

## QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

### SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 19 OCTOBER 2010

#### IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

#### **(339) Program 2.1: Refugee and Humanitarian Assistance**

Senator Cash asked:

Mr Hughes previously gave evidence at the Estimates hearing held on 9 February 2010 [at page 78] that: *"It is not uncommon for the department in circumstances where there is a particular humanitarian need identified to resettle people in a much shorter time frame than the average....."*

- (a) How does the Department determine if there is a "particular humanitarian need"?
- (b) Provide details of all resettlements that have taken place since 1 January 2008, where a "particular humanitarian need" was identified including:
  - (i) The identified humanitarian need; and
  - (ii) The time taken to process the particular refugee's visa.

<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commtee/S12748.pdf>.

*Answer:*

- (a) Australia's Humanitarian Program is designed to be flexible in order to respond quickly to emerging humanitarian situations, and has the capacity to fast track applications of individuals or groups where there are exceptional and compelling circumstances.

The Department routinely makes these assessments and priorities and expedites cases for a variety of reasons including vulnerability, health, or the needs of a relative in Australia. Where such reasons have been identified, processing can be expedited by the Department.

- (b) It is not possible to provide details of all resettlements since 1 January 2008 where a particular humanitarian need was identified, although specific examples can be provided. In 2009-10, the average processing time to finalise an offshore humanitarian visa was 32.7 weeks but 6.2 per cent of granted cases were finalised in 12 weeks.

- (i) Specific examples are as follows:

- Since 2008, the Department has granted visas to 557 Iraqi locally engaged employees (LEE) (and their families) who had assisted the withdrawing elements of the Australian defence forces in Iraq. The LEE and their families were at risk of harm because of their engagement with the Australian Government.

- The Department has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) concerning emergency processing of highly vulnerable individuals. Typically, these individuals are granted subclass 203 Emergency Rescue visas. Since 1 January 2008, eight Emergency Rescue visas have been granted.

(ii) The average time to process these caseloads were:

- LEE applicants underwent usual but expedited processing in order to meet the withdrawal timeline of the Australian defence forces. Fifty per cent of LEE cases were finalised in an average of 13 days from registration and 95 per cent of cases were finalised in an average of 29 days from registration.
- The MOU with the UNHCR states that the Department will accept or decline the referral of a case for emergency processing within two working days. Every application is assessed against the criteria in the Migration Regulations and processing times will vary depending on the circumstances of each individual case. The average processing time was around 33 days for the eight Emergency Rescue visas granted since 1 January 2008.