

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

QoN 028 – Public Hearing 2 February 2022

Topic: Importing of currency

Senator Kimberley Kitching

Question

CHAIR: Who can use the UN importing of hard currency? Does it just have to be a business? Do you have to be a business from overseas? Who can avail themselves of it? If I am a restaurant owner in Kabul—

Mr Sloper: I will need to take those details on notice and return to you. I am not familiar with the detail of the importing of cash, but I do know that it is only a small drop in the demand, so it will not be a solution. I think it is predominantly targeted towards UN institutions.

Answer

- The United Nations (UN) imports of physical currency into Afghanistan are used by UN agencies and other organisations, such as NGOs, delivering humanitarian assistance.
- Private businesses not engaged in delivering humanitarian assistance cannot participate in the UN's currency importing activity.

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

QoN 029 – Public Hearing 2 February 2022

Topic: Distribution of funds

Senator Kimberley Kitching

Question

Mr Innes-Brown: Thus far, we've disbursed \$22.5 million to our partners who are implementing programs on the ground. I can give you a bit of detail on those—

CHAIR: Yes, please. And is it \$25 million even?

Mr Innes-Brown: It's \$22.5 million, with \$14.5 million to the World Food Programme for nutrition and livelihoods, \$3.5 million to the United Nations Population Fund for protection and sexual health, and \$4.5 million to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund for emergency health.

Besides that amount, there will be another \$42.5 million disbursed before the end of this financial year. Of that, we are in the very final stages of contracting and then disbursing around \$20 million from our humanitarian emergency fund, which will go to partners to support internally displaced people in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries that are hosting refugees. So we are very hopeful of getting that amount out the door very soon.

CHAIR: And are those directly neighbouring countries?

Mr Innes-Brown: Yes.

CHAIR: Because I am aware of some people in Delhi, and I'm wondering if they would be covered as well.

Mr Innes-Brown: I would have to take that on notice, but we are thinking more around Iran and Pakistan, and those sorts of countries.

Answer

The \$20 million Regional Response Package, funded by the Humanitarian Emergency Fund will support internally displaced people in Afghanistan and refugees in neighbouring countries including Pakistan and Iran. India has not received funding as part of this component.

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 030 – Public Hearing 2 February 2022

Topic: Australians in Afghanistan

Question from Committee

Question

DFAT's submission notes that as at 24 January 2022, DFAT is aware of 61 Australian citizens and permanent residents residing in Afghanistan, and states that not all of these individuals wish to leave Afghanistan, and some wish to leave but not at this time.

- a. To DFAT's best knowledge, how many of these 61 Australian citizens and permanent residents do wish to leave Afghanistan at this time?
- b. For those who wish to leave but not at this time, what reasons have been given to DFAT to explain this approach?

Answer

As of 7 February 2022, DFAT is aware of 59 Australian citizens and permanent residents residing in Afghanistan. Our consular numbers in Afghanistan are dynamic, reflecting the changing circumstances of individuals, including their willingness to stay or leave. Australian citizens and permanent residents who are currently unable or unwilling to depart Afghanistan advise us that this is due to:

- family members not holding Australian visas;
- not holding travel documentation;
- the difficulty of obtaining passports in Afghanistan; and
- the complexity of visa processes in transit countries accessible by commercial means from Afghanistan.

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 031 – Public Hearing 2 February 2022

Topic: Departures from Afghanistan

Question from Committee

Question

2. DFAT's submission notes that Australia was able to use a small number of Qatar Airways flights during October and November 2021 to facilitate the departure of Australian visa holders from Kabul, but this 'has not been an option since early December 2021 as the Taliban regime paused flights of this nature'.

- a. Please outline in further detail why these flights were paused in early December.
- b. Is there any prospect of this type of flight resuming in the near future? What work is Australia doing to progress this issue?

3. DFAT's submission states that since the end of the airlift evacuations in August 2021, it has supported the travel of over 2,400 Australian citizens, permanent resident and visa holders out of Afghanistan and in to Australia. This represents an increase of approximately 1,400 additional people who have departed Afghanistan and arrived in Australia since DFAT's last update to the committee in November 2021.

- a. Please provide some further detail on how these approx. 1400 people have managed to leave Afghanistan and arrive in Australia since November 2021.
- b. Of these individuals, how many are Australian citizens, how many are permanent residents and how many are other visa holders?

Answer

2.

- a) An issue between the Taliban and Qatar on the use of these flights led to them being paused in December 2021 and January 2022. According to media reports, this was due to a dispute over which passengers were permitted to take the flights.
- b) As reported in the media, some charter flights by Qatar have recently resumed from Kabul. We continue to assess the viability of this route for assisting Australian citizens and Australian visa holders to depart Afghanistan.

3.

- a) Since November 2021, we have utilised Australian Defence Force contracted flights, facilitated commercial flights and charter options (including the aforementioned flights from Kabul) to bring people to Australia. People have travelled from a number of locations globally, including significant numbers via Pakistan.
- b) Inquiries about the breakdown of arrivals into Australia, including visa types, should be directed to the Department of Home Affairs.

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

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 032 – Public Hearing 2 February 2022

Topic: QoN 032 Humanitarian assistance

Questions from Committee

Question

4. Please provide an update on the \$65 million funding in immediate humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan, announced by the Government in September 2021. How much of this funding has been spent to date, and what has it achieved on the ground in Afghanistan?
5. Have there been any further recalibrations to the quantum and delivery of Australia's planned humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan since DFAT last appeared before the committee?
6. DFAT's submission notes that on 11 January 2022, UN agencies launched the Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan (HRP) and Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP).
 - a. What is Australia's current and expected future involvement with these plans?
 - b. With a 'pledging conference' expected in March 2021 to implement these plans, what quantum of funding will Australia be expected to contribute?
7. ACFID submitted that Australia is prioritising humanitarian activities and pausing development activities in Afghanistan, pending a review in early 2022. The Afghan Australian Development Association's supplementary submission reiterates its call for the Australian Government to develop a new funding stream focused on longer-term development assistance in Afghanistan (in addition to existing funding which focuses on immediate humanitarian assistance).
 - a. Can you provide an update on the review mentioned by ACFID?
 - b. What is the department's view on the arguments that a longer-term development assistance funding stream for Afghanistan is required?
8. The Red Cross (p. 5, Recommendation 5) is suggesting that the Australian Government work with international partners and support agencies and establish a protocol to assess and record, in an emergency evacuation, instances of family separation of people in their care. What is DFAT's response to this suggestion?
9. The Red Cross is recommending (Recommendation 11, p. 6) that the Government recognise what will be a protracted crisis in Afghanistan and develop a mid- to longer term strategy for Afghanistan? Is such work underway in DFAT?

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

Answer

4.
 - We have dispersed \$22.5m of this funding and are confident the remaining \$42.5m of humanitarian assistance will be disbursed in coming months.
 - Funding is supporting a range of urgent and life-saving priorities, including support for the provision of food, shelter and sexual reproductive health services; essential health services; and gender services and research, supporting the protection and empowerment of women and girls.
5. There have been no further changes to the government's commitment since DFAT last appeared before the Committee.
6.
 - The HRP and RRP outlines the UN response to the humanitarian crisis. DFAT's funding of UN humanitarian partners contributes to the delivery of the the HRP and RRP.
 - Future funding will be considered by government.
 - 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.
7.
 - We anticipate that for the immediate future our program will be primarily focused on humanitarian assistance which will seek to balance the program objectives, resourcing and risk management requirements, while taking into account the situation on the ground as it evolves.
 - We recognise the protracted nature of the Afghanistan crisis and that short-term humanitarian assistance alone is insufficient. Under the Regional Humanitarian Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan 2021-2024, DFAT will develop targeted, well-planned multi-year interventions through to 2024, and focus our humanitarian advocacy on three priority cross-cutting issues – gender, protection, and disability.
8.
 - DFAT has procedures in place to identify and escalate any cases of family separation identified in a crisis. These procedures include referrals to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent network when we become aware of family members separated from relatives in an active conflict zone. DFAT is currently conducting a full review of consular policies which will include outreach to stakeholders.
9. We recognise the protracted nature of the Afghanistan crisis and that short-term humanitarian assistance alone is insufficient. Under the Regional Humanitarian Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan 2021-2024, DFAT will develop targeted, well-planned multi-year interventions through to 2024, and focus our humanitarian advocacy on three priority cross-cutting issues – gender, protection, and disability.