

# **ATTACHMENT TO AGENDA ITEM**

**Ordinary Meeting**

**18 February 2020**

<b>Agenda Item 8.3</b>	<b>Advocacy for Improvements to the Community Support Program - Amnesty International</b>	
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# MY NEW NEIGHBOUR

## HELPING MORE REFUGEES SET UP A SAFE HOME HERE

We live in a world where people have no option but to flee their homes and countries – and rely on the kindness of strangers to help them start again. That’s why Amnesty International is pushing for all countries, especially the wealthiest, to do their fair share and welcome refugees. But globally, resettlement places for these people are rare and over-subscribed.

While most governments turn their backs, people are finding clever and creative ways to welcome refugees using their local networks, skills and generosity. Amnesty wants Australians to be able to do the same. Australia can, and should, be doing more to help welcome people in need.

Australian neighbourhoods have proven to be generous, welcoming communities when given the opportunity to do so. Almost 150 local government areas are self-declared Refugee Welcome Zones. Our neighbourhoods are home to former refugees like Corporal Kborali from Afghanistan who today serves in the Australian Defence Force, and world famous Orthopaedic Surgeon Dr Munjed Al Muderis from Iraq.

**Many neighbourhoods already welcome refugees. Many Australians are ready to receive their new neighbours. That’s why we are asking the Australian Government to expand and improve their community sponsorship program (CSP) so that businesses, the community and families can help too. Community sponsorship would allow people seeking safety to rebuild their lives, and set up a home here where they can prosper and thrive as new arrivals.**

## A BETTER PLAN

By implementing Amnesty International's plan for a better, more orderly humanitarian/migration program the Australian Government would prevent dangerous sea journeys as well as avoid costly and punitive deterrence measures.

**A better refugee policy must include creating more opportunities for safe and legal entry into Australia through:**

- expanding and improving the options for private and community sponsorship
- increasing the size, and adjusting the composition, of our humanitarian resettlement program
- making it easier for refugees to be included in our existing visa programs as students or skilled workers.

**In combination with these new opportunities for entry, Australia can meet its international obligations and create a fair, efficient way to help people seeking asylum by:**

- ending offshore processing
- providing timely and safe rescues at sea
- boosting our humanitarian assistance to our neighbouring countries
- sticking to defined time periods for visa assessments for refugees waiting in our region

## HOW CAN THE COMMUNITY HELP WELCOME MORE PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM?

A Community Sponsorship Program would enable members of the community to sponsor visas for refugees from around the world who wish to begin the process of rebuilding their lives in Australia.

Amnesty has worked closely with sympathetic businesses, community organisations and academic institutions who are keen to help.

## WHAT DOES AUSTRALIA HAVE NOW?

In 2013 the Australian Government introduced a 'Community Proposal Pilot' that enabled communities and businesses, as well as families and individuals, to propose applicants for humanitarian visas. In 2016 the Prime Minister announced the establishment of a Community Sponsorship Program (CSP) to follow on from this pilot program.

While it is a welcome start that Australia has recognised the potential of community sponsorship, the Government's model has significant flaws. There are currently only 1,000 refugee placements through the CSP. The costs for sponsoring are exorbitant, including an approximately \$20,000 visa application fee, additional fees for family, a bond of \$20,000, plus airfare, medical screening and settlement costs. Applications are only received for those aged between 18 and 50, who have an offer of employment, personal attributes to enable financial self sufficiency within 12 months of arrival and who are willing to live and work in regional Australia.

## AN EXPANDED AND IMPROVED COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Amnesty International is calling on the Government to expand and improve its Community Sponsorship Program.

### An appropriate program would:

- **Not take places from others in need**

In order for Australia to do its fair share in meeting global need for people seeking asylum, the CSP must be above and beyond any existing humanitarian or visa quotas. Ensuring CSP places are additional to Australia's existing humanitarian intake will mean that the Government is not merely passing the buck by shifting their responsibility onto the community.

We have also heard from businesses and community groups that additionality is needed to give them confidence that their contributions to CSP are delivering true humanitarian outcomes.

- **Provide adequate support and services**

In order to assist people seeking asylum to integrate successfully into our communities, it is essential that adequate settlement and support services are provided. The pilot program allows access to Medicare and Australian Migrant English Program but more clarity around services and entitlements is needed.

It is also necessary to put in place measures to protect refugees from exploitation or harm in the event of their sponsor seeking to make a profit from their arrival or if the sponsorship arrangement breaks down.

- **Limit costs**

An improved CSP must ensure it is not too costly for refugees or their sponsors. Currently, the high cost of the application and visas is approximately \$80,000 for a family of five – three times the amount of the Canadian program.

- **Allow community, family and businesses to act as sponsors**

Amnesty recommends that there be three main categories of potential sponsors:

- family sponsors bringing refugee family members residing overseas who are in need of international protection
- independent sponsors such as faith-based groups, universities and community associations who may sponsor those most in need, as identified by UNHCR, who do not have family links and who are not yet job ready
- business/employer sponsors who want to employ job-ready refugees to meet dual commercial and corporate social responsibility objectives.

- **Create more places for people seeking asylum to settle in Australia**

Amnesty recommends that the Australian community could support the sponsorship of around 10,000 refugees per annum through CSP. This number could be reached in a staged expansion over the Budget Forward Estimates. This is based on Australia's wealth, population and recent levels of interest in community sponsorship. By way of comparison, the Canadian community had a quota of 16,000 places for 2017.



# WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Write to the Commonwealth Government, asking them to expand and improve the Community Sponsorship Program.
- Work with your local Amnesty action group to facilitate conversations about the benefit of an expanded and improved community support program for the community at large eg. widely share the stories of former refugees joining and contributing to your community.
- If you are a local government, pass a motion asking the Commonwealth Government to expand and improve its program to help those who could be your new neighbours.
- Agree to lead your community in discussing shared sponsorship options eg. either sponsoring refugees as an organisation, or encouraging other businesses and organisations to do so.

## NEED MORE INFORMATION?

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