

## Civilians in Afghanistan need our support



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As the world continues to watch the distressing images from Afghanistan, we feel a mix of horror, distress and even anger, as we try to comprehend the extent of the crisis and the emerging ramifications of the Taliban seizing control of the country.

There are serious fears for the innocent civilians trapped among the fighting and grave concerns for the fate of specific groups of people, including women and girls, locally engaged employees of western embassies and forces, human rights activists, employees working in Australian Government-funded schools and non-government organisations and the minority groups who have previously suffered persecution under Taliban control.

After almost two decades of intervention and promises of protection by many world leaders including our own, the Australian Government now has a moral imperative to act in response to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Urgent calls for support are growing louder, so too is the reminder that Australia has a duty to not abandon the Afghan people.



[The Refugee Council of Australia \(RCOA\)](#), an allied organisation of the union, has written to the Prime Minister, along with the Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs and Immigration ministers, specifically outlining what the Australian Government can do in response to this unfolding crisis.

Following on from this, all Federal parliamentarians were issued with a statement signed by more than 300 allied organisations and groups — including Federation — to gain their support in actioning seven important steps that civil society groups, refugee-led organisations and members of Australia's Afghan diaspora have shown wide consensus on.

The steps outlined in the joint letter call on the Australian Government to intensify efforts in evacuations, offer additional refugee settlement placements in Australia, increase aid to the region, extend permanent protection rights to refugees, make changes to temporary protection visa policies and increase support for family reunion and other visa applications. Members can read the jointly-signed letter [here](#).

As a social justice union, Federation supports the Refugee Council of Australia's call for Federal Government priority actions in Afghanistan and for the urgent protection of refugees and asylum seekers, both here and abroad.

Federation joins with other allied organisations in urging the Australian Government to address these critical priorities, provide greater safety and take leadership in response to the Afghanistan crisis.

As teachers and unionists, we too have a role to play by extending our care and support to any in our schools and communities who are suffering distress and/or trauma from the events unfolding in Afghanistan at such a rapid rate. Thank you for all you have already done; and for what you can continue to do in this regard.

Members who wish to take individual actions in support of our refugee communities, or in solidarity with the work of allied organisations, can visit the following web pages to determine how best to assist.

The Refugee Council of Australia is the national organisation for refugees, people seeking asylum and those who support them. The non-profit organisation, independent of government, connects thousands of organisations, individuals and advocates, and works alongside refugee communities, supporting refugee-led advocacy and programs. The council invites membership, donations to various activities, actions and support programs; volunteering and participation in campaign actions.

[The Asylum Seeker Centre](#) provides practical and personal support for people living in the community who are seeking asylum. The centre is working with the Refugee Council of Australia and other agencies, calling upon the Australian Government to take immediate action in response to the crisis in Afghanistan. They have endorsed the joint letter to Federal Parliament and have organised a way for individuals to speak up and show support for the safety and human rights of the people of Afghanistan, by also writing to local MPs, Senators, Ministers and the Prime Minister. Members can sign their support for the joint-letter to parliament [here](#). Members can contribute to the centre's food drive in support of asylum seeker families in Sydney [here](#).

The global organisation dedicated to protecting refugees, the [United Nation's Refugee Agency](#) (UNHCR), is seeking donations to provide direct aid to the Afghan people during this crisis. The UNHCR has remained in Afghanistan, supplying emergency shelter, food, water, sanitation and health assistance to the people of Afghanistan, who are not only suffering from the effects of war but the COVID-19 pandemic too.

The [Refugee Advice and Casework Service](#), which provides free legal advice, assistance and representation to people seeking asylum in Australia, is running a petition alongside the Afghan Australian Advocacy Network's open letter, which outlines the steps they believe will ease the suffering of the Afghan people and prioritise protection and settlement for them. The petition calls upon the Prime Minister to take urgent action to support Afghan people. You can demonstrate your endorsement of the open letter by signing the petition [here](#).

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