

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
Inquiry into Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan, 2021 - 2022

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 001 Hearing 11 October 2021

Topic: Afghanistan public hearing 11 October 2021

Senator Penny Wong

Question

1. Please provide an explanation of why the Secretaries of Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs and Trade chose not to participate in the first public hearing of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into Australia's engagement in Afghanistan on 11 October 2021.
 - a. Did the Secretaries of Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs Trade discuss or forewarn their non-appearance with their respective ministers or ministerial offices? If yes, when and with whom?
 - b. Did any DFAT or Home Affairs officials discuss the Inquiry, its terms of reference or any possible Inquiry questions with any Member of Parliament on or prior to 11 October 2021? If yes, when or with whom?

Answer

The Committee invited representatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to give evidence. The Committee did not advise that the Secretary's attendance was required. The Secretary had another meeting at that time.

- a. No. DFAT officers did provide details of their witness list to the Office of the Foreign Minister ahead of the private and public hearings.
- b. Yes. DFAT participated in the FADT Senate Inquiry on Australia's engagement in Afghanistan private hearing on 6 October 2021. DFAT attended a private briefing with members of the Opposition on 27 August 2021.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 002 – 11 October 2021

Topic: Closure of Australian Embassy in Kabul

Senator Penny Wong

Question

2. On what date did DFAT first receive advice from defence/security agencies about the potential need for the Australian Embassy to be closed?
3. Can DFAT confirm that the first time it received advice from defence/security agencies about the potential need to close the Australian mission was April, per DFAT Budget Estimates 2021-22 Answer to QoN 107?
 - a. If yes – Please confirm that no agency, official or analyst flagged such a possibility prior to April 2021?
4. As QoN 107 also states, the Department of Defence and DFAT had produced assessments over a period of years related to the serious security threats in Afghanistan that could impact on Australia's diplomatic presence in Kabul. What regular inter-departmental committees were meeting on Afghanistan through 2020 and 2021?
 - a. How often did these meetings take place?
 - b. What agencies and departments were represented?
 - c. Was the Embassy and its security a feature of these meetings?
 - d. If yes, what contingency planning arrangements were in place for the Australian Embassy in the event of a rapid deterioration of security? When were these contingencies first developed?
5. DFAT's submission to the Senate FADT References Inquiry into Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan states that DFAT commissioned a review 'to assure contingency arrangements and necessary security enablers to support our continuing diplomatic presence, which reported in March 2021' (p. 2).
 - a. When was this review commissioned
 - b. Who commissioned this review?
 - c. Was it tasked by the Foreign Minister?
 - d. Did the Department propose such a review prior to late 2020?
 - e. Did this review recommend closing the Embassy?
6. The US announced a political agreement with the Taliban and a timeline for drawing down forces in February 2020 - why did it take a full 13 months after the US-Taliban deal for the Government to have an idea of the implications of this and deteriorating security on our Embassy operations?
8. How did these assessments inform planning by Defence operational planners, DFAT and Home Affairs for maintaining an Embassy presence post ADF and allied forces withdrawal?
 - a. Were there contingencies in place for diplomatic representation, implementation of aid programs, the processing of visas etc?
11. Did the current or former Minister of Defence seek briefings about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan? If yes, how many times and what were the dates for 2020 and 2021?
 - a. Did the Foreign Minister seek briefings about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan? If yes, how many times and what were the dates for 2020 and 2021?

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- b. Did the current or former Minister for Home Affairs seek briefings about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan? If yes, how many times and what were the dates for 2020 and 2021?
- c. Did the Prime Minister seek briefings about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan? If yes, how many times and what were the dates for 2020 and 2021? How often and by whom was the PM briefed?
- 14. In its 4 May submission, did DFAT outline a timeframe for the Embassy closure?
 - a. Did the Department recommend that the Embassy be closed immediately?
 - b. Did the Department recommend that all A-based staff withdraw by a certain date?
 - c. Was the Embassy closure timing linked to the ADF withdrawal? I.e. Was it DFAT's recommendation to close the embassy prior to ADF withdrawal?

Answer

2. Security agencies, the Department of Defence and DFAT had produced assessments over a period of years related to the serious security threats in Afghanistan that could impact on Australia's diplomatic presence in Kabul. Threats included terrorism, insider attacks, and general violence. DFAT had itself undertaken six internal reviews or assessments of the physical footprint and security of the mission in Kabul and means of mitigating security threats since 2016. In view of the worsening security trend and the likely drawdown of US and international forces, the then-Secretary of DFAT commissioned an internal review in August 2020 to assure contingency planning, practise contingency arrangements to ensure the Embassy was in a position to close quickly, and to identify necessary security enablers for the safe functioning of the mission, loss of which might trigger closure of the Embassy. The review ran from September 2020 to March 2021, reporting to the Secretary. DFAT advised the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the progress of that body of work in an information submission on 12 January 2021, advising that despite work on mitigations the risks of operating in Afghanistan might rise to a level that was unacceptably high. At that time, no final decision had been made on the drawdown of foreign military forces, which would affect the ability to mitigate security risks. The decision to withdraw foreign military forces was announced by US President Biden and NATO on 14 April 2021, and by Prime Minister Morrison on 15 April 2021.

The Department of Defence and ONI advised DFAT on a number of occasions in late April 2021 that closure of the mission might be required owing to the deteriorating security situation and the drawdowns of US and international forces and the ADF.

3. See answer to 2.

4. DFAT chaired regular inter-departmental meetings on Afghanistan.

- a. Monthly
- b. They were attended by representatives from Defence, Home Affairs, AFP, AGD, PM&C and intelligence agencies.
- c. Yes. The focus of the inter-departmental meetings was information sharing to maximise our situational awareness on security, security threats, the peace process, partner actions, and political, economic and humanitarian issues. The meetings helped shape our awareness of security threats to the mission. DFAT held a separate fortnightly virtually meeting between DFAT Canberra and the mission focused exclusively on embassy security. Once the decision to close the mission was taken, a daily drawdown meeting was held between DFAT and the mission to ensure an orderly closure of the mission. Defence was in attendance.

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d. All Posts have a Crisis Action Plan, which covers contingency planning, and which is subject to regular review. In addition, contingency planning meetings were taking place at the mission several times weekly in 2021 - both internal meetings and with other embassies in Kabul. There was a practice exercise undertaken in January 2021 which informed the findings of the internal review referred to in the answer to question 2.

5.

- a. September 2020.
- b. The then-Secretary of DFAT, Frances Adamson.
- c. No.
- d. Yes, in August 2020.
- e. No.

6. As per question 2, DFAT undertook extensive contingency planning for the eventuality of the loss of security enablers that might trigger closure of the Embassy. Foreign military forces were important in providing security enablers, but alternative provision of enablers was considered as part of contingency planning. The withdrawal of military forces was not confirmed and announced by the incoming Biden Administration until 14 April 2021.

8. DFAT regularly received assessments from defence and intelligence agencies about evolving threats in Afghanistan, which factored into our ongoing risk assessment and contingency planning. DFAT identified key enablers, loss of which might trigger closure of the Embassy.

a. Yes, all Posts have a Crisis Action Plan, which covers contingency planning. The implementation of aid programs was largely managed from Canberra and the Embassy had no role in visa processing.

11.

a. On 12 January 2021 DFAT advised the Foreign Minister that risks for the continued operation of the Embassy in Kabul may rise above the acceptable threshold. On 12 April, DFAT provided a brief to the Foreign Minister advising on the increasing security risks in Kabul. On 4 May DFAT advised the Foreign Minister that, due to the security environment, the Embassy should be closed. The Foreign Minister received a briefing on security in Afghanistan before her visit to Kabul (9 May 2021).

14. Yes, the 4 May DFAT submission outlined a timeframe for the Embassy closure.

- a. Yes, by 28 May 2021.
- b. Yes, by 15 June 2021.
- c. Yes, alongside the ADF withdrawal.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 003 Hearing 11 October 2021

Topic: Evacuations from Afghanistan

Senator Penny Wong

Question

15. In its submission, did DFAT outline the implications for the Locally Engaged Employee visa scheme - both for DFAT and Defence - from the Embassy closure?

a. Did the Department outline to the Minister how many current and former staff and their families would likely be eligible for LEE visa certification? i. If yes, how many for DFAT and how many for Defence?

b. Did DFAT seek views on the ongoing the visa processing requirements with the Department of Home Affairs?

16. Did DFAT recommend that these visa processes would need to be expedited in light of the impending departure of A-based DFAT staff and ADF personnel?

a. If no, why not? Why was this not a factor for the Minister to consider?

b. If yes, did the DFAT recommend that more staffing resources would be required for DFAT and Defence to certify visa eligibility for current and former staff?

c. Did the Department of Home Affairs increase staffing requirements to meet this demand?

20. In its 4 May 2021 submission, did DFAT outline any concerns/risks regarding the safety of current and former DFAT/Defence local staff, noting the resurgence of the Taliban in regional areas of Afghanistan at that time?

a. Did the Department flag any future assistance that may be required by former and current DFAT/Defence local staff in the absence of any Australian government personnel?

b. Did the Department flag the possibility of evacuations to help get these people and their families to safety in a scenario where the security of Afghanistan deteriorated rapidly?

21. In its 4 May 2021 submission, did DFAT outline how many Australian citizens and permanent residents were located in Afghanistan as of 4 May 2021?

a. Did the Department recommend any assistance or evacuation of Australian citizens and PRs prior to the closure of the Embassy?

b. If not, why was the safety of Australians in a rapidly deteriorating situation not made a priority?

25. When did the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade first advise the Minister that an evacuation would be required to get Australian citizens, PRs, visa holders and visa applicants in Afghanistan to safety?

a. Did the Department have an estimate of how many Australian citizens, PRs, visa holders and visa applicants were in Afghanistan at that point in time? i. If yes, how many were located in Kabul? ii. How many were in Oruzgan province?

27. By the week of 5 June, there were public calls – including from former ADF members – for the Government to initiate a non-combatant evacuation operation for those Afghans who helped Australian operations. Was an evacuation being contemplated by Departments at that time?

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- a. Did any Minister task any Department to look into the possibility of an evacuation in June?
 - b. If no, what was the justification for not having some contingency plans in place?
 - c. Was there any discussion in June across Departments of how to assist Australian visa holders and citizens located outside Kabul, for instance those who supported ADF operations in Uruzgan province?
28. Did any Minister task any department by early June to at least expedite locally engaged staff visa certifications and applications?
31. On 8 July former Prime Minister John Howard said Australia has a 'moral obligation' to help Afghan interpreters. In reference to contractors refused visas he says "I don't think it's something that should turn on some narrow legalism". Was any Department tasked by their Minister or by the Prime Minister to accelerate visa processing times or to initiate evacuation planning following Mr Howard's intervention on 8 July?

Answer

15. In its 4 May submission to the Foreign Minister on the Embassy closure, DFAT outlined the implications for the DFAT Locally Engaged Employee visa scheme.

DFAT outlined that around 16 DFAT Locally Engaged Employees of the Embassy and immediate families - in the range of 50-100 people – might be expected to submit visa applications in future.

Noting LEE visas had been granted for the previous 8 years, since 2013, once the Government had taken the decision to close the Embassy a different approach was needed. DFAT, Defence and Home Affairs worked closely to advise the Government on the overall estimated number of LEE and families who may seek to depart Afghanistan under the LEE visa program, taking into account those who already had humanitarian visas, those holding a certification applying for a visa, those seeking certification, and those who might apply in future.

The assessment at that time was that these cohorts amounted to around 1,000 individuals. Home Affairs with input from DFAT and Defence maintained an up-to-date assessment.

The Government decided in late May on the basis of advice to expedite the processes of certification and visa processing and to prioritise the use of commercial flights, considering other means of departure later if needed. The Government worked through significant constraints of quarantine and caps and with state governments to facilitate entry for LEE and family members above caps. Additional resources in the International Organisation for Migration to conduct health checks were commissioned by Home Affairs. Travel exemptions to enter Australia were arranged. Costs of quarantine were covered. 438 LEE and family members were enabled to travel to Australia over the period to 15 August on commercial flights.

Visa applications from certified LEE were and are afforded the highest processing priority within the Humanitarian Program but applicants must still meet rigorous health, character and national security requirements.

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On 20 July the Government decided further measures to expedite LEE departures, including a plan for facilitated commercial flights if needed. DFAT arranged a slot at Howard Springs for a charter flight in early September, with a plan for a second if needed.

These measures were expected to exhaust the known and expected LEE and family demand.

16. a. see answer to [15].

b. DFAT steadily increased staffing resources to meet the increased volume of applications.

c. Visa applications from certified LEE are afforded the highest processing priority within the Humanitarian Program but applicants must still meet rigorous health, character and national security requirements. For the period from mid-April to 20 August 2021, Home Affairs increased offshore and onshore resources allocated to processing LEE visa applications.

20. DFAT stated that the number of certification applications from DFAT LEE could increase if security deteriorated. There was no significant Taliban resurgence in regional areas at the time of the submission.

a. The submission underlined the importance of the LEE visa program, which had been running for 8 years.

b. see answer to [15].

21. In the submission, DFAT stated that the Embassy estimated that there were up to 500 Australian citizens in Afghanistan.

a. No

b. As at 4 May, the security situation had not yet deteriorated to the point where an evacuation of Australians needed to be considered. Regular commercial flights were operating, and the Australian Government continued to provide up-to-date travel advice to Australians in Afghanistan, with clear advice on security risks. The Smartraveller advice on 4 May 2021 (issued on 23 April 2021), advised "On 14 April 2021, NATO announced it would withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by September 2021. On 15 April, Prime Minister Morrison announced that the last remaining Australian troops will depart Afghanistan by September 2021. The 2020 US-Taliban deal expires on 1 May 2021 and there's the potential for increased risk of attacks around and following this date."

Travel advice was updated on 25 May to advise "With the departure of international forces, there's an increased risk of attacks. The Foreign Minister has approved the drawdown of staff from the current location of the Australian Embassy in Kabul. The Embassy will move to a non-resident model from 28 May. Our ability to provide consular assistance to Australians remaining in Afghanistan will be severely limited after the Embassy drawdown. Australians in need of consular assistance should contact the Australian Government 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre on 1300 555 135 in Australia or +61 2 6261 3305 outside Australia."

Travel advice was updated on 1 July to advise: "If you're still in Afghanistan, you should leave as soon as possible by commercial means if it's safe to do so. Do not delay."

25. On 14 August, DFAT provided advice to the Minister that DFAT, Defence and Home Affairs agreed it could be necessary, to expedite the uplift of Australian nationals, permanent residents and immediate family members who may wish to leave Afghanistan, along with

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humanitarian visa holders, including former Locally Engaged Staff. DFAT also advised of its support for Defence evacuation contingency planning.

On 16 August, DFAT provided advice to the Minister of the need to expedite the uplift, via emergency evacuation, of the above cohorts.

DFAT was in contact with the 57 Australian citizens, PRs and family members registered with DFAT at 14 August 2021. 75 per cent of those registered resided in Kabul; none resided in Oruzgan. As at 12 August, Home Affairs had advised DFAT that there were around 425 Afghan LEE with visas, or on hand visa applications, in Afghanistan. DFAT does not hold a record of the location of where visa applicants lived in Afghanistan.

27. No. Commercial flights were operating. Departments continued to collectively monitor developments, including through close engagement with five-eyes partners, to ensure its advice to government on contingency planning was current. Travel advice was updated regularly to reflect the changing security situation.

a. DFAT is not aware of the entirety of tasking by Ministers of their Departments. Defence routinely undertakes contingency planning for the conduct of such operations.

b. A detailed Crisis Action Plan is maintained by all DFAT overseas posts. The CAP for Afghanistan considered all medium to high risks posed to Australians and Australian interests, and detailed evacuation plans should these be required, including for the staff at the mission as well as Australian citizens, permanent residents and their immediate families. Embassy staff held regular contingency planning meetings and maintained a working copy of the CAP. Following the Embassy closure, staff retained responsibility for the CAP while working remotely.

c. No.

28. See answer to [15].

31. See answer to [15].

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 004 – Hearing 11 October 2021

Topic: Taliban

Senator Penny Wong

Question

34. By 21 July 2021 US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the most senior military officer, General Mark Milley said 'a Taliban automatic military takeover' was 'not a forgone conclusion', while also acknowledging the 'strategic momentum appears to be sort of with the Taliban'. Did this warning about the Taliban's strategic momentum change the Government's assessment about the need for an evacuation operation by late July?

a. How many provinces and regional capitals were under Taliban control by the end of July?

Answer

General Milley's comments did not specifically impact on the Government's assessment about the need for an evacuation operation.

a. Defence analysis of Taliban progress was based on classified intelligence assessments. Public reporting was consistent with our understanding that as at 29 July, 109 of 400 districts, and no provincial capitals, were under Taliban control.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 005 - Hearing 11 October 2021

Topic: Evacuation arrangements

Senator Penny Wong

Question

37. Which international partners did DFAT engage with on the evacuation mission prior to 16 August?

a. Which countries and when?

b. Did the Foreign Minister request updated briefings on the Afghanistan situation in the two months between June 18 and August 16?

38. Explain the process by which the evacuation was established and the roles of key government agencies.

a. DFAT was the lead agency, correct? When was that decision made and by whom?

b. How was Home Affairs involved in the decision-making process? They had no lead role in the evacuation, how were communications and requirements managed?

39. What instructions were given by Ministers in terms of who should be evacuated and the timeline for the evacuation?

40. How many personnel were sent to Kabul from each Department?

a. Please detail the main additional resources (e.g. number of RAAF aircraft).

44. What was the process for an Australian evacuee to get into the airport during the evacuation?

a. Can you confirm that the flight offer emails sent by DFAT to evacuees did not have their names in the email?

b. How did people with electronic visas prove their validity to Taliban and allied forces at various airport checkpoints?

c. Can you confirm that 449 visas issued by email did not have full names, DOB or ID numbers on the emails?

47. What steps were taken by Australian personnel to help reduce bottlenecks outside Kabul airport?

48. What communication protocols were in place between Australian Govt and ADF personnel inside the airport and coalition forces outside the airport to ensure Australian evacuees could enter the airport?

51. Has Defence or DFAT received complaints, feedback, or other concerns internally and through the chain of command about the priority list?

53. How many people from the above categories were separately evacuated by other countries?

Answer

37.

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- a. DFAT spoke with the US in mid-July about its evacuation planning.
- b. Yes

38. DFAT led the Australian Government evacuation and chaired an Inter-Departmental Emergency Taskforce (IDETF) to coordinate our response. Ministers met daily to take decisions. Ministers, the IDETF and the Head of the Crisis Response Team on the ground in Kabul made operational decisions. The IDETF met 19 times, daily and sometimes twice a day, during the operation (13-31 August, and on 2 September) and was attended by senior officials from: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet; Department of Defence; Department of Home Affairs, Australian Border Force; Australian Federal Police; Emergency Management Australia; Department of Health; Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications; Office of National Intelligence, Defence Intelligence Organisation; and overseas posts.

- a. Yes. Under the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework the Minister for Foreign Affairs is responsible for leading government responses to international crises.

- b. [Refer to Home Affairs]

Home Affairs senior officials were represented at the IDETF. Home Affairs officers deployed to Afghanistan and the UAE worked in line with directions from the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Alex Hawke MP, and Head of the Crisis Response Team (Rodgers/Sloper).

39 The 16 August joint statement by the Prime Minister, Minister for Defence and Minister for Foreign Affairs stated the evacuation would focus on Australians and those granted – or in the process of applying for – Australian humanitarian visas. Public comments by the Prime Minister on 15 and 17 August noted a focus on Afghans who had aided Australia – i.e. former locally engaged employees.

On 19 August, Minister Hawke agreed to arrangements for managing the issuing of emergency visas in Afghanistan. Decision-making by the most senior DFAT officer on the ground, the Head of the Crisis Response Team, for the evacuation of non-citizens / non-permanent residents was guided by principles defined by Minister Hawke:

- against granting visas to a person who was not directly connected to Australia through being a certified locally engaged employee (LEE), or as a family member of an Australian citizen, permanent resident, LEE or Australian visa holder;
- in favour of providing visas to spouses, children (including under guardianship arrangements), parents and grandparents;
- against providing visas to more distant relatives including siblings of the primary visa holder and their families;
- against splitting family groups; and
- against granting visas to single men of fighting age.

The Minister for Immigration also delegated authority to the senior officer on the ground, the Head of the CRT to authorise uplifts from Kabul in extremis and balancing the best information available. This was on the basis that all required checks and reviews would occur in the UAE or a third location before a visa was issued and onward travel to Australia occurred.

The evacuation needed to take place during the period of allied forces controlling Kabul airport and ahead of the 31 August final withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

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40. Fifteen DFAT officers deployed to Kabul during the evacuation operation.

From Defence:

The ADF deployed 352 personnel from Australia to Al Minhad Air Base, UAE in direct support of the Afghanistan evacuation operation, on top of those ADF personnel already deployed to the region. The ADF deployed 147 personnel to Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul. The 147 personnel were a combination of personnel already deployed in the Middle East region and those deployed from Australia to support of evacuation operations.

a. ADF air assets utilised were 2 x C130J, 2 x C17 and 2 x KC30.

44. Those individuals registered with DFAT were sent an email with advice on proceeding to the airport, prioritising safety, and providing clear advice on risks, along with instructions on the best way to be identified by those at the gate. Smartraveller was regularly updated with advice for Australian citizens, permanent residents and their immediate families, as well as Australian visa holders on travel to the airport.

a. Emails sent by DFAT were individually addressed but did not contain the names of individuals in the body of the email.

b. Names of Australians and visa holders eligible for evacuation were provided to the US and UK in the early stages of the evacuation but were of limited utility due to the chaotic environment at the airport gates. Any communication with the Taliban on airport access was coordinated by the US and UK. ADF personnel worked with these forces at the gates to identify potential Australian evacuees out of the crowd and passed information through to Home Affairs and DFAT who then assessed the validity of documentation being presented.

c. For Home Affairs to respond

47. Security and management of the gates at the Kabul airport was managed by US and UK military personnel. It was not possible for the DFAT officials on the ground to go beyond the airport, to do so would have put them at great risk.

48. All Australian agencies in Kabul met at least twice a day to review planning and operations. While communication links were not always stable, the ADF and APS agencies worked to maintain communication between Australian teams at each stage of the operation.

Head of DFAT's Crisis Response Team (CRT) or his representative and ADF staff each attended coordination meetings hosted by NATO, which were held at least once daily and sometimes more frequently. These meetings covered the security situation, logistics and issues relating to the evacuation.

The Australian Government's primary communication with people seeking to depart was the smartraveller consular travel advice. As information became available concerning specific cases, Australian staff would identify potential evacuees, provide advice on the situation at the gates, or respond, where possible, to questions.

ADF, DFAT and Home Affairs staff were positioned as close as possible to the gates, and worked with US and UK military personnel at the gates, in order to identify Australians, permanent residents, visa holders, and other Afghans eligible to travel.

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51. DFAT did not maintain a priority list.

DFAT is aware of media reporting criticising the evacuation efforts, including concerns about the inaccessibility of the airport during the evacuation, however DFAT did not maintain a priority list. See answer to QoN 49 for further details.

DFAT is not aware of concerns or complaints internally or through the chain of command about the priority afforded to eligible evacuees.

53. While we do not keep a record of the exact numbers, we are aware of a number of Australian citizens, permanent residents and immediate family members who were evacuated by other countries, to whom we have provided consular assistance in returning to Australia.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 006 – Hearing 11 October 2021

Topic: LEE visas

Senator Penny Wong

Question

54. How many DFAT LEE visa certification requests had been received by the Department when the PM announced the ADF withdrawal on 15 April 2021 and since the legislative instrument IMMI 12/127 was issued in December 2012?

a. How many DFAT LEE visas had been granted by 15 April 2021? How many of these were primary applicants and how many were family members?

b. How many DFAT staff were working on LEE visa certifications on 15 April 2021?

55. How many DFAT LEE visa certification requests had been received by the Department when the Embassy closure was announced on 25 May 2021?

a. How many DFAT LEE visas had been granted by 25 May 2021? How many of these were primary applicants and how many were family members?

b. How many DFAT staff were working on LEE visa certifications on 25 May 2021?

56. How many DFAT LEE visa certification requests had been received by the Department by 1 July 2021?

a. How many DFAT LEE visas had been granted by 1 July 2021? How many of these were primary applicants and how many were family members?

b. How many DFAT staff were working on LEE visa certifications on 1 July?

57. How many DFAT LEE visa certification requests had been received by the time that Kabul had fallen to the Taliban on 14 August 2021?

a. How many DFAT LEE visas had been granted by 14 August 2021? How many of these were primary applicants and how many were family members?

b. How many DFAT staff were working on LEE visa certifications on 14 August 2021?

58. What resources – either in Afghanistan or Australia - were added to the DFAT LEE team as the Taliban started capturing more of Afghanistan?

a. Was there any request from the Department or others for additional resources for the LEE team at any point this year?

59. What is the average processing time for DFAT LEE certification?

87. Was the same advice provided to DFAT?

105. How many DFAT LEE visa holders remain in Afghanistan?

110. What is the plan to get these people to safety?

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Answer

54. Between December 2012 and 15 April 2021, the Department received 113 applications for certification.

- a. Between December 2012 and 15 April 2021, 45 LEE visas had been granted to primary applicants, totalling 215 people when including family members.
- b. On 15 April 2021, one DFAT staff member was responsible for LEE visa certification.

55. In addition to the 113 applications received between December 2012 and 15 April 2021, a further one application was received by 25 May 2021.

- a. No LEE visas were granted between 15 April and 25 May 2021, so the total number of visa grants to primary applicants remained unchanged at 45.
- b. On 25 May 2021, one DFAT staff member was responsible for LEE visa certification.

56. Between 25 May 2021 and 30 June 2021, the Department received 105 applications from individuals seeking certification under the LES program.

- a. Between December 2012 and 1 July 2021, 46 primary visas had been granted (225 including family members).
- b. On 1 July 2021, approximately 3 staff members were working full-time on LEE visa certification.

57. Kabul fell to the Taliban on 15 August and international flights ceased on 16 August.

Between 25 May and 15 August, the Department received 222 applications from individuals seeking certification under the LEE program. As at 17 August, 46 certifications had been granted no decisions were outstanding.

- a. Between December 2012 and 17 August 2021, 55 LEE visas had been granted (270 including family members).
- b. On 14 August 2021, approximately 5 DFAT staff were working full-time on LEE visa certification.

58. In response to the escalating crisis in Afghanistan, on 17 August 2021, the Afghanistan Taskforce was created and resourcing to the LEE team was increased. From mid-August 2021, in addition to the 5 full-time staff on the team, a further 11 staff were rotating on a 24/7 basis to respond to the significant increase in enquiries and applications, both for LEE and 449 visas.

59. Each application is treated on a case-by-case basis. Processing times are determined by the complexity of the case, the completeness of the application, and responsiveness of applicants to requests for additional information. Since May 2021, the Foreign Minister has considered 11 LEE Ministerial Submissions.

87. On 22 August, the Government decided to consider emergency 449 visas for all applicants who had applied for the LEE program but were not certified.

105. At 2 September 2021, 49 of 89 certified LEE (82 certified in 2021) remain offshore. We are unable to advise how many of them remain in Afghanistan.

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110.

- Travel throughout Afghanistan is extremely dangerous, and our travel advice recommends Australians stay in a safe place.
- Australia continues to work with international partners to pursue all opportunities to assist Australians and their immediate family members who wish to depart Afghanistan, including working with the Qatar Government to facilitate the departure of Australians on flights from Kabul.
- Australia is supporting citizens and visa holders who reach border crossings out of Afghanistan in selected circumstances
 - some land borders are closed to travellers seeking to cross from Afghanistan and some border crossing points that are open are at risk of terrorist attack
 - border crossing points may be closed by authorities without notice, especially when crowds gather or where there are concerns of an increased risk of attack.
- On presentation in locations outside Afghanistan, visa holders are being assisted by DFAT and Home Affairs to transfer to Australia, including COVID-19 testing and border exemption processes
 - for subclass 449 holders this facilitation also involves collection of biometrics and security checks.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

QoN 007 – 11 October 2021

Topic: Hekmatullah

Senator Kimberley Kitching

Question

Has DFAT spoken with the Qatari government regarding Hekmatullah's release?

Answer

The Australian Government has outlined its views on the Hekmatullah matter to the government of Qatar on many occasions.

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

QoN 008 – Hearing 11 October 2021

Topic: Humanitarian package

Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells

Question

Please provide further details of the \$100 million humanitarian package and how it will be delivered?

Answer

Humanitarian needs have risen sharply in Afghanistan, with half the population (around 18 million people) requiring humanitarian assistance. On 13 September, the Minister for Foreign Affairs announced that Australia would contribute AUD 100 million in humanitarian assistance from 2021-24.

DFAT will work through UN humanitarian partners, with a specific focus on supporting women and girls. Australia's contribution includes multi-year funding to the World Food Programme, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the United Nations Population Fund. A breakdown of the \$100 million is as follows:

- around \$45 million from the existing bilateral aid program to meet immediate humanitarian needs in Afghanistan. This will support the provision of food, shelter and sexual reproductive health services, support for essential health and education services, and support to the protection and empowerment of women and girls;
- \$20 million of new funding from the existing Humanitarian Emergency Fund allocation to support neighbouring countries hosting Afghan refugees, and mitigate possible irregular migration impacts and people smuggling, including \$5 million to the UN Refugee Agency Supplementary Appeal, announced on 20 August, and;
- around \$35 million from the bilateral aid program, from 2022 to 2024, to respond to the protracted nature, including to provide basic health services, food and shelter to women and children.

While the situation in Afghanistan is highly volatile, UN partners continue to deliver assistance across the country and have proven records delivering humanitarian assistance in Taliban controlled areas, while adhering to UNSC sanctions. DFAT will continue to carefully monitor the evolving humanitarian context, including the capacity and access of humanitarian partners, to inform any subsequent decisions on funding allocations. We will not provide funding to the Taliban regime.