

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - 30 MARCH 2022

Federal Budget 2022: CAPSA welcomes announcement of 16,500 additional places for Afghan refugees, urges Federal Government to do more for refugees and people seeking asylum

The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) welcomes the Federal Government's provision of 16,500 additional humanitarian places over four years for refugees seeking protection from the ongoing Afghanistan crisis. While CAPSA is pleased to see this crucial announcement, it expresses concern that the Federal Government continues to allocate significant funding into Australia's inhumane offshore immigration detention regime, and that minimal supports have been allocated for people seeking asylum and refugees living in the community.

CAPSA, co-convened by Jesuit Social Services and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia, is an alliance of individuals, schools, parishes and Catholic organisations advocating for the fair and humane treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia.

CAPSA Co-Chairs Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services, and Tamara Domicelj, Country Director of JRS Australia, commend the Federal Government for making a long-awaited decision to provide an additional intake of refugees affected by the Afghanistan crisis.

"This announcement comes after almost eight months of dedicated and persistent advocacy from across the sector and the broader Australian community, spearheaded by diaspora leaders through the Action for Afghanistan campaign", emphasised Ms Domicelj.

"This will support 16,500 more people to find safety in Australia and an opportunity to rebuild their lives," stated Ms Edwards.

"As a Catholic alliance, and through our collaboration with the Christians United for Afghanistan campaign, we have been greatly encouraged to see leaders and communities of faith join together to take action. We commend all of the communities, individuals and organisations involved in the Action for Afghanistan campaign – this Budget announcement shows what can be achieved together," Ms Edwards and Ms Domicelj both reiterated.

Zaki Haidari, Leadership Coordinator at JRS Australia and member of the Diaspora Advocacy Network for Afghanistan, also provided important reflections on the announcement.

"This announcement of additional places for refugees from Afghanistan over four years is testament to the resilience of the Afghanistan diaspora in Australia, but also to the support and solidarity of so many in the Australian community, including veterans, faith communities, and civil society partners. If implemented in a timely manner, it will save thousands of lives. Whilst we thank the Australian Government for this hugely consequential step, the Government should also grant approximately 5,000 refugees on temporary visas permanent protection, and give us the rights to contribute fully to Australia", Mr Haidari emphasised.

CAPSA is also disappointed to see that the Federal Government has allocated \$1.28 billion to onshore detention, an increase of \$20.6 million in the previous budget, whilst also spending \$482.5 million on offshore processing. Despite there being only 112 refugees and people seeking asylum who remain detained on Nauru, the Federal Government has chosen to allocate exorbitant funds to maintain this cruel system. Not only will this keep these 112 people in further limbo, this is critical funding which could have been better used to help provide permanent protection to those living in Australia on temporary protection visas, or to support those who have been released from immigration detention into the community.

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