan civil society to implement a multi-year locally led program that supports human development outcomes, with a particular focus on protecting and advancing the rights of women and girls.
9. Expedite the processing of humanitarian visa applications for people at risk in Afghanistan. The lives of many of these individuals, including aid workers who supported the delivery of Australia's program, are at risk. Their applications must be considered as a matter of utmost priority.
10. Provide a further 20,000 places to support people at risk fleeing Afghanistan, in addition to Australia's annual humanitarian visa intake. The government should also extend permanent protection to all Afghan refugees currently in Australia, support family reunifications and increase its efforts to support safe passage for visa holders and vulnerable people.

Situation update

A “man-made” humanitarian crisis

The primary cause of the current humanitarian crisis is the economic freeze imposed by the international community. International funding, which comprised 75% of the country’s expenditure under the previous government, was turned off quite literally overnight with no contingency plans in place. The freezing of assets, combined with a halt in aid, and the crippling effect of sanctions has brought Afghanistan’s economy to its knees.

This has resulted in skyrocketing inflation, record levels of unemployment and a severe liquidity crisis. The cost of basic household items like wheat and fuel has increased by around 40 per cent, and food now accounts for more than 80 per cent of average household expenditure. Even those with some savings are struggling to access their own cash due to the collapse of the country’s banking system. Reports of parents being forced to sell their children to strangers to survive is a heartbreaking indication of just how bad things are.^v

Dominik Stillhart, the director of operations for the International Committee of the Red Cross, at the end of a six-day visit to Afghanistan, stated: “This suffering is man-made. Economic sanctions meant to punish those in power in Kabul are instead freezing millions of people across Afghanistan out of the basics they need to survive. The international community is turning its back as the country teeters on the precipice of man-made catastrophe.”^{vi}

The Taliban no doubt bears some responsibility for the crisis and the backsliding in the rights of women and girls in particular. However, far more people in Afghanistan are suffering due to famine, than are due to the human rights abuses of the Taliban. Withholding aid may serve a political purpose in the short term, but it is having severe human consequences. Moreover, international donors to Afghanistan, of which Australia is one, must consider the consequences of this policy in terms of regional stability, migration flows and global security.^{vii}

Humanitarian response

If the Australian government is serious about its commitment to stand by the people of Afghanistan and to help preserve the development gains of the past two decades, it must act urgently to dramatically scale up our development and humanitarian assistance.

Australia’s response since August 2021

As the Committee has heard in evidence provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia has made a one-off commitment of \$100m in humanitarian assistance to be delivered through the World Food Programme, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the United Nations Population Fund. This includes \$65 million in the 2021-2022 financial year and \$35 million through to 2024.

In Question on Notice 25 from public hearings on 15 November 2021, DFAT officials clarified that \$45 million of the \$65 million to be delivered this year is re-prioritised funding from this year’s existing budget allocation of \$51 million. Only \$20 million is new additional funding from the Humanitarian Emergency Fund.

ACFID understands that of the overall commitment to provide \$65 million to fund humanitarian response activities this financial year, only \$22.5 million has been disbursed to date.

UN Humanitarian Response Plan

On 11 January the United Nations launched its Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan in 2022. In the forward, OCHA Afghanistan Humanitarian Coordinator Dr. Ramiz Alakbarov outlines that the current crisis is not just the result of recent events but is a reflection of chronic under investment in Afghanistan over several years.

Nearly four times as many people need life-saving humanitarian assistance compared to just three years ago, and the situation of women and girls is “particularly dire.”^{viii}

The 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan requests US\$4.44 billion and aims to reach 22.1 million people in need of life-saving humanitarian support due to the consequences of decades of conflict, recurrent natural disasters, lack of recovery from past disasters and the added shock from the takeover of the government, subsequent sudden pause in international assistance and resulting economic shocks. ACFID calls upon the Australian government to make a significant contribution at the UN Pledging Conference scheduled for March. ACFID’s previous submission noted that recent commitments fall behind other donors, as well as our own historic humanitarian and development assistance to Afghanistan. At a time when the needs are so great, it is incumbent on the government to do more.

The future of Australia’s response

In response to questions by the Committee, DFAT has indicated that future funding decisions will be informed by humanitarian needs, the capacity of humanitarian partners to provide humanitarian assistance, and the actions of the Taliban administration – including the safety of foreign and Afghan humanitarian workers.

ACFID’s view is that the humanitarian needs in Afghanistan warrant a significant increase in Australia’s funding of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian organisations – both UN bodies and NGOs – have the capacity to provide assistance and have been doing so throughout the past year as Afghanistan has experienced significant political upheaval, economic crisis, and environmental challenges (including drought, a harsh winter, and a recent earthquake). Complexity and risk should not be viewed as a barrier to supporting humanitarian organisations – it is their mission to operate in challenging environments and provide vital assistance to people living through crises and insecurity (often in these environments where help is needed most).

In his statement on the Humanitarian Response Plan Dr. Alakbarov drew particular attention to the important role of NGOs on the ground, describing them as the “backbone” of the humanitarian response effort. Many ACFID members are working as implementing partners with UN agencies which the Australian Government has funded. Funding NGOs directly would reduce overhead costs, enabling each dollar to go further in aiding the people who need it most. We would encourage the Committee to consider recommending that Government fund NGOs directly in its final report.

As outlined in our initial submission, there are currently approximately twelve ACFID members who are working in Afghanistan. Some are members of international federations, and most work in close partnership with local NGOs in delivering services on the ground. It is important to note that the situation in Afghanistan is not unprecedented. As the committee heard in evidence at hearings on 8 November 2021, humanitarian organisations have been operating in Afghanistan for decades, including under the previous period of Taliban rule from 1996-2001.

A tried-and-true channel for supporting NGO-led humanitarian responses in complex environments is the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP), a five-year partnership between the Australian Government and Australian NGOs. The partnership uses Australian Government resources to leverage NGO networks and expertise, to deliver effective humanitarian assistance. For each response, the partnership selects the NGOs best placed to respond to those in need quickly, safely and effectively. The AHP has delivered assistance in a wide range of politically sensitive and operationally challenging environments including Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Given the operating environment for humanitarian actors in Afghanistan has become clearer in recent months, and the proven effectiveness of AHP in responding to crises in other country situations, we strongly encourage the government to support the work of Australian NGOs with an existing presence in Afghanistan through this channel.

Ensuring that humanitarian workers, including and especially female humanitarian workers, can operate freely and safely across Afghanistan is also of utmost importance. In January this year Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, emphasised that there has been “significant progress” in the ability of women to work across all provinces as had been promised to the United Nations by the Taliban.^{ix} Donors should rest assured that women’s access to work is a high priority for all humanitarian actors operating in Afghanistan. While negotiations to ensure safe operating conditions is ongoing, the obstacles to providing assistance to people and communities living under Taliban-rule are steadily being resolved in a principled and constructive way at national, provincial and community levels.

Recommendation 1: Urgently disburse committed funding and increase Australia’s humanitarian assistance this financial year by \$35 million. This increased allocation should support a response by Australia’s flagship NGO humanitarian response program, the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP). This should be additional to the \$65 million promised by Minister Payne at the September 2021 UN Pledging conference.

Overcoming political barriers to support the Afghan people

Action to address mounting humanitarian needs among the Afghan population cannot and should not be conditional upon the Taliban’s behaviour. Evidence shows that withholding funding as a lever to improve governance is not an effective strategy. It also doesn’t account for the role that the international community has played in Afghanistan over the past twenty years, including the direct relationship between the withholding of international funding flows and the current economic crisis.

Breaking the political impasse

Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Former US Ambassador to Afghanistan (2014-2016) Michael McKinley acknowledges the political dilemma facing donors while making a persuasive argument for the importance of humanitarian aid.

Western governments and international organizations are faced with difficult choices...Of course, diplomatic and political preconditions on engagement with the Taliban can and should remain in effect. But it should also be possible for the United States and its international partners to augment their emergency response to help ordinary Afghans without making concessions to Afghanistan’s new rulers.^x

He writes that without immediate action, Afghanistan will see a humanitarian disaster of historic proportions. This outcome:

...would not only cause great suffering to the Afghan people but also heighten the contradictions of the 20-year international engagement in Afghanistan. We should not wait for that disaster to respond to the challenges that are evident now. The United States and its allies cannot undo the failures that led to the fall of Kabul in August. But they can ensure that ordinary Afghans know we will not turn our backs on them at a time of extraordinary need.

The costs of inaction

A report by International Crisis Group also paints a thorough and realistic assessment of the costs of inaction:

Economic strangulation is unlikely to change the Taliban’s behaviour but will hurt the most vulnerable Afghans. The rising number of people fleeing the country could provoke another migration crisis. State collapse would mark a terrible stain on the reputation of Western countries, which is already tarnished by chaotic withdrawal.^{xi}

“Playing politics” with funding as a means of pressure on the Taliban has been described as a “cynical, superficial, and dangerous policy.”^{xii} As European humanitarian organisations have argued:

The Afghan people should not be denied vital healthcare and be abandoned without food because the international community sees economic starvation as the only available tool to influence the Taliban regime. The international community is effectively punishing Afghan civilians for the actions of a regime brought upon them by force. For women, the discrimination we are likely to see institutionalised under the Taliban will pale in comparison to the effects of the collapsing economy, which risk setting their right to healthcare and education back decades. What we see now is only the beginning of a humanitarian crisis that will affect the Afghan people for generations to come.^{xiii}

Being part of holding the Taliban to account

To support the approach outlined above, we urge Australia continue its support of international efforts to strengthen accountability mechanisms to monitor the human rights situation in Afghanistan and support genuinely inclusive governance in Afghanistan.

The capacity to monitor human rights at the scale required to deter violations and preserve evidence is currently low. The UN Human Rights Council's designation of a one-year Special Rapporteur position is a welcome first step. But some human rights experts fear this may fall short of what is required and will be limited in scope and resources when compared with other monitoring mechanisms such as a Fact-Finding Mission, or a Commission of Inquiry. The Australian Government should support the establishment and financing of more robust accountability and oversight mechanisms.

Australian and the international community should also provide tangible support to Afghan human rights defenders and civil society who are putting their lives on the line and have such an important role in upholding human rights, transparency and good governance in the country. Consideration should also be given to ways of monitoring how Taliban authorities are generating and spending revenue, and promote transparent, equitable and accountable taxation policies and practices.

What Australia should do

At an emergency meeting on 12 October 2021, G20 countries resolved to “tackle the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, even if it means having to coordinate efforts with the Taliban.” There was unanimous agreement about the need to alleviate the crisis in Afghanistan in light of the cash shortages, unpaid civil servant salaries soaring food prices and widespread hunger.^{xiv}

Australia must play a leading and active role in international efforts to make good on this commitment. As a joint letter by former US Generals, Ambassadors and policy makers makes clear, there are no perfect solutions, but the current impasse is untenable.^{xv} While the international community await a political resolution, millions of people's lives, including women and children, hang in the balance.

Recommendation 2: In addition to funding this financial year, provide \$100m per annum in humanitarian funding for Afghanistan over the coming years as part of a multi-year country strategy and assistance package that responds to the root causes of the protracted crisis.

Recommendation 3: Advocate at the Human Rights Council for the establishment of an adequately resourced UN Fact-Finding Mission for Afghanistan to monitor the human rights situation and hold the Taliban accountable for violations of human rights and its commitments to the inclusion and protection of women and minorities.

Sanctions and financial access challenges

UNSC Sanctions against the Taliban

On 22 December 2021, the United Nations Security Council decided that humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan are not a violation of the sanctions regime against the Taliban. Resolution 2615 is a broad, self-executing humanitarian exemption for “humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan”, and allows “the processing and payment of funds, other financial assets or economic resources, and the provision of goods and services necessary to ensure the timely delivery of such assistance or to support such activities.”^{xvi}

On 4 January 2022, DFAT communicated to ACFID and its members that it would implement this humanitarian exemption immediately, and this advice has since been shared on the department’s website.^{xvii} The sector welcomes and appreciates DFAT’s swift action to provide guidance to humanitarian organisations following the decision of the Security Council. We welcome proposed amendments to the *Charter of the United Nations (Sanctions – the Taliban) Regulation 2013* to reflect the change more concretely in Australian law.

The humanitarian exemption within UNSC sanctions is a welcome breakthrough for humanitarian organisations, but significant challenges remain. Not least, the humanitarian exemption has been granted for 12 months only.^{xviii} The Australian government should advocate for the Security Council’s decision to be made permanent. Not only is clarity and continuity important to effective humanitarian responses, but it would also support the long-term planning and investment required to make meaningful progress on alleviating such a protracted humanitarian crisis.

Safeguarding humanitarian action

The experience in Afghanistan highlights the importance of safeguarding humanitarian action to limit the potential harm of sanctions for civilian populations. Without clearly worded and explicit humanitarian exemptions, sanctions (whether country-wide or targeted to individuals) complicate and delay the delivery of humanitarian aid, especially at times of crisis and disaster. ACFID and its members have seen this become a recurrent issue in both autonomous and UN Security Council sanctions regimes not only in Afghanistan but also Syria, Somalia, the DPRK and Yemen.

Granting exemptions or waivers on a case-by-case basis has consistently proven time-consuming and inefficient. It requires a significant investment of time and resources by humanitarian organisations and may hinder the principled delivery of humanitarian aid. Often, the chilling effect of sanctions has already taken hold before waivers can be issued and this causes critical delays in the provision of assistance. Revising programs to ensure sanctions compliance costs humanitarian organisations and their in-country partners and stakeholders. It creates uncertainty, inefficiencies and ultimately reduces their ability to provide life-saving aid at times when it is most needed.

For these reasons, we would encourage the Committee to recommend that the Government consider front-ending humanitarian safeguards for both our implementation of UNSC sanctions and autonomous Magnitsky-style sanctions. This would mean establishing clear legal or regulatory paths which enable humanitarian organisations to continue critical humanitarian operations during transitional times of crisis, unless and until the government affirmatively acts to restrict humanitarian assistance.^{xix} We understand that the Government has committed to a 12-month review of recent changes to its autonomous sanctions regime and expect that the impact of sanctions on the delivery of humanitarian assistance will be considered as a priority issue in this process.

Ongoing liquidity crisis

Despite the UNSC humanitarian exemption, getting cash into Afghanistan to deliver aid remains extremely difficult. The liquidity crisis is not only impacting the ability of humanitarian agencies to respond swiftly and at scale; it is having a direct impact on Afghan people who cannot access money from their accounts or who are suffering the effects of skyrocketing inflation. ACFID urges the Australian government to work with its international counterparts to resolve the economic crisis in Afghanistan as swiftly and humanely as possible. The time has come for donors to take a coordinated and graduated approach to unfreezing international funding flows.”

Recommendation 4: Urgently brief relevant Australian financial institutions on the UNSC humanitarian exemption to the Taliban sanctions regime (UNSC Resolution 2615) and how this has been implemented in Australian law to prevent banks blocking financial transfers for humanitarian purposes due to their own de-risking.

Recommendation 5: Advocate for the 12-month humanitarian exemption to the UNSC Sanctions against the Taliban to be made permanent and ensure that all sanctions implemented by Australia (autonomous or UNSC) do not impede the principled delivery of humanitarian aid.

Preserving the human development gains

Australia’s development engagement in Afghanistan over the past two decades has achieved real results and made a tangible difference to the lives of people in Afghanistan – our development mission was not fruitless or a failure.

In September 2021 Minister Payne pledged that Australia would not turn its back on the people of Afghanistan. She described the development gains of the past two decades as “essential advances” which must be protected. The time to act on these statements is now. Australia must not delay in providing a clear plan for how it will support the people of Afghanistan over the medium to long term.

Supporting human development in Afghanistan also aligns with our national interests in maintaining regional stability and security and preventing the resurgence of violence in Afghanistan, including the threat of terrorism.

Australia’s pause on development programs

In December DFAT wrote to organisations, including ACFID members, who deliver humanitarian and development programs in Afghanistan with Australian funding. This letter indicated that the Government plans to pivot the development program to mostly humanitarian activities and instructed organisations to pause all development activities pending a review of the overall program in early 2022.

Experts have repeatedly warned that the current crisis in Afghanistan cannot be resolved through a humanitarian response alone. Continuity in development assistance is absolutely vital for the delivery of basic services, especially given the current economic crisis which is having such a severe impact on people’s livelihoods. The line between humanitarian and development programs is often blurry, and especially in Afghanistan given the country’s historic dependency on aid and the compounding effects of multiple barriers to development over the past two decades (such as poor governance, drought and natural disasters, conflict and insecurity, and limited economic growth). This is reflected in the UN’s Humanitarian Response plan, which puts a strong focus on “nexus” issues such as protection, safeguarding livelihoods, stabilising the provision of basic services and building community resilience.^{xx}

From ACFID's perspective, it makes no sense for international donors to fund emergency food supplies, while cutting off funding to long-standing agricultural development programs which promote food security and economic independence of local communities. Pausing development programs causes significant disruption and uncertainty for organisations who may be forced to furlough local staff or forego critical milestones which will have long-term implications (in season-dependant agriculture programs for example.) However, we acknowledge that given governments are not recognising the Taliban, traditional bilateral development cooperation is not tenable. We need to look at other ways to enable development work to continue in order to stave off the worsening humanitarian crisis and protect the gains of the past two decades.

What 'humanitarian plus' could look like

Australia should be constructive and pragmatic, working with the international community to find ways to continue achieving development outcomes in partnership with the people of Afghanistan.

Other donors, including the United States and the European Union, have taken a broad approach to supporting human development and basic human needs in Afghanistan. The EU has allocated over 250 million Euros to 'humanitarian plus' work which includes maintaining education, sustaining livelihoods, and protecting public health. As the US representative to the UNSC Mr Jeffrey DeLaurentis has noted, the humanitarian exemption to the UNSC sanctions permits "activities designed to meet the basic needs of the Afghan people including those that primarily benefit poor and at-risk populations – including in the areas of shelter, food security, education, energy, water, sanitation, health, nutrition and hygiene." There is a growing consensus that donors must go beyond conventional humanitarian aid, and support activities in areas such as education, livelihoods and protection which are essential to the wellbeing, safety and stability of people and communities in Afghanistan.

ACFID understands that there are ongoing discussions between former donors to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) and the World Bank about how this fund can be used to support basic human needs in Afghanistan. We encourage the Australian government to be proactive and principled in its approach: the dire needs of the Afghan people must come first.

Working with independent humanitarian organisations, NGOs, and civil society organisations also offers a clear way to undertake vital work to support the basic human needs of Afghan population while not engaging in bilateral discussions with the Taliban or entering into the question of recognition.

Many of these humanitarian and development organisations have been operating in Afghanistan for decades and have strong relationships with their local partners and the communities in which they work. Working with and through civil society also promotes inclusivity and offers a way to provide services to hard-to-reach communities, vulnerable populations and minorities. Given the Australian Government's stated intention to support the rights of women and girls, assisting women's rights defenders, human rights defenders, NGOs and civil society who share this mission is a clear and tangible way to deliver on this commitment.

Recommendation 6: Prioritise Afghanistan in Australia's long-term aid programming. Despite the end of our military and diplomatic missions, Australia must not turn its back on the people of Afghanistan. Ministers have pledged that the closure of our embassy in Afghanistan would not impede our ongoing development support to the people of the country.

Recommendation 7: Adopt a 'humanitarian plus' approach by permitting activities which support basic human needs (broadly defined), including agriculture and education. Suspending programs risks setting back the gains of the past twenty years, especially in the rights and opportunities of women and girls

Recommendation 8: Fund Australian NGOs and Afghan civil society to implement a multi-year locally led program that supports human development outcomes, with a particular focus on protecting and advancing the rights of women and girls.

Visas for at-risk Afghan aid workers

When ACFID gave evidence to the Committee on 8 November 2021 we indicated that 209 humanitarian visa applications had been made by Afghan aid workers who are at risk because of high visibility and close connection to Australia and Australian government funded activities. At that time, six of those applications had been processed and approved.

Since then, to ACFID's knowledge, no further applications from this cohort have been processed or approved. At a meeting with ACFID and its members on 14 September 2021 Minister Hawke indicated that it would be sensible to consider this group of at-risk individuals as a priority cohort in visa processing.

We are concerned that delays in processing these visas is prolonging and exacerbating the risks facing individuals and is causing additional distress and suffering for vulnerable people and their families. We believe the Government can and should expedite the processing of visas for these individuals.

This cohort represents a very small proportion of local Afghan staff who work with Australian humanitarian and development agencies. The evacuation of this small group will not prevent humanitarian and development work continuing. Australian aid agencies remain on the ground and are committed to staying in the country and supporting the people of Afghanistan.

Recommendation 9: Expedite the processing of humanitarian visa applications for people at risk in Afghanistan. The lives of many of these individuals, including aid workers who supported the delivery of Australia's program, are at risk. Their applications must be considered as a matter of utmost priority.

Recommendation 10: Provide a further 20,000 places to support people at risk fleeing Afghanistan, in addition to Australia's annual humanitarian visa intake. The government should also extend permanent protection to all Afghan refugees currently in Australia, support family reunifications and increase its efforts to support safe passage for visa holders and vulnerable people.

Endnotes

- ⁱ Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore on children in Afghanistan, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/statement-unicef-executive-director-henrietta-fore-children-afghanistan>
- ⁱⁱ “97 percent of Afghans could plunge into poverty by mid 2022, says UNDP,” <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/97-percent-afghans-could-plunge-poverty-mid-2022-says-undp>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Kanni Wignaraja of the UN Development Programme cited in “Afghanistan’s Economy is Collapsing,” *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2021/10/30/afghanistans-economy-is-collapsing>
- ^{iv} “Aid cut-off may kill more Afghans than war,” Op Ed by European Humanitarian Organisations, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/12/4/urgent-action-needed-to-save-millions-of-afghan>
- ^v “Afghanistan Has Become the World’s Largest Humanitarian Crisis,” Jane Ferguson, *The New Yorker*, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/afghanistan-has-become-the-worlds-largest-humanitarian-crisis>
- ^{vi} “Afghanistan: An infuriating, man-made catastrophe points toward massive suffering for Afghan families,” ICRC, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/catastrophe-toward-suffering-afghan>
- ^{vii} Afghanistan: The Humanitarian Catastrophe is the Security Threat, UN Special Rapporteur Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, *Just Security*, <https://www.justsecurity.org/79697/afghanistan-the-humanitarian-catastrophe-is-the-security-threat/>
- ^{viii} UNOCHA Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan, 11 January 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-response-plan-2022-january-2022>
- ^{ix} Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, Closing remarks at the launch of the 2022 Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan, Geneva, 11 January 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-5>
- ^x Michael McKinley, “Afghanistan’s Looming Catastrophe,” *Foreign Policy*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2021-12-03/afghanistans-looming-catastrophe>
- ^{xi} “Beyond Emergency Relief: Averting Afghanistan’s Humanitarian Catastrophe,” International Crisis Group Report, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/317-beyond-emergency-relief-averting-afghanistans-humanitarian-catastrophe>
- ^{xii} “Don’t abandon Afghanistan’s economy too,” Adam Tooze, *Australian Financial Review*, <https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/don-t-abandon-afghanistan-s-economy-too-20210831-p58ndt>
- ^{xiii} “Aid cut-off may kill more Afghans than war,” Op Ed by European Humanitarian Organisations, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/12/4/urgent-action-needed-to-save-millions-of-afghan>
- ^{xiv} “G20 pledges help for Afghan humanitarian crisis at special summit,” ABC News, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-13/g20-pledges-help-afghan-humanitarian-crisis-at-special-summit/100534358#:~:text=The%20Group%20of%2020%20major,who%20hosted%20an%20emergency%20summit.>
- ^{xv} Joint letter by former US Ambassadors and Generals published by The Atlantic Council. “Afghanistan is About to Collapse,” *Atlantic Council*, 14 December 2021 <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/afghanistan-is-about-to-collapse-heres-what-the-us-must-do-about-it/>
- ^{xvi} UN Security Council Resolution 2615, 22 December 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/security-council-resolution-2615-2021-adopted-security-council-its-8941st-meeting>
- ^{xvii} “Australia implements humanitarian exemption to UN Security Council sanctions in relation to the Taliban,” DFAT Website, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/security/sanctions>
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- ^{xix} “Aligning Sanctions Laws with Humanitarian Principles: Pre-authorizing Aid in Afghanistan and Other Crises,” Rachel Alpert, *Just Security*, <https://www.justsecurity.org/78069/aligning-sanctions-laws-with-humanitarian-principles-pre-authorizing-aid-in-afghanistan-and-other-crises/>
- ^{xx} The humanitarian-development “nexus” refers to “the transition or overlap between the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the provision of long-term development assistance.” This approach aims to meet immediate needs, while also reducing risk and vulnerability of populations over the medium to long term by focussing on collective outcomes. <https://www.unocha.org/fr/themes/humanitarian-development-nexus>