

Afghanistan faces an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, Australia must step up

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The Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade References Committee has today released its [interim report](#), as part of its ongoing inquiry into Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan. The peak body for Australian humanitarian and development organisations, the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) welcomes the committee's attention to the urgency of the current humanitarian crisis and the call for Australia to take a "principled humanitarian approach to providing urgent assistance."

Afghanistan is now the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe. Due to the current economic collapse, the UN warns that 24.4 million people will need humanitarian assistance this year, with women and girls among those most at risk. Given the scale of this unfolding humanitarian disaster and our repeated commitments to stand by the people of Afghanistan, Australia must urgently increase its assistance.

ACFID CEO Marc Purcell said: "Australia must act fast and act now to help prevent millions of deaths in Afghanistan. Minister Payne's announcement of \$65 million in humanitarian funding this financial year was a welcome start, but Australia can and must do more."

ACFID is calling for the Government to urgently disburse the funding it has already committed to and provide an additional \$35 million this year to be delivered through NGOs which have an established presence across the country and strong relationships with communities. Given the scale of need and chronic under-funding of humanitarian assistance in recent years, Australia should pledge an ongoing allocation of \$100 million per annum as part of a multi-year package which addresses the root causes of the protracted crisis in Afghanistan.

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. This level of near-universal poverty has not been seen anywhere in recent history.

Marc Purcell added: "For months, humanitarian organisations have been warning of this looming catastrophe. Our worst fears are now being realised with millions of people on the brink of famine."

"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."

ACFID is also calling on the Australian government to lift its freeze on development programming, 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. As the Senate inquiry interim report clearly states, it is important that governments provide humanitarian assistance "while developing a longer-term strategy for engagement." In particular, ACFID welcomes the committee's recommendation that DFAT provide development assistance and "foster further engagement with local NGOs and diaspora groups which can assist with the provision of aid to the local level and most vulnerable" (Recommendation 8).

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 the rights and wellbeing of women and girls, are not lost.

ACFID also welcomes the Government's confirmation that it will give priority in the humanitarian visa program to individuals with enduring links to Australia, such as Afghans who were employed by Australian non-government organisations or who worked on Australian Government funded projects. However, Mr Purcell said:



“The government will need to pick up the pace on resettlement. People at risk don’t have the luxury of waiting four years.”

ENDS

For more information or to arrange interviews, contact 0401 721 064 or media@acfid.asn.au.

About ACFID

Our vision is of a world where all people are free from extreme poverty, injustice and inequality, and where the earth’s finite resources are managed sustainably. Our purpose is to lead and unite our members in action for a just, equitable and sustainable world.

Founded in 1965, ACFID currently has 129 members and 22 affiliates operating in more than 90 developing countries. In 2020–21, the total revenue raised by ACFID’s members amounted to \$1.897 billion — \$698 million of which was raised by more than one million individual donors. ACFID’s members range from large Australian multisectoral organisations that are linked to international federations of non-government organisations (NGOs), agencies with specialised thematic expertise, and smaller community-based groups, with a mix of secular and faith-based organisations.

