

The Hazara Community

A Statement from Settlement Services International

Settlement Services International (SSI) joins the Refugee Council of Australia and the 50,000-strong Hazara community in Australia in calling on the Australian Government to act quickly before the Taliban commits more atrocities and displaces more Hazara men, women and children in Afghanistan.

In recent weeks, the Taliban has waged a sustained attack on Hazara villages in Khas Uruzgan, Malistan and Jaghori districts, resulting in the death of many men, women and children and the kidnapping or displacement of thousands, including family members and relatives of thousands of Hazara Australians. SSI has many members of the Hazara community among its staff, volunteers and clients, and is well aware of the acute anguish news of these events has caused.

SSI believes that the Australian Government, as a major contributor to international efforts for stabilisation and reconstruction of Afghanistan since 2001, can play a vital role in urging the National Unity Government of President Ashraf Ghani and NATO's Resolute Support Mission to act to ensure the safety and security of the Hazara people.

Without an immediate and coordinated national and international response, Taliban forces are free to commit mass atrocities against the Hazaras, with an escalation of violence and further displacement. Specifically, we request the Australian Government use its influence to urge the National Unity Government in Afghanistan and NATO's Resolute Support Mission to take the following measures:

1. The National Unity Government must deploy adequate military forces to secure the districts of Khas Uruzgan, Malestan and Jaghori and other vulnerable districts.
2. The Resolute Support Mission must escalate its response to the Taliban attacks by providing adequate and immediate air support to the local resistance forces and the Afghan government forces that are currently deployed in these districts.
3. The National Unity Government and the international community should provide emergency humanitarian support to civilians who are displaced in these districts.
4. The National Unity Government and the Resolute Support Mission must plan for long-term deployment of formal units of the Afghan military forces to protect these districts and the roads that connect them to urban centres against future Taliban attacks.

Furthermore, we ask that the Australian Government:

5. Immediately review all decisions to refuse protection visas to Hazara asylum seekers currently in Australia and to halt forced returns to Afghanistan considering the escalating and targeted attacks on Hazara people.
6. Invite leaders from the Hazara community in Australia to advise the Australian Government's engagement in Afghanistan.

Australians with connections to the Hazara community have been deeply affected by this violence.

SSI calls on the Australian Government to show leadership in responding to this escalating humanitarian crisis and offers its condolences to families in Australia who have been affected by these devastating attacks.

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About SSI:

Settlement Services International is a community organisation and social business that supports newcomers and other Australians to achieve their full potential. We work with all people who have experienced vulnerability, including refugees, people seeking asylum and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, to build capacity and enable them to overcome inequality.