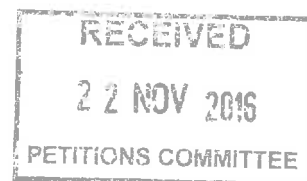




**THE HON PETER DUTTON MP
MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION
AND BORDER PROTECTION**



Ref No: MC16-021868

Mr Ross Vasta MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Ross,
Dear ~~Mr~~ Vasta

Thank you for your correspondence of 12 October 2016 enclosing Petition 1167/1676, concerning persecuted Christians in the Middle East. I note that this petition has also been referred to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, to respond to matters that relate to her portfolio.

A total of 12,000 humanitarian places have been made available on a one-off basis for people displaced by conflicts in Syria and Iraq. These places are in addition to Australia's 2016-17 Humanitarian Programme, which includes a substantial number of places for people displaced by conflicts in the Middle East. Priority for these places is being given to refugees who are assessed as being most vulnerable (that is, women, children and families) and to those located in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. A significant proportion of these visas are expected to be granted to people from minority ethnic and religious communities, many of whom are Christians.

Additionally, the Australian Government has committed to increasing the size of the Humanitarian Programme, from the current level of 13,750 places to 18,750 by 2018-19. This will allow many more people in humanitarian need, including persecuted minority groups from the Middle East, to resettle in Australia.

The focus of Australia's Humanitarian Programme is for refugees and other people who have fled their country of usual residence. Australia's ability to assist people still living in their home country is limited, and few in-country applications are granted each year. People granted under this category are generally brought to the attention of the Government by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Churches and faith-based communities are able to propose vulnerable families for resettlement in Australia. The Community Proposal Pilot and Special Humanitarian Programme pathways under the Humanitarian Programme provide a mechanism for communities in regional areas to identify and support individuals in humanitarian situations for resettlement.

Thank you for bringing this petition to my attention.

Yours sincerely

PETER DUTTON 22/11/16