



2022 ANNUAL REPORT AFGHAN SUBCOMMITTEE

The RAR Afghan Subcommittee was established in October 2021 to

- Maintain the advocacy and focus on the situation in Afghanistan and for its people due to the current crisis for a period of 12 months.
- Raise RAR member and public awareness about issues resulting from recent events in Afghanistan.
- Provide material and information relating to the situation in Afghanistan
- Advocate for people from Afghanistan impacted by recent withdrawal of foreign troops and the fall of their government – including those who came to Australia seeking asylum prior to these events.

The subcommittee agreed that it would

- Report on the status of people seeking refuge and asylum both within and outside Afghanistan.
- Provide information for circulation to the membership on the situation in Afghanistan and for those from Afghanistan seeking asylum.
- Make recommendations for workshops, forums, guest speakers on Afghanistan.
- Recommend action to the RAR National Executive arising out of discussion & research of the subcommittee.
- Provide support to people arriving in Australia from Afghanistan.

The subcommittee has met monthly and includes representatives from NSW, Vic and South Australia with three representatives from Afghan communities in these states. The group has provided regular reports to the National RAR Executive, RAR Update and provided submissions to the federal government. Excellent relationships have been established with local media with many articles published particularly in the Norther Rivers media, Ballarat and a front page feature in the Wangaratta Chronicle. ABC online, The Saturday Paper and The Guardian have all published features in consultation with RAR,

In August, 2022 the RAR President, Convenor of the Afghan Subcommittee and two members of the subcommittee Lida Hazara and Muzafar Ali met with the senior advisor to the Minister for Home Affairs and Julian Hill MP to advocate for Afghan people applying for humanitarian visas. While this established a relationship with these politicians it has not produced results.....as yet.

RAR groups in partnership with our Afghan friends in regional and rural Australia are currently sponsoring and supporting over ninety (90) vulnerable Afghan families and individuals for humanitarian visas. Sponsored humanitarian visa applications were lodged with the Department of Home Affairs from August 2021 to June 2022. To date we have only successfully sponsored twelve individuals to Australia, these Afghans arrived in October 2021.

RAR Provides Wide Regional Support

Members from RAR Branches including Maleny and Warwick in Queensland, Uki, Ballina, Armidale, Blue Mountains, Bathurst, Orange, Southern Highlands, Queanbeyan and Wollongong in NSW, Albury/Wodonga, Yackandandah, Wangaratta, Mansfield, Alexandra, South East Gippsland, Trentham, Swan Hill, Aireys Inlet, Apollo Bay and the Grampians in Victoria and Tasmania are sponsoring families from Afghanistan.

These Afghan nationals are from Hazara and Uzbek minorities, long persecuted by the Taliban for their moderate views and respect for women's equality and rights.

Many of the Afghan people sponsored for humanitarian visas served with Australian Defence and NATO forces and worked with Australian organisations and United Nations agencies during the last twenty years. Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021, many of the people sponsored have been threatened with imprisonment and extreme violence. Families are separated, in hiding and constantly moving to avoid Taliban capture. When possible, sponsors communicate regularly with the people they are supporting and are aware of increasing Taliban persecution, torture, kidnapping and execution threats against these men, women and their children.

Many RAR members said that while they could not sponsor they would donate to support Afghan people. Sponsors and supporters have donated over thirty thousand dollars to assist people facing grave danger to survive, providing funds for passports, visas, language translation, transport to neighboring countries so they are safe. Many RAR groups send money each month to subsidise people's basic living needs while waiting for Australian visas. Ballarat RAR work with the multicultural community in Ballarat to send thousands of dollars worth of food to rural areas of Afghanistan. Other RAR groups are supporting Women For Change to provide food and education to children and families in Kabul. RAR offers our sincere thanks to the hard work and generosity of these members.

Support these people to contribute to Australia

The majority of the sponsored Afghan people RAR is supporting are highly skilled across different sectors and will make a great contribution to the Australian community, particularly in rural areas. They include police officers, pilots, pharmacists, midwives, doctors, tourist guides, farmers, sports people, musicians, mechanics, hospitality workers, lawyers, judges, teachers, film makers and journalists.

The 2022-23 Humanitarian Program is currently set at a ceiling of 13,750 places, with an additional 4,125 places for Afghan nationals (each year for the next 4 years). This is too few places and if the process takes four years this will be too late for many of the people who are being sponsored by RAR.

RAR sponsees who have been subject to extreme persecution are now in Pakistan, they registered with UNHCR six months ago and still cannot get an interview. RAR has credible evidence from sponsees which has been confirmed in UN, Amnesty and international reports that Hazara and Uzbek minorities in Afghanistan have been subjected to sustained persecution, targeted violence and killings since NATO left Afghanistan and this should be recognised by the Australian Government.

The valuable work of the Afghan Subcommittee must continue to maintain advocacy for Afghanistan people, to continue to raise member and public awareness and to urge the government to increase the humanitarian intake of people from Afghanistan as Australians have a moral obligation to support Afghanistan following twenty years of occupation and a chaotic withdrawal from this country.

Marie Sellstrom
Convenor RAR Afghan Subcommittee.
September 16, 2022

MOTION

The Afghan Sub-Committee continue to work in 2022/23 to advocate for Afghan people to be brought to Australia on Humanitarian Visas and that the numbers of humanitarian visas be increased.

The Australian Government be urged to speed up the process of granting visas as people are in danger now.